FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON CAPITALIST GLOBALIZATION IN THE ANDES
AGRICULTURE, FOOD SYSTEMS AND WOMEN

NIKKI A. HATZA
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Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Carolyn Sachs
Head of Women's Studies and Professor
Thesis Supervisor/Honors Adviser

Jill Wood
Senior Lecturer
Faculty Reader

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.
This thesis examines the influences of capitalist globalization on agriculture and food systems throughout the Andes, and explores the resulting effects in the lives of rural Andean farming women. Ecofeminist theory is used to analyze and understand the consequences of capitalist globalization in the lives of women, and feminist economic theories are used to formulate a basis for plausible alternatives. Food sovereignty and gift giving theories are discussed as feasible feminist alternatives to global food systems, and ultimately, new feminist discourses and paradigms for the globalized food and agriculture system are proposed.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

In pursuit of a point of intersection among my three majors—Women’s Studies, Spanish, and International Studies—I traveled to the equator with an open mind and eager spirit, and lived in a home-stay in the small indigenous pueblo of Lumbisi, a mountain town in the outskirts of Quito nestled in the Andes Mountains. In many ways I had, if not assumed, hoped that my home-stay would be saved from the omnipresent influences of globalization. I hoped to be immersed in a non-western culture and to learn an alternative way of knowing. I experienced this cultural immersion in a unique way. My travels between my home-stay and Quito were like a time warp in—from a close-knit traditional farming community, where the soil had been tilled by the same family lines for generations, and where much of the food was home grown (see fig. 1.), to the fast streets of Quito shrouded in smog and punctuated by fast food chains like KFC and McDonalds, the surrounding mountain range a reminder of an Incan past. My household

Fig. 1. View from homestay. Lumbisi, Ecuador. Hatza. 2009.
boasted a mixture of cultural traditions and modern day technology. But it was the juxtaposition of unlikely foods that sparked the inspiration for this paper. Meals prepared by my host mother ranged on a given night from the traditional “cuy” (guinea pig) and “papas con salsa de maní” (potatoes with peanut sauce) (see fig. 2.) to an instant Maggi brand soup.

Slowly the impact of the globalizing food supply became apparent to me. In large, high-end grocery stores I found many familiar foods imported from the U.S. In rural farming villages I watched as subsistence farming transformed, plots either shrunk to small gardens or expanded into commercial cash cropping farms. Questions arose in my mind—what was at the root of these changes? How were farmers being affected by the restructuring of food and agricultural systems? What did this mean for the lives of my host-family and other Andean families like them? And in particular, what did this mean for the women I witnessed whose worlds revolved around food—planting, harvesting, preparing, serving? These questions inspired the research found in the following pages, the purpose of which, in light of my experience living in a rural indigenous farming village in Ecuador, is to examine the effects of capitalist globalization on the lives and roles of rural Andean women in relation

Fig. 2. Traditionally prepared cuy (Cuy, Lumbisi, Ecuador. Hatza. 2009.)
to the changing framework of agriculture and food systems, as well as investigate viable feminist alternatives to the current system of exploitation.

By exploitation I refer to the systems of capitalist globalization that, over the past decades, have systematically degraded the environment and consequently the cultures and peoples connected to the Earth. Through the process of capitalist globalization, rifts between the global North and South have deepened, institutionalizing systems of inequality between industrialized and Third World peoples. Globalization of food systems and agriculture, through international trade agreements, has given way to monoculture, proliferation of genetically modified seeds, privatization of natural organisms, and a strong push toward corporate agriculture, leading to demise of small subsistence farming and mass migration to urban centers, a loss of biodiversity, and multidimensional systems of inequality within spheres of gender. At the bottom of the ladder, side-by-side, capitalist globalization finds the land and the indigenous women who farm that land. This simultaneous environmental degradation and “feminization of poverty” are particularly poignant in the context of an ecofeminist philosophy. Patriarchal paradigms imposed by the Western ideologies have, in many ways, ingrained a feminization of nature, weaving an intricate connection between the oppression of women and the exploitation of our environment. In many ways, this connection relates to why the term “feminization of poverty” has become a reality over the last few decades. With women representing the majority of Third World agricultural producers, they have borne the brunt of a forced process of industrialization and development that has treated them as victims in need of saving rather than agents of change toward economic development.
It is this very mindset that has permitted the continued oppression we see, masked under the misinformation that a Western ideal of development—meaning privatization, commodification, and capitalization—is the best way to “save” the people of the Third World. Yet, in various niches and communities around the world functional alternatives to the capitalist food systems of globalization exist in resistance to the dominant framework of exploitation. This paper will investigate, in addition to the effects of globalization of food systems, alternative feminist philosophies and systems that could offer insight into a better, safer, more sustainable, more equal world.
Chapter 2

Capitalist Globalization, Agriculture and Food Systems

“‘Globalization’; that is to say, [the] vast human misery and degradation of the environment that is being wrought by the Western corporate domination of the world economy” (Ruether, vii).

Feminist Perspectives on Capitalist Globalization

The effects of capitalist globalization in the world today are utterly prolific across all spheres of life, agriculture and food systems included. When studying abroad in Ecuador I was shocked to see small, eight-dollar containers of Jif peanut butter sitting on the shelf at upscale supermarkets next to pouches of guayaba mermelada, though the effect was more sobering than comforting. In fact, I was stunned to see my host mother making instant soup for dinner some nights, the imported, yellow Maggi package, a subsidiary of Nestle, an outsider in the pantry among home grown “choclo” (corn on the cob), hand butchered “pollo” (chicken), and “aguacates” (avocados) picked from the tree outside of our home (see Fig. 3). These experiences were cues to me that globalization had a hold of agriculture and food systems in the Andean region, as it does across the globe.
Western globalization operates under the ideology that development is contingent upon the spread of capitalism, privatization, commercialization and free trade, and that said forms of development need be proliferated for the betterment of the world. Yet, as the far-reaching fingers of globalization have stretched across the globe over the last half-century, invading all spheres of life from private to public and industry to agriculture, the effects have consistently been in opposition to the aforementioned assumption. Global pressures toward privatization and global free market economy have caused myriad problems to which those in power have turned a blind eye in favor of capital accumulation. Such consequences, which I will explore, include but are not limited to monoculture, increased commercialization of agriculture, mass production and exporting of cash crops, the growing elimination of small farmers from the land they have cultivated for centuries and mass Third World migration of poor farmers off the land and into urban slums to sell their labor. Yet, as increasingly plump Americans munch on once exotic avocados imported from Ecuador, poor, rural, Third World farmers can barely feed their own families. The degradation of traditional subsistence farming has eliminated the ability for farmers to live off the land that they farm, initiating domino effects of cultural degradation, gendered marginalization, breakdown of rural families, migration of rural people to urban areas, influx of commodities into the rural market, and the rising costs and decreasing access to food in rural areas (Akhter, 99). Subsistence farmers and small farmers are experiencing these problems across the globe, the majority of whom are women, and Andean agriculture is no exception.

To understand the overwhelming problems that have arisen as a result of capitalist globalization, one first must understand the systematic implementation of rural
development programs. Rural development, since its inception, has failed to include means of conservation or regeneration but has been built around state-policies designed to reshape the rural way of life to meet urban needs (Akhter, 92). In a sense, rural development programs have served as “interventionist tools of post-colonial states with the support of multilateral and bilateral aid agencies, targeting by its very design the southern countries and their people” (Akhter, 93). Thus, rural development programs initiated by the Western world and proliferated through capitalist globalization have been used systematically as a tool of wealthy western countries to control rural agricultural production in the Third World. The goals of these programs lacked a component to empower poor rural farming communities toward self-fueled economic development, but rather often functioned to best capitalize on the exploitation of poor rural farmers and the land they have traditionally cultivated for centuries, making the wealthy western world the true beneficiaries as the expense of poor farmers. What is more, the rapid proliferation of these programs has taken on a life of its own; as Josefina Francisco wrote in her 2000 report “Women, Trade Liberalization and Food Security” for the World Food Programme, the capitalist globalization of agriculture “is being pursued at a pace in which there is insufficient time to evaluate results and repair damages, and through an approach that excludes and penalizes other so-called inefficient markets and economies” (90).

Since the implementation of free global trade and the inception of the World Trade Organization in 1994, rural development programs have pressured rural Third World farmers toward commercialization, monoculture, and mass exporting. In her book *The Stolen Harvest*, ecofeminist activist and physicist Vandana Shiva analyzes the effects
of capitalist globalization on agriculture and food systems in the third world as a blatant and unapologetic robbery of crops, cultures, and ways of life committed by the Western world and agribusinesses against poor rural farmers of the developing world under the guise of bolstering global food security. It is a continuation of the myth, that without industrialized agriculture the world will starve, that permits the current global food system to operate in the way that it does, despite the fact that, according to the FAO, the world produces enough food for everyone to consume 3,500 calories daily, almost 1,100 more than the minimum daily requirement. While global commercialization of agriculture has significantly increased output of food being produced, the net gain is negative when the resources being exhausted and diverse crops being lost are considered (Shiva, 7). What is more, the surplus of food being created results in the arrival of one or two new products being introduced into the international market, while Third World farmers lose vastly diverse crops to commercial farm plots. Despite the surplus, inadequate food distribution allows the continuation of hunger and starvation among the poorest people of the world—so why continue to commercialize and overproduce? Surplus and capital accumulation go hand in hand, and the capitalist regime under which the global food system currently operates is at the beck and call of the major agribusinesses like Monsanto and Cargill (Shiva, 9).

