

COFFEE AS BLOOD: PERSECUTION OF THE RHADE PEOPLE

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I. INTRODUCTION

Next to oil, coffee contributes greatly to the quality of life. That is if we can afford it and can delight in it appropriately in the context of how we live and eat. Over half a trillion cups of coffee are consumed each year and that water is the only beverage that drinks more often. About half a billion cups are drunk each day in the United States alone.

But to the Rhade people of the Central Highlands of Vietnam, coffee is a tragedy that inflicts pain, suffering, and hurt upon them and their children. They suffer political, and economic enslavement, and are the target of genocide because of coffee. The production of coffee is a major factor in what is, in effect, the very end of the world for them; a story of killing and systematic destruction of their history, culture, language, and identity. The seizure of their lands to produce and consume modernly refined and the best-tasting coffee is, in effect, the blood of the Dega people.

II. BACKGROUND

The Rhade people (“Anak Dega” or “The Children of Dega”) are one of the Malayo-Polynesian groups of people of the Central Plateau in Vietnam. We are a separate race with a single origin; it evolved through the same processes and stages as others of the Malayo-Polynesian peoples such as the Cham, Malay, Indonesian, and the Philippines. The differences among them are insignificant compared to the other ethnic groups of South East Asia. We are ethnically distinct from the leading group of Vietnamese. We speak the language called Rhade, and we make up one of the largest tribes centered around the Buon Ma Thuot city of Dak Lak province and on all sides in the Central Highlands in Vietnam.

The Rhade people have lived in the Central Plateau of Vietnam for hundreds, even thousands, of years, practicing a sustainable form of agriculture called “forest following.” Growing mainly rice with some long-term plants such as coffee, and all kind of tropical fruit. Engaging in the market since the French colonial time. During both the ancient Vietnamese royal court such as the Nguyen Dynasty and the French colonial regime, Central Highlands was treated as a quasi-independent state with their own form of organization, administration and law enforcement in families, clans, tribes. Showing loyalty to the Cambodian Court, to the Vietnamese Courts, though it never became part of them. and, later, to the French colonial regime. Inclusion by Vietnamese invaders from the North was strictly regulated—mostly prevented. It was not until the 1890s when, in competition with Thailand, the French incorporated their entire area into what was then called “French Indochina.” The Central Highlands governed separate

administrations from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Their lands in the Central Highlands of Vietnam include nearly 2 million hectares of fertile, basalt soil which is very suitable for industrial crops like rubber, coffee, cocoa, pepper, mulberry, and tea. Coffee has, now, become the essential industrial commodity of the area and the French had already begun to exploit some of that.

When the Southern Republic of Vietnam was established in 1954, its president, Ngo-Dinh-Diem, his government followed the old plan of the ancient Đại Việt in their “Nam Tiến “ in English “ Southward” invading and occupying the lands of everyone to the South and began to occupy the lands in the Central Highlands, including using the ancient “Dinh Điền” model of militarily protected settlement villages on the lands of the Dega people, and illegally annexed the entire Highland area into Vietnam and began to occupy it with Vietnamese settlers. Then immediately the North Vietnamese came in with their Russian tanks in 1975, took over, and declared “liberation,” which was, in fact, the ultimate defeat of all of the Dega people of the Central Plateau. The occupation and settlement became massive, with some 2 million North Vietnamese peasants settling upon the lands which were seized from our people, but still, because of its stubborn policies of collectivism, the people of Vietnam were starving.

Then the communist regime began to abandon strict collectivism with its economic reforms of 1987, reforms which it calls “Đổi mới” in Vietnamese, or “Renovation” in English. To take the Dega land for the communist state's rubber and coffee plantations and to settle more Vietnamese colonialists upon them as well, they dissolved The Dega people's traditional villages throughout the Central Highlands, destroying the legal structure of the Dega People's traditional agriculture, completely ignoring the Dega people's sustainable system of diverse farming and forest management. The regime imposed its system which they called the “Fixed field, the Fixed residence” (“Định Canh, Định cư”) falsely implying that the Dega people were nomadic, and allocating to each Dega family only under a half a hectare of land for unsustainable, permanent cultivation. The Dega traditions of collective management of clan lands in a system of forests followed by periodic burning were made illegal. Dega people's traditional village and ways of life, conventional agricultural farming, natural resources, and infrastructure essential for their lives were destroyed by this process, which the Vietnamese regime considers to be “economic development,” but which, in reality, has reduced the Dega people to the lowest level of poverty, and it turned out to be a complete disaster. In the meantime, like China and Russia before them, Vietnam has abandoned much of Communism and changed into a single-party state capitalist system, complete with rampant capitalism, corruption, and its oligarchy in which coffee plays a key role, especially as a large state and private corporations, as well as neighboring Vietnamese, compete for the land which used to belong to the Dega people.

III. IMPACT

This displacement has tragic consequences for the Dega people, especially the young. Having lost their traditional means of living, language, and culture, they now must seek menial jobs working for Vietnamese, often in urban areas. They are flooded with consumer goods, alcoholism, and all kinds of Vietnamese media, much of which exploit them, especially girls and women, by undermining Rhade people women's ability to reproduce biologically and culturally in the future.

