

Analysis of Holocaust References in Political Rhetoric
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Over the course of the twentieth century, and lamentably persisting into the twenty-first, genocide has continued to decimate civilian populations around the globe. International response to these atrocities has- more often than not- been too little, too late. Yet, in the aftermath of Armenia, Cambodia, Kurdistan, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Kosovo, the international community has repeatedly echoed the chorus “Never again”. This promise is indelibly tied to the most well-researched, well-documented, and largest genocides of the twentieth century: the Holocaust. The preeminence of the Holocaust in popular conscience gives it particular salience when addressing other cases of genocide, as evidenced in the continual use of the slogan “Never again”.

To establish a more comprehensive understanding of how politicians respond to cases of genocide and to better understand how the international community –the United States notwithstanding- has continually failed to live up to their promise of “Never again”, I will seek to answer the question: when and how are references to the Holocaust made by political officials and to what end are they invoked? I propose to do this by analyzing principally political speeches and official addresses made regarding the Rwandan genocide and the current crisis taking place in Darfur, and looking briefly at the case of Kosovo. First, I will show how the Holocaust can be used in political rhetoric, highlighting these methods by employing comparisons with news stories, opinion writers, and speeches by public activists. Then, I will focus on particular cases in official political addresses where Holocaust references are and are not employed, and explain

why this is the case. By the end of this paper, I expect it will be clear that references to the Holocaust can be employed in various guises, but are only used in political rhetoric when at least one of two “safety factors” is present.

Emotive Use of the Holocaust

“The terminology of the Holocaust has entered into the contemporary lexicon and it has come to be used by advocates of many causes for a multitude of political and cultural purposes.”¹ Here, Hasia Diner states succinctly that the Holocaust is now part of the popular culture, as the majority of the populace has some understanding of the Holocaust. Thus, the Holocaust-awareness of which has become almost common knowledge- is prime material for use in the public arena, where media outlets and public speakers seek to reach an audience typically composed of mixed socio-economic status and varied educational backgrounds. The Holocaust, then, provides a synthesizing thread through which a speaker may connect to these audience members- regardless their individual backgrounds. This fact- that the Holocaust is a topic to which many can relate- is the principle upon which this inquiry is based.

While the accuracy of Diner’s statement may seem self-evident, one cannot simply dive into an analysis of when politicians choose to employ Holocaust references and when they choose not to do so. In order to understand when and why the Holocaust is used in political rhetoric, it is first essential to examine *how* it is used- that is, to identify the various ways in which speakers can employ the Holocaust in their addresses. Upon understanding these methods and their affect on the audience’s perception of the speaker’s message, speakers’ motivations and patterns for employing the Holocaust will become dramatically clearer. Likewise, the importance

¹ Diner, Hasia. (2006). “Before ‘the Holocaust’: American Jews Confront Catastrophe, 1945-1962.”

of the role of “safety factors”- factors present in a situation which act as an obstacle to action- will become more meaningful.

Historian Peter Novick identifies the Holocaust as an “emblematic atrocity.”² The weight of imagery and connotation conjured by mere inference to the Holocaust constitutes its “emblematic” status. Commanding such a powerful response from the social schema of an audience, makes references to the Holocaust a useful tool for numerous speakers. This may be employed in a variety of ways. In an attempt to “start at the beginning”, let us first examine use of the Holocaust at the beginning of addresses.

Structural Use

Use of the Holocaust in the opening lines of a speech immediately sets the tone of the address. By using this method, the context in which the audience receives, interprets, and evaluates the speaker’s message is established from the outset. For example, in an address delivered by U. S. Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues David J. Scheffer, his first substantive statement begins, “The legacy of the Holocaust, which includes much unfinished business...”³ The body of his speech is concerned mainly with more recent atrocities, reparations, and war-crimes trials. However, in opening his speech in reference to the Holocaust, he has laid the foundation for linking the Holocaust to his message about his current undertakings as a US official. Similarly, Representative Tom Lantos (D-Ca) began an article, “After the Holocaust, the world declared that never again would we stand by and let genocide take place. And yet...genocide [is] raging unabated in western Sudan.”⁴ The remainder of the piece focuses exclusively on the crisis in Sudan, but as a result of the opening paragraph, the

² Novick, Peter. (1999). *The Holocaust in American Life*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. (257)

³ Scheffer, David J. (1999). “Milosovic, Pinochet, and US: Responding to Crimes Against Humanity.”

