



The Empowerment of Indigenous Women:
Traditional Knowledge, Sustainable Development and the Role
of Culture

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Abstract

Women of indigenous tribes all around the world have valuable information about the environment. However, in many cases, they lack the power to share that knowledge, even within their own village. The main research question of the thesis is: what is the connection between the knowledge that indigenous women possess about traditional agricultural practices and the effect of their empowerment on the augmentation of sustainable development practices in agriculture? The clearest example of the significance of the role of indigenous women is in Ecuador. Ecuador is one of the most diverse biological and ecological regions of the world. Concerns about population growth and limited natural resources are causing uproar among the international community. Moreover, there is conflict over the control and use of those resources. The opinions between indigenous peoples, the government and the international community vary greatly; and these perspectives have much to learn from each other in order to reach a sustainable system. Therefore, this thesis will contribute to the cross-cultural awareness and understanding between the different stakeholders in Ecuador and in the world. The hypothesis is that the practice and preservation of traditional knowledge is contingent upon indigenous women; as they become more empowered in their community, the role and importance of traditional knowledge as a method to promote sustainability in agricultural will be maintained or increased.

Introduction

After the 2010 decennial census and 2011 population estimates, there are approximately 7 billion people currently inhabiting the world (US Census Bureau, 2011). And that number is growing by an average of 1.15% a year (World Bank, 2012). Jonathan Swift, in his infamous piece, *A Modest Proposal*, advocated the sale of poor Irish babies to wealthy nobles in order to ease the economic strains of Ireland of the mid-eighteenth century. The one-child policy in China was another solution introduced in 1978 to slow the inevitable growth of the global population. These two “solutions” and others similar to them are meant to address concerns about the limitability of natural resources. Recently, governments and international institutions have been turning to sustainable development as a method that has better potential to be culturally conscious, as well as invigorate natural resources and conserve the environment.

A Brief Overview

In order to address the hypothesis of this thesis, I explore how the empowerment of indigenous women will affect traditional and agricultural practices. *Part I* will give a brief overview of the historical background of Ecuador and the indigenous population living there. Additionally, the terms and concepts that will be used throughout the thesis will be described. *Part II* is a comprehensive literature review of the existing journal articles, books and reports relevant to this thesis topic. The review consists of the definition of the major terms found within this thesis project, how the literature addresses this specific research question and finally, the strengths and weaknesses within the existing body of literature. This section is followed by a short introduction to the niche that defines this thesis, describing where this research fits into the broader academic literature. *Part III* is an explication of the methodology used to explore the central hypothesis. The methodology section defines all operational definitions within the thesis and breaks down how the hypothesis will be investigated. *Part IV* discusses the findings. It will be divided into three sections that all build to the main conclusion of the thesis. *Part V* summarizes the main arguments of the thesis and brings to a close the discussion about culture and empowerment.

Research Questions

My hypothesis is composed of three tiers that culminate to confirm the connection between indigenous women, their knowledge of traditional knowledge and the affects of their empowerment on sustainable agricultural practices. These three tiers are: 1) the establishment of

the importance of indigenous knowledge to the process of sustainable agricultural projects; 2) the role of indigenous women in this process and the connection between indigenous women's knowledge, their part in agricultural decision-making and the success of sustainable development and, 3) how the empowerment of indigenous women is crucial to the improvement of the agricultural system and the maintenance of sustainable development practices.

The questions I asked in order to gather information about these three tiers were: What is the indigenous women's role in agriculture? What will this show about a change in traditional knowledge use? Why is it important for women to have a part in decision-making? What are the possible benefits/disadvantages of having women involved in political, economic and social decisions? How does this compare to an indigenous community? What are the effects of indigenous women's' empowerment in traditional and agricultural practices? In what ways can indigenous women be empowered from within their community and from the efforts of the international and state communities? What challenges do women face that limit their empowerment? By answering these questions, the connection between indigenous women and their important role in preserving the environment will be made clear. This knowledge can then be used for creating sustainable development policies that include the wisdom of traditional knowledge.

My thesis has theoretical, normative and practical importance. First, I create a clear theoretical basis of past and present literature and studies relating traditional knowledge and indigenous agricultural practices. I focus on an in-depth case analysis of Ecuador for the primary part of the thesis in order to establish a deeper understanding of the role that politics and culture play in agricultural and sustainable development. Through this case study, I demonstrate how culture can be used as a model for understanding a people or a nation, as well as the importance of culture in the tailoring of sustainable development projects to fit the people and their values. This thesis is also significant for the normative message it proposes: that indigenous women have a crucial part to play in sustainable development projects and should be included in such plans. Additionally, indigenous women should also be empowered, in order for their influence to have a wider affect. This connects with the practical portion of the thesis, which proposes areas and methods for further research, in order to have data proving the significance of indigenous women in agriculture and sustainable development. This data will help to support further efforts to empower indigenous women and respect their voice.

PART I: Terms and a historical overview

In order to do effective and significant research, it is essential to define the terms from which this research is based. Within this area of scholarship, important concepts that come to the forefront are *sustainable development, traditional knowledge, outside pressures, rural development, and empowerment*. All of these concepts and terms each contribute to the other and to the understanding of this research.

I define *traditional knowledge* and practices as a collection of behaviors, practices and attitudes passed down from generation to generation that promote cultural values such as respect for the earth, peace, giving, and many others. Traditional knowledge is not only used in agriculture; it is also a broader spiritual and emotional guide (Grenier, 1998; Turner et al., 2000; Gegeo, 1998). In the Solomon Islands, the Kwara'ae, the indiginous tribe of the area, uses traditional values of falafala to influence their agricultural practices, as well as their concept of a prosperous lifestyle or what philosophers refer to as "the good life". Empowerment is defined as the conference of power on a previously suppressed or excluded population or the usurpation of power by that group. This empowerment can range from the giving of responsibility and active participation in decision making, to access to education, and can even extend to land rights (Herlihy, 1996; Deere and Leon, 2008; Agarwal, 1994). Another important term to define is *sustainable development*, which can be defined as the technological and methodical development that addresses the physical limitations of the environment and economy as well as promotes conservation and preservation practices that will ensure that future generations will have the same quality environment as the present generation (Kidd, 1992; United Nations, 2000). In comparison, rural development is a model of agricultural policies and projects that are created to solve agricultural, economic and environmental problems in underdeveloped countries (Gegeo, 1998). *Outside pressures* is my terminology for the insistence of NGOs, development groups and the government to get involved in "saving" natives by using their personal or scientific knowledge and applying it to develop projects.

Ecuador is a multi-ethnic state composed of mestizos, Amerindian, Spanish and black groups. The total population of the state is 15,007,343 according to a census conducting in July of 2011. About 25% of the population is representative of the indigenous tribes spread throughout Ecuador. Approximately, 6.4% of the GDP is a product of agriculture; the rest is due

to industries and services. Arable land comprises of about 5.71% of the Ecuadorian state, with only 8,650 sq km actually irrigated. The Amazon rainforest covers most of Ecuador, and therefore has a major impact not only on the agricultural products of the state but also the issues surrounding environmental conservation, preservation and development. What is referred to as the three horsemen of the global apocalypse: poverty, environmental degradation and population growth, are a major concern in Ecuador (Fisher 1998, 2). Specific environmental issues include deforestation, desertification, and soil erosion.

These environmental issues, and many other economic and social issues, are pushing sustainable development to the frontlines, as a solution to these problems. Additionally, state concerns about increasing productivity and indigenous efforts to compete in the national and international markets, has increased the significance of development on a domestic level. Therefore, the question of who controls the rainforest has hampered efforts to implement sustainable development. Is it the indigenous people who live there, the government of Ecuador, or the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who provide resources and research in order to preserve the rainforest, who should control development in the Amazon? This question is more than just a matter of politics, but also of culture. Each of these three groups represents a different culture, and each is crucial to the construction and implementation of sustainable development.

Development, in the general sense, is defined as “intentional practices to produce broad-based and sustained change” (Radcliffe 2006, 231). By themselves, indigenous peoples, the Ecuadorian government and NGOs cannot bring about a successful operation of sustainable development. However, in analyzing the scholarly literature and reports surrounding development in the Ecuadorian rainforest, it is demonstrated that development is not only a product of culture but also a conduit of politics. The role of indigenous people in the development of Ecuador is a crucial concept to understand in order to recognize the role that indigenous women have in the development process.

PART II: Literature Review

In order to fully address the main research questions, it is necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of the literature in the field. This literature review explores a section of the development question that specifically investigates sustainability and traditional knowledge. Moreover, it details the systems of agriculture already established by indigenous

communities and the role that women play in those systems. The strengths and weaknesses of the literature are also discussed. The investigation of the literature in this field clarifies where my specific research can fit into the overall field.

The searches I pursued in order to answer my research question were based on the following five key areas of analyses questions: 1) what is sustainability, traditional knowledge and other development related terminologies?, 2) what are the agricultural practices of indigenous peoples in Ecuador?, 3) what is traditional knowledge and its part in indigenous culture?, 4) why should women be involved in agriculture and why should they be empowered?, and 5) what are the pressures placed on indigenous groups by outside pressures? I explored a variety of mediums, including academic articles, books, and policy papers.

Research Question Addressed

The review and evaluation of the literature related to my research topic can be sectioned into three different areas: 1) agriculture and plant diversity; 2) economics and development; and 3) women, gender roles and the indigenous culture. The exploration of these three different areas leads to an understanding of the underlying framework of the thesis, as well as an elucidation of how the empowerment of women will benefit sustainable development efforts.

In terms of the methodology of each literature, there were four different types: case studies, participatory research, ethnographic research and surveys. They all served to elucidate different types of knowledge within this topic. Each have their own benefits, as described above, and each will find a place within my specific research. A discussion of the results will best show how each type of methodology played a part.

Discussion of Literature

A general strength of the literature as a whole was the growing consciousness in the international system and in academic institutions of the importance of indigenous peoples, especially of indigenous women. The mounting concern of politicians and environmentalists about the environment has prompted a search for alternative conservation and preservation methods. Therefore, I discovered many articles that deal with this question and provide me with a model of how to organize data for the purpose of addressing both a global and the local audience of Ecuador. Related to this is the push in various articles for further research, which not only gives me an opening to do my research, but affirms that this topic is important.

For example, the article “Technological Domains of women in mixed farming systems of Andean peasant communities” by Maria Fernandez, is a classic example of an action-calling analysis that calls attention to the importance of an issue. The article describes the relationship between men and women in various villages, as defined by their agricultural responsibilities, either as a herder or cropper. According to Fernandez, in Andean societies, the farming style is usually that women are in charge of herding and animals and men are in charge of crops, seed acquisition, sowing, and harvesting. However, the important part of this division is not the actual tasks themselves, but the technical knowledge this gives the person responsible for the tasks. This knowledge gives the person more rights to make decisions in their area of expertise. Fernandez calls for the understanding of the women’s work and for the appreciation by indigenous men of their female counterparts in order to create social change and equality for women in agricultural systems. One way she calls for this is by giving women equal rights to decisions making and production, which is a solution that other researchers have also advocated (Barsky et al, 1984; Pacari, 2002; Benavides, 1996; Laurie, 2005).

Just as the above example demonstrates, a large area of the literature that I researched addressed the role of the indigenous women in the community, in agriculture and in politics. There is a dual call for the empowerment of women from NGOs and from the indigenous women themselves. In the NGO sector, studies have shown that indigenous women are in possession of traditional indigenous knowledge and farming practices (Waters, 2004; IFAD, Fernandez, 1986). In another example, an IFAD report written in 2003 states that indigenous women are deeply involved in agricultural management and forest conservation, and without their inclusion in councils and decision making, conservation efforts will suffer (IFAD, 2003). Specific questions asked in this section explore the affects that indigenous women have on the commercial market, in domestic farming, and in community land plot planning (Fernandez, 1986; Hamilton et al., 2001; Hamilton, 2000; Bremner, 2006) For example, Fernandez describes a project in Aramachy, Peru, in which a committee was formed to work with NGOs on improving agricultural practices using local knowledge. However, no women were chosen to be on the committee. The eventual inclusion of women demonstrated the specific technical knowledge that women possessed but men did not. Moreover, it showed the value of the inclusion of women in decision-making in order to improve agricultural practices and the quality of life in the village.

