

probably amongst the largest human wipeouts in history – akin to the numbers who succumbed to the Black Death in Europe, or those killed during both world wars put together. If the figures were smaller in Australia and southern Africa, it was only because there were fewer tribal people there to begin with.

Land theft

Violence, enslavement and disease affect fewer indigenous people now than formerly, but the same is unfortunately not true for land theft, which is on the increase. This is the key avoidable issue tribal peoples now confront, and part of the problem is that it is often characterized as either inevitable or for the common good – or even beneficial for the tribe in question – rather than the serious and deadly crime which it really is.

Until recently, the main cause was colonization. The rich have been establishing their farms and plantations on tribal land for generations; they are still there. In South America, huge soya and sugar cane fields, as well as cattle ranches, feed the wealthy world's appetite for food and fuel which cost the consumer relatively little, but have taken an expensive toll in human suffering long before they reach the dinner table or gas station. The 1970s saw an increase in poorer colonists, particularly in Indonesia and Bangladesh, as well as South America: governments pushed the impoverished away from the urban areas, which were potential hotbeds of threatening dissent, and drew them into more remote zones where tribal peoples also lived.

These poor newcomers were often granted a plot, tools,

and sometimes a cow or small dwelling, and told to make a new life for themselves. Many tried, but gave up after a few years, often leaving much damaged land behind. Hordes flooded into the Amazon from Brazil's poverty-stricken northeast; across the continent, thousands flowed down the Andes into the Amazon region of Ecuador. On the other side of the world, the poor were shipped from Java's slums to West Papua. Dozens of tribal peoples disappeared as a result of all this. Some tribes, now rendered landless, drifted to the towns to try and eke out a living as labourers, prostitutes or beggars. Losing connection with each other, and with no home to return to, they disappeared irretrievably as peoples. Others, such as the Guarani in Brazil, hung on desperately, living on shrinking scraps of land, sometimes just on roadside verges, but nevertheless clinging together and to a sense of their identity, and remembering what they had lost. Many are still there. Guarani children still routinely despair and commit suicide, usually by hanging themselves from trees. The youngest recorded so far was Luciane Ortiz, a little girl of nine.

Resource theft

Over the last generation, resource exploration and extraction has become an even bigger threat than colonization. This usually comprises oil/petroleum, minerals, or timber, as well as damming rivers for hydropower. As the world's population consumes more goods and energy, driven by its growing population and huge corporations promoting an unceasing demand for new things, the price of such commodities has increased severalfold, making it more and more profitable to exploit remoter areas, exactly the places where tribal peoples have survived.