⁴ Lantos, Rep. Tom. (2005). “Genocide Can’t Be Ignored.”

gravity of the Holocaust increases the weight of Lantos' message on Darfur. Thus, Rep. Lantos is able to color the audience's perception by linking the Holocaust to Darfur. By immediately mentioning the Holocaust, he establishes it as a source of comparison, even before introducing the main subject.

Concordantly, closing a speech with reference to the Holocaust can refocus the content of the speech through the prism of the Holocaust. This can be done without having made prior mention of the Holocaust, in an effort to "pack a punch" and throw the audience a twist that will remain long after they leave their seats. However, it may also be used when a reference has already been made during the opening lines of the address. For example, in the same address mentioned above, Scheffer- after having opened his rather extensive speech by mentioning the Holocaust- brings the audience full circle, saying

"We must make every effort to ensure that the worst crimes of the Twentieth Century are not repeated in the Twenty-first. None of us can or will forget the Nazi war crimes-arguably the most abominable atrocities of this century. The horrors of the Holocaust must serve to reinforce the resolve of this generation of Americans to eradicate such heinous crimes..."⁵

By re-introducing the Holocaust at the close of his address, he simultaneously instills the import of his speech for the future by tying it to the weight of the past, via the Holocaust. The audience, having been primed at the outset with images of the Holocaust can more easily make this connection and thus more readily accept his message.

In addition to Holocaust references opening and closing addresses, the Holocaust can function as a structural component of the speech. Here, the Holocaust serves as a more factual, contextualizing element in relation to the conflict which is the main topic of the address. It can be used to augment the audience's perception of the given conflict's severity. Even if a fewer

⁵ Scheffer, David.

number of people are involved in a particular incident (i.e. 800,000 in Rwanda; 300,000 in Darfur), it can be placed in the larger context of the enormity of the Holocaust, thus inferring parallels of impact, severity, immortality, etc. Furthermore, because it is not politically correct to state that one life is worth more than another, placing even a small conflict on the same spectrum of atrocities as that on which the Holocaust lies, it would be practically impossible to dismiss the smaller conflict as “not that bad” without incurring severe political consequences and moral criticisms. These two factors combine to force a third result of Holocaust rhetoric: the establishment of an urgency in stopping a genocide. This stems both from the stated value of human life and thus the desire to save lives (necessitating quick action), as well as having established parallels of situations and thus opened the possibility that a small conflict could reach the scale of the Holocaust (demanding action to prevent the conflict from escalating to this point).

Moral Evocation

Hasia Diner explores what she terms “Holocaust consciousness,” and “the magnetic draw of the Holocaust in American popular culture well beyond the boundaries of the Jewish community.”⁶ This public mentality fosters a common perception of the Holocaust, its facts, effects, and moral obligations. Thus, the Holocaust evokes a sense of guilt and moral imperative for the majority of the American populace; this is the reason that speakers can use it to manipulate an audience through structural devices, as mentioned above. The death and destruction of the Holocaust has become ingrained in popular conception- present in images of loaded boxcars, crematoria, and Auschwitz. With this imagery has also come a sense of common responsibility that humanity allowed such atrocities to occur. As such, references to the

⁶ Diner, Hasia. (51)

Holocaust can serve as a font of listeners' feelings of guilt in non-action. Congressman George Miller (D- California) most clearly employs this "guilt-trip" stratagem in the following passage:

During the past genocides of Armenia, the Holocaust, and Rwanda, the world community failed to speak up and act with diligence in a timely manner... Now we look back at the tens of millions of lost and destroyed lives and ask how this happened. Today we have the opportunity to learn from history rather than repeat it. Already too much damage has occurred but if we act with diligence now, perhaps we can stop this catastrophe that is occurring in Darfur.⁷

There is a call to popular action based on the assumption that every person shares the responsibility to prevent such atrocities. This concept is founded in the belief that failures to stop genocide in the past are inexcusable and continue to mar the record of humanity.

Claims that historical obligation has resulted in present imperatives is embodied by the catchphrase "Never Again". This phrase is popularly identified as the "lesson" of the Holocaust, if one could claim to derive such a lesson from such an event. Regardless the appropriateness of the nomenclature, politicians, political activists, and teachers alike tout the slogan as the essential message imparted to future generations by this horrific event. As one can clearly not turn back the clock and save the 11 million lives lost during the genocidal campaign across Europe, popular conception identifies the only alternative as preventing its repetition in the future. Thus, the phrase has gained wide-spread recognition, and come to invoke the Holocaust without requiring any prior mention of the event itself. In many cases, the slogan "Never Again" is used to highlight the discrepancy between the promise made over 60 years ago, and the reality of the current situation. For example, regarding the genocide in Darfur, Representative Steve Israel

