

Decolonising development to end hunger in rural Peru

Thomas Quayle

Masters student
University of Sydney

Abstract

This paper focuses on the issue of hunger and food insecurity in the Peruvian Andes. It provides a critique of the development industry and argues that the responses it utilises often draw on colonial structures that reproduce oppression. The development industry tends to be driven by the idea that the remedy to hunger and poverty exists in embracing globalisation and marketisation. However, interventions rooted in capitalism can actually exacerbate rather than resolve these issues.

Rather than relying on imported solutions from the global North, this essay discusses a process of cultural affirmation and the reassertion of traditional knowledge in the Peruvian Andes. It canvases the decolonising work of a Peruvian Non-Government Organisation (NGO) known as El Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas (PRATEC) and argues that contextualised responses that affirm Indigenous knowledge and encourage the co-production of knowledge rather than the wholesale importation of foreign solutions can reduce food insecurity at a local level.

Key words

Colonisation, cultural affirmation, decolonisation, development, food insecurity, hunger, Indigenous peoples, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), Peru, Peruvian Andes, poverty, traditional knowledge.

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Introduction

Hunger represents a significant global social problem, so much so an Open Working Group created by the United Nations General Assembly included ending hunger and food insecurity as one of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) introduced in 2015. The SDGs represent “a universal call to action” to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all by 2030 (United Nations Development Programme [UNPD], 2021). However, six years after this call to action was theoretically answered by member states, the goal to end hunger and food insecurity by 2030 is “tremendously off track” (United Nations [UN], 2021). In 2020, the United Nations (UN) estimated that the number of undernourished people around the world would surpass 840 million by 2030 (UN, 2020). However, it recently announced that between 720 and 811 million people faced hunger in 2020, some 161 million more than in 2019 (UN, 2021). If this trend continues, the UN 2030 estimate will prove to be wildly off the mark.

This essay focuses on the issue of hunger and food insecurity in the Peruvian Andes and the responses being utilised by the development industry to address it. These responses tend to be driven by the idea that the remedy exists in embracing globalisation and marketisation (Anderson, 2000, p. 222). However, market-orientated interventions actually exacerbate rather than resolve the issue. Arguing that development is actually colonisation masquerading as benevolence, this essay canvases the decolonising work of a Peruvian Non-Government Organisation (NGO) known as El Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas (PRATEC) and argues that the remedy actually exists in cultural affirmation and the reassertion of traditional knowledge.

Development or colonisation in rural Peru?

According to Anthropologist Benjamin Orlove, the colonial “history of the native peoples of the Andes is a tragic one” (1985, p. 45). “From the lush Amazonian basin to the rocky peaks of the Andes, Indigenous peoples of Peru have found themselves the victims of oppression since the arrival of Spanish conquistadors in 1532” (Nelson, 2019, p. 1). Indeed, European invaders waged a brutal conquest in which the Indigenous peoples of the Andes were “beaten, raped and killed for their land and resources” (Nelson, 2019, p. 1). Many were ripped from

their lands, separated from their families and forced into slavery (Dizikes, 2010). These colonial acts disrupted the Andean world and shifted the control of Indigenous wealth to “conquerors from outside” (Orlove, 1985, p. 45). Moreover, the introduction of European language, currency, and culture severely altered their lives, breaking down their social structures and modes of living that have sustained them for centuries (Nelson, 2019, p. 1).

Indigenous peoples continue to suffer the consequences of these historic injustices, with poverty and hunger being a primary legacy. As stated by the UN, being Indigenous in Latin America is synonymous with being poor (2009, p. 27). Nearly 45 percent of people in rural Peru live in poverty and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has described food insecurity in the region as “chronic” (2019). In order to address this, it recently invested \$194.36 million US dollars in development projects designed to modernise food production systems and encourage marketisation in rural Peru (International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], 2019). A significant number of these projects are operated by NGOs (Nelson-Nuñez, 2019). In order to encourage marketisation, NGOs introduce agricultural technologies such as drip irrigation systems, fertilizers and storage techniques to help farmers modernise their agricultural production (Hartmann, Arata, Bezerra, and Pinheiro, 2019, p. 7). They also facilitate the organisation of farmers into collectives, often encouraging them to focus on particular crops desired by the global market (Bidwell, 2020).

Development in whose interests?

