

Can the genocide be
explained
sociologically
criminology essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

provide intellectually responsible explanations of these events, social scientists are therefore capable of producing explanations that can both interpret and create understanding. Their work allows further reflection on the problem of explanations in sociological work (Brown, 1963).

This essay will focus on whether or not social scientists provide an explanation for genocide, in other words whether or not genocide can be explained sociologically. The beginning and emergence of genocide is unknown but it is assumed that the first genocide took place during the hunting and gathering period (Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990). After agriculture had been discovered there was a division within the world and it consisted of settlers and nomads. The settlers were good at gathering food and a conflict resulted between the two groups as the nomads would raid the settlers of their food, however they would not kill the settlers when doing so as they were still needed because the nomads planned to continue and raid the settlers in the coming years. The settlers could not defend themselves due to lack of resources (Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990). As time progressed the settler's learnt how to improve their agriculture skills and their produce grew so well that they could support cities, rulers and armies. They became successful and wealthy and started to associate with trade and began to build empires and city states. As a result of this, conflict then grew over wealth, trade and trade routes. Wars were fought over this, and it was through these wars that people realised their victories were temporary. It became clear that the only way to have a guaranteed secure future was to eliminate those who were defeated completely. Thus the first reason for the

first genocide appears to be elimination of any future threats (Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990). Genocide then grew and progressed from this.

Genocide as defined by Lemkin (1944) who states that it is “ the criminal intent to destroy or to cripple permanently a human group. The acts are directed against groups as such, and individuals are selected for distraction only because they belong to these groups” (Lemkin, 1944 p. 147). This is the definition that the UN (United Nations) Convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide relied upon (Andreopoulos, 1994).

Following this, social scientists have redefined the term genocide to suite their theoretical perspectives. The definition of the UN convention however, remains the most popular and widely used. This is due to it being a legally accepted and a workable definition. Under the definition of the UN Convention, Genocide remains an international crime whether committed in peace or war this shows that genocide is a uniform phenomenon (Andreopoulos, 1994). Variations within genocide do exist, through its context and processes, for example, the distinction between domestic genocide and genocide done in international war. With domestic genocide, people have differences and conflicts within their own societies based on religious views, ethnicity and their race, while, with international war genocide, mass killings are committed due to conflict between two separate states (Andreopoulos, 1994).

Through the UN Genocide Convention, genocide was deemed the most horrendous crime of all time and individuals would then use it as the defence to any form of discrimination, oppression and injustice (Martin, 2006). This resulted in disadvantaged groups trying to get sympathy by dramatizing
<https://assignbuster.com/can-the-genocide-be-explained-sociologically-criminology-essay/>

their situations. For example, due to one of the articles of the convention, which claimed genocide included an intention to prevent any birth, led to claims that abortion clinics were a form of genocide. In more general terms if an individual's rights were violated, this would also be taken as genocide. The concept was clearly being abused, and the UN became more and more resistant to charges of genocide. This may have contributed to the need of re-definition of genocide. It is therefore important to reach a generic definition of genocide which should be consistent with the everyday use of the word so that when people see a mass murder the only word available to them to describe such an event should be genocide (Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990).

Sociologists are interested in genocide for many reasons as it will be discussed in the case studies below. These case studies are drawn upon to show one of the reasons as to why sociologists might want to explain genocide and why people act and behave in such a gruesome manner.

The Jewish holocaust is one of the most popular and notorious among all genocides, 6 million Jews were murdered by the Nazi regime and those who supported the regime. Despite the severity and scale of this genocide it was somewhat predicted or predetermined that it would be very important (Jones, 2011). During the rise of modernity, Jews did not fit in with the new modern ways. They were seen as enemies of modernity. This resulted in some Jews seeking integration and those who did were accepted by some European countries including Germany, who granted citizenship to the Jews from 1812. This then raised the question as to why Germany would turn on the Jews and murder them (Jones, 2011). The Jews lived peacefully in <https://assignbuster.com/can-the-genocide-be-explained-sociologically-criminology-essay/>

Germany up until the tragic and embarrassing loss of the First World War. This resulted in traditional forms of power falling and Germany needed to form and create a new identity if they were to survive the aftermath of the war, and so a slow drive towards nationalistic ideology was to emerge. The political extremism led to the creation of NSDAP (political party) which was founded by Adolf Hitler. Hitler's vision was driven by his hatred for the Jews. Once they reached a position of power, the Nazi's were unstoppable and their purpose for the Jews was clear. The Jews were terrorised in many ways by the Nazis forcing most of them to flee the country while they still could and forced them to abandon their homes, companies and wealth. However, the fact that many countries were not accepting Jewish refugees meant that more wanted to leave but only a few could go and most of those who stayed committed suicide out of fear of the social death that the Nazi rule imposed on them (Melson, 1996).