Furthermore, Bremner and Lu call for further research in their article “Common Property among Indigenous Peoples of the Ecuadorian Amazon.” The article summarizes the common property practices of individuals and the community in Ecuador. A withdrawal right is “the right to obtain or use a specified resource” (Bremner and Lu 2006, 501). The biggest concern of the article was focused around the withdrawal rights from communal lands. There are two types of withdrawal rights, either the individual has their personal property rights to a communal land or the community has certain rights that it gives to all individuals in relation to the communal land. The difference between them is that communities that allow the individual rights often have access to, as well as own more, land, while households with communal withdrawal rights often only get the land they have been permitted to cultivate. Moreover, based on these two withdrawal rights, Bremner and Lu suggest that a multi-system of property control and arrangements would be best suited to indigenous groups in order to balance out the management of land; however, the specific type is not determined in the article. By multi-system of property control, the authors suggest a combination of individual and communal withdrawal rights, which would allow indigenous people more control over how land is managed on a community level. Furthermore, this would also allow outside groups, such as conservation groups, a better understanding of how land is managed in the indigenous community and thus how conservation projects should be handled (Bremner and Lu 2006, 516-517) Therefore, the authors suggest various future research designs that could answer the questions regarding the most ideal land management model. The main directions of further research include the exploration of the durability and flexibility of community institutions and the ability of these indigenous institutions to meet the challenges of changing indigenous livelihoods.

The trend revealed in the Bremner and Lu article, as well as other researchers, regards the legal and political status of indigenous peoples. Additionally, it explores how the indigenous community would be different if women were granted land rights, inheritance rights, equal part in family agriculture and a seat in local councils (Pacari, 2002). Pacari advocated the allowance of women to sit on the Ecuadorian Congress in order to expand democracy. Also, the inclusion of women would give women a voice and allow their ideas effect political policies. Another area addressed in the indigenous women’s sector is the increasing women’s movements to support anti-domestic violence and lessening male alcoholism (Golcolea, 2001). Similar to this is the focus on indigenous women’s equality and equal participation and division of labor (Fernandez,

1986; Barsky, 1984). An over-encompassing theme that was prevalent in previous scholarship is what role indigenous women play within the indigenous culture and the general role of culture (Gegeo, 1998; Hamilton, 2001; Becker, 2003; IFAD). The concept of culture is fascinating in that it introduces a different way of analyzing the indigenous people than the typical “Western” view.

Descriptive results are also a method of exploring and focusing on culture. Such is the focus of a working paper by Hamilton, Asturias de Barrios and Tevalán (2001) called “Gender and Commercial Agriculture in Ecuador and Guatemala.” Hamilton et al. investigated the roles of men and women in two indigenous villages, one in Ecuador and the other in Guatemala. In comparing the two cases, they found that women and men in Ecuador have a system of equality imbued within the culture and traditional beliefs that allot women equal inheritance rights. The results also describe the significance of the economic role of the women and thus their valuation within the Ecuadorian village as a meaningful agent who deserves respect. This conclusion was similar to the results of other researchers’ studies in Ecuador and other Latin American countries with indigenous populations (Hamilton, 2000; Brown et al., 1988; Rudel, 2002; Radcliffe, 2006; Pohle and Reinhardt, 2004; Gray et al., 2005; Goicolea, 2001; Hiraoka, 1980; Deere and Leon, 2001; Warren, 2004).

Research from the perspective of the indigenous group also demonstrates the trend in the literature to analyze culture. The paper, “Enhancing the Role of Indigenous Women in Sustainable Development” by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), includes among its report the stories and voices of indigenous women. The methodology of this report was through field work and participatory research, which ensures in a more direct fashion that the voice and opinions of indigenous people are heard, which, in my opinion, is not the case for statistically based methodologies. In the conclusion, IFAD not only listed its achievements in the indigenous village working with the women on projects they found important but also ended with the stories of women. Each of the stories was about a paragraph and outlined how NGO assistance combined with indigenous knowledge helped to either improve a bakery (Maria) or gained access to education to empower more girls in her village (Maria Carmen). The inclusion of these stories allowed me to understand the personal problems and histories of people and to hear physical evidence of the success of cooperation between western groups and indigenous

communities. I would like to find more literature that includes the indigenous voice throughout the entire article or report.

In this case, and in general about all the literature in this field, the strengths of the various articles and books were apparent in the content of the works. I gained a wider understanding of the culture of indigenous peoples and how this related to agriculture, gender norms and economics. Moreover, the analyses about culture were often exhaustive, so that collectively, I had several levels of knowledge, from the general to the specific. For example, generally, I gained an understanding of the indigenous traditional knowledge across cultures and how it relates to nature. Then, specifically, I learned about five major indigenous communities and their specific agricultural practices and food produce. Furthermore, a few articles even went into more detail about the specific tasks women were responsible for and how this affected the indigenous community.

The final topics that were broadly addressed under the agricultural dimension of my thesis ranged from specific indigenous farming techniques to global “perfected” methods for farming. Several articles went into an analysis of different indigenous communities and described the similarities and differences in their farming practices (Pohle, 2004; Gray et al., 2008; Bremner et al, 2006). Another question addressed in this section regarded the cultural values associated with farming and land cultivation (Gegeo, 1998; Fernandez, 1986; IFAD). For example, David Gegeo explains how falafala, the shared cultural traditions of the Kwara’ae indigenous tribe bases their ideals of their traditional ways, of their idea of the good life based on respect for life and their changing opinions of the modern world, to cultivate their land. This aspect of agriculture is very similar to the growing awareness of the importance of traditional knowledge and indigenous knowledge base in development (IFAD, Laurie, 2005; Radcliffe, 2006).

Furthermore, Gegeo, in his article “Indigenous Knowledge and Empowerment: Rural Development Examined from Within,” presents readers with an excellent example of a normatively based article that also describes the values of an indigenous peoples regarding agriculture. The main purpose of the article is to compare rural development strategies engaged from outside the indigenous village to indigenous initiated or indigenous focused development that incorporated the ideas and beliefs of native people. For example, Gegeo describes the words that the Kwara’ae have for two types of development: *bisnis* (business) and *diflopmen*

(development). *Bisnis* is considered negative; it is “dead” in that it does not lead to the production of anything, but to selfish and greedy morals. *Diflopmen* is another word for a concept already known to the Kwara’ae that denotes positivity. *Diflopmen* calls for nurturing with “one’s own hands” (305) an idea, goal or project, that will result in life. The conclusion of this study advocates for the de-silencing of indigenous voices and the valorization of their knowledge in creating development programs. This normative call for an understanding above action and more so on the changing of social norms is prevalent in an article by Becker and Ghimire (2003). They advocate the synergy of western and indigenous knowledge and ideas to help together and conserve the Amazon. This article focuses more on the shared identification of the western and indigenous voice in order to work together. One example of this is the western scientists’ use of indigenous oral language for project proposals so that there is no misunderstanding between the two groups (Becker and Ghimire, 2003).

On the other hand, some articles advocated the model based plans for development. For example, a method used in the 1960s in Ecuador involved the building of roads and the rapid clearing of land. However, since not all peoples were granted equal access to roads, this model of development resulted in unequal economic growth and bad agricultural practices that exhausted the land (Rudel et al., 2002). Another instance of this is the combination of colonization and conservation. These two ideas are related because of the global need to preserve the environment and thus the government or an international institution’s desire to control these “precious” areas with or without the indigenous people’s consent (Rudel, 2002; Becker, 2003; Benavidas, 1996). The need to conserve the Amazon or to organize and carry out agricultural practices is addressed in a way that involves indigenous people in degrees. The first option involves total involvement of indigenous people’s cooperation, which is the cultural development or the construction of indigenous people-run mechanisms that are based on traditional knowledge (IFAD, Gegeo, 1998; Radcliffe, 2006). A method that is disadvantageous for indigenous people but still beneficial for conservation goals involves their participation in professionalization, which is the governmental or NGO training of indigenous people to specialize in certain marketing and farming methods (Laurie, 2005; Becker, 2003). Finally, the method with the least concern for indigenous culture is rural development, which is the imposition of governmental or NGO projects on indigenous tribes (Hiraoka, 1980). A few

sources discussed how modern women's and indigenous movements were created to challenge rural development projects headed by outside groups (Barsky, 1984; Deere, 2001).

Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies

The methodologies of the literature reviewed are as varied as the information they provide. Each was specific to the study but provided insights into the benefits and disadvantages of the different methods. The two most prevalent methodologies were case studies and surveys. The third type of research was participant observer research, which is anthropologically based. A fourth type of research methodology was ethnography.

Case studies in research were often used in a more in-depth analysis of indigenous people and their culture. Gegeo specifically studied the Kwara'ae indigenous group and detailed not only their language, but how the differences in words revealed the differences between a western culture and the Kwara'ae culture. Another specific case study was done by Pohle and Reinhardt about the Shuar indigenous community in the lowlands of Ecuador where they explained the specific culture and land managements of the Shuar tribe. These were especially valuable in understanding the indigenous culture and agricultural practices (Pohle and Reinhardt, 2004; Fernandez, 1986; Rudel et al., 2002; Hamilton et al, 2001). Specifically, Gegeo's research revealed that the Kwara'ae views of the good life impact how they treat the land; with respect, love and kindness. Pohle and Reinhardt identify the plants that the Shuar community cultivates and their purpose. However, what this methodology lacks is the indigenous voice from their own point of view, rather than the voice of the researcher, which is most often the case.

Therefore, another variation of the case study emerged as researchers' incorporated a multi-disciplinary, participatory-action-research plan which allowed indigenous peoples to have a voice and to speak on behalf of themselves and their community. This methodology usually included communication between researchers and the indigenous population as was the case in Rhoades and Nazarea's research in a village in Cotacachi, Ecuador and Isabel Goicolea's research in the Orellana province in Ecuador. (Gegeo, 1986; Goicolea, 2001). Rhoades and Nazarea found that the negotiation of common ground between the researcher's study interest and the local indigenous community's needs allows both parties to participate in the project and benefit positively. Goicolea's research revealed the challenges women face, the most serious being domestic violence and male alcoholism. Researchers can also benefit from this type of

research if they want to know the specifics of the indigenous culture and also understand the intricacies of the indigenous culture, agricultural practices and women's movements.

Similar to participatory research is ethnography. Ethnography is the description of culture via interviews and questionnaires (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). This differs from participant observer research because it does not necessarily necessitate the active participation of the researcher in the culture, although this is often the case. Gray et al. analyzed five different indigenous tribes and described how each of them manages and uses their land (Gray et al. 2007). They found that the type of land use corresponds with education and cattle raising among other issues. For example, the Huaorani have cleared the least amount of land and have the less access to education than the other tribes, whereas the Secoya have cleared the most land and are more likely to own cattle. This type of research is useful for breaking down the information of another culture and putting it in terms that are understandable for the researcher. This is significant because it identifies the way in which cultural studies and case studies are written about in articles, as well as demonstrates an area that could be improved upon by future researchers in order to get a more complete investigation of a case. In regards to this thesis, this type of methodology is what most interests me and what I believe is a valid form of investigation of a culture.

Another popular methodology was survey analysis. Surveys came in many forms, such as statistical analysis, household and community surveys, family surveys and geographic surveys (Gray et al., 2008; Hamilton, 2001; Brown et al., 1988). For example, Hamilton et al. surveyed the use and access of women to land in the Quichua tribe. Often, surveys were accompanied by either observations or interviews (Goicolea, 2001; IFAD 2004). Interviews came in two forms, informal and formal. Surveys are a useful way to get a broad understanding of the indigenous culture or specific questions concerning a topic. However, since the questions are determined by the researcher, it inadvertently focuses on what the researcher believes to be important and not the indigenous people. This can cause a problem in dialogue between indigenous people and the Ecuadorian government or NGOs.

Therefore, the four types of methodologies – case studies, participatory research, ethnographic research and surveys – all served to elucidate different types of knowledge within this topic. Each have their own benefits, as described above, and each will find a place within

my specific research. A discussion of the results will best show how each type of methodology played a part.

The weaknesses of the literature I reviewed are inherent in the methodologies used and the validity of the research. While I believe that the literature I reviewed is reliable because it has been peer-reviewed and published in widely acclaimed journals, the lack of an indigenous voice calls in to question the actual extent to which indigenous perspectives are represented. When it comes to discussing a different culture or people that is not of the same culture, ethnicity or country as the researcher, I define validity as representing this different culture to the best of the researcher's ability in terms of that culture's own beliefs. Or, a researcher will acknowledge their inability or biases in doing such a culturally conscious representation and admits that their research may be completely accurate. This is a major weakness because although many articles have the good intention and the invaluable knowledge that supports indigenous movements or the empowerment of indigenous people and women, they do not have the indigenous voice included in their research.

