

POLITICS OF RACISM, GENOCIDE AND ETHNIC CLEANSING IN LIBYA: A STUDY OF TAWERGHA

AMON RIMAMTANUNG STEPHEN

TARABA STATE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, NIGERIA.

Email: stephenamonn@gmail.com, Tel.: +234(0)8181393605

Abstract: *The Town of Tawergha was used as a staging ground by “Gaddafi” forces to launch attacks on the Town of Misrata, Libya's third largest city. After rebels broke the siege of Misrata and overran Tawergha, the Town with about 40,000 populations the residents fled or were driven out by the rebels. The Tarwegans were accused of crimes including murder, rape and sexual torture against the people of Misrata. Scores were held in prisons under militia's command in Misrata and Tripoli, where human rights groups recorded cases of torture and right abuses. The forced displacement of about 40,000 people, who were under arbitrary detentions, torture, killings are widespread, systematic, and sufficiently organized to be crimes against humanity. The Successive governments in Tripoli and local authorities in Misrata have failed to stop the ongoing persecution of an entire community and the destruction of the Town inhabited by black Africans descendant. The aims of this paper is to look at how the reprisal attacks by the Misrata rebels in Libya against the people of Tawergha resulted into genocide and ethnic cleansing which is term a crime against humanity by the United nations convention and which is punishable under the international law.*

Keywords: Politics, Racism, Genocide, Ethnic Cleansing, Libya, Tawargha.

Introduction

The word Tawergha stems originally from a word of the Amazigh language, pronounced "Tamort Taoragt or Taorgat" which means the green island or green land, this is because of the lakes and the many canals branching off in different directions for over ten miles from its source. Tawergha is an ancient traditional Libyan Town, located halfway on the coastal road linking the eastern and western parts of Libya. The north boundary of the municipality is situated 38 km south of the city of Misrata (which is the third biggest city in Libya) and it is bordered to the east by the "the Gulf of Sirte", on the west by the administrative borders of the city of Bani Walid and on the south by the administrative borders of Sirte. Tawergha used to include 21 residential suburbs and had 44 to 48 thousand inhabitants, the total number depending on the different sources (Tawergha, 2014:4). Sam Damgher describes Tawergha as a Town inhabited mostly by blacks Libyans a legacy of 19 century origin as a Transit Town in slave trade era. (<http://www.blacksstamnews.com/news/135/ARTICLE/7627/2011-09-14, HTML/> Accessed on 12 April 2016)

The area enclosed one of the most important strategic projects for agricultural production, (Agricultural Tawergha Project) with 3000 cultivated hectares. There used to be a compound for cattle poultry livestock production, which was built in the 1980s. This large project was based on the most prominent natural features in Libya, the famous water of Tawergha with a permanent underground flow which stretches all the way in a west direction towards the capital, Tripoli. The region of Tawergha is still regarded as the oldest and the second largest water reservoir in Libya. The Tawerghans have darker skin color then the citizens from the neighboring Town of Misrata treated them as a lesser Libyans. During the Gaddafi regime their living conditions and opportunities slightly improved. Many Misrata citizens didn't agree with Gaddafi on the chances he offered the people of Tawergha and they were told multiple times by the Misratan that the people of Tawergha did not deserve the positive attention as they were black, less than dogs and bad Muslims in their eyes (Tawergha, 2014:5).

Although Gaddafi probably had a different opinion on his status, many people refers him to be a dictator. The few revolts during his 42 years of reign were dealt with brute force and many opposition members were mistreated, tortured or killed. In 2011, two out of three major Libyan cities opposed the Gaddafi regime with protest which started out as peaceful demonstrations against the regime. Gaddafi tried to suppress the protests with violence and the people of Benghazi and Misrata responded with the Libyan revolution on 17th February 2011. After months

of fighting and crimes committed on both sides, the revolutionaries were on the verge of being defeated near Benghazi and the world feared a massacre. To prevent the genocide, the United States, England and France pressed NATO into action. Within days the army of Gaddafi was targeted by a dozen countries and after months of NATO bombing on the Libyan military positions, the rebels regained the initiative and the Gaddafi regime was pushed back (Tawergha, 2014:5).