⁷ Miller, Congressman George. 7 March 2006. Press Release: Congressman Miller Takes Struggle in Darfur to United Nations.

invokes this terminology with his comment, “After the Holocaust, we declared ‘Never Again!’
But, how many times can we say ‘Never Again!’?”⁸

Because the Holocaust constitutes a dark period in history, it also serves as a point from which one may attempt to measure the progress of society in regards both to humanity itself and the to international institutions which were developed in the post-World War II era. The evaluation of humanity stems from the moral imperative to act (described above) and whether or not people do intervene. U.S. Ambassador David Scheffer employs this method in an implicit but effective manner. He states,

The first crimes against humanity [took place] more than 50 years ago... And yet today, on the eve of the new millennium when the technological, economic, and artistic triumph of mankind brings new meaning to civilization, the mega-crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and significant war crimes still occur.⁹

In his statement, Scheffer clearly compares the advances of society (technological innovations and economic prosperity) with the repetition of heinous crimes. This type of comparison serves to highlight the importance of the discrepancy in society’s development and elicit a sense of guilt and motivation to remedy the situation. Compounding this sense of guilt is the threat that “History” itself will judge non-action unsympathetically and render a verdict of shame. History as a judge is not a stratagem unique to use of the Holocaust. However, it is well-suited to it, as Representative Lantos’ words make clear: “[In 1943] We could have bombed the railroad lines that were carrying tens of thousands of victims each month to [Auschwitz]. Instead, we bombed oil facilities less than five miles away... History will judge us no less harshly if we now

⁸ Israel, Steve, Together We Can Start a Ripple of Change, address: 3 April 2006.

⁹ Scheffer, David. Department of State Washington File, Transcript: Scheffer Address on Crimes Against Humanity, *Milosevic, Pinochet, and US: Responding to Crimes Against Humanity*, December 1999. p. 2

knowingly stand by as the men, women and children of Darfur suffer and die.”¹⁰ The message here is clear: any excuse the world may have had in 1943 no longer applies; to repeat this noninterference would be unforgivable and the legacy of inhumanity will stain our portrait in history for generations.

The final rhetorical device that can be used to invoke the Holocaust is actually not a device but a single word: “genocide”. The term “genocide” has strong ties to the Holocaust. In fact, it was first invented by Raphael Lemkin in an attempt to devise a word that would have such “lasting association with Hitler’s horrors, it would send shudders down the spines of those who heard it.”¹¹ Lemkin, a Polish Jew who immigrated to the United States in 1941, sought to use his position outside Europe to motivate international intervention, in part by coining a new word which would strike listeners to the core. “It had to chill listeners and invite immediate condemnation...His word would do it all. It would be the rare term that carried in it society’s revulsion and indignation.”¹² Thus, the term was *specifically designed* to be associated with the Holocaust and to elicit emotional responses of horror and moral absolutism. Largely, he succeeded: the term genocide still carries with it an inextricable reference to the Holocaust, inherent in its meaning. Thus, during this inquiry, use of the term genocide –or avoidance thereof- will be equated to reference or avoidance to mention of the Holocaust.

Safety Factors

In light of the powerful responses that a mention of the Holocaust can elicit, and the variations in which it may be manipulated to educe certain types or degrees of responses by audience members, it should come as no surprise that in the carefully calculating world of

¹⁰ Lantos, Representative Tom.

¹¹ Power, Samantha. *A Problem from Hell*. (42)

¹² Ibid.

politics, use of Holocaust references are made with great care. It should be noted, that in the extensive analysis presented above, no example exists in which the Holocaust was portrayed in a positive light- that is, where the perpetration of the Holocaust was condoned and Allied intervention lamented. In today's cultural climate, the atrocities of the Holocaust are reviled across the board.¹³ Concordantly, there are no instances in which a speaker has attempted to employ the imagery or example of the Holocaust as an argument *against* intervening in genocide. Such use of the Holocaust, in this cultural environment, is simply not possible. As such, politicians design, as with all rhetorical devices, to use Holocaust references to their advantage. Unless a leader is earnestly seeking to intervene in the conflict, which as Samantha Powers points out in her work *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide* is rarely the case, s/he can do this only in a certain climate of mitigating circumstances, or what I shall call "safety factors."