The intention behind marketisation is to improve rural livelihoods and increase economic opportunities to address issues such as poverty and hunger (Belliveau, 2020, p. 31). However, the work of NGOs in Peru’s agricultural space has been linked to capitalism and the consumeristic wants of the global North (Belliveau, 2020). Marketisation has fostered relationships of servitude whereby local farmers lose the autonomy to determine their own crops, use their traditional methods of cultivation and set their own prices. After all, the land of the conquered territories is used to satisfy the needs of the colonisers, not the people living there (Segura, 2018). Development draws on colonial structures to facilitate “the creation of feeder economies on the periphery, contributing to the underdevelopment of the global South” (Richard, 2018, p. 8). A bit like the Capitol’s control and exploitation of the Districts

in *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008), the global South's role in the world is to supply the global North with commodities while remaining impoverished itself. Indeed, as stated by political scientist Gbedoah Richard, the developmental path and progress of those in the South is "dependent on factors controlled by their imperial masters" (2018, p. 8). The global economy "operates as an ultrasocial system with rules of its own that frequently conflict with individual and community well-being" and imposes an "imperative of growth" reinforced by "top-down institutions, belief systems and regulations" that shifts power away from local farmers to economic elites (Gowdy and Lennox, 2014, p. 156). Marketisation is therefore "a guise under which foreign players can purport to do economic good for the country", while taking "action to deepen their pockets" (Belliveau, 2020, p. 21).

"Peru holds a natural bounty" (Belliveau, 2020, p. 2). Amongst other things, the country is the largest producer of potatoes in Latin America, exporting over 17,000 tons of the tuber in 2020 (Ramos, 2021). However, while consumers in Europe and the US have ready access to cheap Andean potatoes, marketisation is not improving circumstances for people in rural Peru. The development industry shifts communities away from subsistence farming and into a cash society. While engaging the market is purportedly intended to generate incomes, the approach actually pushes farmers further into poverty and fails to end hunger. The production costs associated with crops demanded by the global market make them unprofitable for farmers because, as indicated by Environmental Studies scholar Emma Belliveau, they necessitate much greater use of fertilizers and pesticides, increased water input, and more technology and mechanisation (Belliveau, 2020, p. 35). This "requires a great investment that is not necessarily recouped at market" (Belliveau, 2020, p. 35), with "the only real beneficiaries" being "the corporations that make farm supplies and equipment" (Altieri, 2002, p. 29).

The focus on industrialising agriculture to increase productivity succeeds in producing large volumes of food but the problem of hunger and food insecurity persists (Huambochano, 2018, p. 1004). Indeed, the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems has found that global food and farming systems enhance the supply of produce to global markets, but they generate negative outcomes on multiple fronts including persistent hunger, micro-nutrient deficiencies, diet-related diseases and livelihood stresses for farmers around the world (2016, p. 1). More food is being produced, but it is not feeding the people who produce it.

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The focus on industrialising agriculture with the objective of increasing productivity and efficiency also impacts negatively on the health of ecosystems and resulted in the degradation of land (Huambochano, 2018, p. 1004). The potato is a crop of significant importance to the Peruvian people. Indeed, the root vegetable has been cultivated in the Andes for around 8,000 years and is highly respected in Peruvian culture:

Recognized as integral to the development of stable communities and continued nourishment, ceremonies and ritualistic practices surround the cultivation and use of the potato even in modern life. Quite literally, they are essential to both the lives and livelihoods of the Andean people; 70 percent of highland people's ingested calories come from the potato (Belliveau, 2020, p. 21).

The potato crop is also extremely diverse. Indeed, "More than 4,000 varieties of native potatoes grow in the Andean highlands of Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador" (International Potato Center, 2017). However, this diversity is being undermined by the imperatives of capitalism and marketisation. The modernisation and commercialisation of agricultural production jeopardises the agrobiodiversity of peasants' fields (Angé, 2018, p. 30), "often because families are worried about making enough money to feed themselves" (Belliveau, 2020, p. 31). In order to survive in a cash society, families choose to cultivate crops that are desired by the market at the expense of native varieties, leading to the displacement of Indigenous potato varieties and threatening diversity (Hellin and Higman, 2005). What is more, modern farming practices, and those that rely on pesticides and other chemicals in particular, are detrimental to ecological integrity and have had "harmful consequences for soil fertility" (Angé, 2018, p. 3).