As Shiva explains it, international trade policies of the WTO have institutionalized and legalized the growth of corporate agriculture “based on harvests stolen from nature and people” (Shiva, 1). Crops that have been domesticated and seeds that have been cultivated and saved are being patented by bioengineering agribusinesses and commercialized, stealing centuries of cooperative cultural labor in order to capitalize
on these resources at the expense of people and cost of loss of biodiversity. As a result, 
seed saving, which has formed the basis of many agricultural societies, developing rich 
histories of cultivated knowledge passed down through generations, is made essentially 
illegal. Under the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement of the World 
Trade Organization, corporations like Monsanto are legally permitted to claim GM seeds 
as their private property—essentially claiming ownership of a living organism, and one 
that has been cultivated through centuries of communal effort (Shiva, 9). This new area 
of intellectual property has been regarded as quite controversial, with much debate over 
the right of bioengineering firms to claim rights to an entire living organism, when only 
one inserted gene, rather than the entire organism, is actually developed through science. 
By allowing GM firms to take ownership of entire organisms, farmers that have aided in 
the conservation of seeds over time are losing access to the very seeds their cultures 
developed. This loss of seed saving is a loss of biodiversity as well as a (sustainable) way 
of life. Today, 32 percent of the commercial seed market is controlled by ten corporations 
valued at $23 billion (Shiva, 9). Corporate giants like Monsanto and Cargill, who own 
large portions of the agricultural market, hold great power to sway international trade 
policy in their favor, at the expense of smaller farmers. The resulting global food system 
is effectively run by this small group of large corporations, a system Shiva refers to as 
“food totalitarianism”.

The food totalitarian system to which Shiva refers is having drastic impacts on the 
lives of small farmers across the globe. The new regime of global food and agriculture 
has not only commodified the land it dominates but also the people of that land. 
Globalization has, in a way, eliminated what was once the rural way of life through
relentless commercialization of all aspects of life. As Akhter explains, “every one is a ‘customer’ or a client of goods and services…they are all beneficiaries…clients … recipients or borrowers. So the people have lost their ‘human face’. They are only the ‘objects’” (100). While this generalization is not ubiquitous, the claim is poignant at a time in our history when the rate of capitalist globalization is ever increasing. It is a stark truth that this generalization will very soon be reality as rural third world farmers the world over are dragged into the grand assembly line of globalization, prepackaged and made to be part of the system, as customer client or otherwise, like the rest of us.

“As farmers are transformed from producers into consumers of corporate-patented agricultural products, as markets are destroyed locally and nationally but expanded globally, the myth of ‘free trade’ and the global economy becomes a means for the rich to rob the poor of their right to food and even their right to life” (Shiva, 7).

The institutionalized liberalization of trade has allowed foreign imports to flood local markets in the South, devaluing local produce and rapidly eliminating subsistence farming. Yet, due to competition, exported cash crops are undervalued in the global market, making it difficult for former subsistence farmers to afford imported foods, which are quickly becoming their only sustenance option.

The implications of the changing framework of global food systems is particularly significant in the lives of Third World women, as they comprise the vast majority of subsistence farmers being used and exploited. Women farmers across Africa, Asia, and Latin America are victims of an ill-conceived, un-sustainable, profit-driven plan of Western politicians to privatize, commodify and capitalize on the exploitation of the Earth. Studies have shown that the main beneficiaries of these rural development
programs have been men, time and time again, allowing male farmers to privatize to some extent (Paulson, 249). As a result, women’s traditional farming roles are changing, and without access to traditional subsistence farming and seed saving roles women are unable to perform their self-ascribed and gendered duties. For instance, the role of women to care for their families through nutritious meals is degraded as access to fresh, locally grown crops diminishes and pre-packaged instant meals are imported and introduced. And though the systematic disenfranchisement, marginalization and exploitation of women resulting from globalization has seemingly been treated, in effect, as collateral damage to necessary capital accumulation endeavors, women and gender issues have not been completely excluded from development discourse. As it is noted that rural third world women have experienced the most extreme consequences of so called “development”, various internationally funded programs have been created since the 1970s to address the issue of women and gender. Since the 1970s, programs like Women In Development (WID) have evolved into Women And Development (WAD) followed by Gender and Development (GAD). Despite gradual transformations in ideologies from viewing women as recipients of development into agents of change, none of these programs have worked specifically for women with the intent to liberate and empower (Rathgeber). For programs like these “women were not the goals but the means to achieve other goals such as family planning, rural development, etc.” (Akhter, 102).

**Agricultural Commercialization and Commodification in the Andes**

The aforementioned effects of globalization, while occurring systematically worldwide, are acutely experienced by Andean farmers as well. According to the 2005 study
“Trade Liberalization in Agriculture: Lessons from the First 10 Years of the WTO”, there is evidence that, since the advent of the World Trade Organization in 1994, the net agricultural trade balance of the entire Latin American region is skewed in favor of five countries, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile and Ecuador—the latter three of which are all Andean countries. (Goswami, et. Al, 23). What is more, this study suggests that the aforementioned countries are experiencing increasingly severe and highly unsustainable environmental degradation as a result (Goswami, et. al, 23). The study draws a link between this environmental degradation and a growth in macroeconomic inequities between countries in the Latin American region being exacerbated by the inception of the World Trade Organization (Goswami, et. al. 23). The study interviews Everardo Orellana Villverde, a Peruvian Farmer, illuminating the totalitarian food system:

“The threat and the biggest danger is the indiscriminate growth of imported products. We compete against wheat, flour and milk imported from the US and other countries. We do not export our products and we cannot have a balanced diet if we do not have the resources. The imported products destroy our consumer habits. With the little we have, sometimes we buy imported products such as spaghetti and cans of milk because it lasts longer” (Goswami et. al., 24).

Sr. Villverde highlights the agricultural dumping that Latin America has experienced as a feature of the WTO food system in which commercially produced corn, cotton, rice, meat, soybean and wheat—products central to food and agricultural systems of the region—are dumped freely into the market by EU and US agribusiness corporations (Goswami et. al. 24). It is increasingly difficult to shield farmers in these countries from cheap imports. As cheap produce imports flood local markets small farmers are pushed out and larger private farms are the only ones that can remain.
This study highlights various examples throughout the Andes of the effects of the WTO totalitarian food system on the Andean people. In Peru, the dairy industry has been hard hit as highly subsidized EU products have been introduced into the market, essentially eliminating nearly all local dairy industry, and relegating any dairy production to large commercial farms in Lima (Goswami et. al. 26). This is significant when contextualized within the lives of small Andean farmers. The inability to compete with outside influences and imports flooding the markets as a result of deregulation of international trade has caused economic hardships on small farmers, an unsustainable reality that simply cannot be ignored. In a world claiming to use free trade as a form of economic development in Third World Countries, it is clear that this system is leaving behind the most important actors in development—the people.

**Agricultural Commercialization and Andean Women Farmers**

Across the globe, women “are the subsistence farmers of the planet,” producing the majority of the food being consumed by their families and sold within local market structures for consumption (Federici, 48; Shiva, 8). Women in agricultural communities have traditionally assumed the gendered role of responsibility for food security, or assuring that there is food to nourish the family, a part of their role as caregivers. This role has resulted in centuries of seed saving and diverse crop cultivation, fostering rich biodiversity. The role of women holds an important place at the intersection between production and reproduction, both in relation to the land they farm and the families they care for. Yet, because women’s work has not traditionally yielded a monetary profit, very little value is placed by Western capitalist societies on this work, and “given the
capitalist bias in favor of production for the market, housework is not counted as work, it is not included in the GNP and is still not considered by many as ‘real work’” (Federici 48). Because women’s work has been devalued and deemed irrelevant to capitalist endeavors, women have suffered greatly, and again, this connection between women and the environment within productive and reproductive frameworks is highlighted by the wide recognition that women and the environment are the two groups experiencing the most devastation at the hand of capitalist globalization in agriculture.

The staggeringly unequal effects of globalization are multidimensional, working between and within spheres of gender. While the overall beneficiaries of rural development initiatives and capitalist globalization continue to be the Western countries and multinational corporations and institutions initiating these programs, those who end up in positions of property ownership or high management on commercial farms are almost always male. Rural Andean women, in this sense, lose out, as they generally do not have access to property ownership in the process of privatization, losing the land they once farmed. The primary Third World beneficiaries of rural development and capitalist globalization, if any exist, are men, devaluing the work of rural, Third World women. Yet the inequity expands beyond that as globalization intensifies “existing inequalities and insecurities to which poor women are subject” while opening opportunities for educated and professional women in the developed world (Bhavnani and Foran, 320). Thus, poor Andean farming women, in conjunction with poor farming women the world over, find themselves at the bottom of the global social ladder, and being held there by institutionalized inequities resulting from globalization of free trade and agricultural development.
In her 2003 case study “Gendered Practices and Landscapes in the Andes”, Susan Paulson explores and analyses the personal experiences of Bolivian farming women within the changing frameworks of globalizing free market economies, food systems and agricultural development, which illustrate the aforementioned struggles women are facing. These case studies, in examining the multidimensional relations among gender roles, traditional agricultural practices and ecological resources of the Bolivian Andes, bring to light connections between social and environmental impacts of agricultural modernization by exploring effects of globalization on the land and the people.