Specifically, the lack of the prevalence of participatory research or collaborative case studies was, in my opinion, a weakness of the literature. There were only three to four of the articles I read that included participatory or collaborative research methods. This suggests a narrowing of focus of researchers, or in other words, a fixation on older empirically based research. If more researchers were to include the indigenous voice and perspective in their writings, there would be a greater understanding of the needs and goals of the indigenous community in regards to agriculture and gender norms as comprehended by indigenous people. However, one benefit of this weakness in the literature gives me an opportunity to fill this gap with my own research.

In reading and evaluating the literature related to my thesis topic, I find that my niche within this field is distinct because of the focus I have on culture in connecting the role of indigenous women, traditional knowledge and sustainable development. There exists in the literature field research about indigenous women's empowerment, or about traditional knowledge, or about sustainable development. However, there is not much literature that places an emphasis on the intertwining of these three major topics. My research takes into consideration culture. It also advocates that culture be taken into consideration on an international scale. The empowerment of women must address these tensions between culture

and access to power in the indigenous village and internationally. Therefore, based on my evaluation of the literature, my area of interests fits into a small gap cushioned by the interplay of culture, traditional knowledge and indigenous women.

Conclusion

Is the combination of traditional knowledge and sustainable agricultural practices possible? How is it related to the empowerment of indigenous women and why? These two questions inspire my research and the evaluation of the literature by scholars. By focusing on the importance of culture in connection to indigenous women elucidates how women are going to achieve change within their own community and gain the power to implement traditional knowledge practices in agriculture. In exploring this topic, I have found my niche and how my thesis can contribute to political scientists and anthropologists. I endeavor to use the knowledge gained from this literature review to guide me in the investigation of my own research questions, in the construction of a valid methodology and in the actual writing of my thesis.

PART III: The Methodology

The underlying logic of this thesis is simple; I propose that three specific issues are true and interrelated: 1) the compatibility of traditional knowledge and sustainable development practices; 2) the importance of indigenous women in development plans and implementation and 3) the necessity to empower indigenous women in order to facilitate and improve traditional and sustainable agricultural practices. While this idea is not original, it bears repetition. The impact that this knowledge could have on the empowerment of the twice discriminated indigenous women, and on the environment, is tremendous. By propagating this message, indigenous women move to the forefront of peoples' thoughts, and the likelihood that their voice will be heard grows.

I identified the variables used in my thesis from two different sources: the literature I read about the topic and international and indigenous documents. Constructing a methodology to fit these variables and my research was a process unto itself. The specificities of my topic call for a combination of both statistical analysis and anthropological analysis. I primarily read internet resources, based on peer-reviewed journal articles from sources such as Proquest, JStor, Google Scholar, Google Books and Taylor & Francis. My reasoning for primarily using the online sources is twofold. First, these resources are as reliable and valid as a physical source. In terms

of the articles, they have undergone stringent scholastic analysis and peer revision in order to be a part of the journals in which they are presented. Second, online journals are also one of the most up-to-date sources that I can find about my topic. I did use books, but a majority of the ones I used were found online. Although books are being published within this field, I believe that I have faster access to the most up to date resources from online sources. Another source that I used was international documents posted on the United Nations website. Finally, I used websites created and operated by the indigenous tribes themselves. They provide invaluable “insider” knowledge about their tribes that scholars studying them from afar would never know.

Operational Definitions

The key components of this thesis are composed of imprecise terms. In my effort to quantify these definitions, I fashioned relevant operational definitions of each term, in order to adequately measure them. In breaking down each of the three sections of my thesis, the operational definitions relating to that specific area is defined.

The first section of my thesis connects indigenous traditional practices in agricultural practices a successful implementation of sustainable development. *Traditional knowledge and* would be measured by examining specific indigenous agricultural methods and comparing them to methods used by NGOs and official methods used by the agricultural ministries in Ecuador and the United States to determine whether the methods used by the indigenous communities is inherent to their culture. This definition will be determined by examining as far back in history as possible.

Sustainable development would be measured in short term and long term affects. The short term affects that define and are associated with sustainable development are a measurement of yields. It can be posited higher yields (as compared with previous years) will result from sustainable development, as well as low impact agriculture on the land. Another measurement of sustainable development is measuring the speed of the turn around rate of the land, taking into consideration previous years turn around rates without the use of sustainable methods. Long term affects of sustainable development are also crucial to the understanding of sustainable development as a whole. Long term affects can be defined by the increased well-being of indigenous community. This can be measured quantitatively by comparing the indigenous community’s GDP before the use of sustainable practices and after, as well as the rise of the

community above poverty level, by comparing governmental census records. Additional measurement of sustainable development is a rise in the general health of indigenous community in terms of deaths recorded with illness and the number of outbreaks of dangerous sicknesses. Also, the increased access to education within the community would demonstrate that the community would have more resources to use on education rather than producing enough food for sustenance or business. Therefore, the use of traditional practices should result in an increase of the sustainability of the agricultural practices used by the different indigenous peoples of Ecuador. Specifically, this positive relationship can be indicated by the maize plant and its history and growing techniques as cultivated by the different indigenous communities. By applying the measures of traditional practices and sustainable development practices to the particular cultivation of the maize plant, it should show not only the benefits of traditional knowledge in this individual case, but a greater understanding of traditional indigenous agricultural practices.

The second part of the hypothesis explored in this thesis is: indigenous women are the keepers of traditional knowledge and therefore, they are crucial to the process of agriculture. It is imperative that women have a part in decision making. Their presence will result in more advantages rather than disadvantages because they will provide the balancing half of the male societal, political and economic presence. An indicator of the ameliorating affects of indigenous women in agriculture is the indigenous women's role in agriculture immensely important for a successful agricultural system. If women had a voice in the community and if the traditional methods advised by indigenous women were utilized in agricultural practices, women will bring more attention to "non-traditional" methods of politics. This would include, women bringing a more nurturing and qualitative perspective to economics, as measured by exploring how women have a more communally focused cost/benefit perspective rather than a typical male economic cost/benefit perspective. Also, it would be expected that yields would be larger in years in which women had more influence in agricultural practices. Additionally, in those years, there would be less waste of land. Lastly, there would be an increase in the wellbeing of the community, such as increased access to education, a rise of the overall community above the poverty line, etc.

Finally, the third section is: the empowerment of indigenous women will contribute to the success of a sustainable agricultural system. *Empowerment*, in this specific thesis, will only be discussed as regarding indigenous women. Therefore, the measures of empowerment will focus

on ways in which women would benefit from changes in the existing norms. Empowerment can be measured via political indicators, such as access to property rights and land use and inclusion in inheritance laws, as demonstrated by legal codes and government policies. A further source of political empowerment is decision making powers within the community. If a person has a voice within the community, they can influence policies agreed upon and the means to carry them out. Another measurement of empowerment is based on economic liberty, such as access to resources such as seeds, tools and micro-financing. The use of these resources indicates that a person has elevated position within the society. Additionally, it also shows that a person has the privilege of mobility and a means to change their economic situation if they so desire.

Social empowerment would include protection from male domestic abuse and alcoholism. Since alcoholism and abuse are serious problems that indigenous women face, acknowledgment of the indigenous community of this problem, accessibility of women to centers to deal with these problems, as well as punitive or judicial methods to deal with alcoholism and abuse for men, would demonstrate that women have the power to act without fear of being physically or emotionally attacked. The empowerment of women will contribute to the success of a balance between traditional knowledge and a sustainable system in agricultural practices. This is indicated by the changing role of indigenous women in the community can be reflected in a change in their responsibilities in agriculture (with maize specifically, and on the whole) and in their roles in the community. If indigenous women had an acknowledged voice among the community and if indigenous women were included in laws protecting agricultural rights, than sustainable processes in agriculture would benefit. Such political empowerment would be the expansion of laws such as inheritance laws and land management laws to include women. Therefore, the exploration of these three areas using the operational definitions described will clarify my thesis and help determine whether my hypotheses are correct.

Thesis Three Section Breakdown

The first element of my thesis is: indigenous traditional agricultural practices will lead to a more sustainable agricultural system. I use an in-depth case study of Ecuador, to demonstrate how it's three principle actors – indigenous people, the state and NGOs – all have a role and power in the politics of Ecuador. This power is what creates and maintains the Ecuadorian culture. Moreover, each actor has its own culture, which affects how the other two actors and the

international community view them. Therefore, the analysis of each actor's power and culture reveals how they contribute to the sustainable development of Ecuador and determines the extent of their political influence. This is achieved by researching and exploring the literature provided by academia in this field. By doing a thorough break down of the studies regarding indigenous peoples and sustainable development in Ecuador, it becomes clear how this section of my thesis leads to the next.

The second element explains how indigenous women are the keepers of traditional knowledge and therefore, they are crucial to agriculture. This section takes a more deductive approach, in that it is first studied on a general level, and then becomes specific to Ecuadorian indigenous women. I still focus on how culture plays a role in the research I investigated and describe the cultural and political significance of the findings. The manner in which I study the phenomenon of how women are first a vulnerable but necessary actor in the international culture is determined by the analysis of select international documents created by the United Nations.

The international documents chosen were selected due to two criteria, their prominence in the international discourse regarding the importance of women and indigenous women in the greater international arena, as well as their date of publication. In terms of their prominence in the international discussions about indigenous women, I choose documents that were often cited by each other as being a crucial step in the development on international norms and documents about this topic. This would include the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Beijing 10 Conference, the press releases of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Millennium Goals. I also selected these documents based on the time in which they were published in order to gain an understanding of how international discourse has and has not changed in regards to the rights of indigenous women. The international documents range from the 1990s to 2011 and therefore give the most comprehensive overview of how the international community is viewing indigenous women's rights.

I also include a summary of the argument proposed in the article by Hudson, Caprioli, Ballif-Spanvill, McDermott, and Emmett to put forth and build upon the idea that the achievement of women's security will also bring about the security of a nation (1). I chose this article because it explains in the clearest manner, across several different fields, including evolutionary biology, political sociology, and psychology, how important the treatment of

women is to the greater prosperity of nations. Furthermore, it is an excellent foundation from which my argument to empower indigenous women makes the most logical sense.

I use the information gathered above, as well as articles written by academics in this field, to describe how indigenous women are affected by the international community culture and their own tribal culture. I specifically look at the case study of Ecuador because it not only ties together the first section of the thesis, but provides a more precise lens in which to understand the issue of indigenous women on a more familiar scale. I use the lens of culture to understand how the international and indigenous cultures can affect the women's culture and their entrance and exit into those communities. Furthermore, I examine in what ways indigenous women in Ecuador are discriminated against due to their identity within the indigenous and international culture and thus set the stage for what must be done to change that position. The use of the case study is important to gain a deeper understanding of the role of indigenous women in their communities and how they are a powerful and valuable asset. I believe that this would be lost in a larger case analysis because the subtleties of a single case study are brushed over or ignored when there are multiple cases.

Finally, the third and final section of my thesis combines the two sections from above, and asserts that only the empowerment of women can result in the benefits of increased women's presence in international and national communities. Specifically, I seek to show that the empowerment of indigenous women will contribute to the success of a sustainable agricultural system.

Ideally, data obtained during a field excursion to Ecuador would have further strengthened the arguments presented in this thesis. However, such a venture was not possible. The second best source of data would have been from databases, such as the World Bank or the UNEP which would have provided me with raw data to analyze. After a thorough search that spanned months, no such databases were found that had the data necessary to prove that indigenous women's empowerment correlates positively with increased sustainable development. I searched not only through websites hosted by the United Nations or the World Bank, but also through annual reports posted by international organizations, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and other sources posted by NGOs and indigenous peoples. However, I could not find data that measured any comparison between

indigenous men and women or even the general income of indigenous communities in any country.