Gaddafi used the town of Tawergha and Tmana in the East and neighboring areas of Zliten in the West, and Bani Walid from the South to station his troops and military equipment during the siege of Misrata, firing heavy artillery into the city on a daily basis. The people of Misrata blame all Tawergha that some civilians assisted the military during the siege of their city in 2011. Pictures and video recordings before the attacks show that a truckload of Tawerghans joined the military convoy and the Misratan claim that crimes have been committed. Misrata faced heavy shelling and sniper fire from Gaddafi's troops for two months until rebel forces successfully pushed Gaddafi troops to the periphery of the city. More than 1,000 people reportedly died in the assault on Misrata. When the Libyan army weakened by NATO air bombardments, Tawergha became the first target for National Transitional Council (NTC) Misratan brigades and in August 2011 Tawergha was raided by rebels and militiamen who humiliated, imprisoned and brutally tortured 1300 men, many of whom were massacred as black scapegoats for the crimes committed by the regime of Gaddafi (Tawergha, 2014:5).

The Town of Tawergha was ethnically cleansed and 44,000 to 47,500 people were evicted or fled the violence. Their houses and shops were looted, blown up or set on fire and the infrastructure and community buildings destroyed by NATO and militia bombardments. Many Tawerghans were tracked down to be imprisoned and tortured by a special Misrata hunting party of 70 members specifically assigned to this task and the rest of the population of Tawergha found their way to the Internally Displaced Persons camps all over Libya. The internally displaced people from Tawergha are easy targets and fair game in the camps. The rebels and militia members enter the camps unopposed while randomly shooting people without sparing the lives of women and children or the elderly and abduct boys and men for torture. Many torture victims are killed afterwards. Although many people from Misrata do not agree with the Misrata militia ethnic cleansing or imprisoning and torturing of innocent people from Tawergha (Tawergha, 2014:6).

The General national congress (GNC) members from Misrata said that it is up to the government to assist in the reconciliation process and that it is out of their hands, but it is noticed that members from the Libyan government who dare to bring up the subject are threatened and even tortured themselves. For the past two years the various human rights organizations have written extensive and outraged reports about Tawergha fate but till to date, the new regime in Libya failed to provide security and justice for the people of Tawergha. NATO war in Libya was proclaimed as a humanitarian intervention bombing in the name of "saving lives." We can see NATO played an important role in the ethnic cleansing of Tawergha, an ethnic cleansing of which has been forewarned and in which they decided, nonetheless, to participate. However the international community does not actively protect civilians from Tawergha, who are subjected to torture and genocide (Tawergha, 2014:6).

Definition of Terms:

The concept of racism

Although there is no single or universally accepted definition of the concept racism. According to (Wikipedia 2016). Define Racism is a product of the complex interaction in a given society of a race-based worldview with prejudice, stereotyping. Racism can be present in a social actions, practice or political systems (example Apartheid) that support the expression of prejudice or aversion in discriminatory practice. The ideology underlying practice racist practices include the idea that humans can be subdivided into distinct groups that are different in their social behavior and innate capacities and that can be ranked as inferior or superior. Racist ideology can become manifest in many aspect of social action may include xenophobic, otherness, segregated hierarchical ranking, supremacist, and related social phenomenon. Racism is the systematic practice of denying people access to rights, representation, or resources based on racial differences. It is a thorough system of discrimination that involves social institutions and affects virtually every aspect of society (Rights Sites News 2014).

The Concept of Genocide

Raphael Lemkin coined the term “genocide” by combining the Greek word for race, nation, or tribe (*genos*) with the Latin word for killing (*cide*). In an efficient conceptualization of the term, Lemkin wrote that genocide is the “destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group” Lemkin (1944: 79). He also referred to genocide as the “destruction of human groups” Lemkin (1947: 147). Elaborating on the term, he claimed:

Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the group themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. Genocide is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group Lemkin... (1944: 79).

Genocide Many experts have answered that question. Despite the large number of definitions in the literature, a core consensus meaning of the term “genocide” may be distilled. In particular, genocide refers to violence that is extensive (deliberate, large scale, organized, systematic, sustained, widespread), group-selective (targeted at groups), and group-destructive designed to destroy groups in particular territories under perpetrators’ control (Scott, 2011).

The original UN Resolution (No. 96-1), which declared genocide an international Crime was approved unanimously by the General Assembly on December 11, 1946, and was adopted on December 9, 1948 (Minority Rights Group, 1982: 3). Over fifty years later, it is the only internationally recognized definition of genocide; although there is no single or universally accepted definition. The following articles illustrate some of the core parts of the definition established by the Convention:

Article II: In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following Acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, Racial or religious group, as such: The mental element, meaning the “intent to destroy, in whole or in Part, a national, ethnical, racial or Religious group, as such,” and The physical element which includes five acts described in sections a, b, c, d and e. A crime must include both elements to be Called “genocide.”

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the Group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life Calculated to bring about its physical destruction In whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group (Dunoff, Ratner, and Wippman, 2006).