As occurred across the globe, Paulson discusses the efforts of rural development implemented by internationally funded NGOs through the 1980s and 1990s in Bolivia. The goal of the program was to modernize agriculture through technical training and institutional support in order to increase the area of land cultivated as well as the output of certain, market selected crops. Yet, Paulson found that the results of this project really indicate selective success—while agricultural production increased in certain areas it lagged in others; while commercial production improved, crops for family consumption or market exchange did not; “monoculture of improved varieties was expanded, but not the cultivation of diverse local species and varieties….men’s activities and efforts were strengthened but not women’s” (Paulson, 247). The effects of globalization again appear one-sided, unequal, finding women at the short end of the stick.

As commercial production was expanded, Paulson found that other social and environmental aspects of life were compromised (247). Specific examples of environmental and social degradation included displacement of communal spaces used by women for varying purposes, and overgrazing and excessive fuel wood collection
contributing to deforestation. The modernization initiated a domino effect of social and ecological implications, for instance: expansion of commercial area minimized viable grazing space for animals herded by women, weakening livestock as well as forcing women to travel farther to find open green space. At times, families had to sell livestock, limiting women’s access to manure and thus capacity to maintain fertile soil, as well as minimizing milk and meat access and disrupting the traditionally female role of family nourishment (Paulson, 248).

Paulson found that, while traditionally male-performed labor-intensive farming tasks are made easier with the aid of modern technology such as plows, the tasks of women and children, such as weeding, become far more labor intensive and time consuming in the growing plots of commercial land (248).

“As women lose access to key resources, and as the resources they do control become degraded, their work becomes less efficient and productive, and they are required to invest more time and energy (Paulson, 248).”

Women interviewed by Paulson expressed feelings of inadequacy due to the inability to provide balanced meals to family and livestock coupled with failures to assure health and fertility of soil, animals and people (Paulson, 248). Yet, the very stresses and engendered experiences of inadequacy were direct results of capitalist globalization and commercialization of agriculture. Paulson includes poignant quotations from a number of indigenous Bolivian farmers. One man shared, “the cost of buying fertilizers and food for the family is constantly increasing, and we men have to earn more and more money to buy these things that everyone used to make at home” (Paulson, 249). Women testified, “my husband hits me because I don’t cook well, like they used to’. ‘My mother-in-law
criticizes me because I don’t make my herd multiply like she did.’ ‘My child got sick because I was off herding on a distant mountainside’” (Paulson, 249). The degradation of women’s work as a result of capitalist globalization has infiltrated the lives of these women, taking a toll on not just the tangible but the intangibles through disempowerment.

In the 90s, new studies revealed that nearly all significant beneficiaries of modernization programs were men, who had accrued disproportionate social value to their female counterparts (Paulson, 249). As a result, new gender-oriented initiatives began in order to include women in the development process. Yet the process once again stratified the communities in Bolivia, this time by class, allowing families benefiting from the expansion of commercial land to privatize greater plots while poorer families, no longer able to profit from agricultural work, became laborers. One woman had lost her herd and found work washing clothing for other women in the community, suggesting an innately interdependent relationship between the degradation of the land through which they once shepherded herds and the deteriorating socioeconomic and familial situations of poor rural women (Paulson, 250).

As has been the case throughout history, development in the Andes has displaced many poor women farmers from their land, who seek work selling their labor for low wages in more populous urban centers. Paulson’s (2003) analysis of the process synthesizes that as the economic value flows away from women, herds, and mountainsides it is redistributed into cities, and ultimately to the wealthy developed world (250). This pattern of exploitation of women and the environment alike, for the economic gain of more affluent societies, has been cyclical throughout history. While the
concept that women and the environment have been the two demographics most harmed through the globalization process, the relationship between gender and environmental degradation has been left widely unrecognized. Environmental conservation efforts such as biodiversity saving groups and female economic empowerment efforts such as microfinance organizations have acted in isolation of one another, often exacerbating the situation of the other one (Paulson, 251). Paulson highlights the need for comprehensive multidimensional efforts for reform and change that address these problems together rather than in isolation (251).

Finally, Paulson discusses the ways in which western ideologies have become embedded and accepted through globalization, devaluing traditional ways of knowing in favor of capitalistic ways. This has played a role in gender relations by valuing “production”, a traditionally male area, in support of commercializing agriculture, while devaluing “reproduction”, a sphere within which women have been placed for centuries, which was once celebrated as the heart of a thriving community and a necessary realm for crop and human reproduction but has since been relegated to “housework” (Paulson, 251). Andean women, like their counterparts throughout the Third World, are suffering at the hands of an evolving totalitarian food and agricultural system being proliferated by capitalist globalization.
Chapter 3

Andean Farming Women: Changing Identities Through Globalization

All around me I saw the indigenous women of Lumbísí, Ecuador connecting with the land they farmed, the land they had grown up knowing as they knew themselves. I stepped out of my home-stay just before sunrise, the world still heavy with sleep, roosters just beginning to stir. The damp chill of the mountain air startled my lungs awake as I climbed the steep mountain trails for a morning hike. I passed women returning home, still shrouded in the waning darkness of night, carrying massive bundles of corn, beans or grass on their backs. Women herding cows or sheep nodded and whispered a polite “buenos días” as we passed one another, their traditional Quichua dress vibrant as the sun began to peak over the mountains in the distance. Many of these women looked to me like they had been alive for centuries, tiny, backs hunched under the weight of years of labor, white hair smooth and thick, sunken eyes nestled in deep creases of sun-darkened faces. I gasped for air just walking up the mountainside and wondered in amazement how such frail-looking women could carry such heavy loads up these inclines without a second thought.

On the weekends, I sat on our porch with my host-mother and sisters shelling beans and shucking corn, separating out what we would keep for ourselves from the rest.
that would be sold at market. I watched their agile hands fly through the familiar work, the bean pods and corn like extensions of their fingers. Once the sun reached its peak, with sweat dripping down our faces, we took refuge in the kitchen—what seemed to be the central location for the women in my family and the hub of the household. We prepared fresh “jugo de mora” (blackberry juice) or my favorite “jugo de piña” (pineapple juice) and take glasses outside to my host father as he worked with other men in the community laying bricks down on our soon-to-be paved road. With the women of my family I learned to cook *quimbolitos*, sweet cake-like pastries wrapped within giant banana leaves, and *humitas*, corn based pastries wrapped in the husks and steamed (see fig. 4 and fig. 5). Together we picked the corn from our field, de-grained it, ground the kernels, prepared the batter—the process was labor intensive and yet deeply fulfilling as my host mother and sisters shared with me an important part of their cultural identities.

**Self Identity: Women and Food**

Food is inseparably intertwined with culture—it is sustenance that has been the center for social gatherings, the force bringing families together each night, and the work...
of women for centuries in different societies across the globe. Women’s work has traditionally been deeply connected with food within the private realm of the household. Household work and the work of maintaining a family are often devalued by Western society, misread as failing to produce anything in comparison to work outside of the home. However, as sociologist Marjorie DeVault argues in *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring Work*, food preparation is the very work that defines family, indeed, through the work of feeding her family “women quite literally produce family life from day to day” (13).

To understand food and farming as they play into the identity of Andean farming women, it is important to understand the history of oppression contextualized from Spanish colonialism to present day globalization. The pre-Incan cultural farming traditions that still thrive today among some rural, indigenous Andean communities are characterized by myths, legends, religious rituals and ceremonies, a cyclical interdependence between the people and the land, and a clear gender duality. Many of these traditions, derived from pre-Incan civilizations and dating back to 100 A.D., were preserved as the Incas adopted the beliefs of the peoples they conquered (Millones, 2001). However, these indigenous communities have lived a history of marginalization through conquest and colonization from the Incan empire, to the Spanish colonization of Latin America and the postcolonial era and even up through present day with pressures of globalization and modernization (Rhodes, 2006; Choque-Quispe, 1998; De la Torre & Tapia, 1998). In this section, I will discuss the cultural identities of indigenous Andean farming women in relation to cultural farming traditions and examine the effects of
present day globalization trends in agriculture and food systems on these identities and ways of knowing.

**History of Oppression**

Indigenous populations of the Andes, and specifically the women of these communities, have been marginalized continually throughout history by both internal and external sources including sexism from men in their own society and also by colonial and imperialistic forces demonstrated quite severely under the rule of Colonial Spain (Choque-Quispe). In fact, according to Maria Choque-Quispe in her essay on the colonial domination and subordination of indigenous Andean women, the indigenous woman has become the “symbol of the conquered people” as she experienced the most pointed objectification during Spanish Colonization (13). In effect, the indigenous woman was reduced to a “commodity whose value hinged on her reproductive abilities” both by the indigenous men as well as the Spanish conquistadores (Choque-Quispe, 13). However, the complete marginalization of the entire indigenous community was a deep-seated process imbedded in the colonial political structure established by the Spanish conquerors.