Therefore, I decided to deeply analyze three different articles that represent the three main sources of empowerment for indigenous women. I determined these three empowerments from two separate, but concurring, sources. First, much of the literature I read for the previous two sections also suggested areas of empowerment for indigenous women. Specifically, works by Deborah Yashar, who has extensive knowledge of Latin American indigenous movements, detailed women's empowerment in the following areas: education, access to resources and an increase in state capacity (Yashar 1998, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007). The Millennium Goals are in agreement with the sources of empowerment proposed by Yashar. During the 2010 UN Summit in New York, the General Assembly reiterated its goals of promoting education, increasing the access of women to higher wages and recognition of unpaid labor, and increasing their participation in state institutions (Goal 3 Fact Sheet 2000, 1-2). From these sources, I attempted to find specific articles that would demonstrate the fulfillment of empowerment policies sponsored by the government that showed a statistical improvement to the lives of women and a corresponding improvement of the sustainability of the agriculture. However, this too proved to be impossible; therefore, I conclude this thesis with an in-depth research plan for how I would find the data necessary to prove the main hypothesis.

I use the case study of Ecuador in order to demonstrate the significance of a culturally based research approach. In doing so, I believe the benefits of a case study far outweigh the limitations. First, a single case study eliminates the superficiality and brevity of multiple case studies. While one case study limits generalizability to other cases, one of the important points I want to stress in writing this thesis is not the case itself, but the process of studying this case. It is important to incorporate cultural and political perspectives when working with other nations and cultures because there is not a one-size fits all model for sustainable development. By focusing on Ecuador as a single case, the advantages understanding culture and the importance of incorporating culture in future research and development implementation plans are made apparent. Hopefully, researchers will use the methods indicative of this theory to conduct their own future research.

The standards that I will apply to the materials to judge whether they support my hypotheses are: 1) if the piece was written by an indigenous group or incorporate studies that

surveyed indigenous people; and 2) whether the methodology used in the research included a cultural analysis or sought to understand the culture of indigenous people. This was the main determinant of whether a research study was determined useful or not. I chose this method of standardization because it remains true to what I subjectively believe is the ultimate goal of this thesis: to give indigenous women support in order for them to gain a voice in their indigenous community and in the international community.

PART IV: Findings

The Founding Hypothesis

My hypothesis rests on the foundation that indigenous traditional practices in agricultural will lead to a more sustainable agricultural system. Inherent in this assumption is the idea that culture, power and politics are intimately intertwined; each contributes to the expression and identity of a people. By exploring the case of Ecuador, these key concepts are elucidated and expanded to include the issue of development. Within Ecuador are three actors – the indigenous peoples, the Ecuadorian government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – vying for control of the discourse and implementation of development. Each actor contributes a different aspect to the development question that is influenced by their respective culture. Inherent in this control is the political power to disseminate their cultural view of development and gain the resources necessary to maintain it. The politics of development is shown to be an important part of the discourse and process of development, and culture provides a means to interpret these politics. Moreover, understanding how culture contributes to development and the inclusion of culturally based perspective is demonstrated to be a crucial part in the success of development in Ecuador. A specific type of development, namely sustainable development, and the incorporation of certain aspects of the three actors' culture is necessary for the improvement of all peoples within the state of Ecuador.

The Culture Question

Culture is a many faceted concept; it incorporates not only the practical, but also the emotional, political and psychological aspects of the human experience. Philosophers and theorists have argued over what exactly culture entails: is it determined by society, is it a choice, or is it the fountain from which all other life operations are given meaning? Original

investigators and theorizers of culture, such as Clifford Geertz, define culture in their own way. Geertzian culture is the idea that culture encompasses and defines a people. Culture dictates a population's everyday relations, their technology and their material products. If one learns about that culture, they theoretically, according to Geertz, could become a member of that culture (Swidler 1986, 273). Such "bounded" and "frozen" theories of culture (Wedeen 2002, 716) as proposed by Geertz, is hard pressed to describe how culture is contested within a specific population. In the case of this thesis, the Geertzian idea of culture does not address why different peoples within the Ecuadorian state – the indigenous peoples and the Ecuadorian government – would contest how development ought to be implemented. Nor does it describe why another "culture" outside of Ecuador, an NGO, would be interested in development within Ecuador.

Another possible definition of culture is proposed by David Laitin. He defines culture as contested "points of concern." Laitin's culture "traffics in symbols" and states that the interpretation of these symbols in context, will lead to the understanding of that culture (Laitin 1988, 589). Laitin's theory of culture does leave room for contestation; it suggests that if there are people who adhere to one shared point of concern, there also exists other people who contest and disregard this point (Laitin 1988, 590). However, Aaron Wildavsky reveals a weakness in Laitin's culture theory, that "political objectives are separate from and superior to social relationships" (Wildavsky 1988, 594). In the context of Ecuador, Laitin's theory does not explain why the Ecuadorian government would reach out to NGOs for aid in development, and in the process sacrificing some of their political power. Nor would Laitin's theory take into consideration the social relationships between NGOs and indigenous peoples and the possibility that they could work together to find a suitable sustainable development plan. Ann Swidler defines culture as "shaping a repertoire or 'tool kit' of habits, skills, and styles, from which people construct 'strategies of action'" (1986, 273). In other words, culture provides the alphabet, from which the script of human action is written. In the context of exploring the culture and power dynamics of development, Swidler's theory is most relevant to understanding how people within a culture contest a common concern, in this case study, development. Additionally, it explains why those different groups contest the meaning, construction and implementation of development. However, culture alone does not explain why the issue of

development is contested; a theory of power is needed in order to fully understand the politics of development in Ecuador.

Power within Culture

What exactly is power? Michel Foucault defines power as “a relation”. Power, therefore, is inherent in all interactions, and expresses itself as a duality of power and resistance (Dirks et al. 1994, 8). Politics is often associated with the play of and search for power or the maintenance of power. Foucault joins the concept of power together with his theory of culture. The idea of power is necessary in order to understand the role of politics in culture. Politics, in the theoretical sense, can be explained by Swidler’s “tool box”. It is a means through which culturally influenced action can be strategically used to reinforce that culture and achieve the goals that the culture is equipped to accomplish (Swidler 1986, 275). Additionally, culture can only be expressed within a group or community. It follows that a single person defines him/herself by how they compare with another person’s culture and by how other people define that person (Wildavsky 1988, 595). Therefore, culture, as a group phenomenon, provides people with the skills to express their beliefs, symbols, values, and concerns in a setting that will reinforce those concepts and confirm it within a group, namely politics. Therefore, politics is a byproduct of culture because it is created by a society’s personification of shared or common ideas that define them as a society and define how they express themselves to themselves and to others. Understanding politics requires more than understanding how society’s culture, but also understanding the strategies and mechanisms that the culture uses to construct politics. Therefore, it can be concluded that an understanding of power within a culture is needed in order to determine what is valued within that society, and the ways in which those core values or perspectives are maintained and controlled within that society. In the case of Ecuador, power is inherent in two key aspects, development and knowledge.

Who Creates Knowledge?

The concepts of development and knowledge are a political representation of power within the Ecuadorian culture. This is due to the fact that the differing ideas of development and the importance of knowledge create confrontations between the actors in Ecuador, which translate into a political power struggle to assert their own idea over the other. Knowledge is one of the most powerful tools of dominance and power. Bourque discusses the concept of knowledge in her article about learning. She rejects the idea of knowledge as “a one-way,

objectifying relationship between the knower and what is known” (Bourque 2002, 195). Instead, she attests that every society defines knowledge in a different way. For instance, the indigenous perspective of knowledge is as a dialogue with the world around them, including not only other people, but also nature, spirits and the elements (Bourque 2002, 195). Through her explanation of knowledge-building, it is clear there are several similarities that can be drawn from Bourque’s ideas and Wedeen’s process of meaning-making. Bourque and Wedeen share the idea that meaning is created by “a social process through which people reproduce together the conditions of intelligibility that enable them to make sense of their worlds” or in the words of Bourque, “people teach by showing and they learn by watching and doing” (Wedeen 2002, 717; Bourque 2002, 195). Therefore, power through knowledge in an indigenous society is not defined by the ownership of knowledge, but by the sharing of it.

Gegeo’s article though it does not specifically address the indigenous peoples of Ecuador, does analyze how knowledge is powerful in his analysis of the indigenous people of the Soloman Islands. The comparison of the Kwara’ae indigenous peoples and the indigenous peoples of Ecuador gives perspective on shared culture and development problems of indigenous peoples across the globe (Gegeo 1998). Gegeo discusses how individual decision making in political and community issues is derived by inclusion in the community “critical discussion”. Participation, in this example, is contingent on knowledge of the formal rules of argumentation and conversation. Therefore, the only way to participate in political systems is to have knowledge of the language. In Ecuador, indigenous peoples are keepers of invaluable knowledge about the properties of the earth, the plethora of plants growing in different regions and how to cultivate them. Indigenous peoples live in the areas that governments and NGOs want to develop; they inhabit the same land that their ancestors lived on (Gray et al 2005, 100). Two conclusions can be drawn from these cases, 1) knowledge is created by the culture, and is a tool for contesting, constructing and disseminating new knowledge and/or cultural norms and 2) the possession of this knowledge is power, and gives a person the ability to participate in the creation of knowledge.

One of the most powerful tools of a state is knowledge. Knowledge can be used as a medium of control and a determinant of the most important values within the state (Herrick 2005, 21-24). The education system, the official disseminator of knowledge, is characterized by state approved discourse that dictates how its citizens behave, interact within established societal

norms and view the state's history. Text books are especially potent source of state narrative. With the control of knowledge and the source of knowledge, states have the power to strip other groups within the state of their power of discourse and alliance building. States also use rhetoric in order to maintain their power. By withholding rhetorical-making powers from other state actors, states ensure that they are the only source of knowledge and knowledge creation (Herrick 2002, 21-24).

What results from this discussion of culture, power and politics is a picture of a struggle between two main actors: indigenous people and the state of Ecuador. The desire of state control conflicts with the indigenous community in two distinct ways. Culturally, there is a disagreement over the use of the "tools" of knowledge used by the state and indigenous people to create politics and acquire power. Second, this conflict makes it difficult for there to be agreement over the methods and implementation of development. However, there is still one more actor missing from the discussion. Where do NGOs fit in to this scenario of culture, knowledge and power?

NGOs exist outside the politics of the Ecuadorian state. However, Wildavsky would argue that NGOs, as entities who identify themselves by their institutional goals, many of which have to do with creating sustainable development (Keese 2001,1), share a culture with other development-minded people in Ecuador. NGOs possess a different type of knowledge; they are authorities and cognizant of a broader culture, based on quantitative and qualitative research and cross-cultural analysis. In other words, NGOs have the potential to gather "tools" from various cultures' tool kits. This gives them access to knowledge from several societies and institutions. Furthermore, it gives them great power over other domestic groups because NGOs have elevated access to resources and knowledge which those groups do not possess and wish to acquire (Keese 2001, 2). However, since NGOs are not subject to the demands of a specific state, they theoretically have the power to use their knowledge in any project or study they see fit. Therefore, questions regarding the intentions and methods used by NGOs to attain their goals are broached by the international community or by the specific state under the scrutiny of an NGO (Keese 2001, 1). Another interpretation of the NGO culture is that they have the culture from which they attained their education and or lived. Therefore, NGOs based from the United States have a distinct "western" culture, based on the values usually associated with the US (Radcliffe and Laurie 2006, 233). Even United Nations based NGOs can be said to be culturally "western"

based because of the major influence of the United States and other prominent world powers (most of which are culturally western inclined). In either case, NGOs gain their power from the connections they have with the international community and specifically, with the world powers in the international system. Furthermore, this power, defined by NGOs knowledge, is also apparent on a political scale.

International treaties on environmental protection and human rights are endorsed by states for various reasons. A state is as likely to sign a treaty because it is something it believes is right as they are to sign it in order to adhere to certain accepted international norms. For example, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, drafted in 1947, is motivated by a predominately western concept that was adopted by other states after several compromises and discussions across the international community. Few, for example the Saudi Arabian delegation, protest the content of treaties such as the Declaration. However, usually such contestation does not result in the total abandonment of the document. Usually, international documents require the contestation and compromise of meaning before being ratified (Ignatieff 2001). NGOs also have this type of power and authority. Although not to the same extent, NGOs are representatives of international norms that theoretically “govern” or more practically influence the decisions and actions of states (Bebbington and Thiele 1993, 1). The power of NGOs can thus be characterized as political, because when they intervene within states, they are often there to contend a part of the state that is wrong or misguided within the state’s political system. For example, countless issues in Ecuador are based around land policy issues. Many projects and reports conducted in Ecuador address the social issues of land policy, but offer improvements on a political or policy level (Keese 2001, 2). Therefore, NGOs are also wrapped up in the politics of development, in general and in the specific case of Ecuador.