Article III: The following acts shall be punishable:

- (a) Genocide
- (b) Conspiracy to commit genocide;
- (c) Direct and public incitement to commit genocide;
- (d) Attempt to commit genocide;
- (e) Complicity in genocide (Minority Rights Group, 1982: 2).

The concept of ethnic cleansing

Ethnic cleansing is a type of crime against humanity. In an ethnic cleansing, ethnic or religious groups are force to leave an area by a more powerful ethnic group. The goal of an ethnic cleansing is to get rid of everyone who does

not belong to the more powerful ethnic group. Then the more powerful ethnic group can have the area they cleansed for themselves and only members of their group will live there. In an ethnic cleansing, perpetrators may use different ways of getting rid of the people. They may force people to move: until they leave: and used rape and mass murder. Usually, the perpetrators will also try to destroyed any signs that the victims lived in the area they are cleansing they may destroy homes, farms, infrastructure, monuments, cemeteries, and places of worship. The United Nations defines ethnic cleansing this way:

- It is done on purpose, as a part of a plan
- It is done by one ethnic or religious group
- That group uses violence and terror to force other ethnic or religious group
- The goal is to make sure that only the perpetrators ethnic or religious group lives in those areas. A report by united nations experts said that ethnic cleansing has been done in many different ways including:
 - Murder
 - Torture
 - Arresting innocent people and putting them in jail
 - Executing people without a trial
 - Rape and sexual assault
 - Forcing people to live in ghettos
 - Forced migration and deportation
 - Attacking civilians and civilian areas like homes and schools
 - Destroying property.

Experts say that ethnic cleansing is different than genocide in genocide a group tries to kill every member of a group, so that group no longer exists on earth. In an ethnic cleansing, perpetrators are trying to get rid of other groups in specific areas. Though there is no official legal definition of ethnic cleansing however, both the International criminal court (ICC) and the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) Define deporting population from its home as a crime against humanity other crimes that happens during ethnic cleansing are treated as separate crimes that may fit under the definitions of genocide or crime against humanity. For examples murdering, raping, and persecuting large groups of people are all crimes against humanity under international criminal court (http://simple.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_cleansing Accessed on 12 April 2016.)

Who are the perpetrators?

The ethnic cleansing of Tawergha lasted from March until the 11th of August 2011, in the month of Ramadan, when the mass killings occurred. On that day the tragedy of Tawergha started with the rebels of Misrata entering Tawergha from four sides assisted by NATO bombing, who started to shell targets in residential neighborhoods. The shelling continued during the morning, which brought harm and death to many people buried by bombed buildings, and which forced people to flee on foot because most cars were without fuel, which increased the magnitude of the disaster. The Tawerghans fled to the Town of Al Heisha, mostly on foot as although there were some cars; there was not enough petrol available. Some of the people of Al Heisha helped to fetch several of the people of Tawergha from the desert and the sabkha region, and also collected some of the remains and body parts of Tawerghans and buried them in Al Heisha. Three days after the disaster, some people of Tawergha could get access to fuel and dispersed to other cities. (e.g. Sirte, Jafra, Zala, Sabha, Tripoli, Tajoura, Bani Walid, Tarhunah) The Misrata battalions of death, (Thobacks, Alnacim, Almoharb, Warrior, Martyrs, Sir Garib, Alniser, Ahasam, Tripoli Street, Ahmed Kerkom), mistreated the women, children and the elderly at the Alimdad site and kidnapped the youth from Tawergha who were brought to Misrata for, unlawful imprisonment, torture and many were killed (Tawergha, 2014:11).

The Misrata militia hunted down all Tawerghan refugees and took their cars, mobile phones and money, burning cars and property of the people that were not of value to them. This occurred in Tripoli and other cities that have been sheltering displaced people. A number of Tawergha local council members were arrested assaulted and the complete paper and electronic council archive of Tawergha was stolen. As the municipality of Tawergha has been officially canceled, the former members of the Local Council have not much to offer to lighten the harsh conditions that the people of Tawergha encounter on a daily basis. It is financially handicap as the Local Council is not funded by the government and lacks the official authority to make decisions. The Tawergha Local Council suffers from a lack of financial support from the Office for the Displaced Persons. In addition to loss of personal property at the hands of rebels from Misrata. After the residents from Tawergha were expelled and were barred

from returning, militias from Misrata started to systematically destruct the Town and farms. All property was looted and the buildings were not spared from destruction including all public places, like banks, hospital, mosques and schools which have been burned down after the theft of their contents. The village water tower was demolished with explosives and the dairy and poultry equipment was confiscated and the buildings were destroyed (Tawergha, 2014:11-12).

