

# The Violence Behind Corporate Globalization Is Threatening Indigenous Communities With Extinction

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We all face the possibility of extinction from nuclear war -- or more likely accident -- and from environmental destruction. Sen. John McCain even threatened North Korea with "extinction."

As we speak, some humans are already going extinct. Their extinction is often a consequence of the structural violence of corporate globalization. Communities are under threat, especially those which sit on land coveted by big business. Some live near rivers polluted by dumping. Others rely on biodiversity wiped out by intensive agriculture.

Their misery stems from the so-called "soft power" of corporate globalization and is bolstered by the "hard power" of militarism, special forces and the rent-a-goat culture designed to enforce it.



Brazilian Indigenous people from several tribes protest against the new rules of demarcation of Indigenous territories, in Brasilia, on November 23, 2017. (Photo: EVARISTO SA / AFP / Getty Images)

## Colombia

Colombia is a country of more than 49 million people who live in 33 departments, the largest of which is Bogotá (population 7 million). More than 50 percent of the population identify as Mestizo and approximately 30 percent identify as white. More than 10 percent are Afro-Colombian. The smallest demographics are Indigenous and unspecified groups. One percent of the population own 50 percent of the land.

At the top of Colombia's diverse and complex social fabric sit primarily white descendants of Spanish colonizers who own most of the country's land and businesses. They have unlocked resources for foreign investors, especially British and American companies. A disproportionate number of Colombia's millions of internally displaced persons are Afro-Colombian and Indigenous.

Recently in Chocó and Buenaventura, Afro-Colombians went on strike to protest their ongoing impoverishment, brutalization by state forces, unemployment and low wages. Their demands include job creation, regional production, sanitation infrastructure and new housing, among other things.

Beginning in the 1960s, predominantly Spanish-descendent non-elites (i.e., non-Afro-Colombian and non-Indigenous peoples) formed self-professed left-wing groups to counter

the elite domination of land- and business-owners. The main

groups were the once-popular Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), both founded in 1964. These groups used violence -- small in scale compared to the enemy armed forces of Colombia and their allies -- in a failed effort to defeat government forces and their paramilitary partners. In mid-2017, FARC disarmed for the first time in 50 years, leaving fragmented gangs and paramilitary forces fighting progressive elements of the diverse population.

**Over 60 percent of Colombia's Indigenous populations -- more than 750,000 individuals -- are in danger of extinction.**

As the decades-long civil wars continued, Western businesses saw lucrative opportunities. Britain's BP oil, SABMiller brewery and AngloGold Ashanti have substantial commercial interests in Colombia. The country has multiple resource curses: It is rich in oil, coal, coffee, minerals and coca, from which cocaine is derived.

Caught in the middle of this are Indigenous Colombians, who constitute just 3.4 percent of the population, or 1.5 million individuals. They include lowlanders and highlanders and total approximately 100 different groups. Native Colombians speak 65 Indigenous languages, of which five are extinct and 19 are disappearing. Just three departments -- La Guajira, Cauca and Nariño -- host 80 percent of the country's Indigenous population. Furthermore, about one-third of Colombia is a "reservation," and many of these regions have "environmental conflicts due to extractive activities," according to the Indigenous rights group International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA).

In 2014, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia, Todd Howland, reported that over 60 percent of the country's Indigenous populations -- more than 750,000 individuals -- are in danger of extinction. The Center for Autonomy and

Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of Colombia and IWGIA all attribute the extinction of Indigenous communities to resource-driven conflicts.

Also in 2014, the UK's Lord Alton commented on the UK-Colombia bilateral "free trade" agreement. Alton said: "According to the Colombian constitutional court, 34 groups of indigenous peoples are currently at risk of extinction. The court identified forced displacement as the major cause." Alton concluded that "the UK has created in this trade treaty something that will benefit British businesses but harm exploited and vulnerable people."

