

Peasant rebellions

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- Kikuyu Mau Mau rebellion
 - England got Kenya as a colony in an agreement with Germany in 1884 (!)
 - 1902: 50% - 95% of the African population was dead
 - drought, locusts, smallpox, British military actions
 - English settlers encouraged to move in
 - Kikuyu resisted violently but lost
 - White settlers got cheap land
 - Kikuyu were forced to work for them for low pay
 - to earn cash for the poll (head, existence) tax and hut tax
 - they were prohibited from growing cash crops
 - required to carry a pass and work history
 - Indirect rule through appointed chiefs
 - loyal to the British, abusive
 - Initially, Kikuyu were allowed some land and herds
 - their situation as “squatters” was unfair but not intolerable
 - from 1920-1950
 - laws required Kikuyu to work ever more days per year
 - most of the herds were confiscated
 - Kikuyu were beaten, killed, abused with impunity
 - Reserves where many Kikuyu lived became overpopulated, overgrazed, eroded
 - Many landless Kikuyu concentrated in urban Nairobi
 - Mau Mau oath
 - a binding promise to support Kikuyu rebellion
 - 1952: Violent revolt
 - killed British-appointed chiefs and collaborators (2000)
 - killed white settlers (200)
 - controlled Nairobi
 - British responded with extreme military force
 - arrested 100,000, killed 11,000
 - atrocities by settlers
 - atrocities in detention camps to “reeducate” oath takers
 - British believed the oath was the main motivation!
 - avoiding cognitive dissonance of recognizing oppression
 - Rebellion defeated by 1959
 - British granted Kenya independence in 1963
 - The newly empowered African elite largely took the same role as the former white settlers
 - Point: a process of globalization and capitalism
 - first, caused by European imperialism (colonization)
 - fed by growing capitalist need for materials and markets
 - and by capitalist need for ways to make a fortune

- and self-serving racist ideology
- then, by capitalist need to increase profitability
 - or was it just greed?
 - but it is economic in a way possible only with globalization
 - made possible by continued racist views and willful ignorance
- leading to resistance by peasants in the periphery
- resulting in part of the modern global setting
- Zapatista rebellion, Chiapas, Mexico
 - First, the Mexican revolution of 1910
 - communal land had been distributed to individuals in 1860
 - who then gradually sold it to ever larger landowners
 - starting in 1876, vast state lands were sold to US corporations to attract investment
 - by 1910, most Mexicans were landless
 - 1910 Revolution redistributed land back to peasants
 - Article 27 of the constitution authorized the government to give *ejido* land parcels to groups of 20 or more to work, but not sell
 - but largely failed to do so in Chiapas
 - because the 8000 landholding ranchers used private armies to repel the government forces in 1916
 - this extreme stratification persisted into the 1990s
 - In Chiapas, government first encouraged settlement:
 - populated highlands and empty lowland rainforest
 - government encouraged highland Maya to settle in forest
 - Protestant converts also left highlands for the forest
 - others encouraged to settle to block Guatemalan intrusion
 - But then undermined it:
 - government never granted land title to most peasants
 - they did not know how to practice swidden agriculture
 - land would be cleared, exhausted, they would move on
 - ranchers would follow to raise cattle
 - used private *guardias blancas* to push peasants off land
 - big hydroelectric projects flooded peasants off land
 - Government had to renegotiate international debts
 - agreed to austerity budgets
 - stopped subsidizing fertilizer that the peasants needed
 - ended coffee price supports, so the price dropped
 - more peasants went bankrupt and lost their land
 - Government signed NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), a WTO agreement
 - required elimination of Article 27 of the constitution
 - now allowing sale of shared *ejido* land, benefiting ranchers
 - phases out tariffs between US, Canada, Mexico
 - ends Mexican crop subsidies but allows US ones to stand
 - encouraging ranchers to produce beef for US market

- and so to use even more force by *guardias blancas* to push peasants off remaining land
- 1994: Zapatistas announced rebellion in Chiapas
 - specifically opposing NAFTA and neoclassical ideology
 - led by Subcomandante Marcos
 - initially military attempt at revolution in all of Mexico
 - took towns and police stations
 - defeated militarily in two weeks
 - negotiated ceasefire
 - retained some land under their control
- 1995: Government broke ceasefire, took Zapatista territory back
 - but all the principal Zapatistas escaped
- Since 1995, Zapatistas have avoided violence
 - gradually took over government functions in Chiapas
 - rallied support through internet and press
 - succeeded in major legal land redistribution from large landholders to peasants
- Vicente Fox elected President of Mexico in 2001
 - Zapatistas negotiated with him, but rejected his offers
 - instead, established “autonomous municipalities”
 - local, bottom-up government in Chiapas
 - continued meetings with international organizations, press releases, rallies, etc.
 - to remodel Mexican government without participating in it
 - to form a common front with indigenous and peripheral people globally
- Point: a different response to globalization
 - Complaints are very clearly due to globalization
 - Government settlement policies in part to block Guatemalans
 - Violent pressure from capitalized ranchers, producing for the global market
 - Displacement by internationally funded dam projects that produce power for distant parts of the country
 - Austerity measures forced by international lenders:
 - no more fertilizer subsidies
 - no more coffee price supports
 - NAFTA
 - required elimination of Article 27, allowing sale of *ejido* shared land
 - eliminated protective tariffs
 - eliminated crop subsidies in Mexico, but not in the US
 - increased violent pressure by ranchers’ *guardias blancas*
- Response made use of globalization, too
 - skillful use of PR and spin, internet, press releases
 - Subcomandante Marcos is a poet, musician, political philosopher...
 - cultivating alliances with sympathetic groups globally
 - international conferences in Chiapas
 - raising money globally
- Results?

- successful land redistribution
- successful experimentation with local autonomy
- but very little economic improvement for peasants
 - the land is just too poor
 - the plots too small (not enough land for the population)
 - they just can't compete in a capital-intensive global economy
 - without government subsidies
 - or some other high-value product
- more people go to the US to work and send back money
 - Chiapas used to be in the lowest third of Mexican states in terms of amounts of money sent home from abroad
 - now it is in the top third of states receiving remittances
- Is there a place in the modern world for peasants?
 - maybe for some?
 - some peasants do make a profit
 - some peasant farming is sustainable
 - some peasants do well by switching to non-traditional, high-value crops
 - or is this just a painful transition as they disappear?
 - leaving all food production to highly capitalized agriculture
 - if so, can the world absorb them as wage laborers?
 - if not, then what?
- If peasants go the way of foragers, then peasant abuse and resistance will disappear, too
 - will this be good for the world?