The Spanish colonization of Latin America, (which stretched from present day United States through Mexico, central America, and all of South America sans Brazil) established administrative structures to maintain deep divides between the traditional indigenous farming communities and advancing society of Spanish Colonials, or “peninsulares” (Jeppesen & Henriksen). Unlike the Incan Empire’s conquest of indigenous tribes, the Spanish colonization of Latin America did not adopt but rather
excluded the indigenous beliefs and traditions. By establishing this culturally divided society, the Spanish colonial regime prevented the advancement and modernization of the indigenous peoples. As a result, Andean farming communities, though able to maintain, to some extent, their languages, native dress, social organization of communal land ownership and other traditions, were left in extreme poverty (Jeppesen & Henriksen,).

Consequently, the indigenous farming communities of the Andes were forced to sustain themselves in the margins of society under oppressive rule and did so through the continuation of ancient farming traditions. What is unique about this cultural preservation process is the integral role played by women in the survival of their culture.

From pre-Incan times, gender duality has played an important role in the social-structure of indigenous Andean farming communities (De la Torre & Tapia, 1998). As a result, in Andean tradition the identity of “woman” has historically been intimately linked with the concept of nature. For instance, in Quechua (the language of the Incas) many aspects of the natural world, including plants useful to humans, contain in their name the word “mama”, meaning mother: for example Mother Earth -Pachamama, the sea-Mamacocha, the moon Mama Quilla, maize-Mama sara, and potato- Mama acxo (De la Torre & Tapia, 1998). However, more specifically, in Andean agricultural communities woman is seen as being directly connected with the seeds that are planted and harvested. This connection has played a vital role in Andean agricultural history, as the responsibilities of women for seed conservation have, in many ways, enabled the preservation and continuation of their distinct culture and way of life despite colonization and oppression (De la Torre & Tapia, 1998).
Through this connection with the seed, Andean women have developed and maintained knowledge of the hundreds of different edible plants that can be grown in the diverse ecological climates of the Andes. For example, over 200 species of potato have been cultivated to grow in the Andean highlands, each one of them unique to various cultural needs, and each one understood intimately and committed to memory by Andean women (De la Torre & Tapia, 1998; Cabieses, 2001). This invaluable knowledge protected by women—developed through centuries of cultivating diverse crops to grow and thrive in the varying ecological settings of the Andes—has allowed these communities to survive in the margins and remain self sufficient in the way of food and sustenance.

During times of oppression, such as under Spanish colonization, indigenous Andean women silently continued their agricultural practices and this vital knowledge of seeds was passed from mothers to daughters (De la Torre & Tapia, 1998). This knowledge of biodiversity—the diverse native crops and the types of cultivation each variety needs to provide a bountiful harvest—was protected by women and was the key to sustaining food security for these communities throughout the centuries, and that which allowed them to continue a self-sufficient lifestyle as the indigenous way of life was pushed continually to the margins of what Spanish colonies had established as the mainstream. By passing seed conservation techniques and knowledge from generation to generation, the women upheld their cultural identity and preserved their traditional way of life.
Crops

The Andes are host to various ecologically diverse climates, with a vast array of altitudes ranging from mild valleys to bitter cold peaks. As their culturally established symbolic connection to the seed required, the women of Andean farming communities were responsible for finding varieties of crops capable of growing in the differing altitudes, climates, and topographies. In addition to the more well-known crops, maize and potatoes, women cultivated many other types of native crops including tubers such as mashwa and oca, roots like yacon and chagos, fruits including pepino and goldenberry, grains such as quinoa, legumes including beans and tarwi, cucurbits like squash, and even condiments such as chilies and roqoto (De la Torre & Tapia, 1998). The potato alone yields over 200 varieties in the Andean highlands, each one domesticated and known personally by the women of the community. As a result, the potato, among other crops, over time has become an important part of the culture as there is a potato for every “climate, every type of soil, every need, every tradition, every legend and poem” (Cabieses, 2001).

The indigenous farming populations have not only protected these native Andean crops, but also added to the region’s biodiversity over time. Women, for centuries, have built upon this knowledge by cultivating the genetic makeup of their crops to grow and thrive in the different ecological settings. For example, the Puna zone, which is the coldest region of the Andes, is home to the domesticated “bitter potato” which resists very cold temperatures and has been adapted for the Puna zones of Peru and Bolivia (De la Torre & Tapia, 1998). With a growing mental database of plants useful to humans, the women have protected and expanded their knowledge of biodiversity, which has
supported the development of the indigenous farming culture in an otherwise unlikely context, all throughout the Andes. Unfortunately, as we have seen, this sacred biodiversity is being threatened and lost at the hands of globalization’s corporate farming initiatives enforcing monoculture agricultural systems.

Traditional Farming Practices

“The inhabitants of the Andes do not perceive of their individual and communal actions separately from nature. Economic cycles coincide with symbolic and ceremonial times of year, which in turn correspond to social events and life cycles.” (Lumbreras, 2001, “An Age-Old Task”)

In his essay on agriculture in the Peruvian highlands, Luis G. Lumbreras (2001) describes the survival of ancient farming practices and ideologies in today’s Andean farming community, explaining that age-old indigenous farming techniques, developed in ancient times, are still visible in today’s Andean agricultural communities. For example, the “chaki taklla,” a foot-plow used in the sowing of potato seeds and developed specifically for use in the steep slopes of the Andean Highlands, is still used to maintain the agricultural heritage of the Andean people. Farmers in Cusco’s Urubamba valley still use the Chaki taklla, which long predated the use of ox power in Andean agriculture, to prepare their potato fields (Chauvin, 2001). In addition to this technology, the ancient agricultural wisdom is still quite alive. For example, historically, Andean farmers considered weather predictions and even sun angles in the sowing patterns of their seeds, and today, furrows are still planned around weather predictions. During a predicted dry year, crop furrows are planned to retain water whereas during predicted rainy years the furrows would be arranged to drain water away from the crops (Lumbreras, 2001).
In addition to the continued use of Ancient farming technologies, there are also ancient farming traditions that have survived in the way of rituals and ceremonies. For example, the sowing ceremony in Ampay, in Cusco’s Urubamba Valley is still practiced today. The villagers come together to ask the gods for permission to plant their potato seeds in a celebration of the ancient tradition of “ayni” or shared work (Chauvin, 2001). For the ceremony, the villagers bring seeds, native instruments, maize beer, and the “chaki taklla” plow (Chauvin, 2001). This is one of many rituals still used in Andean farming, which highlights the profound connection that these communities have with the land they farm. Along with ceremonies, many myths and legends have survived as well, and are still prevalent in Andean farming communities.

In his essay “The Inner Realm,” Luis Millones explores the ritual significance that Andean culture places on Andean crops. Certain traditions, including ceremonies and myths, in connection with Andean agriculture date back to pre-Incan times (Millones, 2001). For example, the Moche people, who thrived on the Northern Coast of Peru from 100-600 AD, viewed the potato as part of the “inner world, a place of seeds and corpses, of future and past, as opposed to the…world of the present” (Millones, 2001). In other words, the crops on which the Andean culture depends to survive are part of a deeper realm beyond that of human existence. This idea is still deeply embedded in Andean thought, as the crops are valued for more than the sustenance they provide. To note that agricultural myths and traditions of today’s Andean farmers date back to pre-Incan times establishes the force and longevity of their cultural identity, one that has been preserved for centuries. In his essay on the ancient myths and legends of the potato’s rich cultural history among Andean civilizations, Fernando Cabieses (2001) addresses the profound
connection between the identity of the community and the crops that they farm in explaining that “for ancient civilizations the potato embodied the very roots of existence”. This strong belief in the connection between life and crop is still alive today.

Andean farmers have been cultivating and harvesting a diverse array of crops for 8,000 years—a history that has formed an inextricable link between the people and the land (Cabieses, 2001). This belief in a link between human life and nature manifested itself in many ways and took many forms, including, for instance, a gendered view on nature that was applied to human existence as well. For example, the moon (Mama Quilla) was viewed as the “lady mistress” that gave the power of fertility to both the women of the community and to Mother Earth (Pachamama), in order to reproduce and continue the culture and to germinate and provide the sustenance needed for the culture to survive respectively (Cabieses, 2001). It is in these ancient myths that the connection between woman and mother earth was established and that which shows the strong connection between the self-identity of women in these Andean farming communities and the land that they farm.

Andean farming traditions—from ancient technologies and epistemologies to ceremonies and mythologies—are an important part of the culture, and the continuation of these traditions has allowed for self-preservation, over time, in the face of marginalization. The history of these ancient traditions holds an important weight in the roles and identities of Andean women, emphasizing a connection between Andean women and farming traditions of the land they cultivate. However, in the wake of global development programs, globalizing food systems, and major changes in the agricultural industry, these identities are changing. Influences of modern technologies and a global
market are steering Andean agriculture away from its tradition roots toward monoculture and corporate farming. As a result, the traditional role of rural Andean women in the farming process is changing, affecting, in many ways, their cultural identities.

