

Contexts, concepts and controversies

Juan van Kessel and Francisco Mamani Cañasaca

When thinking about the basic differences between Andean and western cosmovisions, one has to refer to the 'culture', specifically the 'basic values as expressed in local words and concepts. These aspects are seldom an issue in development discourse. Here we bring forward some differences in concepts and languages between Andean and western ways of looking at life, including the meaning of commonly used words, such as economy, labour, and technology.



Over the past 20 years in the Institute for the Study of Andean Culture and Technology (IECTA), we have looked at the concept related to 'development with cultural identity'. The baseline in Andean culture and agricultural technology is the relationship between man and the *Pachamama*. The *Pachamama* is the divine and universal mother of life, or Mother Earth. She gives us everything, and she is the one we communicate with through various rituals. A reciprocal relationship exists between man and *Pachamama*; as *Pachamama* looks after us, we in turn have to take care of her and treat her with belief and love. If not, she will go against us, and the harmony between man and *Pachamama* will be lost.

Conceptual differences

This concept is, therefore, the basis for mythological expressions as well as what we call *Pachavivencia*, or living with Mother Earth. We prefer the term 'Pachavivencia', because we feel that the word 'cosmovision' is a western-based concept that does not-adequately express the indigenous conscience and way of thinking.

We encounter a similar experience with the meaning of the words 'technology', 'labour', and 'economy'. We are trying to find indigenous concepts that fall within this world of thinking, but we have not succeeded, as in the Andean concept there are no words that coincide with these western terms. Therefore, we use the expression '*criar la vida*' (or 'raising life') instead of the

word 'economy', '*saber criar la vida*' (or 'knowing how to raise life') instead of the word 'technology', and '*hacer brillar la chacra*' (or 'making the productive fields shine') instead of the word 'labour'.

Another constant element in the research is that we work on it and write the reports together with indigenous co-researchers. These persons are not mere informants but fully-fledged co-researchers, together with whom conclusions about the indigenous ways of thinking and perceiving life, as well as ideas are constantly checked.

Controversial vision on labour

The heirs of western culture perceive labour mainly as an economic activity. Western workers do their utmost to earn a living, gain material wealth and achieve wellbeing. They do their work in the social context of the modern production system, but in the end it is the natural environment that provides them with the materials they need for their economic activities. For them, nature is the collective of all available natural resources with which they can work to transform and humanise the world. Work is very important to them as a means of self-expression and as a basic duty in this world.

The self-definition as *Homo Faber*, or 'Man Creator', transcends the differences between western ideologies such as Christianity, socialism and capitalism. The *Homo Faber* of the west feels that he or she can create their own world, by constantly re-shaping it. To

reach their economic objectives, workers combine their activities with technology, which becomes increasingly sophisticated and powerful. Thus, human creation becomes ever more impressive and gigantic, and devours an increasing amount of natural resources. In the Andean concept, increasing wealth is not the most central element; this is, instead, maintaining the good relationship between *Pachamama* and the community.

Modern workers are not atheists, but their god is a distant and transcendental god, named 'Supreme Creator'. Following the biblical creation myth, from the start this creator has given man the authorisation to work earthly things and transform them to his liking and design. Since this time God has no longer interfered in any human productive activity. On the other hand, when people want to eat, they first have to work and produce 'in the sweat of thy face' (Gen. 3.19). The products of their work legally belong to them. This is their property, reserve and wealth. After work comes leisure, opportunities to enjoy the fruits of sacrifice, at the weekend, on the annual holiday or during retirement. In this way modern workers also follow the example of the supreme creator: God 'rested on the seventh day of his work' (Gen. 2.2) and promised mankind, after a laborious life, 'eternal peace'.

Andean vision on labour

In all these aspects, the Andean people have a different vision on labour, or



work. Although for them work is also the production of subsistence necessities, they would not define work simply as an economic activity. Nor would they consider themselves as independent creators, and the world as the collective of all available natural resources. The Andean cosmivision puts the phenomenon of work in its cultural and religious context.