The Politics of Development

The politics of development, and how it is shaped by culture and shapes culture, is addressed in the individual analysis of the actors of development in Ecuador. Development is a source of power, as well as a field in which power is contended. Power is derived from the potential for development to provide future economic prosperity and its ability to act as a mechanism of environmental conservation. Previous, development has been discussed in a general way; now two distinct definitions will be offered. Sustainable development is

technological and methodical development that addresses the physical limitations of the environment and economy as well as promotes conservation and preservation practices that will ensure that future generations will have the same quality environment as the present generation (Kidd, 1992; United Nations, 2000). Finally, rural development is a model of agricultural policies and projects that are created to solve agricultural, economic and environmental problems in underdeveloped countries (Gegeo, 1998). Therefore, it can be concluded that indigenous peoples, the Ecuadorian government and NGOs each view and act with their respective culturally-constructed tools to bring about development.

Traditional Knowledge and the Indigenous Peoples' Experience

Why should the natural inhabitants of the Amazon, the indigenous peoples, have power over development and the future of agriculture in that area? This question, and others similar to it, is posed in the argument over power and control in development projects in Ecuador. Although the world has progressed forward in terms of minimizing the gap between the privileged and victimized, for example with the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and also acknowledging the value of “vulnerable peoples”, namely natives and women, in key international environment documents such as the *Millennium Report* and *Agenda 21*, the world still has far to go in terms of truly accepting and including the marginalized cultures such as the indigenous culture within the framework of development plans. By exploring what exactly the indigenous culture is and how it is powerful and necessary in its own right, theories of an innovative development plan can be formulated. As Sarah Radcliffe and Nina Laurie state in their article, “Culture and development: taking culture seriously in development for Andean indigenous people”, “culture has thus to be situated firmly within an analysis of the grids of power inherent to development and the hierarchies between world regions, races, cultures, and modernity or tradition” (Radcliffe and Laurie 2006, 231).

One of the greatest “tools” of the indigenous community is traditional knowledge. Traditional knowledge can be defined as a collection of behaviors, practices and attitudes passed down from generation to generation that promote cultural values such as respect for the earth, peace, giving and many others. Traditional knowledge is not only relevant to agriculture, but it is also a spiritual and emotional guide (Grenier, 1998; Turner et al., 2000; Gegeo, 1998). This characterization of traditional knowledge is most likely an accurate portrayal of indigenous culture based on research done that have highlighted the importance of the natural and the

spiritual in indigenous cultures (Gegeo 1998; Warren 2004, 317). Often considered a symbol of an indigenous tribe by the outside world, traditional knowledge is both a tool and a strategy of the indigenous culture.

In a very basic sense, traditional knowledge, as a “tool”, provides knowledge about the techniques and methods of tending plants. For example, located in the lower tropical mountain forest of southern Ecuador, the Shuar indigenous tribe is responsible for all their subsistence needs. The Shuar use their knowledge of plants in the growth and utilization of over 120 wild plants and 65 cultivated plants. The diversity of the use of these plants, ranging from food consumption, construction materials and medicine is astounding (Pohle and Reinhardt 2004, 134). Moreover, the knowledge of the five largest indigenous tribes spread throughout Ecuador, would provide even more information on the utilization and properties of Amazonian plants (Gray et al. 2005). Also differences in traditional knowledge between the different indigenous tribes and of commercially grown food produce, could allow development plans specific to a land type to be constructed. One problem that has arisen in regards to traditional knowledge practices is that it is not enough in colonized or partly developed areas (Gray et al 2005, 107) to counteract advances made by the three horsemen, namely poverty, environmental degradation and population growth. Therefore, as a tool, traditional knowledge provides the methods to sustainable agricultural practices. However, it is as a strategy that traditional knowledge, as a representative part of the indigenous culture, is crucial to creating the foundation of how development should be organized and constructed. In other words, since the indigenous peoples know the land and the most effective tending and harvesting methods, they should determine in what ways sustainable development should be implemented.

The Ecuadorian Government and the Rural Development Project

The Ecuadorian government is a republic, headed by a president. Both the individuals who make up the Ecuadorian government and the government as an institution of the state contribute to a particular culture. As suggested previously in the discussion of the power of a state, the toolbox of a state is comprised of tools that will maintain the state’s sovereignty and control over its population. In many ways, the Ecuadorian state and the indigenous peoples share a combined culture as Ecuadorians. Within this shared cultural identity, the state has a type of ownership over the indigenous peoples, since they are citizens. What does this have to do with the tools of development? The Ecuadorian state has the political means to control the

resources of the state, and specifically the resources that would go towards development. The Ecuadorian state uses various tools of control, implicit of the Ecuadorian culture, the instigation of Spanish as the official language, a universal suffrage age of 16, and the writing of a constitution on October 20th of 2008 to legitimize that power and make it a habitual part of the national history (CIA Factbook, 2011).

However, it is within the state that the idea of development may diverge. Rural development, as defined above, has been the goal of states for decades. This model of development was seen as a means to rise percentages of the population above the poverty level. Additionally, rural development was seen as a way, especially in Ecuador, to assimilate indigenous cultures into the Ecuadorian civilized society (Radcliffe and Laurie 2006, 237). Although this state view of development has been changing, Bebbington suggests that the Ecuadorian's obsession for control over the state will continue to hinder development projects. This is especially true for NGO and state relations (3). Therefore the major problems inherent in the Ecuadorian state driven development is an overwhelming emphasis on the politics of development and not the benefits of a sustainable system.

Despite these possible problems, the Ecuadorian state is necessary for the process of sustainable development because of their access to national resources (Agyeman et al 2002, 176). Furthermore, their ability to change the rhetoric of the state and give agency and value to the indigenous peoples' version of development would facilitate the process of development. Moreover, the state could create an official domain within the Ecuadorian society for indigenous peoples that would not marginalize or limit their ability to participate in sustainable development decisions.

NGOs: the Floating Culture

Finally, NGOs hit the scene of development in Ecuador, with a new cultural and political significance. Since NGOs vary extremely from each other in terms of the many different types of NGOs that exist in the world, the focus will be trained on environmental NGOs. The culture of an NGO is hard to pin-point. Laitin would assert, based on his earlier argument, that an NGO's culture is easily explained by the point of interest the members share. However, Swidler would probably assert that an NGO's culture stems from the society the NGO was based, which is often a western based society. Either way, the tool kits of an NGO are similar in the sense that they use their tools to accomplish the same actions: providing aid for sustainable development

projects. Therefore, two major tools of NGOs are their business orientation and their flexibility. For the most part, NGOs are internationally funded; individual donors or institutional donors will fund the projects of specific NGOs in order to either support a project directed by the donor itself or by the NGO (Keese 2001, 2). An NGO's business orientation is also a tool because it is reflective of how NGOs construct their political objectives. Money is a major source of power, both within the world and within the entity of the NGO. Therefore, as a source of knowledge and money, NGOs gain political power. They can use this power in many ways, one of which is to hold governments accountable for the maintenance of development projects (Fisher 1998, 2). However, one danger of being monetarily bound is an affinity towards a "hero complex." Inherent in many western actions and perspectives is of the west being a "savior" or hero for the under-developed world (Fisher 1998, 1). This complex can lead to the attitude that "NGOs know best." In other words, as a "culture" that gains a large portion of its legitimacy from the endorsement, NGOs may feel that the reason they are receiving this money is because of their superior knowledge in the subject area and the confidence to carry out the project. This attitude is indicative of a culture that uses their knowledge as a marketing tool; if they are inherently flexible in mission, money and location, and their main attribute is their labor capacities and knowledge, it follows that NGOs would believe that they thus know the best course of action in the projects they are placed in charge.

Flexibility is another tool in the toolbox of NGOs. The identity of an NGO is built not only on their platform, but on the diversity of their possible actions. This flexibility gives an NGO power in two ways. First, it allows NGOs to mold to fit the work they are funded to complete. In other words, even specialized NGOs, such as those focused on the environment, can have a skill set general enough to attract project proposals from various sources. Second, the flexibility of NGOs allows them to incorporate other discourses and perspectives into their work. This inclusion of the local or indigenous voice (Bebbington and Thiele 1993, 2 & 7) can be seen as a strategy of flexibility to successfully implement development projects. However, a potential problem that can result from talking with indigenous peoples, and effectively allowing them access to rhetoric creation, is an increase of power struggles and tensions between NGOs and governments (Bebbington and Thiele 1993). Therefore, as a strategy to bring about the success of sustainable development in Ecuador, NGOs provide a dual advantage: 1) they have access to funding and international support for development projects, as well as access to government

facilities and resources (Bebbington and Thiele 1993), and 2) they have the ability to talk to and include the indigenous voice and perspective in projects. In the case of Ecuador, NGOs are in a powerful position within the politics of development because they link the development goals of indigenous peoples and the government together.

Conclusions and Implications

The idea that culture can be contested on an individual basis daily, but that the actual culture that a person is identified by can be centuries old, is astonishing. Even more amazing is the ability of political scientists to explain this complex relationship of symbols, skills sets and actions within a social system with academic articles of 20 pages or less. The realm of political culture is still an area of study that requires vast amounts of exploration, evaluation and contestation. From Geertz to Swidler, researchers are getting closer to discovering the core of culture and how people and societies are influenced by and correspondingly influence it. Moreover, the concepts of culture, politics and power are changing as new ways of viewing the world and the people within it arise. Politics, and therefore power, are shown to be more than just related to culture, but an intrinsic part of how culture is contested and created and then re-contested. Knowledge and rhetoric, previously held in esteem as sources of power, are now being discovered to not only be the conduits of politics, but also of culture.

Moreover, until recently, culture has been neglected in the discussions regarding development, which has been previously seen as an economic and political issue. In order for successful sustainable development plans to be created, not only in Ecuador, an understanding of the relationship between culture and politics is crucial. Without this comprehension, at minimum, development plans will not be easily constructed, and at maximum, cross-cultural interactions will suffer the neglect and malpractice of the culture-blind human mind.

Indigenous peoples play an especially special role in this chain of actors. They are the ones with the intimate knowledge of the land and the only possible and responsible implementers of traditional knowledge practices. The analysis of their cultural knowledge and power is the most significant in a situation of applying traditional practices. Indigenous people bring with them a fathomless understanding of the earth, which is demonstrated in the various traditional knowledge practices that they utilize. This knowledge is a compilation of hundreds of year's

worth of experience, influenced by the beliefs of the indigenous culture as well as the contestation of those beliefs. Especially in the case of Ecuador, it is clear that the indigenous population not only have knowledge of the methods themselves or the land, but how to maintain the practices so that they become sustainable.

A Parting Proposal

Dirks, Eley, and Ortner, in the introduction to their edited volume, *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, challenge the reader to view history not as a single narrative, but as a text that can be interpreted and re-interpreted in myriad of ways (6). Furthermore, the editors propose that discourse of history is itself “culturized”, in the sense that the events, identities, etc., of history are being told and remembered in a cultural lens (6). How will development projects in Ecuador, and around the world, be remembered 20 years from now? How about 100 years? 1000 years? Will the international narrative have changed to incorporate the indigenous voice and the voices of other marginalized groups? Constructivist political theory asserts that deep understanding, of another culture’s customs, beliefs, history and every other aspect of that society, is necessary to deal with that culture on a basic level. Furthermore, they assert that societies change (Verweij et al 1998, 7-8). Thus, constructivist theorists would say that it would be hard for the international narrative to not change. As Wildavsky stated and as it is briefly discussed in the section about power, culture is social; it cannot be created by itself in a single individual (1998, 595). Therefore, the people representative of the innumerable cultures of the world, as separate as they are in terms of values, are all bound to interact with each other in a social, political or economic setting. It follows that with every interaction, a little more is understood about the other culture. Therefore, the eventual incorporation of less prominent cultures and perspectives will, in time, be part of the international narrative.