**Role of Women in Andean Farming Practices**

Many of the myths and legends maintained in Andean farming culture are connected to the crops, and in turn, inevitably connected to the women. This age-old Andean tale told by Cabieses (2001) in his essay “A Timeless Story,” describes how the crops came to be. It starts with a woman who was the sole survivor of the extreme poverty that ravaged the first inhabitants of the Andes:

“...She eked out a living in the arid desert sands until one day she fell asleep under the scorching sun. As she slept, she was impregnated. She bore a son and did her best to feed and care for him. But the child died, and his remains were scattered across the land. Maize sprouted from his teeth, manioc from his long white bones; sweet potatoes grew from his brains and potatoes sprang from his testicles. His eyes, his hands and his head, likewise, sprouted food and the land soon teemed with crops so that people would never again die from hunger” (Cabieses, 2001).

This tale portrays woman as giving birth to the crops that would eventually thrive to feed the entire Andean nation and save the culture. This Andean myth inherently ties women to the Earth, which produces the sustenance needed for survival. In a way, it is the Andean woman along with Mother Earth that produces and reproduces the sustenance on which the culture depends to survive. This gendered ideology is anchored deep within the Andean mindset, and relates directly to the tasks and responsibilities that women perform within the farming communities.
Agricultural production in the Andes is dominated by a sense of community—each family member plays a role in the farming process, as do neighbors and friends. In fact, most Andean communities maintain communal plots in addition to individual family plots. Women, however, may perform up to 70% of agricultural tasks, while men are often absent from the farming process due to financial pressures to pursue higher paying jobs in cities or on bigger farms (De la Torre & Tapia, 1998). In agricultural communities of both the Northern and Southern Andes of Peru, for instance, women’s main responsibility is related to the seed—the tasks most directly involved in the cultivating process and most closely connected with the land. Women are responsible for seed preparation—or the cultivation and propagation of native crop varieties (De la Torre & Tapia, 1998). This entails maintaining and building upon the abundance of knowledge and information regarding the many varieties of seeds—a task unique to women which has survived by passage of these mental seed archives and indexes between generations of Andean women. Other seed related tasks involve managing the surplus and choosing which new seeds will be adapted to replace older depleted ones (De la Torre & Tapia, 1998). This process of choosing new seeds to replace old ones often occurs at seed fairs—organized events where Andean families bring their surplus items to trade with other families in the region, which helps support growth of biodiversity (De la Torre & Tapia, 1998). While replacing old seeds and stimulating genetic diversity are important, women also pick seed varieties based on what they may need for traditional dishes and family nutrition—two of their other roles within the family: providing traditional meals and maintaining family health by preparing varieties of nutrients like the protein rich quinoa grain and the vitamin rich potato (De la Torre & Tapia, 1998).
The women’s role in relation to the seed goes beyond that of domestic necessity and is twofold: first-production, and second-transmission of knowledge. Production is related to the extensive knowledge women hold of technical farming practices and cultivation of the seeds. Women not only know the hundreds of varieties of seeds but also know what types of ecological settings they need to grow and how they must be cultivated to yield a large harvest. Transmission of knowledge is what secures the preservation of their culture and has occurred for centuries as Andean women pass their knowledge to their daughters (De la Torre & Tapia, 1998). Historically, this knowledge has been prized and valued greatly in Andean society. Often when choosing a wife for her son, an Andean mother would test her potential daughter-in-law’s knowledge of the crops and seeds before approving of the match (De la Torre & Tapia, 1998). In this way, the connection with the seed historically defined Andean women. As guardians of the seeds, women are also guardians of their culture because without the knowledge of the seeds the Andean lifestyle of sustainable subsistence farming would surely have died out years ago.

However, despite the important role of women in cultural preservation throughout history, the obstacles presented through present-day globalization of food systems and agriculture are causing significant tension. As the biodiversity of the Andes wanes with a move toward monoculture, Andean women are losing the very knowledge that has defined their identities, cultures and ways of life for centuries. As small farmers lose their land, and rural women migrate into urban centers in pursuit of work, they begin to lose connections to the traditions that defined them. Globalization, by robbing women of the
seeds they once cultivated, simultaneously robs rural Andean women of their cultural identities.

**Seeds and Identity**

“They belong to us, to us the women”
“To whom else can they belong, than to us women”
“It’s women’s work”

Quotes from women in farming families surveyed in Quechua and Jalca zones of Peru (Tapia & De la Torre, 1998, p.24).

There is a deep-seated gender related division of labor in Andean farming communities and, as a result, seeds historically belong to the women (Tapia & De la Torre, 1998). The connection between the seed and woman is uniquely feminine, and any interactions between men and the seed are viewed as “weak” or “feminine,” as it is outside his gender role (De la Torre & Tapia, 1998). Andean thinking is defined by gendered duality in which everything in life—from nature, to animals, to humans—is either masculine or feminine and is defined by the principles of said gender (Choque-Quispe, 1998). The woman’s connection with the seed is part of her gender role and is, in the Andean mind, directly related to her reproductive capability as a woman. The woman’s ability to reproduce is, in large part, that which connects her to nature, Mother Earth, and the seed as the nurturing of the fetus within the womb parallels the cultivation of the seed in the Earth.

The woman’s responsibility to the seed starts as the seeds enter the home. As explained by one woman interviewed by De la Torre and Tapia (1998), “men gather the seeds in the family plot and bring them home, so the women can sort and arrange them as we wish…” (p. 24). Once the men harvest the crops and deliver the seeds to the women,
the women must nurture the seeds. The women know the seeds intimately, care for them, and choose the ones to be planted, eaten, sold, and cultivated. Part of their responsibility to the seed is to know them innately as one knows oneself, requiring women to memorize huge amounts of information about seeds. This connection has allowed women to play a major role in the growth of biodiversity in the Andes, and as a result, these women have, without trying but by nature, become what Tapia and De La Torre (1998) refer to as “conservationists of native Andean seeds” (23). Through a long history of oppression during which Andean women depended heavily on this connection to the seed in order to protect their marginalized culture, it becomes clear that this direct connection between woman and earth, fetus and seed, is the backbone of the identities of these women.

As we can see, women have, throughout history, played the role that has allowed this culture to survive by maintaining and continuing the agricultural knowledge of the culture in its entirety. This role is specific to women as the gender duality of Andean thought and culture places these responsibilities on the female gender. As a result, the individual self-identities of Andean women are directly tied to this centuries old culture, creating a personal sense of self that is tied to their work with the land. This personal self-identity is reinforced by and inextricably linked to the gender duality of the culture that specifically identifies women as in connection with the seed. Thusly, the relationship between woman and nature in Andean culture is the backbone of the complex self identities of Andean women. This seemingly inherent connection of woman to nature and the land is explored extensively by Ecofeminist theory.
Ecofeminism

Ecofeminist theory, borne from converging environmental and feminist movements of the 1970s—both of which shared the demand for a transformation of institutionalized sociopolitical systems as a necessary step toward solving the issues for which they fought—and established as a third wave feminist theory, “is a political position based on analysis of the consequences of Western patriarchal society’s devaluation of nature and women” (Warren, 2002; Sturgeon, 2002, p.117). According to their book Ecofeminism and Globalization, Lorentzen and Eaton explain ecofeminism as an “intellectual and activist movement that makes critical connections between the domination of nature and the exploitation of women” and which “encompasses a variety of theoretical, practical and critical efforts to understand and resist the interrelated dominations of women and nature” (2002, p. 1) Moreover, as the feminist movement includes not only women but all others experiencing like marginalization, ecofeminists claim that this unjustified domination connects not only women but also people of color, children and the poor just to name a few, to the unjustified domination of nature (Warren, 2002). This movement takes the association among woman, body, emotion, nature and the devaluation of such inherent in the Cartesian hierarchy of—and inevitably the masculinization of—thought embedded in Western ideology, and examines them on a deeper level by exploring the factors beneath the woman/nature relationship (Bordo, 1986). Ecofeminism functions upon two baseline assumptions, although there is some debate about this within the field—first, that women and men maintain distinct relationships with their environment making that environment a gendered issue; second,
that women and men have distinct reactions to environmental issues, or more specifically that women are “more responsive to nature” than are men (Mellor, 2003, p. 12).

The idea that women and men exist differently in relation to nature is simply based on the expected assumption that, as women and men have differing life experiences, they have differing environmental ones as well (Mellor, 2003). The more contended assumption—that women are more responsive to environmental issues—has been constructed in two ways according to Mellor’s (2003) essay on “Gender and the Environment”. Social ecofeminists see this connection between woman and nature as socially constructed, resulting from the fact that both entities, woman and nature, having historically been subordinated by male dominated society, exist in a traditionally contingent relationship constructed by a socially institutionalized connection. Thusly, social ecofeminists believe woman and nature, having been placed in parallel situations of devaluation within the Western socio-political structure, are connected. Whereas affinity ecofeminists see women as being linked to the natural world as a consequence of their embodiment as women and mothers—a fundamental and essential or inherent connection based on biological reasoning (Mellor, 2003). Andean cultural beliefs, which innately unite woman with Mother Earth, mirror the ideas of affinity ecofeminists.