The confinement and consolidation of the Jews under the Nazi control emphasised the Nazi ideology and how it was based on a united and purified Germany, this concluded their movement. Two years after the Soviet Union invasion, 1.8 million Jews were rounded up and gunned down (the holocaust by bullets) (Melson, 1996). To prevent any guilt and psychological trauma for German killers which resulted from the shooting of women and children, concentration camps with gas chambers were introduced to maintain distance between the killers and the victims. About 1 million Jews were killed at one of the main killing centres; nearly two million more died due to gas and also by other means in the death camps. Similarly 1,890,000 Jews were slaughtered between the five death camps that were set up in Poland. The

camp system became very lethal for Jews. It became evident that the devotion to the elimination of the Jews was more important to the Nazis than their own self-preservation (Melson, 1996).

The genocide in Rwanda was one of the most concentrated forms of mass killing ever seen; approximately 1 million people (Tutsis and the Hutus who opposed the government) were killed in different ways over a course of twelve weeks. 800,000 of the victims were killed within three to four weeks during the genocide. When taken into account the large amount of people killed in such a short time it is clear that the death rate was at least five times more than that of Nazi Germany. The Rwandan genocide resulted in successfully turning the mass population into murderers; Hutu men, women and children were among the murderers (Jones, 2011). The genocide escalated due to the presidential plane that was shot down killing the president and many Hutu power radicals. It was assumed that following the incident the Tutsi's would jump into power, however, the president's death was blamed on Tutsi RPF officers (the Rwandan government denied the accusations) and the Hutu's wanted revenge. The news of the attack was released about half an hour after it happened and the first few murders that the genocide was to follow only started taking place 10 hours after the announcement of the presidential death, this however, does not prove or show that the genocide was pre-planned by the Hutu's (Mann, 2005).

During the genocide there was no help or support from international leaders; they watched millions of innocent people die with no interference. When the genocide broke out, foreign forces were sent into Rwanda, but only to evacuate whites. Following the evacuation of international citizens the UN <https://assignbuster.com/can-the-genocide-be-explained-sociologically-criminology-essay/>

Security Council focused its attention on withdrawing the UNAMIR forces from the country. Rwanda was only able to hold on to 470 peacekeepers, these were still able to save lives during the course of the remainder of the genocide (Jones, 2011). The UN later voted to send more troops to Rwanda; however the troops did not arrive in time, by the time help got to Rwanda the genocide was over. It was assumed that Rwanda was just not important enough to be rescued (Power, 2002). In 2004 the UN officially apologised for the lack of assistance for Rwanda and claimed that next time there would be an effective response and this would be done in good time (Power, 2002).

Sociologists have tried to explain genocide sociologically by providing explanations as to why it might exist and how to stop it. Some of these explanations include; Roger Smith's argument that genocide is an instrument of the modern state policy (Smith, 2010), while on the other hand, Helen Fein argues that these groups are murdered just so the states design for a new order is fulfilled (Fein, 1990). Similarly Leo Kuper argues that modern state monopoly creates both the desire and power to commit genocide (Kuper, 1983), while Horowitz much like Rubenstein argues that genocide is an act of state and as an act of state it is intended to be the main means of social control and this can only take place in a totalitarian state (Horowitz, 1976). Due to the vast majority of explanations, only a few will be looked at in a bit more detail.

One of the most recent and controversial attempts to explain organised genocide violence is that of the English sociologist Michael Mann, who links and explains genocide through democratisation processes. Mann's main focus is on explaining the origins and continuous rise of genocide by looking <https://assignbuster.com/can-the-genocide-be-explained-sociologically-criminology-essay/>

at relations of political power in society. According to Mann, genocide is committed by groups that are manipulated by politicians and this causes an unfortunate disruption to social and political progress. Genocide is seen as not being different from modern ideologies as it is committed in the name of the people; this is what Mann calls the dark side of democracy. The class struggle and its institutions managed to restrain democracies from committing mass murder on its own citizens; however, they still managed to commit cleansings on groups defined as outside of the 'people'. This meant that as democracy got stronger among the perpetrators, so did genocide. This is the first sense in which genocide was the dark side of democracy. Genocide is therefore modern because it was seen as the dark side of democracy. The fact that it is granted within democracy that the possibility that majority groups can oppress minorities creates more threatening consequences in certain types of multi-ethnic societies (Mann, 2005).