It is important to note that the inclusion of the indigenous voice in the international discourse will be a long and slow process. Therefore, in order to combat immediately the three horsemen of the apocalypse – poverty, environmental degradation and population growth – in the present time, it is imperative to take into consideration the discussion about culture and power and begin applying a new proposal to these problems and others. The proposal is simple: develop. Develop, not in the sense discussed above, but develop the mind and a lifestyle that questions the bounds of one’s culture. A new tool must be introduced to the toolbox; it is a rope

or a connection point between one's own culture and the culture of another. Only by expanding the imagination and reaching to understand, as Swidler would say, the cultural tools and actions strategies of another person or society can humanity develop a way to broach the problems of the environment and configure an answer. If everyone in a society develops their mind, gradually, a rope will connect each person to another, creating a web of mutual understanding. Although this proposal may result in conflict or the contestation of other cultures, it also has the potential to lead to peaceful and innovative interactions.

The Next Step

Looking at Ecuador, the leadership of indigenous peoples in agriculture is an example and perhaps a model of an agricultural system that is both profitable in terms of productivity, as well as sustainable. In every part of Ecuador, there are many small to large tribes of indigenous peoples living off the land and trying to survive the world's continuous shift towards technology and development. In the previous section, it was shown that indigenous people's participation in development projects was crucial; to ignore or exclude them would set back environmental protection projects and development aspirations irrevocably. It was discussed that the part that indigenous peoples needed to play in agricultural, sustainable development projects was in the decision-making and implementation of the project. The priceless information that indigenous people possess concerning the land, and the necessity to fit the development project to the culture that will be most affected by it, the indigenous peoples, were two important points. However, something not discussed is who should specifically contribute to the creation of sustainable development projects. I propose that indigenous women are the only people with sufficient knowledge to implement sustainable, traditional practices because of their role as the keepers of traditional knowledge.

The Woman's Battlefield

Agriculture and development aside, what makes indigenous women, or even just women, crucial to the world? In all fields of study and careers, women have had to fight to establish a position in which they could share in the power of men. This is apparent in cultural, political and security spheres. According to political culture studies, the positions that women have held in society have varied across cultures. Superficially, the rights and respect that women have received differ drastically in the United States than in Middle Eastern countries, and varies also

in Amazonia Ecuador. However, certain characteristics can be highlighted as being universal cultural perspectives of women.

Women have traditionally been considered the “weaker sex.” The belief that women are biologically and mentally unfit for equivalent male positions in society has been perpetuated for centuries. Philosophers, biologists, psychologists, historians and politicians have stated with aplomb that women have no place in decision-making, government, in the work place, etc... and yet with every passing year, women are pushing to the forefront of their professions, and breaking into the professions that were once closed to them (Millennium Report, 2000). As stated on the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women website, “gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society. Women lack access to decent work and face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. They are too often denied access to basic education and health care. Women in all parts of the world suffer violence and discrimination. They are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes.” Why are women subjugated to such mistreatment? Or an even more provoking question, why is this behavior against women maintained? The UN Women’s solution states that changes in the socio-economic spheres will lead to the empowerment of women. This thesis proposes a similar resolution that takes into account the influence that culture has on politics. Therefore, it is only via politics, policy reform and the changing of customary norms that women’s importance can be firmly fixed in the world culture.

On the political front, women have made progress through the United Nations Resolution 1325. The Resolution 1325 was passed in 2000 by the Security Council in order to ensure the protection of women, especially in armed conflict. This Resolution also acknowledged the role that women play in conflict resolution and peace building, and stressed the importance of guaranteeing the rights of women and girls. Additionally, the resolution called for a gendered approach that took into consideration how women view and experience conflict (Security Council, 2000). This resolution has helped form the basis for women’s rights and security in the international arena. International Women’s day, created on March 8, 2000, also is a reminder to the world to celebrate and commemorate women. Another source of women’s push for acknowledgement and respect are the World Conferences on Women. The next conference will be the fifth, and each previous conference has not only brought to the forefront issues that promote the protection and empowerment of women, but also drawn connections from all around

the world for the support of women and their experiences. These events and documents are significant in two ways. The first is for the principle value that they bring to the international arena; the messages that they advocate about women's rights, are stepping stones to a more equal world. Secondly, the events and documents are reinforcements for a new perspective on women and the catalyst of a change of culture that includes the women's perspective. According to David E. Lorey, rituals are imperative to the construction and maintenance of new ideas or processes through socialization of culture. The evolution of ceremonies over time has a significant impact on how people regard the focus of the ceremony and how they store it in their memory and in history (1997, 42). As discussed previously, Swidler and Laitin would agree that a symbol is a powerful representation of the culture (1986, 273; 1988, 589). These symbols underline habits and skills that shape the nation and politics of that culture. Therefore, the formalization of women's inclusion in the symbolism of a holiday or a law continues to build the foundation in which women's culture is amalgamated into the dominant international culture.

Moreover, research has been shown that women are not only an asset to society and politics, but also a crucial player in the security of a state. Hudson et al. in an article entitled "The Heart of the Matter", proposes that the security of states is contingent on the security of women (2009). The authors demonstrate how the physical security of women is connected to the level of peacefulness in a state. Furthermore, addressing this security issue within states will not only benefit women who are victims of domestic and war-related violence, but it will also enhance the balance of power between the sexes within a society. Additionally, it will further support the growing women's culture in the international political, economic and social spheres. Even in the military, women are becoming more involved. Resolution 1820, passed in 2008, advocated greater awareness and prevention of sexual violence in conflict. It called to light not only the physical, emotional and psychological damage of women due to sexual violence, but also the threat that it imposes on the society as a whole. Since women are vital agents to the prevention of conflict, if women cannot feel safe in their own nations, then it is impossible for peace to be truly present (Security Council, 2008). Therefore, the growing awareness in the social, political and security spheres of the international arena of the significant part that women play in the world is a benefit to the emerging culture of women. This is in turn advantageous for the inclusion of women in other areas of decision-making and power.

Women, in all these instances, are entering into a sphere that was previously dominated by men. While the methods that men are using are efficient, it is shown that the inclusion of women has augmented the efficiency in these sections. The fact that UN resolutions were passed shows how women are being seen internationally as an important missing piece that must become a participant of decision-making. And these are not the only documents that promote the inclusion of women; other examples include the Millennium Development Goals, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women. These examples of the necessity to include women in all aspects of society are precursory to the analysis of whether indigenous women's involvement in agriculture is more beneficial to a tribe than solely a man's participation in agriculture. As the focus narrows back to the case of Ecuador, it is apparent that these changes in the international community affect the indigenous communities of Ecuador. Increased support of indigenous women's rights within the indigenous community and internationally gives indigenous women the opportunity and determination to demand and fight for their own rights and indigenous identity recognition, especially in regards to agriculture and valorization of labor (Radcliffe 2002, 151 and 165). In general, knowledge, as demonstrated in the previous section, is a type of power that can be politically, as well as socially, significant. Indigenous women's knowledge is especially powerful in the realm of environmental conservation and agriculture. The knowledge and power that indigenous women possess is represented in their position as keepers of traditional knowledge.

Indigenous women face two "stereotypical" measures of inferiority as women and as an indigenous person (UN report: Gender and Indigenous Peoples, 2010; Beijing Declaration, 1995). This biased view of indigenous women creates greater limits to their rights and entitlements. Conflict over resources, either between indigenous groups, with the government or with an international entity has many effects on how indigenous women are treated and the obstacles they face in providing for their family. In other ways, conflict over resources and land use limits women's access to forms of empowerment and has effects on the education of children, her active participation in household decision making and other community jobs. Additionally, lack of resources and funding acts solely to further exasperate the situation and keep women in their "place" (Radcliffe 2002, 150). The largest advantage that indigenous women have is their knowledge and skills with traditional knowledge.

Women as Keepers

In most major creation stories, the earth is represented by a woman, who nurtures and cares for all creatures on the earth. In Quechua, Pachamama means mother earth. The mother earth or goddess represents, not only in Quichua culture but in other indigenous cultures, “the feminine and divine element represents the fruitful and prolific mother” (Tapia and Torre 1998, 9; Beijing Declaration, 1995). It is not a very large stretch of the imagination that women are the possessors and keepers of traditional knowledge. What does it mean to be a keeper? Patricia Howard, in her article, “The Major Importance of ‘Minor’ Resources: Women and Plant Biodiversity”, identifies the role of keeper as the duties of a housewife, home gardener and seed custodian (2001, 2). She argues that since the domestic sphere is generally undervalued, the importance that women bring specifically to plant biodiversity, and more generally to environmental conservation, often goes unnoticed. Louise Grenier, while doing research with indigenous cultures, described in her book, *Working with Indigenous Knowledge: a guide for researchers*, how this exclusion and non-valuing of the woman is not only from inside the village, but also by outsiders. She warns that if researchers do not speak with women separately, they risk losing the women’s perspective and knowledge in group interviews due to male dominance of the conversations (1998, 34). The position as keeper of traditional knowledge has deeper roots than the role of housewives in the conventional sense.

Not only do indigenous women use TK in their home lives, they also use it as custodian of seeds, medicinal herbalists, gatherers and cultivators (Howard 2001, 2; Tapia and Torre 1998, 15-16). These roles are interconnected, but perform different functions for the overall sustenance of the family and the protection of the local environment (Howard 2001). In the agricultural cycle, indigenous women play a part in every level; they have a hand in seed selection, planting, harvesting, and storage (Tapia and Torre 1998). In a study done by Barry and Schlegal, women are responsible for about 79% of the vegetal food in a household (1982). For example, in the Cotacachi village, women take complete control of seed selection and include in their job the distancing of men from the selection process and any other interference (Nazarea 2006, 319). However, traditional knowledge is not learned over night. The wealth of knowledge about plants and the technical skill to use them is accrued over a lifetime (Howard 2001, 4). The representation of this life’s work is the home garden. Sometimes referred to as a

huerta or swidden, the homegardens are “the oldest and most widely used cultivation systems...[characterized by] their location near the home, their function as a secondary source of food and income for households, the predominance of family labour, and heir multi-functionality as aesthetic, social and recreational spaces, as well as for providing medicines, herbs and spices, fodder, building materials and fuel” (Howard 2001, 7). Women’s dual usage of both domesticated and wild plants promotes diversity within the homegarden that surpasses that of male dominated fields (Howard 2001). However, as will be discussed later, oftentimes this domestic labor completed by the women goes unpaid and under-valued (Radcliffe 2002, 151; Millennium Goals, 2000).

How is culture connected to this? Women as keepers of traditional knowledge have the job not only to use their traditional knowledge to grow, but also to pass it down to the next generation, to their daughters, in order to preserve its continuance. Tapia and Torre, in their book, *Women Farmers and Andean Seeds*, also state that the dual purpose of women as keepers is in agriculture and a responsibility to pass on their knowledge and skills (1998, 24). According to Howard, it is through garden chores that women pass on their knowledge about plants and their usage (2001, 8). Moreover, the article “Local Knowledge and Memory in Biodiversity Conservation” by Virginia D. Nazarea, states that local knowledge is preserved through memory. The importance of memory is often not addressed due to the general perception of memory as inconsistent and unreliable. However, Nazarea argues that in order to maintain sustainable biodiversity-rich regions, ecological memory must be present. Ecological memory is a function of two sources, and internal and external source. The internal is the actual working of the land, a concept Nazarea identifies as “living” memory (2006, 328). The external source is memory from archival reports and records. The argument of the importance of memory is not a farfetched one. Culture itself is a mix of memory, tradition and rituals. The continuance of a culture is contingent on the existence of that culture in the living memory of the people and in official traditions such as laws, national holidays and customs (Lorey 1997, 41; Grenier 1998, 2). Furthermore, what is history without memory and a culture to interpret it? Oral tradition in indigenous cultures is so important due to the skill and art it takes to relate a lesson in a fashion that will be most memorable (Grenier 1998, 2). Thus, it is clear that indigenous women are essential to the process of traditional knowledge not only for their possession of knowledge, but also for their purpose of continuing the traditions taught to them by passing it on to the next

generation. Additionally, by using traditional practices, indigenous women ensure that they attain food security for their family, by increasing access, availability and good use of food (Tapia and Torre 1998, 38; O'Brien 2009, 11).

What about the men?

Up until this point, only the importance of indigenous people in traditional and sustainable agricultural practices and then the further specification of the part of indigenous women in agriculture have been discussed. Although indigenous women are the main focus of this thesis, it is important to also address the role of indigenous men in agricultural practices in Ecuador. Women are in the position they are in today due the influence and actions of men. The role of indigenous men is significant because of what they bring to agriculture and the differences between male and female farming methods. The exploration and analysis of the responsibility of indigenous men is a crucial counter example to why indigenous women are important to the process. Furthermore, it will more clearly show why men are not enough by themselves to promote a sustainable community.