According to Mellor (2003), one way of analyzing the like devaluation of women and nature is in the inherent depreciation that Western institutions have accorded the resources of each. The earth’s resources, such as the air and the oceans, have, throughout the history of Western imperialism, been seen as free such that, being value-less, these resources can be exploited, used, polluted, and exhausted without replenishing or repaying. Likewise, women’s work, historically within the domestic realm of cooking,
cleaning, childrearing, etc. is unpaid or paid very little across the globe. Indigenous Andean women experience this even outside of the domestic realm: while nine out of every ten indigenous Ecuadorian women work—80% of whom work in agriculture—only 10% actually get paid for their labor (Radcliffe, Laurie & Andolina, 2003). This collective devaluation is manifested by the “Western conceptualization of nature as feminized, exploitable resource,” constructing deep-seated connections between women and nature (Sturgeon, 2002, p.117). In essence, the common marginalization of women and nature links the two in some way, and ecofeminism explores this possibility of the closeness of woman to nature. Ultimately, regardless of being social or affinity theorists, ecofeminists acknowledge and claim that women have in some way, be it biological, cosmic or socially constructed, been “placed in a subordinated position alongside a devalued natural world within Western/patriarchal, dualist, socioeconomic structures,” and thusly are more in tuned to the negative ecological effects of socio-political institutions than are men from their superordinate position (Mellor, 2003, p.19).

At the heart of the issues fought against by the ecofeminist movement is the fact that the “gendered nature of Western society is directly related to the increased exploitation of the environment” (Mellor, 2003, p. 16). Because Western thought is inherently patriarchal and it equates nature with femininity, Western society has continually exploited natural resources such as oil and water, which are currently facing global shortages. As the implications of this aspect of Western thought began to take a global toll through growing globalization, the international population of women came into play. In recent years, prominent ecofeminists such as Vandana Shiva have criticized the growing globalization of the Western capitalist market economic system and the
implications it is having in the lives of women, and more specifically woman subsistence farmers in developing nations. According to Karen J. Warren in her book *Ecofeminist Philosophies* (2002), over half of the world’s food is grown by women farmers, and between one-third and one-half of third-world agricultural laborers are women. Warren (2002) explains further that “women’s share in farming varies widely cross-culturally, but in general men do more of the actual fieldwork when access to machinery or large farm animals is involved … and women do more when the work is done by hand” (9).

Essentially, women have been placed in a role that theoretically and physically connects them to nature, which—regardless of intent—inevitably causes nature to play a role in the identities of these women, in particular, who work so closely with the land they farm.

In essence, ecofeminist theory reiterates the connection between woman and land previously established within Andean thought by exploring the various other depths to this relationship. The Andean woman is linked to the land she farms by the traditions of her culture, by her symbolic connection to the seed, by her knowledge of this land, and by her parallel experience of devaluation by the Western, patriarchal, dualist world. It is this mutual subjugation of the land and woman that resonates within the context of the changing identities of Andean women. As agricultural globalization degrades the environment—introducing foreign food imports, moving toward monoculture, overtaking small farms and grazing space for corporate farming—the Andean woman too is being degraded. Andean women are leaving the land to which they are connected to find other jobs—in cities, as maids, or in service positions—emphasizing the cultural losses occurring in conjunction to environmental losses. Thus, the connection drawn between
Andean women and nature by ecofeminist theory is highlighted as they both feel the negative effects of capitalist globalization’s systems of subjugation.
“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead

Reaching back in time to the roots of western thought, philosophers like Locke, Rousseau and Bentham, whose ideas on private property deeply impacted the foundation of western capitalist society, in many ways planted the seeds that have grown to link life, as it exists today within current sociopolitical systems of globalization, to private property. In the same way that Locke proclaimed an innate human desire to live, he defined what came to be accepted as an unchallenged truth, that, likewise, there exists an innate human desire to own resources and exclude others from access to these resources in his axiomatic “Of Property”. Yet, it is this very shortsightedness, this acceptance that there exists no alternative to an overtly self-serving human nature, that has locked us into a system that, exacerbated by processes of globalization, is resulting in rapid environmental degradation, deepening lines of global inequality and feminization of poverty, heightened tension between North and South as well religious fundamentalism both East and West.

As Carol Rose explores in her 1994 work “Property as Storytelling: Perspectives from Game Theory, Narrative Theory, Feminist Theory”, not only are these blindly accepted axioms of human nature limiting, but we see other forms of human interaction with property all the time throughout our culture and other cultures as well. She
highlights six different personality traits, one of which she refers to as “Mom” or an individual who will always choose to share her wealth so that everyone gets some, rather than any one person appropriating as much as possible beyond one’s needs at the expense of others. This behavior, a tip of the hat to feminist theories on “gift giving”, hints at what an alternative framework could mean.

The logic behind this community-oriented thinking works hand in hand with Rousseau’s condemnation of blindly self-serving appropriation of resources, in which he explains “a selfish man over-utilizing the resources of nature to satisfy his own ever-increasing needs s nothing but a thief, because using resources beyond one’s needs would result in the utilization of resources over which others have a right” (qtd. in Shiva, 17). It is clear that continuing to progress within an ideology that supports usurpation of resources that belong to a common global human community will lead deeper into the mess of global degradation we currently face. It seems only logical that this trait of community oriented thinking, that seems to be excluded from the patriarchal systems of thought accepted by Western society, is the same trait upon which a viable alternative to our current system must be based. And, despite the current tendency to ignore it, it is taking place throughout society with community decision making, with mothers and children, and even with men! When cooperation of this sort—working toward the greatest good for all—occurs it is often overlooked, yet it is the key to change. A woman-centered philosophy of cooperation, functional in small communities we see throughout the non-Western world and even in enclaves within the Western world, must be introduced on a global scale. This section will explore the potential discourses, paradigms and dimensions of a woman-centered community-oriented alternative to
capitalist globalization, as well as in specific connection to food and agriculture systems in the Andes.

**Changing Discourses**

“The late 20th century will go down in history as a period of global impoverishment”

-M. Chossudovsky

As we have seen, capitalist globalization has ravaged the globe on multidimensional planes from institutionalized and systematic inequality between North and South, severe environmental degradation to militarization and cultural impoverishment. While undoing what has been done is impossible, and returning to the idealized past is likewise not an option, neither is predicting the future. However, across the globe niches of communities, women, and movements have shown that alternative systems can exist besides this capitalist system of oppression and work, bringing with it a more humane reality for women, men and children alike. This section examines the woman-centered alternatives to the current global socio-political system, and what this would look like for agriculture and food systems in the lives of Andean farming women.

In order to understand the potential of new and alternative systems in the future, it is important to first understand the history of gender related development policies and the effects of these. The integration of women and gender into the current system began with Boserup’s 1970 piece on Women in Development, which, acknowledging that a trickledown effect to development was ineffective, argued for the streamlining of women in the developing world by treating them on equal terms with men. This program was overturned for WAD, the Women and Development approach based on Marxist-feminist
theory, which argued that women are central agents in development and must be integrated effectively into the economic system in order for development to occur. Yet, the focus on class struggle, and the inequality between the global South and North, though an important shift from WID, was lacking still in terms of the inequalities rooted in gender. Thus introducing a third approach, Gender and Development, which is the present discourse used by global powers such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. GAD’s initiative seeks to utilize development systems to transform unequal social and gender relations as well as empower women. Yet, as Bhavnani and Foran note, GAD’s focus on institutions and policies falls short as it loses the woman’s story and neglect’s to see the woman’s agency both in resistance to and perpetuation of systems of oppression (321). In this way, GAD fails to address the complexities of gendered systems of inequality, including issues of control, power, conflict and the larger socio cultural and political paradigms framing the lives of women (Bhavnani and Foran, 321).

As Bhavnani and Foran assert in the work “Feminist Futures: From Dystopia to Eutopia”, all three of these discourses have fallen short in some way, highlighting the importance of cultural literacy. These three systems have been criticized as ethnocentric approaches in regard to assumptions made regarding gender relations in other culture, focusing solely on inequality and subordination and neglecting traditions of cooperation and interdependence between the men and women (Bhavnani and Foran, 321). Bhavnani and Foran propose a new paradigm, WCD or Women, Culture Development in order to address the failure of the former three approaches, which tended to view women as “victims in need of rescuing from their cultures, rather than agents in their own right”
The discourse proposed by Bhavnani and Foran uses a multifaceted approach, layering Feminist studies, cultural studies and Third World/development studies, asserting that in order to ameliorate poverty, development must “engage with production and reproduction as well as with the agency of women” (Bhavnani and Foran, 321). This outlook evokes a balance between economic and cultural aspects of globalization, seeking to place value upon the “everyday experience, practice, ideology and politics of Third World women”, working under the ideology that culture, which informs all lived experiences and shapes environments, is an invaluable component of the development process (Bhavnani and Foran, 321). This WCD approach is particularly relevant in exploring the potential of rethinking development systems for the future as its multidimensional goals reach forward in new ways:

“(1) it centers the activities of women organizing for change rather than only seeing women as victims and passive bystanders of history; (2) it offers a thorough critique of existing patterns of development, and attempts to think beyond them into a more positive future for women, men and children; and (3) it thinks beyond macro-economic and global political arrangements to validate the many ways in which cultures shape the world we live now, and will inhabit in the future” (Bhavnani and Foran, 322).

Discourse must be reworked in a way that sees women, specifically Third World women, as whole individuals, with complex and full lives defined by relationships, emotional depth, and one that empowers them as agents of change and central actors in economic development.