As has already been established, use of Holocaust rhetoric can motivate popular opinion towards moral action and intervention in a genocide. A politician, when seeking for whatever reasons to avoid such action, will thus predictably steer clear of employing any such motivational rhetoric. However, if the politician is incapable of initiating action, as with the cases of lower-ranking public officials, and is fairly certain that no such turn of events will occur as a result of his individual calls for action, he may "safely" employ Holocaust references for his own personal benefit. This inability to propel action on one's own accounts not only for the bold statements of several Congressmen, but - as we will see- for President George W. Bush's statements as well. Additionally, if the party in question will not be held directly responsible for

¹³ A noted acceptance made for extremist groups. However, their mentality is not the focus here, due to their marginal status and their negligible impact on politicians.

the consequences of active engagement, they too may safely employ the Holocaust in popular dialogue. These parties may include lower government officials, interest groups, news reporters/journalists, and even celebrity activists. Conversely, the absence of both these “safety factors” in the case of President Clinton’s position during the genocide in Rwanda explains not only his lack of direct Holocaust references, but even the infamous aversion to using the word “genocide”¹⁴.

Holocaust References and the Presence of Safety Factors

The first safety factor- the power to affect change and take action- and the second- the responsibility for the outcome of any such action- are starkly absent in the arenas where one sees the most Holocaust references made. These arenas principally include lobbyist groups, celebrity activists, and the press- but may also include lower-ranking government officials.

News stories such as Nick Grimm’s 2005 NPR report “UN Questions Whether World has Learned from WWII” unabashedly connect the current crisis in Darfur with the Holocaust, juxtaposing testimony from Holocaust survivors with calls to action in current crises. Opinion-editorials frequently make these comparisons as well.¹⁵ For example, Nat Hentoff in his Washington Post piece, “Have you thought of Darfur lately?” parallels the world’s silence in the face of Darfur to its silence in the face of the Holocaust. However, despite their ability to potentially rally popular outrage, these journalists and reporters have no official authority and thus are not capable of taking direct action. They are thus free to write on moral authority, while bearing no risk or responsibility. Loss of U.S. troops will not be on their head.

¹⁴ which, as stated above, is tantamount to employing the Holocaust directly.

¹⁵ The primary news venues (such as prime-time news programs and popular print media) tend to follow the government’s official line. However, though many might agree or disagree, this assertion is a separate topic of inquiry in and of itself.

The International Crisis Group, one of many nongovernmental organizations lobbying for peace, issues articles and updates on genocidal crises which are replete with Holocaust references. Just one among these many stated, “In...Sudan, unspeakable atrocities are being committed in the context of civil wars which have taken the lives of approximately six million people. The parallels of this modern-day holocaust to 1994's genocide in Rwanda are stark.”¹⁶ Here, the inference that the Holocaust is happening again in Darfur resounds with moral imperative and urgency. Not surprisingly, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is also actively engaged in campaigns against genocide, and does not hesitate to employ the imagery of the 1940's atrocities. Yet, once again, these institutions are not capable of instigating pro-active policies, and as such, enjoy the comfort of safety factors.

In addition to lobbyist groups and news media, activists enjoy the presence of these same safety factors. While all activists may choose to employ Holocaust references, celebrity activists seem to get the most media attention, and thus reach the largest audience. As a prime example, one may turn to George Clooney. In an address to the U.N., Clooney stated:

In many ways, it's unfair -- but it is never the less true -- that this genocide will be on your watch. How you deal with it will be your legacy. Your Rwanda. Your Cambodia. Your Auschwitz. We were brought up to believe that the U.N. was formed to ensure that The Holocaust could never happen again. We believe in you so strongly. We need you so badly. We've come so far. We're one 'yes' away from ending this.¹⁷

His address relied on the guilt and impact associated with these references to the Holocaust, as an attempt to convey the urgency and imperative to spur the U.N. to act. These references in particular employed a number of the emotive strategies discussed above, including the imagery of Auschwitz, threat of historical judgment, moral imperatives, and personal responsibility. His

¹⁶ International Crisis Group. (8 January 2005). “Rwanda’s Lessons Yet to be Learned.”

¹⁷ Clooney, George, Briefing to UN on Darfur. Fox News: *Deutsche Presse Agentur/ The Raw Story*, 14, September 2006.

entreaty to the U.N., his statement that “We’re one yes away from ending this”¹⁸ underscores his impotence in this matter; thus, it is clear that the power and ultimate responsibility lies with the U.N. Celebrities, however, are not the only activists. Jerry Fowler, a representative for the Holocaust Memorial Museum, Darfur activist, and non-celebrity, also employs references to the Holocaust. In his recent lecture “From Memory to Action: The Role of Holocaust Remembrance in Combating Genocide Today”¹⁹ he focused on translating the obligation one has to remember the Holocaust to an obligation to act in preventing or intervening in other genocides (focusing particularly on Sudan).