It is not uncommon that indigenous villages are organized around a patriarchal system (Radcliffe 2002, 151; UN Report: Gender and Indigenous Peoples 2010). In the case of Ecuador, men hold the power in society as represented by their hunting abilities (Robalino, 1989: 95; Ventura, 1997; Radcliffe and Pequeño, 2010). Moreover, the valorization of labor within the indigenous tribe is skewed. Men's labor is considered to be more important than that of the domestic work of women (Radcliffe 2002, 151; Radcliffe and Pequeño, 2010). Therefore indigenous men have the power to determine the routine of everyday life and are the voices heard during discussions and meetings, within the tribe and also with outsiders (Radcliffe and Pequeño, 2010). As a result, indigenous men are accustomed to claiming all the power within a the indigenous society, and being allotted privileges such as land ownership, recognition in state politics, access to economic resources and mobility inside and outside the indigenous community (Radcliffe 2002, 150; Hamilton et al 2001, 1; Jokisch 2002, 525). Many of these changes from a more egalitarian community are due to influences from the international community and models that place men in charge. This contributes to the gradual "globalization" of the indigenous culture and how gendered identities are reinforced by both the traditional and international discourses of society (Gender and Indigenous Peoples 2020; Radcliffe 2002, 151; Uquillas and

Van Nieuwkoop 2003, 7; Beijing Declaration, 1995). How the indigenous people view themselves will in turn affect how the state and the international system interact with indigenous villages; if men have the power, it is best to deal with the man, in order to be efficient and achieve goals. This cycle keeps indigenous women from gaining any social, political or economic power.

Generally, indigenous men are involved with a larger-scale production of agriculture. They are more concerned with generating an income, and thus are more likely to produce cash crops and/or nontraditional export crops (Hamilan et al 2001, 1; Alberti, 1988; Nash, 1986). Immediately, it is clear how the agricultural choices of women and men differ: men are more focused on the economics, while women are more focused on the home. Furthermore, the type of agriculture that each gender chooses has its own skill set (Grenier 1998, 38; Hamilton et al 2001, 3). While men do have traditional knowledge (Grenier 1998, 39), it is apparent that a less traditional type of agricultural method can be used in the production of cash crops, while homegardens can only thrive with traditional methods.

Additionally, men have greater access to technology and training, and thus utilize high-technology for commercial production (Hamilton et al 2001, 1; Jokisch 2002, 525). In the short run, this has the ability to increase the amount of income that men receive in comparison to women. Another economic advantage that is afforded to indigenous men is funding opportunities. Donors are more likely to give money or credit or marketing assistance to men (Hamilton et al 2001, 1; Jokisch 2002, 525). Additionally, men have easier access to nonagricultural labor jobs, in order to substitute their income (Hamilton et al 2001, 2). This contributes to the problems of migration of men to the big cities to find jobs, leaving women alone to work the farm (Tapia and Torre 1998, 15). These examples of the differences between men and women agricultural practices are by no means exhaustive. However, they do give a clear picture of how these types of agriculture are distinct and the show how cultural expectations around agriculture have sprung forth from these two behaviors.

However, this gendered dualism is not the only one present in indigenous tribes; there is also a very strong collective culture. The idea of the collective is that all actions done within the indigenous community are for the benefit of the community. This is based on an individual level in which whatever the individual can bring to the society via its skills, knowledge and power, will get absorbed into the collective (Radcliffe 2002, 161). The collective culture is indicative of

access and withdrawal rights (Bremner and Lu, 2006). Access rights are the ability of an individual to physically enter a specified area whereas withdrawal rights are the right to use a resource in that space (2006, 501). A cross-cultural study done by Jason Bremner and Flora Lu concludes that Amazonian indigenous tribe collective institutions are successful at creating access rights but vary in their efficiency of withdrawal rights (2006, 516). Therefore, in some indigenous societies it may be hard for individuals to make a ripple and either gain personal advancements or speak out against the rest of the collective in order to gain access and control of a resource.

Limitations as a result of both the patriarchal system and the collective culture inhibit what indigenous women are allowed to achieve outside of their community identity. This is the exact type of limitation that indigenous women face when trying to gain a more equal position within their society. The nook that they have been allotted by society ensures that they stay in that position unless they want to upset the way the whole indigenous community is built or hurt the collective. Moreover, fears that changes in culture to a more liberal style will jeopardize the whole indigenous culture and risk the influence of western cultures. Therefore, if women are to be included into a more powerful indigenous culture, they need a way to get around these fears and the impermeability of culture.

Conclusions and Implications

This section has shown the differences between male and female contributions to agriculture. Most importantly, it has demonstrated how women are crucial to the prosperity of a nation, and that indigenous women are crucial to the maintenance of traditional knowledge practices in agriculture. Establishing that indigenous women are not only the logical, but the rightful implementers of traditional and sustainable agricultural practices is just one step in the process of making that fact a reality. Incorporating that into a norm of the international community is another matter completely. However, indigenous women are not sitting aside, defeated at the enormity of this project. The purpose of this thesis is not only to describe the facts or prove an argument, but also to reiterate the story and voice of indigenous women, who are fighting for the right to work the land how they see fit.

Although a lack of field experience is a major disadvantage to this argument, the extent to which I can argue this point and support the women's indigenous movement from a country

away, is telling. Their story is not just relegated to the Amazon; it has travelled far and wide. Although there may be many NGOs and private companies who have known and supported the indigenous movement for years, this is an issue that does not go away. It must be remembered, re-celebrated, and re-awakened often for it to not only have the immediate affect it desires, but also to actively assure that the cultural shift these movements call for is actually incorporated into the indigenous, Ecuadorian, and international cultures.

With this awareness, steps can be taken to make the power of women more than just a goal. Viewing this argument through a constructivist lens, Nazarea states eloquently how “biodiversity being an environmental workhorse under threat and in its conservation as a nascent social movement with broader political ends” and that “[biodiversity’s] call for its conservation are seen as means to renegotiate the dominant discourse on nature and culture” (2006, 320). In other words, this quote is proclaiming that the environment, politics and culture are not separate; they are all connected. By looking at environmental conservation and sustainable development as a reconstruction of a dominant rural development based society, the inclusion of indigenous women in this process can change how culture affects politics, and vice versa. In doing so, indigenous women will not only find a place in the current agricultural culture but recreate it so the culture reflects what they believe has value. As keepers of traditional knowledge, this re-alignment of the culture will result in the preservation of the environment. This can only be achieved through the empowerment of indigenous women.

PART IV: Indigenous Women’s Empowerment

Women of indigenous tribes all around the world have valuable information about their environments. However, in many cases, they lack the power to share that knowledge, even within their own villages. If indigenous women were empowered enough to operate and implement their own policies and/or methods, sustainable agricultural land would not be just a goal, but a living reality. All the above information regarding whether traditional knowledge could be combined with sustainable practices, and the realization that women would be most ideally suited to the implementation of these traditional, sustainable projects, is the rationale behind my hypothesis: that as indigenous women become more empowered in their communities, the role and importance of traditional knowledge as a working agricultural farming method will be maintained or increased.

Empowerment Defined

The concept of empowerment is very broad and can encompass the political, social and economic fields, just to name a few. Empowerment, as defined in the methodologies section is: a focus on ways in which indigenous women can improve their position within the indigenous and international community so that they can benefit from changes in the existing norms. Of the possible avenues of empowerment that could benefit indigenous women, there are three specific empowerments that could greatly improve the lives of indigenous women, but also augment the wellbeing of the indigenous community as a whole, as well as help maintain traditional, sustainable agriculture. These three aspects of society through which women can gain empowerment are better access to resources, education, and increased capacity of the state (Yashar, 2004; Millennium Goals, 2010).

Education is a gateway not only for more information and knowledge, but it is also a guide on how to manipulate and access information. With increased education, indigenous women can learn about various points of further empowerment, such as their land rights, the political rights, their inheritance rights, how to gain micro-financing, how to organize in order to best present their goals and demands, increased access to mediums to express their desires, increased communication networks with people, ways of recording their traditional knowledge practices in order to preserve them, information about legal rights for domestic issues such as abuse and alcoholism, information about other sustainable methods that can be combined with their traditional methods to be more sustainable and many more.

Access to resources also would better position women in decision making capacities. Micro-financing opportunities would allow women to increase their income, and better care for their families. Women could also pay for better technology or more seeds and supplies to help sustain their huertas. Less intensive agricultural labor would enable women to focus on other things besides sustenance; they could spend more time educating themselves or their children, fighting for better political and health rights and other forms of social improvement. Both access to resources and education directly affect the indigenous women; it also directly changes the indigenous culture as women's empowerment affects their relations with other members of the community and their own perspective of themselves.

State capacity, on the other hand, refers to how the state can change to support indigenous women and facilitate better education and access to resources. The state must become a stronger institution, ensuring basic functions such as upholding the rule of law, protecting all citizen rights, and building up a responsible bureaucracy that will equally treat all ethnicities. The building of the state capacity will help change society's perspective and behavior towards indigenous people, but more specifically, indigenous women. In that way, the state's culture grows to include indigenous peoples as part of its citizenry and responsibility.

By examining the validity of these three forms of empowerment, I will determine whether the empowerment of women results in the maintenance and increase of sustainable, traditional agricultural practices. However, before I can explain this, I must also define the oppositions that indigenous women face in attaining empowerment.

Challenges to Women's Empowerment

If women are so important, why has no one realized it before? The answer is, women's significance is known. However, efforts to spread this realization and support women's emergence has been hampered by the very laws that first promulgated the message. Ideas such as gender neutrality in employment or in other sectors of the society have dampened the fight of women for equality. Despite laws that state the equality and protection of women as a first priority, while this may be (superficially) true in the industrialized world, in rural Amazonia, women are still suppressed by their patriarchal societies (Gender and Indigenous Peoples 2010, 3). Furthermore, disrespect and disregard of indigenous rights in the international community have also made it harder for indigenous women to gain the resources and support they need to surmount gender discrimination (Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women, 1995).

In the case of Ecuador, the lack of women in visible sustainability projects or acknowledged as the primary authority on agriculture and conservation efforts, are not only due to the lack of resources in a community or state pressures, but also due to domestic violence, lack of health care, and lack of education (Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women, 1995; Gender and Indigenous Peoples, 2010). Additionally, when indigenous men move away to find work in cities, women are endowed with even more burdens in order to keep the family alive (Jacky 2007, 30; Korovkin 2001, 20). In analyzing these challenges to women's empowerment, a clear course to stop these challenges and promote women's empowerment can be created. Moreover,

by improving the conditions of indigenous women, as demonstrated through the Ecuadorian case study, continued pressure to modify culture by introducing the importance of women into the discourse can occur.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a problem that is not isolated to the Amazon; women have been subjected to abuse from their spouses and family members all around the world. A quote included in *The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples* best personifies this problem: “indigenous traditions and indigenous women themselves identify women with the Earth and therefore coercive degradation of the Earth as a form of violence against women...It is rooted in indigenous cultural and economic practices in which women both embody and protect the health and well-being of the ecosystems in which they live” (2009, 172). In the case of Ecuador, this abuse is affecting not only the physical and emotional health of indigenous women, but it is also stopping the general improvement of women in society (Goicolea 2001, 196). For example, victims of violence are psychologically beaten; they accept that men will beat them and that there is nothing they themselves can do (Counts et al. 1999, 174). Gender norms also keep women from fighting back, as they are seen to be stepping out of their place if they try to stop domestic violence or disturbances caused by drunken men in the neighborhood (Counts et al. 1999, 175). A main cause of domestic violence is alcohol. When alcohol is involved, some women do not feel that domestic abuse is bad, and that it is the right of the husband to treat her in that manner (Goicolea 2001, 97). Violence due to alcohol could also affect the safety of children as well (Counts et al. 1999, 175). This type of self-abasement and reciprocal oppression is the worst source of oppression that can burden indigenous women. These women do not know how nor want to know how to gain their freedom and voice.