Mann argues that a more adequate explanation of how and why genocide takes place is needed, so he creates a typology of the means of murderous cleansing. He distinguishes among different dimensions of cleansing associated with violence and illustrates that some types of violence are more likely than others to intensify. Among the three types of cleansing in the typology, most of them do not end in genocide but only the mildest types. The three types of cleansing include; 'induced assimilation' (the 'other' seeks 'assimilation' into the main group), 'induced immigration' (offers 'incentives' to the culturally similar groups) and 'induced emigration' (this is rarely applied but it is advised by 'rightist nationalists'). The escalation of these types of cleansing then goes as follows; 'coerced assimilation' (the '

other' is forced to join the main group and abandon its own), ' biological assimilation' (' the minority is prevented from reproducing'), ' coerced emigration' (removal by force), ' deportation' (removed by force from state territories), murderous cleansing (organised killings) and ' genocide' (final escalation, deliberate attempt to wipe out entire populations) (Mann, 2005). It can be seen that most of the cleansings are mild in form and that the more murderous cleansings are uncommon. Many groups have tried to avoid cleansing by assimilating into a nation state by changing their historical paths. Due to this Mann limits his analytical focus of murderous cleansings to very rare events in modern history in order to answer the question; why do such cleansings occur? (Mann, 2005).

Rudolph Rummel contrasts Mann's explanations, according to Rummel genocide depends on the authority of a state, the more authoritarian a state, the more likely it is to commit genocide. He argues that democracies do not commit genocide, there might be only a few cases in which genocide occurs within a democracy, however this only happens during wartimes, where mass murder is committed secretly with no democratic command. Rummel, however, fails to distinguish the more important cases of democratic mass murder such as the firebombing of Dresden and the issues in Tokyo. There were also authoritarian genocides that were committed in wartime with an attempt to secrecy for example Hitler and Stalin. Rummel acknowledges the relationship between democracy and genocide; however it is more complex and double edged than he explains (Rummel, 2004).

Zygmunt Bauman also tries to explain genocide, much like Mann, he claims genocide is a modern phenomenon and tries to provide a sociological <https://assignbuster.com/can-the-genocide-be-explained-sociologically-criminology-essay/>

explanation as to why this is (Bauman, 1991). Bauman argues that genocide exists and is a modern phenomenon due to technology, only modern technology that is made available to industrialised countries made it possible for crimes such as genocide to occur. He also argues that conventional morality in modern societies have been silenced and replaced with its own definition of good and bad, this means individuals are no longer responsible for the greater good, but are responsible for abiding by laws. So it is within the newly built systems of bureaucracy where responsibility is drawn from different sources that individuals commit genocide without having to turn to their morals as their evil actions or side is desensitised. It is therefore, according to Bauman, the emergence of modern technology and the growth of systems of bureaucracy and institutions that both prepares individuals and makes available to them the means to commit crimes such as genocide (Bauman, 1991). However this would mean that without the presence of these two conditions genocide would not occur but this is not the case. It is evident from the example of the holocaust and other modern genocides such as Rwanda that genocide cannot depend on only two factors (Waller, 2002).

Leo Kuper's attempt to explain genocide is rooted from his early work in Africa and work on the plural society. He includes sociobiological and psychological theories within the general theory that he adopts to explain genocide. According to Kuper societies which are divided are the 'seedbed' of genocide especially in times where groups battle for domination (Kuper, 1983). Furthermore, Kuper argues that genocide is not an unstoppable consequence of every society as it results from people's own decisions. Kuper goes on to identify other causes of genocide which for him include

economic conflict and ideologies both of nationalism and of dehumanising people (Kuper, 1983).

Chalk and Jonassohn (1990) also accept that one of the main preconditions of genocide is the idea of devaluing the victims and identifying them as the 'other' and unequal to the dominant population. They take a historical based view to explaining a variety of genocide civilisations and settings. They acknowledge the fact that it is not easy for people to kill defenceless victims and so it is evident that to commit genocide authority and a 'quasi-bureaucratic organisation' are needed, this then makes genocide a crime of state (Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990). Through this, it is shown that genocide serves the interest of the state, leading social classes and the elites. Chalk and Jonassohn (1990) show that the first few types of genocide were used to build empires, for example the Mongols and Shaka Zulu's empire. For Chalk and Jonassohn, these explanations are mainly for modern genocides for example the Jewish, Armenian and Cambodian genocides but they provide no general explanation for other forms of genocide (Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990). These explanations of genocide help to reflect on the contemporary condition, this enables the consideration of ways to prevent such crimes in the future and how to deal with the aftermaths.

Explaining genocide is like an attempt to account for a phenomenon seen beyond a constructive background of social structure. It is important to explain such an event as no two events are the same, some only happen once. Therefore explaining these events means many are then available to compare and provide a more secure footing of the matter, in this case the explanations of genocide. Genocide argued by some to be a modern

<https://assignbuster.com/can-the-genocide-be-explained-sociologically-criminology-essay/>

phenomenon has been explained by many social scientists and though some of these explanations are similar, no two are exactly the same. Some of these explanations provide a very significant contribution to the sociological explanation of genocide and some of these explanations remain highly debatable and contested however, they provide a framework for which explanation in sociological work can be explored.