

**THE PARADIGMS OF
GENOCIDE: THE
HOLOCAUST AND THE
ROHINGYA CONFLICT OF
MYANMAR**

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INTRODUCTION

- Given the geopolitical repercussions any conflict entails, the official recognition of genocide is a symbolically loaded, highly contested, carefully calculated and surprisingly also rather an infrequent event.
- The Holocaust stands out as an example of the blending of circumstances and context which have mostly already taken place whereas Myanmar is a contested case.
- These two incidents will make it possible to draw informative comparisons and contrasts about not only the international community's usage of the Holocaust in relation to the genocide paradox but also of the role played by international law, politics and history while handling these incidents.

INTRODUCTION

- Both the cases differ from each other in terms of time, geographical location, international response, current status of each of these incidents, etc.
- Many scholars and common laymen tend to keep the Holocaust as the benchmark as to whether a genocide has occurred or not.
- This results into another set of important questions such as to whether making the Holocaust the benchmark is correct?
- Many scholars talk about the uniqueness of the Holocaust, this raises the issue that all incidents are unique in themselves and only because a particular alleged genocidal incident may not match up to the set benchmark of the Holocaust, should it not be recognised?

COMPARISON TO THE HOLOCAUST

- For a long time in the efforts to comprehend genocide, focus was exclusively towards the Holocaust.
- Only minimal and cursory attention was paid to other genocidal incidents.
- Whenever a genocidal event was compared to the Holocaust it was done largely to set the Holocaust apart from them and not towards integrating it into the larger twentieth century phenomenon of genocide.
- It ended up in making the Holocaust separate and distinct.
- It has finally become evident that if we want to understand genocide as a concept due attention has to be given to the other cases too.

COMPARISON TO THE HOLOCAUST

- The reality is that recognising a particular incident as genocide is based much more on the nexus and role of international law, international politics and history as compared to the fact whether a particular incident is able to reach the benchmark set by the Holocaust.
- One of the main problems, besides defining genocide, when writing about genocides is the fact that the Holocaust has imprinted itself conceptually on genocide.
- It is nearly impossible to talk about any actual or alleged case of genocide without involuntarily comparing it with the Holocaust.

THE HOLOCAUST

- To many of us both the understanding and definition of genocide is either closely linked or synonymous with the Holocaust.
- Another common perception is regarding the Holocaust as the “prototype” of genocide.
- It is also viewed as the “benchmark” of all evil.
- According to Martin Shaw, saying that the Holocaust is the same as any other case of genocide might minimize the horrors its victims went through, but stressing its uniqueness as the only epoch in history where an attempt was made to exterminate all Jews also leaves much to be desired: other victims are left out and the general conception becomes fixed, leaving scholars unable to define genocide objectively without reference to the Holocaust.

THE HOLOCAUST

- Due to the Holocaust being the paradigmatic genocide, it is often stated that the Holocaust as such is unique and deserves to be the epitome of evil.
- Scholars such as Emil Fackenheim, Tom Rockmore, Alan Rosenberg, Raimond Gaita, all grapple with the question of the “uniqueness” of the Holocaust.
- Simply put, while the Holocaust might be a genocide, a genocide is not necessarily the Holocaust. This is known as the ‘uniqueness question’.
- This so-called uniqueness is based on several arguments which are meant to show that the Holocaust is most definitely not the same as a normal genocide, but is in fact is much more sinister.

THE HOLOCAUST

- Nigel Pleasants in his paper, The question of the Holocaust's uniqueness: Was it something more than or different from Genocide, mentions three disturbing consequences of such arguments regarding the uniqueness of the Holocaust.
- The Holocaust's uniqueness entails its unintelligibility.
- Secondly,, that if the Holocaust is unique then nothing like it could happen again, hence nothing can be learnt from its occurrence.
- Thirdly, the uniqueness thesis can only be sustained by diminishing the moral gravity of other genocides.

THE ROHINGYA CONFLICT

- The Rohingya, an ethnic Muslim minority group, a highly persecuted, have been facing discrimination both from their neighbors and their own nation, and are not considered even it's citizens by the Myanmar's government.
- In 2017, the Myanmar government launched a military campaign that killed thousands of Rohingyas and forced more than 700,000 of them to flee their country.
- Many countries around the world, such as the United States have sanctioned military officials and are also providing aid to these refugees who have and are fleeing to neighbouring nations such as Bangladesh.
- In January, 2020 a panel of 17 judges at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) voted unanimously, to order Myanmar to take "all measures within its power" to prevent genocide.

HOLOCAUST & THE ROHINGYA CONFLICT

- Regardless, of all the atrocities, the Rohingya crisis has still not seen any concrete steps for being recognised as a genocide.
- The Holocaust is a universally recognised genocide whereas the Rohingya conflict is a contested incident.
- It proves that that there are influential forces that work behind an incident's recognition as a genocide other than just being similar to the Holocaust.
- According to the United Nations' Human Rights Chief, the Rohingya Crisis “seems a textbook example of ethnic cleansing”.

RECOGNITION ISSUES

- As per Article II of the United Nation's Genocide Convention (UNGC) :
- genocide is any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group:
 - (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

RECOGNITION ISSUES

- The Rohingya conflict seems to be fulfilling clause A to C of the above criteria but there is still a reluctance to call the mass killings and forced displacements as genocide.
- Reasons:
- Article I of the UNGC says: "The contracting parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish."
- Hence, once it is recognised as a genocide, the signatories will require action to stop it, even by force if necessary and that is what they don't want to do. This is very similar to the situation faced during the Rwandan genocide.

RECOGNITION ISSUES

- Lack of economic interest.
- Geopolitical factors.
- There is politics of recognising the persecution as ethnic cleansing rather than a genocide because (see reference below):
 - a) Labeling a crisis as “ethnic cleansing” has no legal implications and hence becomes easier for the states to deal with.
 - b) Recognising a conflict as genocide takes decades whereas recognising one as ethnic cleansing is less time consuming.
 - c) Ethnic cleansing opens the door for the United States to impose specific economic and military sanctions on Myanmar.

(Derived from the article available at <https://www.cato.org/blog/ethnic-cleansing-vs-genocide-politics-behind-labeling-rohingya-crisis>)

CONCLUSION

- The Rohingya Conflict should be recognised as a genocide.
- It is high time that governments and international organisations, specially the signatories to the UNGC take action to stop this persecution.
- There are a lot of similarities between the Holocaust and the Rohingya crisis, hence, it is our duty to both recognise and take action.
- Otherwise, it will just become another example of apathy where millions will die before the governments take action, as happened in Rwanda and Darfur.
- Let history not repeat itself.