Lack of resources

Resources are essential for the successful implementation and maintenance of any project. However, oftentimes indigenous women are discriminated against and thus are invisible to potential donors (*Gender and Indigenous Peoples* 2010, 8). They are limited by low funds, restricted movement (if they are the primary caretakers or are needed at home), lack of education and isolation (Radcliffe, 2004). Without resources, it is extremely difficult for indigenous women to fund their agricultural projects and continue to use traditional knowledge methods (Hentschel and Waters, 2001). Sources of resource restriction include inaccessibility to funds.

Women especially are not deemed to be suitable funding recipients and suffer from inability to gain resources to help their well-being (Radcliffe and Pequeño, 2010). Lack of funding also makes it difficult for indigenous women to buy the supplies they need for agricultural production, restricts their right to use health care facilities, and limits their accessibility to education. Moreover, lack of resources curtails women's efforts to rise up and demand for better rights (Radcliffe, 2004).

The state

The state is a powerful institution that has the power to give and take away the privileges of its citizens. However, in many cases, indigenous people, and especially women, are not considered citizens or at least, they are not treated like citizens. The state denies indigenous women the specific rights that would allow them political participation and representation in order to push for what they want (Radcliffe 2002, 150). Also, lack of political rights denies women access to resources they need for improvements in education, agriculture and health (Gender and Indigenous Peoples, 2010). If the state gave indigenous women were given political rights, they could legally petition for funding for indigenous projects and be sure that their voice was heard at state conferences or government meetings.

Male migration

Economic burdens and small incomes can cause men and women to leave the tribe and move to cities in order to gain money. This outsourcing of labor and abandonment of traditional vocations provides a challenge to the ability of women to act freely by 1) limiting their actions because they were left behind and now must be the main providers of the family and 2) necessitating the forced immersion into the state and western industrial mechanisms that could alter the identity of the indigenous woman or man. Women must take on the activities of the men, in order to continue making an income and providing for the family (Jokisch 2002, 541,547; Jacky 2007, 30; Radcliffe 2002, 151). This leaves women with very little time to improve upon and make more sustainable the agricultural methods they are using and to have enough time and money to give them better access to resources which would make their tasks easier (Jokisch 2002, 547).

Education

Although education was termed as a form of empowerment, it has also been used as a means to appropriate indigenous peoples into the "modern" culture (King 1996, 270). Intrinsic

to the appropriation of the indigenous culture into the Ecuadorian culture via education is the idea that language is the key to doing so. In the Ecuadorian state schools, Spanish is taught. Language is not only a way to communicate but is a representation of a culture, the traditions and values of a people (Hornberger and King 1999, 161). Lack of bicultural schools forces indigenous children to only learn about the dominant Ecuadorian culture (May 1999,1; The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples 2009, 130). This causes two problems: 1) indigenous children do not learn about their own culture in a public setting where they could share their experiences, which is disrespectful of their culture and 2) children are socialized to value Western values that often are contrary to their own indigenous values (King 1996, 272; May 1999, 1). The need for bilingual education, the lack of teachers and the misunderstanding of indigenous and state sponsored educational values and ideas (King1996, 272), restricts the benefits that indigenous peoples could gain from education and information access.

Lack of Access to Health

Access to health care and to medicinal sources is a huge source of contention between the state and indigenous peoples. Access to health care for indigenous women is made difficult due to transportation limitations, lack of health care and funds for traditional medicine development, and the prevalence of sicknesses and sexually transmitted diseases (Goicolea 2001, 193; Gender and Indigenous Peoples 2010, 9). Tensions in health care practices arise due to a non-awareness and understanding of how indigenous people use and regard medicine. The ignorance of doctors and their lack of respect represented by their indifference to how the indigenous culture deals with health and medicine is further proof of a presiding perspective that the western methods are superior. Additionally, most state sponsored treatment centers will only use Western medicines, which goes against what indigenous people believe in. Even worse, such facilities rarely have translators, and thus miscommunication between doctor and patient can further increase the atmosphere of confusion and frustration regarding proper health procedures. Furthermore, states and international institutions do not usually fund traditional indigenous health systems, and thus these facilities remain with few resources and the inability to treat patients (The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples 2009, 172-174). While traditional medicinal centers have been created that could also promote traditional medicines and pass down that knowledge to the next generation, such as the Jambi Huasi center was created in Ecuador in 1994, many more can, and

should, be created, in order to treat local patients via both traditional and western medicinal practices (The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples 2009, p178; Jacky 2007, 52).

All of the above are examples of discrimination and opposition to women's empowerment. Each one deals differently with the way in which the dominant culture affects the daily actions, values and decisions of indigenous women. Therefore, it is only through a change in the indigenous and international culture that indigenous women can gain their empowerment. Only through the actions of education reform, improved access to resources and increasing state capacity, will women gradually begin to introduce themselves as powerful agents within their culture and in the international culture.

Women's Empowerment

Finally, I have reached the heart of my thesis. All the information and analysis up until this point has been building in order to strengthen the connection between indigenous women, traditional knowledge and sustainable development. This connection is indigenous women's empowerment. There are three ways in which women can gain this empowerment: via education, access to resources and improvements in state capacity. All three of these methods are implicitly based on how culture can promote each one and how changes in these areas can give women the foothold they need to raise their voices in their indigenous community and in the international arena.

Originally, I believed that data existed in a database somewhere that would contain the evidence necessary to draw a clear connection between changes in policy, women's empowerment and the sustainability of agricultural practices. However, my attempts to find such data proved unsuccessful. I underwent three major stages of research. First, I sought to gather information about all the indigenous tribes in Ecuador and compare them on their sustainable practice and who their leaders were – whether men or women. The second research strategy I tried was searching through official databases such as the World Bank, Genderstats, the UNEP and the UNDP. Finally, I combed through articles about the region and about the topic of indigenous women, sustainability and empowerment by other authors, with the intention of using their data. Unfortunately, all three research strategies did not provide the data I need. I have concluded that the information I need does not yet exist. This does not mean that the premise of the thesis is wrong, but instead further demonstrates the need to build up this

information for future reference. Therefore, I will create a detailed research plan for how I would go about collecting the necessary data. This research plan will consist of a breakdown of the type of data I need, the methods of data retrieval, and the effects this research would have on future policy.

The Plan

The specific data needed in order to validate this thesis are the following:

- Statistics comparing indigenous men and women over the areas of education attainment, years enrolled in school, education completion; employment, unemployment, monthly income, wages, time spent working; expenses for agricultural work; expenses based on household responsibilities; participation rates in politics or decisions of the tribe or the country; participation in movements.
 - o These statistics should be taken more than once over a specific time period that is at least 1 year.
- A list of all indigenous sponsored movements and the dates they occurred, their goals, participants and achievements.
- Any changes in policies in the government regarding indigenous peoples and what date they were first discussed and ratified.
- Statistics of agricultural yields, expenses to farm, and methods used
 - o This can be based on a certain plant or a general estimate per household

Data that is not absolutely necessary, but that would augment the research done above are:

- Testimonies of indigenous women who were and were not involved in indigenous movements and their opinions of newly enacted policies
 - o This would give researchers actual first person data of the success or failure of empowerment projects
- A return to the interview site after 2, 5 and 10 years to see how the new policies have affected the culture of the indigenous community and the nation

First a clear set of definitions of important terms would have to be clarified, including measures for sustainable development, changes in indigenous women's well-being, traditional knowledge practices, empowerment and outside pressures. I have already discussed possible

measures of traditional knowledge, sustainable development and empowerment. I define changes in indigenous cultivation can be utilized as a signal of changes in traditional knowledge and agricultural practices. The pressure of outside groups (such as NGOs) to use other methods, such as fertilizers, or by the government to abide by state policies is detrimental to indigenous communities without taking into consideration the indigenous cultural perspective. Other drivers or causes, such as drought or government policy can cause detrimental changes to the indigenous agricultural practices. An accurate measurement of *agricultural practices* would include studying land clearing methods. Analyzing clearing methods would indicate the extent to which the environment is affected by these methods. Another indicator of agricultural practices are sowing methods, which are demonstrated by the methods themselves, as well as the quantity of seeds, the kinds of tools used, and the number of days needed to complete the sowing process. Harvesting methods can also give insight into the types of practices used in Ecuador. The time taken to finish the harvest and the tools and resources used give definitive measures of this term. Any change in traditional indigenous agricultural methods would indicate if other non-traditional/sustainable practices are used. Additionally, it would provide evidence of NGOs or the governmentally imposed rural development plans. I infer that an agricultural system imposed in the indigenous community will fail. Moreover, the danger increases that the indigenous community will lose their right to own and utilize their own land if the government intervenes in the application of a development plan.

In this case, two methods would have to be instigated in order to gather this type of data. First, the local tribe or government would have to set up a mechanism or program that would collect data. A researcher certified by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) would have to organize and conduct the research that would interview indigenous households of an area. The format of the interviews can vary; preferably, one-on-one interviews would be best, and then a group interview of the household would be beneficial to determine if there are cultural differences between the male and female household head. Additionally, the level of patriarchal influence in the family relationship can be observed when comparing group and individual interviews, because the responses of women when in front of their husbands may be different from when women are interviewed separately. The information garnered from these interviews would include data about education, labor, agricultural yields and participation in decision-making.

In order to gather information about indigenous movements, interviews would have to be set up with indigenous movement leaders. Leaders would have the best idea of the extent of influence of their movement and also, the goals and expectations of the movement. Moreover, a historical base can be created by asking the leaders about past movements, their goals and their successes. In this way, researchers can gain an idea of how extensive indigenous movements are and what past effects they have had on the indigenous community, the government and the international community.

Information regarding government policies can be accessed from government buildings or databases within the country, or, if available, from the internet. This data is significant because, by contrasting when policies that empowered women were first discussed and when they were ratified, researchers can determine whether indigenous movements had any effect on the government's decision, especially if the movements occurred at the same time as the policy implementation.

Finally, another round of interviews that asked indigenous women about their opinions about improvements in government policies and any other sources of empowerment would provide researchers with meaningful and direct evidence of the effects of empowerment on agriculture. Individual and group interviews of women would provide a comfortable setting for them to tell their personal stories. The analysis of what they think of the government policies, any changes within their village due to their policies and any additional freedoms the women have, could reveal whether changes in politics can actually affect the indigenous culture. Therefore, it would be important to return back to the same sight where interviews were taken and determine any changes in the opinion of both men and women reflect an opening of the society to include indigenous women in a more powerful decision-making capacity.

PART V: Final Conclusions

Indigenous women have been the solution to sustainable development problems since before conservation became an issue. They hold the knowledge needed to preserve the environment and participate in sustainable agricultural practices. They have had this traditional knowledge and used it for centuries, but it is only now that this knowledge has been regarded by the international community as important. This “epiphany” of the significance of the role of indigenous women is only the beginning. My hypothesis is that the *empowerment* of indigenous

women will actually make the difference in the increased implementation of sustainable agricultural practices. This empowerment cannot be granted arbitrarily; in order for it to be consistent and actually make a difference in the lives of indigenous women, the empowerment of indigenous women must become a part of the greater international culture and indigenous patriarchal cultures.

The role of culture throughout this entire thesis has brought to light the importance of looking beyond the behaviors and words of a people to endeavoring to understand the values and decisions that influence how people act and speak. Culture is intrinsic to every action of every person; acknowledgement of the influence of culture is power. Indigenous women hold so much potential to change the way that development and sustainability are viewed. All it takes is the opening of the minds of the international and patriarchal cultures, as well as the inclusion of indigenous women's methods or "tool utilization" in development projects. That first step will further augment indigenous women's participation and inclusion in all aspects of culture and give them decision-making power – the power to influence the culture of future generations. In other words, with the increased presence of indigenous women within their own community and international community, indigenous women will have the power to influence the dominating culture of today and change it for future women, building up a tradition of inclusion not only for the women themselves, but for the significance of their knowledge and their voice. It is our job – the job of the international community, the national communities and any indigenous culture that limits indigenous women - to step into the place of indigenous women and seek to understand their culture as women.

Empowerment is not achieved by conference alone, it must be acknowledged, accepted, and allowed to change the norm. This fact has implications for other sustainable development projects in countries other than Ecuador. Cultural understanding increases awareness of another people; while this may create more points of contention, it also creates more points of collaboration. While the circumstances may be different than it was in Ecuador, the acceptance of indigenous women into the dominant culture and their empowerment will have the same result, no matter what country. All indigenous women have knowledge special to them and the power to change their society. It is time that their voice was heard.

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