In Tawergha a city of black descendants in Libya is emptied by the rebels in 14 September 2011 the rebels from Misrata had torched the homes that belong to the predominantly dark-skinned residents of Tawergha, which is now abandoned. A wall street journal reporter witness some torching words wrote "Slaves" and "Negroes" were scribbled on the walls of emptied homes. The rebels from the city of Misrata had declared that Tawergha would be no more and that the rebels conducting the attacks was named The Brigade for purging slaves, black skin. The wall street journal also reported that Transitional National Councils (NTC) Libyan prime minister Mahmoud Jibril, rubber stamped the wiping of the Town off the map at the Misrata Town hall, referring to the reported atrocities in Tawergha by rebels, Jibril said: "Regarding Tawergha in my own viewpoint is that nobody has the right to interfere in this matter except the people of Misrata". (<http://www.blacks.com/news/135/ARTICLE/7627/2011-09-14/HTML/> Accessed on 12 April 2016).

According to Justice Malala 19 September, 2011 they are killing black's people in Libya. They are killing them in the street, they are killing them in hospitals, they are killing them in Transit camps, and they are killing them in their houses. They are not killing other Africans. They are killing Africans dark sub-Saharan Africans skin tone, the darkness of one's skin, has become for many blacks in Libya the differences between prison and freedom, death and life. (<http://www.timeslive.co.za/opinion/columnist/2011/0919/black-life-is-cheap-in-libya> Accessed on 12 April 2016).

An amnesty delegation visiting the central Tripoli hospital witnessed three Thuwwar Revolutionaries an opposition fighters dragging a black patient from the western Town of Tawergha from his bed and detaining him. The Thuwwar said: "The man would be taken to Misrata for questioning, arguing that interrogators in Tripoli let killers go free. Two other blacks Libyans receiving treatment in the hospital for gunshot wound were warned by the anti-Gadafi forces that their turn was coming." (<http://www.timeslive.co.za/opinion/columnist/2011/0919/black-life-is-cheap-in-libya> Accessed on 12 April 2016).

As you enter Tawergha from the main road, the name is erased from the road sign. It is now silent, Buildings are burnt and ransacked. Buildings show the scars of heavy bombardment, some are burnt out of shells, some are just abandoned. The Town is empty of humans, apart from a small number of Misratan militiamen preventing the return to the Town's residents. Those that escaped from the Town are now scattered across the country. As many as 15,000 people are in Hun, in central Libya. Some are in Sabha and Benghazi, and more than 1,000 are in a refugee camp in Tripoli. This camp, run by the Lib Aid humanitarian organization, was a building site abandoned early in the uprising by the foreign construction workers who lived and worked there. It teems with women and children. There are men about, but they are very few and keep out of sight. The women are ready to talk but they want to cover their faces. Umm Bubakr can't trace one of her sons. "They bombed and shot at us and we had to run away. I ran away with my kids. I've lost a boy and I don't know whether he is alive or dead. And now we are here, with no future. We are scared, we need a solution to our problem and we want to go home." She says there are nightly raids by Misrata militiamen on the camp, to take away young men. They are not seen or heard again (Tarik, K. 2012).

The map of Libya showing the location of Tawergha city.



Source by (Tarik, K. BBC News, Libya November 2012)

National Reconciliation between People of Misrata and Tarwergha

National Reconciliation is the term used for establishment of so-called 'national unity' in country beset with political problems (Wikipedia, 2016 Accessed on 14 April). But Most of the reconciliation efforts in Libya are conducted by either tribal leaders or by non-governmental organizations. But Government of Libya is not taken any concrete steps to address this problem (Amon 2017). There are efforts made by civil society organizations, but the results are not binding on the parties of Tawergha and Misrata (Tawergha, 2014:15).

When it comes to the Tawergha case, it seems that the Libyan government has different priorities and allows the Misrata General national congress (GNC) members to dictate the actions to the members of government that are allowed to undertake in the reconciliation process. Mr. Mohamed Ibrahim, who is the head of the department in Misrata, responsible for the Tawergha case, stated that: In the previous years there was not any direct dialogue between Tawergha and Misurata Local Council and all communication went through third parties Tawergha, 2014:11-15).

The Misrata Local Council had high hopes that the Libyan state would adopt the Tawergha case but unfortunately there has been a complete sense of neglect and as a result the situation has become much worse since then. It is the opinion of the Misrata Local Council that the third parties in many cases did not explicitly pass over their viewpoints making things worse (Tawergha, 2014:16).

Lack of Strong Political will by the Libyan Government to Return Tawerghans back to the Town of Tawergha.