The colonisation of the imagination

Crop diversity is supported by a complex traditional system of agricultural knowledge whereby potatoes are planted according to varieties, seasons, weather, soil, location and altitude (Belliveau, 2020). However, the "push towards modernity" replaces these century old ways of doing things with modern farming practices and erodes this traditional agricultural knowledge (Belliveau, 2020, p. 31).

The terms ‘development’ and ‘colonisation’ refer to the same process under a different name (Goldsmith, 2002, p. 19). Now that formal colonisation cannot be used by the North to continue extracting commodities and resources from the South, they use ‘development’ to reshape and control economies. A means of achieving this control readily observable in Peru is to champion Western systems of knowledge at the expense of local approaches. Such processes reflect “the worst kind of colonization” whereby Indigenous forms of knowledge are pushed “into the barbarian margins” and intellectual dependencies are created (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 38). Indeed, “formal colonization may have ended but the global market, with its attendant intellectual and cultural colonization exported via the imperial road of development, makes colonization a contemporary reality” (Apffel-Marglin, 1995, p. 870).

In Peru, the development industry projects of modernisation and marketisation erode traditional knowledge and obliterate highly complex agrarian civilisations that have developed in the Andes over many centuries, contributing to the partial abandonment of traditional practices in some places (Belliveau, 2020, p. 31; Ishizawa, 2009, p. 207). Influential Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano states that colonised peoples and their ways of doing things continue to be undermined by what he calls “the colonization of the imagination” (2007, p. 169). He describes colonisers expropriating resources, knowledge and labour from the colonised, while at the same time systemically repressing the specific beliefs, ideas, images, symbols and knowledge that was not useful to their global colonial domination:

The repression fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns, and instruments of formalized and objectivised expression, intellectual or visual. It was followed by the imposition of the use of the rulers’ own patterns of expression, and of their beliefs and images with reference to the supernatural (2007, p. 169).

Quijano goes on to explain that the imposition of these beliefs and images serve not only to disrupt traditional practices, but are also a very efficient means of social and cultural control when immediate colonial repressions such as the suppression of Andean cosmovision through the imposition of Catholicism ceased to be constant and systematic (2007). NGOs contribute

to the ‘colonisation of the imagination’ through the imposition of Western agricultural practices and products. Using development as its vehicle, colonisation sustains the official assault on local knowledge and, more recently, the “modernization of agriculture” promotes the outright erosion of agrarian methodology that has successfully sustained Andean communities for centuries (Ishizawa, 2009, p. 211).

Decolonising the imagination: the work of PRATEC

The development industry will struggle to address hunger and food insecurity until it moves from its existing patronising, colonising and interventionist approaches to a more mutual process of working together across lines of difference (Langdon, 2013, p. 387). In order to achieve this, “there is a need for continued, ongoing efforts to decolonise the minds of many of us from the power of Eurocentric framing” (Langdon, 2013, p. 387). NGOs involved in the development industry need to work in ways that decolonise the imagination and put “Indigenous ways of knowing and being back at the forefront” (Garcia-Olp, 2018, p. 79).

An NGO putting ‘Indigenous ways of knowing and being back at the forefront’ is Peru’s El Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas (PRATEC). PRATEC is dedicated to the reinvigoration and dissemination of the agricultural knowledge of the Andean peoples. It was founded by Grimaldo Rengifo, Eduardo Grillo and Julio Valladolid in 1987 after they had all spent their lives working in the development industry believing that it was the best way to help their people (Apffel-Marglin, 2002). However, they came to recognise that development was in fact the problem, not the solution:

The realisation was not simply that development had failed, but that development consisted of a package of practices, ideas, epistemologies and ontologies that came from the modern West and were profoundly alien to the native peasantry. They had become convinced that native agriculture and culture was not only adequate to that environment but was alive and vibrant, despite the efforts of development, education and before that of a long history of extirpation of the native culture (Apffel-Marglin, 2002, p. 346-347).

PRATEC works towards “the recovery of memory” (Ishizawa, 2009, p. 207). Consistent with decolonial approaches that reject assumptions of Western superiority and seek to draw from

indigenous knowledge bases (Garcia-Olp, 2018, p. 79), PRATEC developed a model of “cultural affirmation” that supports “traditional ontologies, epistemologies, axiologies, and sustainable practices” in recognition that the ‘beneficiaries’ of so-called rural development projects are “far from being helpless objects in need of external intervention in order to achieve the status of civilized peoples” (Gonzales, 2015, p. 120; Ishizawa, 2009, p. 207). In doing so, PRATEC triggered a regeneration of traditional agricultural knowledge across the Peruvian Andes (Pimbert, 2009, p. 45).

