Rwanda Genocide

Name

Affiliation

Date

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Rwanda genocide was one of the most brutal genocides in the history of the human beings, in which millions of people were killed by the dominant group of the society. There were a number of reasons behind the genocide and the most important among them were ethnic issues, and, social and political control of the society in a few hands. The genocide in Rwanda was also the result of the structural violence which had been a part of the society for years. The patterns of violence and inequality were quite strongly woven into the fabric of the Rwandan society and needed the utilization of the thick description to explore and explain the issues. Rwandan genocide may have been the worst example of the brutality of human beings, which was supported by the structural violence in society and can be described in the light of the thick description.

Story of Rwanda became prominent after the development of European colonies there, during the eighteenth century. This was also the time which laid the seeds of genocide in the peacefully progressing society. There were two ethnic groups in Rwanda, Hutu, and Tutsi. Hutu was the majority but the working class group of the society, while Tutsi were in minority and cattle owners. The conditions of the society were being managed with cooperation and support of each other. However, the establishment of Belgian and German colonies in Rwanda changed the whole structure of society. The German colonizers established a discriminatory system in the society by declaring the people of the Tutsi tribe as more suitable for the ruling position. The people of the Hutu tribe had to face the discrimination and violence of the ruling group, as well as the foreign colonizers, which filled their hearts with hatred towards them. The Second World War, which had impacted the countries all over the world, also allowed more power to the Belgian colonizers in Rwanda, which supported the Hutu group. Due to the support of the foreign groups, Hutu became successful in gaining the political and social control of the society, while forcing the Tutsi people to leave Rwanda. By 1962, Rwanda was an independent country led by the majority Hutu group, which discriminated the minority Tutsi tribe, by giving them lower ranks in the society. During the 1990s, civil war broke out in Rwanda, in which the Tutsi people living out of the country tried to take the social and political control in their hands. However, they had to face the brutality as the genocide broke out in society. Haperen has described in her article that

“Between 6 April and the end of June 1994, in just 100 days, approximately three-quarters of the total Tutsi population of Rwanda was killed. Estimates of the number of victims vary between 507,000 (Human Rights Watch's historian and ICTR expert witness Alison Des Forges) and 1.2 million (Rwandan government) (Haperen, N.Y).”

Thick description, which provides the opportunity of observing the cultural practices and societal conditions from a closer lens and perspective is very important to explore the cultural issues of the societies. It helps to understand those problems, which otherwise appear to be just abrupt in society. The thick description applies to the context of Rwanda in the way that it helps to understand that the actions of Hutu people and the brutal genocide was the result of the discrimination and violence they had faced. Although the genocide cannot be justified in any manner, it was the result of the unnecessary control and manipulation of the European colonizers in Rwanda, who maximized their profits but crippled the ethnic groups of the society, who were previously living in cooperation and prosperity (Geertz, 2008).

Structural violence was also an important component of the genocide of Rwanda. The people of the Tutsi tribe were not given due position and rights in the Rwandan society, after its independence. Tutsi people had to face poverty, repression, and alienation in Hutu dominated Rwanda. Uvin described in his article that “All in all, approximately half of all Rwandans are ultra-poor, i.e. incapable of feeding themselves decently or investing productively. Up to 40 percent more are poor, while 9 percent are non-poor, and perhaps 1 percent are positively rich (Uvin, 1998).”

Some of the definitions of structural violence as shared by Uvin include “referring to survival, well-being, freedom,” “combination of inequality, repression, and racism,” and “a lack of employment opportunities and social facilities (Uvin, 1998)." Human development helps to shed light on structural violence by highlighting the importance of social empowerment, social cooperation, dignity, equality and promoting sustainability in the society. If all or any of these is deliberately taken away from the public, then it is the structural violence which is specifically done to deprive the public of their due rights. The agricultural development projects in Rwanda also aided violence by giving more land and rights to the majority group and also by practicing social, regional and ethnic exclusion to provide benefit to few dominant groups of the society (Haperen, N.Y).

The political-sociological explanation of public’s participation in genocide is that it was the period of transition of the society, in which the previously dominant group tried to maintain its status quo, by utilizing violence aggression and genocide. The physiological explanation is that the structure of the society was developed in the way that the two parties were not ready to negotiate and considered violence as their only weapon to remain in power. The anomie theory of Merton provides the sociological explanation of the participation of the public in genocide as there were isolation and alienation in society and the rebels redefined the goals and the means of achieving those goals, while utilizing genocide as the source of keeping the control of the society in their hands (Uvin, 1998).

The Rwandan genocide is one of the worst happenings in the world. It was aided by the structural violence and the seeds were planted by the European colonizers. The Tutsi people who initially discriminated the Hutu people became the victims of genocide, which was due to the hatred of the Hutu tribe towards them. The agricultural development programs of Rwanda also supported the structural violence against the Tutsi tribe and made the conditions worst, ultimately leading to genocide which killed more than 800,000 Tutsi people.

References

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