Besides ten thousand agents so-called, the 47 forces online watchdog of the communist Vietnam regime to brainwash, manipulate, distract, intimidate, and pressure to assimilation, the platform of social media such as YouTube and Facebook have been abused and used by Vietnamese communist agents to mold the young Rhade people's behavior, conception, and attitude toward their ancestral land.

Some of the Rhade people could have escaped to Thailand or Cambodia, where their status is precarious. Thousands of old and young people died daily of exhaustion, stress, diseases, and alcoholism.

So, the Dega people have been deprived of almost everything. For many of them their parents, aunts, uncles, and/or grandparents, were assassinated and/or "disappeared" (As in Central and South America, that adjective has become a verb in Vietnam) during and just after the "liberation" by the North Vietnamese army in 1975. All of the Dega leaders of the 1950 and 1960s have been "eliminated." Their traditional clan lands have nearly all been seized and turned over to Vietnamese settlers or state or private corporations. Their system of forest following in the context of lands owned collectively, which provided public lands for the rice fields, and for the grazing of their cattle, buffalo, and elephants and timber for their houses, managed by a clan matriarch, has been made illegal. Their schools have been taken over by Vietnamese and their language is not allowed. They have no freedom of assembly or organization.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Even the environment of the Central Plateau is, now, under threat as the sustainable form of forest management of the Rhade people has been abandoned. Most of the trees have been cut legally and illegally by rapacious Vietnamese timber merchants and a completely unsustainable form of agriculture is being practiced everywhere that breaks down ecosystems, human societies, and the disastrous climate change. There are both droughts and floods every year, and land lost its fertility. Rivers and streams are polluted and my people are most likely dealing with a source of water for drinking, where a substance was introduced into the water that destroyed the existence of fish and other organisms. Something that never occurred before the Vietnamese invasion. Our people who previously lived comfortably and sustainably with their villages, their long houses, their rice fields, and their cattle, buffalo, and elephants have, now,

been brought to the lowest levels of poverty, modern-daily enslaved on their ancestral land in a form of systematic deprivation, forcing assimilation, and genocide.

The Dega people are left to try to compete just to make a living by working on the farm of Vietnamese settlers or state own plantations, with their hands, tied behind their backs, in the context of a single-party state capitalist system complete with Party favorite oligarchs and rapacious corporations, both state and private, looking for and getting the advantage, especially when it comes to access to the lands of the Central Plateau. The Dega people's very rights to existence were denied, and their history, culture, identity, and language are destroyed.

V. GENOCIDE

The word genocide was coined by Raphael Lemkin Jewish lawyer, by combining the Greek word "Geno," which means ethnic or race, and from Latin "cide" or to kill. At the heart of genocide, he wrote, is the destruction of the essential foundation of group life. It means systematic degradation of physical, historical, cultural, language, identity, economic, biological, and environmental habitat when the result is widespread destruction of human life. Thus, creating the group will be destroyed. It is not only physical killing, is a form of genocide.

The United Nations used Raphael Lemkin's genocide concept to provide Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and the Punishment of the Crime of genocide (1948), according to which Genocide means any of the following acts with the intent to destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group such as:

Killing the members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to the members of the group, deliberately inflicting the group condition of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or part, imposing measures to prevent birth within the group, forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

One condition fulfilled in that five conditions will be legally considered to be genocide obliging the member states of the UN intervention and protection according to article I of the UN genocide convention.

The Central Highlands was the biggest target of bombing and spraying with the deadly chemical Agent Orange dioxin. Over 85% of the Dega villages and infrastructure society were destroyed, and many thousands of lives of innocents were being threatened, killed, and ruined in another nightmarish way via horrific injuries, severe life-changing trauma of the loss of home, agricultural farming, and infrastructures essential to life.

Both sides of the conflict used the Dega people as their tools by recreating the Dega people to fight on their battlefield. More than 200,000 people were killed, half the young man Dega population died on both sides of the Vietnam War conflict. (The Dega's population at that time

was under one million). To the outside world that the Vietnam War ended in 1975, however to the Dega people peace has not come.

Under the slogan "To clean up "the Republic of Vietnam and American soldiers' remnants, were in Central Highlands during 1975-1986. A freelance paramilitary group (Similar to Adolf Hitler's mobile killing squads' the "Einsatzgruppen") killing Jewish in World War II was established called "Doi du kich" in Vietnamese or "Mobile squads" in English in every village, hamlet, and district throughout the Central Highlands. The Dega people were being hunted and freely killed in the jungle where they refuge. Many Dega people from the village to the village were being arrested, kidnapped, executed, forced disappearance, tortured, raped, and imprisoned.

Within ten years, all most generations of Dega people elites, traditionally oriented people, knowledgeable people, literate figures, teachers, and students were utterly eradicated.

VI. CONCLUSION

And today, forty-eight years under communist rule, Vietnam has not ratified the International Labor Organization Convention No.169, which covered topics such as health, education, and land rights and although Vietnam voted in favor of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it does not recognize us as Indigenous Peoples.

The condition in the Central Highlands, now in Vietnam, is profoundly concerning. We are facing the experience frightening of no longer existing. Some could remain but transform to the oppressor's terms and enslave.