

Living in our Globalized World: Notes 15  
**Indigenous groups and ethnic conflict**  
© Copyright Bruce Owen 2009

- Indigenous people
  - are native to their region
  - claim right to be there based on long history there
  - are generally dominated by people different from them
  - often maintain own language and practices
  - are defined by insisting on being different from the state culture
- About 5% of the world's population
- Typical features that conflict with global capitalism
  - often mobile (as groups or families)
    - cross nation-state boundaries
    - hard to control
    - require lots of land to move through and use
  - often hold land communally, not individual (or any) titles
    - communal land is hard to buy or sell, since many have to agree
    - cannot be used as collateral for loans
    - tends to be managed for longer term, not quick exploitation
  - often have extensive kin networks
    - sharing reduces consumption
    - reduced consumption and kin support reduce need for paid work
    - more ability to resist state coercion
    - less individual mobility, so less suited to labor market
  - often mobile (as groups or families)
    - cross nation-state boundaries
    - hard to control
    - require lots of land to move through and use
  - often hold land communally, not individual (or any) titles
    - communal land is hard to buy or sell, since many have to agree
    - cannot be used as collateral for loans
    - tends to be managed for longer term, not quick exploitation
  - often have extensive kin networks
    - sharing reduces consumption
    - reduced consumption and kin support reduce need for paid work
    - more ability to resist state coercion
    - less individual mobility, so less suited to labor market
  - often fairly egalitarian
    - less need to consume in order to show status
    - no strong leaders able to enforce rules or collect taxes
  - often live on land that others want
    - sometimes because it is managed for sustainability

- so it still has valuable reserves of forest wood, animals, etc. on it
- that could be harvested and sold for a big, quick profit
- analogy to Pacific Lumber Company
  - managed forest and pension plan sustainably
  - bought by Maxxam
  - which hugely stepped up logging, destroying expanses of forest
  - and pulled over half of the reserves out of the pension plan
  - to pay for the company and then make a profit
- Nation-states consistently destroy indigenous cultures
  - **ethnocide**: destruction of a culture without necessarily destroying the people (vs. genocide)
    - need not be intentional
  - Reasons for ethnocide
    - in order to create national integration
    - to control potential threats to state authority
    - to take resources (farmland, trees, minerals, etc.) that others want
    - out of well-meaning ethnocentrism of dominant culture
      - once again, when ideas fit self-interest too well, be suspicious
  - While in a frontier setting
    - examples: North America; Amazonian forest now; etc.
    - ignore indigenous claims to ownership of the land
      - treat it as unoccupied, available
    - treat indigenous people as exploitable, even slave, labor
      - state protections are distant and inapplicable
  - While establishing military control
    - examples:
      - North America
      - British Sudan
      - New Zealand; etc.
  - While establishing government control
    - resettle mobile groups into permanent settlements
      - makes people visible
      - controllable
    - direct rule: set up a government representative with power
      - Viceroys in Peru
    - indirect rule: co-opt local leaders through whom to rule
      - either existing leaders
      - or create them if none exist or are willing
    - establish favorable land rights, treaties, etc.
      - change them as resources are discovered on the land, etc.
  - Once government control is well established
    - try to change objectionable cultural practices
      - bride price
      - arranged or child marriages

- polygyny
- following certain religious ideas or leaders
  - Catholic missionaries in California, Papua New Guinea, Guaraní, etc.
  - Exterpation of Idolatry in Peru
  - Prophet Deng among the Dinka
- is it ever OK to try to change traditional practices?
  - veiling, scarring rituals, sati, circumcision...?
  - to cause change, make people feel dissatisfied or ashamed
- push family planning / contraception
  - large indigenous families are seen as threatening and problems
- use special schools to teach the nation-state's culture
  - missionaries often help
  - long-term boarding schools keep children from the cultural influence of their parents
  - prohibit indigenous language
  - require nation-state appropriate dress, hairstyles, etc.
    - US Native Americans
    - Australian aborigines
  - result: people who don't fit into either culture...
- Finally, integrate them into the economy
  - people must work for payment and buy to consume
    - why?
  - conscript labor
    - since indigenous people may not feel the need to work for pay
  - impose taxes
    - that can only be paid by money earned in the cash economy
  - establish development schemes: cash crops and factories
    - require people to work for pay if they won't voluntarily
    - as in Azande (Sudan) example with cotton
- The process of ethnocide and peasant resistance to it are results of spreading capitalism
  - we could think of them as externalities of the market itself
  - costs borne by third parties
- Guaraní example
  - located in most of Paraguay, also south coastal Brazil, northern Argentina, southeastern Bolivia
  - Originally:
    - very numerous (over 1 million), prosperous
    - fairly egalitarian
    - swidden agriculturalists with associated managed foraging
      - “agroforestry”
      - a sustainable system
  - Heavily missionized, intermarried, acculturated
    - yet some remain practicing swidden agriculture
- Guaraní culture is now central to modern Paraguayan national identity