The people of Tawergha are displaced, scattered over more than 26 different camp sites all over Libya. The Tawerghans who managed to retain some finances, migrated out of Libya to prevent their sons from being tortured or killed. The refugees of Tawergha decided to return to their city on 25.06.2013 and asked the government to provide transport and protection for their journey. The Prime Minister issued a statement asking to postpone the return. The members of the former Local Council of Tawergha cooperated to maintain their positions in the government. This caused confusion among the people from Tawergha, of which a group decided to return in spite of the Councils request to stay. This group was ready to leave for Tawergha on 25.06.2013, but the authorities prevented their action and promised that there would be a postponement of not more than ten days before all the refugees could go back to Tawergha (Tawergha, 2014:14).

Until last month no action had been taken and endeavors for the return to Tawergha did not exist (Tawergha, 2014:14). The Council of Tawergha tried to obtain an explanation from the Prime Minister as to the reasons for not keeping to his promises. According to the Council of Tawergha it is common knowledge that Tawergha is considered one of cities that lost the battle during the revolution because Tawergha was assumed to be on the side of the oppressor unlike Misrata, that choose the side of the rebels. To make things worse and more prone to discrimination, the Municipal Government of Tawergha was removed off the list of official Municipal Governments. The purpose of this list is that the new Libya is to be divided into Municipal Governments in order to decentralize the role of the federal government and as a move towards more local municipal developments in each city. The Council of Tawergha believes that the Libyan government is at the mercy of victorious cities like Misrata or Zentan, whose members of the government attempt to place dictating orders to the Libyan government regularly or even try to blackmail it. That the latter could be the case seems to be indicated by the closure of the oil and gas export ports and the kidnapping of some key officials including the Prime Minister, Ali Zaidan, himself (Tawergha, 2014:15).

The Tawergha local council on Sunday (June 23-2013) postponed residents return to their embattled Town of Tawergha after an appeal by Libyan prime minister Ali zidan, Tawergans had planned to return home on (June 25-2013) citing unhealed wounds from the revolution, Zaidan told reporters on world Refugee day that Tawergans should delayed their homecoming. He said that under normal circumstances, Libyan citizens would have the right to live where ever they want to live in Libya this is a principles enshrined under the old Libyan constitution and will be enshrine under the next constitution. This is one of their "right" Zidan said at his June 20 press conference. The people of Tawergha have the right to return, but people of Misrata have the right to stand as the wound has not yet "healed" the prime minister clarified. Misrata resident blame Tawergans for supporting Gaddafi forces during the bloody two- months long siege of their coastal city. Many in Misrata also accuse Tawergans of committing atrocities during the war, including mass rape. A Tawergan resident and former Tripoli Revolutionary Milad Bahari was once arrested, beaten and torture by a group from Misrata. He said that the prime minister statement was

very “resentfully received by the people of Tawergha, who expected justice and understanding of their position.” (Ismail, 2012).

Conclusion

For two months, in 2011 the forces of Muammar Gaddafi laid siege to Misrata. These forces were partly based in Tawergha, and the people of the Town are accused of being complicit in the attempt to put down the uprising in the city. They are also accused of crimes including murder, rape and sexual torture against the people of Misrata. The fighters of Misrata eventually prevailed, breaking out of their battered city, and Misratan brigades made up part of the force that overran the capital Tripoli in August. They also captured and killed Gaddafi and one of his sons in late October, 2011 and put the corpses on display in their city. In the middle of August, between the end of the siege and the killing of Gaddafi, Misratan forces drove out everyone living in Tawergha, a Town with more than 40,000 people. Human rights groups have described this as an act of revenge and collective punishment possibly amounting to a crime against humanity. Tawerghans are mostly descendants of black slaves.

Recommendations

- The Libyan government should organize a peace and truth reconciliation commission to address the misunderstanding between the people of Misrata and Tawergha in other for Tawerghans to be part of a new Libyan government.
- The government of Libya should embark on rehabilitation and reconstruction programs that will revive the Town and economic activities of the people of Tawergha
- The Tawergha municipal council that has earlier been canceled by the former interim government of Mahmoud Jibril should also be returned and be included in the current new Libyan map so that the people of Tawergha will be part of the new federal system of government adopted by the people of Libya.
- The Tawergha municipal council should be financed by the current government in order to enable the municipal council to handle Tawerghans' problems.

The aim of this discourse is to draw the attention of the entire world about the atrocities that have taken place in Libya. And the solution proffered by this paper if implemented will go a long way in solving the Libyan political crisis between the people of Tawergha and Misrata.

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