PRATEC’s model is a “decolonizing strategy for knowledge production” (Gonzales, 2015, p. 116) that re-centres Indigenous expertise and ensures Andean knowledge has equal footing with Western knowledge (Apffel-Marglin, 1995, p. 870). Throughout the 1990s PRATEC taught a one year graduate training program (the Program) presenting the Andean worldview while also assessing modern Western knowledge from an Indigenous Andean perspective in a number of Peruvian universities (Apffel-Marglin, 1995, p. 870; Gonzales, 2015, p. 113). Its students were primarily people who were already engaged in the development industry but, like PRATEC’s founders, had an “experiential crisis with their work in development” (Apffel-Marglin, 2002, p. 350).

PRATEC’s curriculum emphasised two key components. Firstly, students were encouraged to realise that they themselves had been subjected to colonisation through an education system that championed Western knowledge while looking at traditional knowledge with blame, contempt and hostility (Ishizawa, 2009, p. 217). They were asked to decolonise their minds by viewing Western knowledge from an Andean point of view (Apffel-Marglin, 1995, p. 870). PRATEC taught that knowledge has a context. Western knowledge originated in Western Europe and is therefore created with particular geographical, meteorological, political and socioeconomic circumstances in mind (Apffel-Marglin, 1995, p. 870-871). Its usefulness outside Western Europe should therefore be questioned rather than accepted as being universal. This way of seeing the world robs Western knowledge of its claim to superiority and encouraged students to view other systems of knowledge as being equally valuable (Apffel-Marglin, 1995, p. 870-871). Importantly, PRATEC does not stand in opposition to Western knowledge. Rather, it seeks to decolonise thinking that places one system of knowledge above all others. Context must be taken into account when applying knowledge, and the voices of

local people must be at the forefront. PRATEC encourages the co-production of knowledge, whereby Andean peoples have the ability to take from other knowledge systems to enhance their own should they wish to do so. Students were encouraged to engage in relationships of equivalence and reciprocity with local communities - “we help them, they help us” (Ishizawa, 2009, p. 214). Thus, PRATEC aims to add value to existing local knowledge on the basis of what local communities would like to incorporate rather than imposing a foreign blueprint.

Secondly, students learned about traditional Andean methods of agriculture, including the cultural perspectives underpinning them. A unique feature of PRATEC’s Program was its recognition of culture and cultivation as inseparable: not only did Indigenous epistemologies and values inform farming practices, but the reverse was also true (Bidwell, 2020, p. 98). ‘Nurturance’ is central to the Andean world view. The term encompasses the concept that people are part of nature, not separate to it. Instead of seeing nature as something to be controlled and commodified, Andean culture adheres to concepts of connection and reciprocity - we nurture the Earth and it nurtures us (Ishizawa, 2009, p. 212). PRATEC engaged in a process of ‘cultural affirmation’ whereby “peoples who live in a place remember and regenerate their traditional practices, nurturing their *pacha* (local world) and letting themselves be nurtured by it” (Tauli-Corpuz, 2009, p. xxxii). PRATEC’s Program brought students to live and share with Andean communities to understand and affirm the Andean peoples’ mode of living. Through this, students learned that traditional modes of living are a viable alternative to globalisation.

Putting theory into practice

In 2000 PRATEC shifted its focus from teaching in universities to establishing a number of ‘Nuclei of Andean Cultural Affirmation’ (NACA) to continue its decolonising work (Ishizawa, 2009, p. 218). Originally staffed by graduates of PRATEC’s Program, NACAs are small community-based organisations spread across the Andes that aim to affirm culture and regenerate traditional knowledge in partnership with local peoples (Gonzales, 2015, p. 119). Consistent with PRATEC’s approach, NACAs give centrality to traditional agrarian knowledge and “do not concede cognitive authority” to foreign cultures and knowledge

systems (Gonzales, 2015, p. 121). NACAs are concerned with “the affirmation of life as a whole” in order to nurture a culturally diverse world through the recovery and revitalisation of the agricultural and cultural practices of Andean indigenous peoples (Gonzales, 2013a, p. 98). They align with the interests of indigenous communities by “walking side by side” with them and “facilitating the collection and systematization of indigenous epistemologies” (Gonzales, 2013a, p. 98). The process of cultural affirmation occurs in several ways including the revival of communal farming; the strengthening of traditional governance structures; the recovery of rituals and festivities associated with traditional cosmovision; and the facilitation of gatherings among Indigenous peoples to share resources and knowledge at the local, regional and national levels (Gonzales, 2013b, p. 38).