- Guaraní language is now required in all Paraguayan schools
- an example of superficial preservation of indigenous culture
- Adjusted well to Spanish contact
  - collaborated on road building, trade, etc.
  - traded yerba mate leaves for cash
    - makes a stimulant tea
- Successful with agroforestry
  - including yerba mate, etc. for sale
  - uses varied resources, allowing varied activities
  - does not deplete the ecosystem by overexploitation
  - lends itself to autonomous family units
  - allows a lot of free time
  - self-sufficient enough to ignore cash economy if they can't sell for a profit or buy at an affordable price
  - enabled by low consumption expectations
- Then Paraguay and Brazil started booming in 1970s
  - massive forest clearing for logging
    - then cotton, soy, wheat
  - due to
    - roads built for military along the increasingly tense border
      - allowed heavy logging
    - capital-intensive agriculture pushed small farmers off other land
      - government dealt with landless peasants by giving them forest land
      - others just cleared plots illegally
      - cleared forest soil gave out in a few years, they cleared more
    - government had to pay off World Bank loans for dams, etc.
      - encouraged cash crop production in order to earn funds to pay back
    - so capital-intensive farmers started clearing forest for fast crops
- deforestation left Guaraní surrounded by fields
  - had no title to collectively used land, so they lost it
  - animals depleted, they had to buy meat
  - but yerba mate plants also destroyed
  - forced into cash cropping themselves
    - capital intensive, requires loans, many went into debt...
  - or forced into wage labor
    - but wages are too low to survive on unless entire family works
  - disease
  - suicide
  - traditional religious leadership broke down because outsiders didn't obey it
  - egalitarian society broke down because Guaraní who distributed government aid controlled wealth and power
- Disadvantaged majorities and leveling crowds
  - Globalization creates rich, foreign minorities

- But democracy may empower the poor majority
  - politicians gain by stoking indigenous resentment
  - can lead to violence
    - against the wealth of the minority (shops, cars, etc.)
    - against democracy, by forces allied with the rich minority
    - against the “market-dominant” minority themselves
- Cause of
  - Filipino rampage through Chinese area of Jakarta, 1998
  - Sinhalese attacks on Tamils in Colombo, 1983
  - Hindu attacks on Sikhs in Delhi, 1984
  - Al Qaeda?
    - may be organized, target business or political rivals
- Often precipitated by an economic blow to majority
  - like a switch to more free market policies for IMF...
    - caused economic collapse, unemployment in Yugoslavia
    - led to genocide of Bosnian Muslims by poor majority Bosnian Serbs
      - egged on by elected leader, Slobodan Milosovic
  - or a global commodity price collapse
    - like coffee in 1989
    - causing famine in Rwanda
    - ultimately set the stage for violence between nominally indigenous Hutus and outsider, better-off Tutsis and Hutu sympathizers
- “Development” is more like “transformation”
  - not necessarily progress into an improved modernity
  - usually means lower standard of living for indigenous, peasants, or “market-poor”
- Resulting in violent conflicts
  - between those who gain from the transition, and those who lose
  - due to economic effects of globalization
  - that global culture masks the role of spreading capitalism by considering conflicts “tribal” or “ancient enmities”
  - often the victims are just other pawns in the system, not the real cause of the problems...