For the Andean people the world is

accountable dedication. For Andean people work is more than a productive activity, it is also a religious service to life.

Andean gender model

Another example of the Andean way of looking at life is the gender relationship in traditional culture. This is a relationship in which male and female are perceived as two different beings that are incomplete without the other, such as day and night, or such as the left and the right hand. They are equal but different, each with a unique identity, and therefore needing each other, maintaining a tense - and therefore productive - balance. Each has its own specific areas that complement each other in social and an economic sense.

The main god, Pachamama, is a woman, while 'Father Sun' activates her motherhood. The Andean myths confirm this Andean vision of the relationship between man and woman: the woman is considered as being of higher ethical order, because she is nearest to Mother Earth. She is the one that most often sits on the ground, and therefore the one most capable of caring for life, the fields, the animals, and the seeds. As a result she has to be involved in the seed selection and sowing of fields. We have to be careful, therefore, with using expressions such as 'discrimination' and 'exploitation', when we observe these phenomena.

In the process of transculturation, most apparent in the urbanised *Aymara* and *Quechua* indigenous communities, this equality between man and woman has become less visible. However, traces of this ethical superiority of women, and the fundamental equality between man and woman, still exist in the conscious and unconscious minds of these groups.

Psychological controversies

At the same time the psychological controversies within the indigenous individual and community are the most difficult to understand and work with. Many highland Indians are cultural *mestizos*, who after the conquest of the Spaniards had to combine both Andean and western ways of life. They admire their 'cultural father' or 'the West', who is the conquistador and the winner, while at the same time hating him, as they feel that he disdains them. As bastards they are not admitted to the white elite, even if they do their utmost to be just as modern and capable as their western 'father', and even if they kill their 'cul-

tural mother'. They feel and are indeed misjudged, and regard themselves as inferior.

The same ambiguity exists towards their indigenous 'cultural mother', who, on the one hand is admired and worshipped, while on the other hand being blamed for the misjudgement and disdain they endure. The result of this ambiguity can be exaggerated or aggressive behaviour. This ambiguity is also reflected in their choice between traditional and modern agricultural technology. This psychological problem can only be solved if they decide to accept their combined cultural identity as *mestizos* as a positive one.

IECTA activities

IECTA (full name *Casa Francisco Titu Yupanqui* - Institute for the study of Andean culture and technology) works on the basis of these Andean concepts with indigenous people. The level of the research, education, and publications is termed 'popular-scientific', and is directed at the indigenous groups and their leaders as well as studies in various universities. These include universities in Pune, Iquique, Lirqua and in Tingo Maria in Peru (together with PRATEC, the Andean Project of Campesino Technology), as well as in Oruro and Cochabamba in Bolivia.

We have exhibitions, especially in Chile, and publish in several journals and radio programmes in Peru and Ecuador. We have a bimonthly magazine, *Volvere*, which specialises in Andean anthropology (as does our library) and can be found on our website. IECTA also supports small scale 'development with identity' projects in four Andes countries. In terms of research methodology, IECTA is working with the above-mentioned conflict models to make controversial aspects between western and non-western systems more visible. These insights enable us to define the objectives and methodologies of the work within the communities more clearly.

References

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IECTA
Av Diego Portales 2046
Casilla 135
Iquique, Chile
johvankessel@yahoo.com
www.iecta.cl



In Andean cosmivision, the woman is considered of higher ethical order than the man, as she is nearest to Mother Earth

a living whole, which demands respect and care. Land is central in this cosmivision: in economic and social life as well as in religion and culture. In Andean economy the concept 'life-raising' (*criar*), therefore, replaces the more western concept 'production'. The basic allegory of Andean economics is 'life as it is experienced by the Andean people', and that includes the three spheres of life: of the gods, of all natural environmental beings, and of humans. In the Pachamama these spheres of life interact reciprocally and mutually, thus manifesting the wonder of life. The *chacra*, or productive fields including herds of livestock, is the source of divine life and its fruits are alive. The *chacra*, and all that it represents, earns the right to be treated with respect and care throughout the whole farming cycle, and demands an