Hand in hand with a new discourse, is the need for a new framework in which interaction will take place—interaction between global North and South as well as interaction between human and Earth. Angela Miles’ “Women’s Giving: Feminist Transformation and Human Welfare”, one of many essays contributing to a new, woman
centered approach to exchange, explores the connection between giving and human welfare. Giving, considered “the fullest expression of our humanity/spirituality and our greatest wealth” has the potential to create a worldview where the term giving is an alternative to what we currently see as exchange (Miles, 364). Taken in the context of globalization of food and agriculture, we see the ways in which “exchange” or trade have come to create institutionalized systems of inequality between the global North and South, and especially in the lives of women. With this in mind, I explore the possibility of feminist gift giving as an alternative worldview.

Giving is in many ways associated with a specifically female worldview and behavior when considered within the context of the current patriarchal systems. Yet, the intention of an alternative system to the current patriarchal capitalist globalization is not simply value another gender or flip the tables. Rather, the new system would, ideally, value both genders equally, regarding their differences and needs, in a way that removed gendered frameworks from our understandings. In this way, the terminology of a gift paradigm, as opposed to a matriarchal paradigm helps to “[clarify] how and why feminist affirmation of women associated characteristics, concerns, work and values is a human struggle to move beyond a gendered world” (Miles, 366).

The paradigm of gift giving, from an economic standpoint, radically challenges the accepted market structure of capitalist globalization by showing that there can be value in an alternative system, and insisting that “this is the only true wealth” Miles, 370). Gift giving, as an economic system, refuses the market altogether as well as all commodification, with the ultimate goal of working toward a fully humanist future. This feminism “resonates with and draws deeply on Indigenous relational and holistic
worldviews” which is mirrored in the traditions of many Third World women. For Andean women, the community oriented mindset, coupled with a comprehensive understanding of culture and gender relations as well as the gift giving paradigm seems to relate to the traditional community systems. So, within the context of globalized capitalism, what is possible? In many ways the new discourse introduced by Bhavnani and Foran is a segue into ultimately understanding the gift giving paradigm offered by Miles in order to understand the necessary basis for new and alternative food and agriculture systems, which I will now explore.

**Food Sovereignty**

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives; to determine the extent to which they want to be self-reliant; [and] to restrict the dumping of products in their markets....Food sovereignty does not negate trade, but rather, it promotes the formulation of trade policies and practices that serve the rights of peoples to safe, healthy and ecologically sustainable production.”

—Statement on Peoples’ Food Sovereignty by Via Campesina, et al.

Since its introduction into the discourse on food systems at the 1996 World Food Summit held in Rome, the idea of food sovereignty has gained increasing popularity throughout agricultural reform and social justice movements (Menezes, 30). The idea grew out of the detrimental consequences of corporate globalization in agriculture across the Third World, very like those discussed in this paper occurring in the Andes. Globalization of the world food trade is defined by regulations imposed by the World Trade Organization based on a need to make market access easier through imports, decrease domestic support for agriculture, and create export subsidies, which strips power from national governments to address culture-specific food concerns (Menezes, 30).
Through the processes of capitalist globalization like trade deregulation, international trade regulations, regional blocs and internationalized food and agriculture systems, the food sovereignty of individuals, particularly peasant farmers of the Third World, many of whom are women, is being threatened (Menezes, 29).

Food sovereignty as an ideology demands the right of all sovereign nations to “maintain and develop its own capacity to produce the staple foods of its peoples, respecting their productive and cultural diversity” (Menezes, 29). This ideology has been adopted by the Via Campesina peasant farming movement as the way to best reform the current system which has, in many ways, worked to “globalize hunger and poverty all over the world, destroying local production capacities and impoverishing rural societies” (Menezes, 30). Unlike the current system, which suggests that the best way for developing nations to achieve food security is to import foods from developed countries, food sovereignty values sufficiency, stability autonomy and sustainability as the most effective ways to create food security. Most Andean countries rely heavily on agricultural exports of monoculture crops, and are in turn dependent upon low cost food imports from developed nations. Food security, an issue that has been debated over in recent decades and led to the GM seed industry as well as trade deregulation and commodification of food, has been continually addressed from a capitalist perspective that has, while successfully creating a revenue producing industry for multinational corporations, in many ways has complicated economic development. In disregarding the deep-rooted connections between a culture and food, as well as the connection between subsistence agriculture and economic stability, Third World nations, and the women who farm the land, are at a significant disadvantage. In contrast to the current system, food sovereignty
would allow Andean nations, as well as other Third World counterparts, independence from this system, in turn preserving cultural traditions as well as providing a source of domestic economic stimulation and stability—an necessary component in development that all industrialized nations once relied upon.

One of the other aspects of food security that is disregarded in the current system is the issue of nutrition. In certain cases, imported, instant foods do not always provide the same nutritional values as diverse and freshly grown produce, farm raised meats and local foods. Menezes explains that food sovereignty is impossible to achieve if eating and nutrition standards being imposed by the global system do not mirror the cultural traditions of a country. For instance, the history of biodiversity in the Andes has provided generations of cultivation of crops like the potato, quinoa, corn and beans among others. As the impact of globalization brings KFC and McDonalds to the cities, and as mass marketing tells poor peasant farmers that instant soup is a better option than a traditional, nutritionally balanced soup of home grown ingredients, the culture of food changes often at the expense of the poorest members of society.

The issue of global eating standards, while significant in the lives of poor peasants who lack access to information, it is particularly poignant for women. As we have seen, one of the most significant roles of Andean farming women was seed cultivation in relation to nutrition. Women have, throughout time, been responsible for providing their families with healthful and well-balanced foods. Thus, globalization interferes specifically with women’s work; making this task far more difficult and consequently devaluing the work of women by suggesting an instant meal can replace a nutritious and balanced meal of locally grown ingredients. Women are expected to continue to fill this
role, and as noted earlier, many women feel the pressure of living up to these traditional expectations in a world where the food systems simply do not allow her to perform this role in a traditional way. Thus, the current global food system is playing a significant role in the changing identities of rural Third World women.

Food sovereignty, in addressing the cultural implications of the current global food trade, would address the situation of women as well. Food sovereignty values the importance of food traditions in maintaining and safeguarding a cultural identity and highlights that “cultures have been able to remain self-sufficient for many centuries with tighter control over the quality of their food products” (Menezes, 33). Food sovereignty not only promotes cultural food preservation, but also stresses the importance of protecting and preserving rural societies through policies “ensuring they are sustainable in economic and social terms” (Menezes, 33).

While Food sovereignty is a relatively comprehensive and holistic take on potential alternative systems, it is quite realistic as well. Indeed, many peasant communities across the globe have become part of the La Via Campesina movement in order to work toward Food Sovereignty. And while cultural issues included in Food Sovereignty will be a significant improvement, considering the overwhelming contribution of women to agriculture across the globe and in the Third World, it will be important to bring the role of gender into the future discourse on food systems.

In order to better understand how this would look specifically in terms of agrarian reform, Peter Rosset’s *Promised Land: Competeting Visions of Agrarian Reform* offers a useful and comprehensive set of guidelines for the future, ranging from the importance of giving women the right to participate as equals in communal ownership to the rights of
indigenous peoples to access resources, yet the single most significant one in relation to globalization and development is the recognition of small family farms as a centerpiece in economic development, and thusly the valuing of women farmers across the Third World as agents in economic development. Just as small family farms were the basis for economic development in Japan, China, and Taiwan, the very same can be true for Andean countries (Rosset, 321). This central concept, a major component in Food Sovereignty, coupled with new feminist discourse of economic development, are a framework for a feminist alternative to food and agricultural systems in the Andes.

**Idealistic or Realistic: Implementing Alternative Systems**

“If we refuse to dream because the odds of waking up to ‘reality’ are so great, we abdicate any role in shaping the future for the better” (Bhavnani and Foran).

How possible would it be for a new world view such as this to be implemented? Across the globe we see it happening on small levels. From the Zapatista struggle in Chiapas to the Women in Black in Palestine/Israel, to the movements spearheaded by Vandana Shiva among Indian women to save seeds and fight the influence of major GMO firms (Bhavnani and Foran, 322). As the negative effects of globalization continue to degrade our earth, our people, and our cultures discontent will surely grow, and, while it is likely to get worse before it gets better, there is far too much progressive activity toward social justice and change in the works to give in to the “inevitability of capitalist globalization” as it currently exists. Bhavnani and Foran evaluate the current trends working toward a more sustainable, humanist and woman-centered future.
Among the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, which has fought for and made great strides in women’s rights, indigenous women have explored alternative strategies of resistance through the use of “non-violence, consensus decision-making, and fluid leadership”. Based around traditional Mayan practices, the foundation of the movement claims “para todos todo, nada para nosotros” (for everyone, everything, nothing for ourselves) which mirrors the worldview based around community and cooperation needed for an alternative system (Bhavnani and Foran, 322). Another innovative practice used by the indigenous women of the Zapatista movement, “dar su palabra” (to have one’s say) involves “dialogue in which everyone present participates in which the value of the unique vantage point of each member of a community and the insights this affords is appreciated” (Bhavnani and Foran, 323). The benefits of this system include maximum community input and cooperation, as well as stronger consensus and support for the community that will be affected by these decisions.