## Brazil

The story is much the same in the former Portuguese colony, Brazil. Wealthy white Portuguese descendants own much of the land. After the 1960s, Brazilians endured decades of oppression under Western-backed military juntas. Brazil's population is 207 million. More than 50 percent identify as Black/mixed race/Afro-Brazilian. Just under 50 percent identify as white. According to Survival International, Brazil's Indigenous populations total 900,000 and are split into 240 groups. This equates to just 0.4 percent of the population.

The largest Indigenous group is the Guaraní people, who number 51,000 and who are mainly crammed into reserves or live on the edges of highways. Levels of suicide are high, as opportunities to live off the land become scarce. Over the last three decades, more than 620 Guaraní have ended their own lives, making the suicide rate 19 times higher than the national average. Those under 30 constituted 85 percent of suicides. Ranchers hire militias to intimidate and "systemically target" them, according to Survival International.

### Ten members of one Amazonian community who made unintended contact with gold miners in September 2017 ended up dead.

In the Amazon, says Survival International, the largest group is the Tikuna, who number 40,000. The Yanomami occupy 9.4 million hectares and number 19,000. The Awá consist of 450 individuals, and the Akuntsu, just five. So-called uncontacted peoples in Brazil -- people who have had no peaceful contact with dominant societies -- number several hundred and consist of around 80 groups. They include the Kawahiva, who flee loggers and ranchers and are said to be on the edge of extinction. In 2016, Euronews reported: The Kawahiva are a group of hunter-gatherers ... forced to live on the run, fleeing violence from outsiders. Attacks and disease have killed relatives. And loggers are getting closer.

Euronews also notes that the coup against the central government of the left-leaning Dilma Rousseff also threatens Indigenous rights, as the US-backed Michel Temer talks openly about deregulating the economy and expanding resource extraction.

Of the Awá alone, Vanity Fair reported in 2013 that loggers were "killing their trees and their animals and are now within a

few miles ... and ... thousands of other invasores ... have illegally settled on [Awá] land and converted a third of their forest to pasture." This is significant because the Awá, like most Indigenous peoples, live off the forest's biodiversity, not farms.

A recent Al Jazeera report found that "the country's economic crisis and growing pressure to exploit the rich resources on those reserves could lead to the extinction of many communities."

According to the New York Times, at least 10 members of one Amazonian community made unintended contact with gold miners in September 2017 and ended up dead.

According to the Times report, during "bar talk," some miners murdered members of the group, stole a hand-carved paddle belonging to the tribe, and bragged about killing in self-defense. Leila Silvia Burger Sotto-Maior, a coordinator for the Brazilian agency on Indigenous affairs, Funai, said: "They even bragged about cutting up the bodies and throwing them in the river." The incident is currently being investigated.

Where are the timber and profits ending up? According to a 2014 Greenpeace study, "Illegally logged timber in Brazil is being laundered on a massive and growing scale and then sold on to unwitting buyers in the UK, US, Europe and China." There is no indication that this has ceased.

## Africa

Turning to Africa, Uganda, a former British colony, has a population of 41.5 million. The largest ethnic group is the Baganda, who make up nearly 17 percent of the population.

One of the smallest and "near-extinct" groups is the Ik. Consisting of 14,000 individuals, the Ik live in the ranges of the Kidepo Valley National Park. In the 1960s, the central government imposed a Wildlife Reserve on the Ik's land, forcing them to migrate to Mount Morungole, along the Kenyan and South Sudan borders. The Ik have largely given up on cattle-rearing due to raids by rivals and farmers. They survive by goat breeding and beekeeping.

### The 1,300-strong ethnic Hadza group in Tanzania has lost 90 percent of its land in just 50 years due to land privatization and exploitation from mining and logging.

Every year, thousands of wealthy tourists visit the Kidepo Valley to enjoy luxury tours. Kidepo contributes to Uganda's \$1 billion-a-year safari industry. Kidepo Safaris says that Mt. Morungole is home to the Ik, "the tiniest ethnic group found in Uganda, [who] have their own special culture." The Uganda Safari Guide offers expensive tours to meet "endangered tribes."

Uganda is not the only African country home to an endangered people.