Indigenous peoples in Latin America have not been the passive recipients of colonial power. Since the first acts of colonisation were perpetrated against them, Indigenous peoples have led uprisings, protested against the exploitation of their lands and pushed back on education systems that reinforce unjust racist legacies, amongst other things (Tonet, 2015). The reclamation of traditional knowledge is another expression of this resistance. The NACAs are supporting Andean peoples in this resistance by helping communities return to agricultural methods that have sustained them for centuries and step out from under capitalism’s yoke to provide for themselves without the need to engage the market. Significantly, the work of the NACAs *is* addressing hunger and food insecurity. The regeneration of traditional knowledge is improving agricultural yields and reaffirming the view that the preferred destination for produce is the farmer’s home (Barkin and Lemus, 2016, p. 278; Vásquez, 2011, pp. 50-65).

PRATEC’s positive results are unsurprising. The capitalist model of food production based on neoliberal economic models peddled by the development industry assumes that the motivation of Andean communities for agricultural cultivation is economic gain (Huambachano, 2018, p. 11; Ishizawa, 2009, p. 236). However, mainstream economics neglects the fact that Andean peoples have an intrinsic interest in preserving the harmony of the world as a precondition of their own well-being (Pimbert, 2009, p. 46). They have limited interest in managing community resources for increased economic income (Ishizawa, 2009, p. 226). Thus, PRATEC’s work provides peoples across the Andes with an alternative pathway to food security that resonates more authentically with their cosmovision.

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Conclusion

Despite PRATEC's results, the NGO has a negligible influence over global social policy and the development industry. PRATEC's operation remains small scale due to a lack of support from International NGOs and governments (Gonzales, 2013a, p. 97). Important scholarly and NGO circles within and outside Peru have "underplayed, disregarded or misinterpreted PRATEC's contributions" to the development industry and, in particular, its efforts to end hunger and food insecurity (Gonzales, 2015, p. 128). This is perhaps predictable. Interest in PRATEC is constrained by its rejection of the conventional objectives of the development industry (Salas, 2013, p. 27). The significant investment the IFAD makes in development projects designed to modernise food production systems and encourage marketisation suggests an international order that blindly adheres to neoliberal economics at best, and deliberately continues the colonial project by promoting the capitalist interests of the West at worst. Either way, the development industry seems unwilling to depart from its economic rationales, its failure to address hunger and food insecurity using Western methods notwithstanding. Such a circumstance renders PRATEC's approach unappealing to the development industry's key players.

While the development industry is generally unsupportive of PRATEC's work, some are taking notice. PRATEC's voice has become known throughout the Andes through its many publications including articles, books and films, as well as through the graduates of its course and the NACAs they have formed all over the Andes (Apffel-Marglin, 1995, p. 870). A handful of progressive and culturally sensitive Euro-North American funding bodies such as the German Society for International Cooperation are taking an interest in PRATEC's work and, as this essay attests, their approach is being written about in academic texts (Gonzales, 2015, p. 21). PRATEC's staff have taught in Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile and Paraguay (Apffel-Marglin, 1995, p. 870), and the International Institute of Environment and Development has also involved PRATEC in global initiatives to promote their 'cultural affirmation' approach in Africa and Asia (Salas, 2013, p. 27). PRATEC's ideas have been taken up by other NGOs and social movements (Bidwell, 2020, p. 99). Among the most notable is the NGO ANDES, which works with a number of small rural communities in Cuzco to create the Parque de la Papa (Potato Park) as a means to "combine agrobiological diversity conservation with the

articulation and defence of indigenous rights” (Bidwell, 2020, p. 99). Thus, PRATEC is contributing to the broader movement to decolonise the development industry and affirm Indigenous knowledge.

If the international order can uncouple itself from neoliberal thought, it could learn something from PRATEC’s decolonising approach to hunger and food insecurity. The NGO shows that contextualised responses encouraging the co-production of knowledge rather than championing one worldview over all others generates positive outcomes. Better still, the development industry could get out of the way completely and create space for Indigenous peoples to combat the ill effects of colonisation in their own way and on their own terms. However, it seems the development industry is still committed to colonisation’s benevolent masquerade, so let’s not hold our breaths.

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