This community-oriented vision is not unique to the Zapatista movement or women’s rights movements, but is also seen among Green Parties across the world. The core values adopted by Green Parties—consensus decision-making, non-violence, sustainability and women’s leadership—is one that can transcend specific issues or movements and be applied to a new and alternative system. The environmental movement’s foundational belief in “interconnectedness of women, men and the planet, of the multiple facets of the current crisis of civilization, and the need for a holistic, imaginative, flexible approach to fashioning an alternative” is exactly what is needed to make strides. And, in the realm of agriculture and food systems, we see it happening as well. One example lies in Navdanya, a farm in the Himalayan foothills working to
preserve natural biodiversity and end monocultural farming practices in forestry, agriculture and fisheries. Vandana Shiva, the founder of this innovative organization, strongly believes change is possible, as the farm has saved many varieties of Basmati rice, medicinal plants trees, and more. In a 2003 interview, Shiva explained: “Women have been seed keepers, but with the corporations thinking of making a trillion dollars annually by forcing farmers to buy seeds, growing seed out on your farm is treated as theft. What we are seeing is literally a shift of control over the seed, over the knowledge”. Yet this small, woman-centered organization is giving women a voice and making changes to the unjust system imposed by capitalist globalization.

While it is apparent that social justice movements are fighting the current system and seeking cooperative and sustainable alternatives in enclaves of women and men all around the world, the question of a global revolution seems daunting. Yet, as Bhavnani and Foran note, the global justice movement is working toward a “global revolution” that is very plausible (323). Thus, for a system like “Food Sovereignty” to be implemented in Andean farming communities, it would require the action of local agents—community leaders, and particularly women, whose worldviews and ways of knowing embody the very alternatives we seek.

In essence, from these various examples, it is apparent that alternative sociopolitical systems are not only possible, but also thriving and functional on a micro scale despite the oppressive framework of capitalist globalization. What’s more, as globalization begins to connect even the most isolated communities, networks of alternative communities are coming together through organizations like the multicultural, pluralist La Via Campesina, the International Peasant Movement made up of small
producers, especially rural women and indigenous people, dedicated to “solidarity and unity among small farmer organizations in order to promote gender parity and social justice in fair economic relations; the preservation of land, water, seeds and other natural resources; food sovereignty; sustainable agricultural production based on small producers” (www.viacampesina.org). Organizations like this are uniting the independent and local movements toward alternative development systems and food sovereignty on a global scale. This is particularly important in the question of plausibility, because the heart of change will come from a transformation of cultural norms.

Specifically, in order for women to take agency and become actors in the mission for change, the discourse of “development” must be rethought, bringing women’s stories to the forefront. Women are not simply victims, they are taking action in significant ways in the poorest communities of the Third World, and to understand the complexities of women’s lives and cultures will allow for development to be redefined in a woman-centered way. As Bhavnani and Foran assert, at the root of this woman based world view, is the powerful role of love.

“Love of life, love of people, love of justice all play a role in the core values of the [aforementioned] movements and organizations…Love is arguably the emotion that provides the vital force that impels many ordinary people into extraordinary acts across time and place. It is the emotion that lies behind much profound personal and social change” (325-326).

Until love, gift giving, and an understanding and valuing of our global human community can be understood as a humanitarian goal, free from its gendered implication, it will be difficult to convince a patriarchal system to swallow this alternative. However, in his 1791 work The Rights of Man, American philosopher Thomas Paine said, “My
country is the world, and my religion is to do good.” It is this idea of global community and common love for fellow humans that must be implemented on an international scale, deconstructing and rewriting the ideologies that fuel capitalist globalization, in order to work toward an alternative that minimizes the injustices and inequality institutionalized within the current system.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

It is undeniable that if we are to continue functioning within the limits of the current global framework, the only future vision imaginable is an exacerbated picture of what we are experiencing and seeing at present. The simultaneous environmental, cultural, and human degradation occurring as a result of capitalist globalization today are, if nothing else, a sign that change is needed if, as a global community, we intend for future generations to subsist off of this Earth. Yet, the heart of the problem lies in the clashing ideologies regarding how to best bring about that change. Despite the clearly negative outcomes of the current global food system—monoculture, loss of biodiversity, greater inequality between global North and South as well as unstable interdependency between the two, lack of sustainability and cultural loss just to name a few—the intentions behind the current system are not wholly negative. While clearly misguided, perhaps by motives of profitability, GM seed cultivation and corporate farming were initiated with the noble intent of solving world hunger. The idea that fuels agricultural globalization is that these cash-crops will not only provide massive amounts of food to feed global hunger but will also create a marketable crop that will allow Third World cultures to become a players in the global economy. Now, some decades later, this movement has clearly failed to reach its goals, yet those in power allow the system to continue, under the misguided assumption that they are doing what is right in order to help those most in need.
It is this very idea, this central falsehood, which lies behind the continuation and perpetuation of the current system. Accepting the reality that the current global food system is not helping, but rather hurting the people it intends to help, would be accepting the fact that a systematic ideological restructuring is imperative. Western viewpoints have consistently been criticized for their ethnocentric nature, and the case of the effects of Western globalization in the lives of Andean women is no exception. The assumption that the Western way is best simply does not prove true in the case of Andean women farmers when we witness their cultural traditions being destroyed, and centuries of work cultivating biodiversity unraveling.

Contextualized within the lives of Andean farming women, globalization has brought, along with modern technology and capitalist markets, cultural illiteracy and a closed mind to non-western ways of knowing. Technologies like agrochemicals and pesticides have devastated the once fertile lands that they have touched and threaten to desiccate much more as pressure to use them grows. Pressures toward monoculture has eliminated biodiversity through the extinction of many varieties of native crops that were cultivated over centuries and were the building block upon which the marginalized Andean culture was able to survive. As the connection with seeds and land that defines the cultural identities of Andean women changes, the key to Andean biodiversity and natural forms of sustainable agriculture are being lost as well.

By viewing Andean women as victims in need of saving, rather than potential agents of change in the movement toward economic development, the current system essentially forces Andean women into the role of a victim. As centuries of seed saving work is lost in monoculture, as access to fresh produce dwindles with food imports, as
grazing space and small farm plots make way for large corporate farming initiatives, the defining characteristics of the Andean woman’s identity dissolves. The pride in knowing the diverse seeds and in providing nutritious and balanced meals for her family, as well as the tender labor over vegetable gardens and grazing herds that gave meaning to the lives of rural Andean women is stolen from them by agricultural globalization, however unintentional it may be. As a result, they become the victims of this system, the very role the system expects of them. Unable to offer their knowledge of sustainable agriculture to unreceptive ears, denied an active role in the movement toward economic development, these women are being forced to abandon traditional identities, migrate into urban centers to find work as their small farm plots disappear, and feed processed and imported foods to their families. With little to no representation in the political sphere, the voice of these women, their stories, their lives, are being denied validity by an oppressive, patriarchal, Western, and deeply ethnocentric global framework.

It is this marginalized voice, the voice of the Andean farming woman along with her other Third World counterparts, to which we can no longer afford to turn a deaf ear and a blind eye. Using food sovereignty as a basis, there is an increasing need to invest in a new global food system that honors the cultural implications of food traditions and that works with, rather than against, the people farming the land. Food sovereignty is just one example of how the world can be viewed differently, in a humane way that values all humans equally, and in a way that does not exploit Earths resources and people, but rather supports sustainability and encourages the survival of different cultures. At present, it is difficult to see an end in sight, but hope lies within the communities actively working for change.
Across the globe we witness evidence of resistance, ranging from the Zapatista women to Vandana Shiva’s Navdanya mission. Throughout history, the most significant shifts in cultural understandings, such as the civil rights movement, have come from bottom up revolutions and this situation is no different. Empowered with an understanding of the ways in which the current capitalist system acts to deteriorate, side by side, identities of Andean women and the diverse varieties seeds they have cultivated over centuries, and the knowledge that groups like La Via Campesina are working to resist this degradation, there is hope for a future in which all humans, all cultures, and the Earth are valued. However, that day will not come until there are significant systematic changes in the international regulations governing the global food system. Until the WTO’s ideologies reflect reality, and the culture of exploitation is eradicated and replaced with a culture of equality, there is still be work to be done.
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ACADEMIC VITA

Nikki A. Hatza

Nikki A. Hatza
312 Winding Way
Merion, PA 19066
nhatza@gmail.com

Education:
Bachelor of Arts Degree in Women’s Studies, Spanish and International Studies, Penn State University, Spring 2010
Minor in Business and the Liberal Arts
Honors in Women’s Studies
Thesis Title: Feminist Perspectives on Capitalist Globalization in the Andes: Agriculture, Food Systems and Women
Thesis Supervisor: Carolyn Sachs

Related Experience:
Education Abroad in Quito Ecuador, Spring 2009

Awards:
Student Marshal, College of Liberal Arts
Student Leader Scholarship
Outstanding Women’s Studies Undergraduate Award
Mimi Barash Coppersmith Endowed Scholarship in Women’s Studies
Education Abroad Whole World Scholarship
Dean’s List

Presentations/Activities:
Race Relations Project Facilitator
Co-Founder and Co-President, PSU Knitivism