Tanzania has a population of nearly 56 million. There are 120 ethnic groups in the country. In terms of employment, most ethnic groups grow crops for markets, including bananas, coffee



and eleusine.

However, the 1,300-strong Hadza group has lost 90 percent of its land in just 50 years. This is due to land privatization and exploitation from mining and logging. The group lives primarily on the edge of the Serengeti plains. Their increasingly limited diet includes porcupine and berries. Andrew Madsen's book *The Hadzabe of Tanzania* notes problems in supposedly protected villages, including "wood cutting, honey gathering, [and] increased mining activities" by Tanzanian migrants who work for local economies.

In addition, the nomadic Maasai are facing persecution in Tanzania and Botswana. The central government of Botswana's efforts to enclose wildlife have led to the loss of land in a series of government evictions. This reminds the people of recent history, where Maasai "were shot, [and] houses were burned," said Samwel Nangiria, a Maasai representative and coordinator of the Ngonett civil society group.

More recently, the BBC reported that in August, hundreds of Maasai were left homeless when government-linked gangs burned their homes to drive them out of the "reserves," where wealthy Dubai-based businesspeople can buy pricy licenses to murder rare animals for their amusement.

## What Can We Do?

As Westerners who support wildlife conservation and who benefit from many of the resources extracted from these countries and regions, we can have a more ethical approach to consumption. We can demand to know that the products -- be they furniture,

jewellery or imported foods -- have come from fair-trade sources. Crucially, we can pressure companies to prove that exploitation is eradicated from their supply chains. We can also form links and networks with Indigenous communities, particularly through unions.

Indigenous people are not passive victims. To give some examples, the Ugandan Ik have elected one of their own, Hillary Lokwang, to parliament. Lokwang has pledged to represent the Ik's needs in government. With regard to conservation, we need to pressure wildlife organizations to guarantee rights for Indigenous peoples, as well as rights for elephants and other endangered non-human species.

In Brazil, over 200 Indigenous organizations work for the survival of their respective peoples, hosting cultural events and clinics. Guarani-Kaiowá leader Ladio Veron says that rich countries "can support us, add pressure, condemn the situation and demand that our rights and land are recognized." Sarah Shenker at Survival International, which works with Indigenous peoples, says, "International pressure can make a difference." She adds that people in wealthier countries must "realize that what is happening to Indigenous people is not just a situation that is far away, and not to do with us."

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*Bio:* T.J. Coles has written several books, including *Voices for Peace* (with Noam Chomsky and others), *President Trump, Inc.*, and his latest, *Fire and Fury* (all published by Clairview Books).

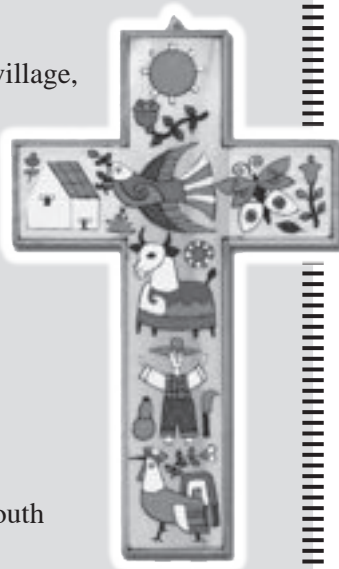
## The Cross of El Salvador

Facing the desk, and any who sit there,  
the Cross of El Salvador,

its inlaid images enliven the village,  
nestled among hills,  
under the warm arching sun,  
white stuccoed homes,  
tiled roofs,  
trees draped in their fruit,  
a visiting cockatoo,  
two hens and their rooster.

In its silence,  
the cross asserts a pledge,  
that out of war's flesh eating mouth  
rebirth will rise.

Tom Keene  
May 2, 2017



ON & OFF  
**FREDERICKSBURG**  
ROAD STUDIO TOUR  
*San Antonio, Texas*

• • •

**Saturday**  
**February 17, 2018**  
11 am — 6 pm

**Sunday**  
**February 18, 2018**  
12 pm — 5 pm

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