These safety factor principles are also evident in the speeches by Congressmen and other government officials cited above, including Representatives Tom Lantos, George Miller, and Steve Israel, as well as Ambassador Scheffer. They cannot of their own accord choose to commit resources and men to intervene in crisis, nor take any direct individual action on the international scale, and as such enjoy greater freedom in their calls for action. They can criticize non-action and gain the moral high-ground, without risking their own reputation on the uncertainties involved with a pro-active policy.

These statements are not meant to question the commitment and authenticity of the moral convictions these reporters, officials, celebrities, or NGO employees may feel. However, the environment in which they work- one characterized by the presence of these safety factors- no doubt affects their actions, their strategies, and their choice to employ Holocaust references. For groups such as the International Crisis Group, their organization’s purpose is to combat genocide, and my comments here are not meant to question the sincerity of that goal. My point is

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Fowler, Jerry. (12 Oct 2006). “From Memory to Action: The Role of Holocaust Remembrance in Combating Genocide Today”

merely that these safety factors are present, and it is precisely because these actors- reporters, activists, etc- operate in an environment so characterized, that they are free to work and feel as they do, employing Holocaust rhetoric along the way. To some extent- certainly with the non-governmental actors- the activists may not even consider the role of these safety factors in their decisions. However, the nature of politics is one of extensive calculation and conscious decision-making. As such, it would be prudent to examine those politicians who are ranked so highly that a single misstep could prove disastrous, in whose actions there is likely much planning and calculation, and whose decisions can indeed have significant consequence. Thus, let us look to President Bush's remarks regarding the conflict in Darfur, as well as the political environment in which he operates.

Bush, Darfur, and Safety Factors

In his September 19, 2006 address to the United Nations General Assembly, President George W. Bush implicitly demonstrated the importance of using the term “genocide” and the implications thereof. His first statement regarding Darfur was the following: “To the people of Darfur: You have suffered unspeakable violence, and my nation has called these atrocities what they are – genocide.”²⁰ If one examines the sentence structure, this apparently simple statement actually seems to establish the declaration of genocide as an offering to the Darfurians, in response to their suffering. The link between the “unspeakable violence” they are experiencing and the separate clause “my nation has called these atrocities what they are” creates an aura of reciprocating action, legitimizing the response and making it seem not only justified and

²⁰ Bush, George W. “President Bush Addresses United Nations General Assembly.” 19 Sept 2006. (3)

appropriate, but indeed the right course of action- the proscribed next step. Implicitly, if the United States has taken this “appropriate course of action”, while the United Nations and other nations have not, they can be seen as leading the way to resolving the situation. Thus, the United States gains the “moral high ground” relative to other nations and international organizations.

By using the first sentence in the Darfur section of his address to reiterate that the U.S. has officially deemed the atrocities taking place a “genocide”, Pres. Bush underscores the weight and exclusivity of the term. As his first major point, he sets this act of “calling it straight” as a principle step in dealing with the situation in Darfur, and thus establishes the commitment of the United States in relieving the suffering. The implications involved with the declaration of genocide are, as explained in the previous section, far reaching in both the moral implications as well as the actual logistical considerations to be made in stopping genocide. However, Bush is free to make these statements because the UN Security Council is highly unlikely to intervene in Darfur. Thus, in choosing to work with the United Nations, President Bush can play the moral high-card with the American public, without the risk of engaging the United States in a conflict under his watch.

Absence of Safety Factors

The safety factors present in the cases considered above were not applicable to the situation that the Clinton administration faced during the genocide in Rwanda. Clinton, by definition of presidential powers, was in a position to intervene in Rwanda. It was completely within his ability as President of the United States to send U.S. military troops and jam radio-broadcasts (which played an infamous role in urging the perpetrators), among other options. Thus, the first safety factor (inability to effect action) is clearly not present. Likewise, Clinton would have been held directly responsible for U.S. actions, had he chosen to intervene.

The institutional and logistical restraints on Clinton's actions were not present as they are in Bush's case. For Bush, over-committal of troops abroad, as well as failing international standing has made cooperation with the U.N. an advisable strategy and plausible excuse for non-intervention. Additionally, the lucrative oil economy of Darfur is of key interest to U.N. Security Council members China and Russia, complicating the politics and making the decision to defer to U.N. authority advisable for reasons that have little to do with the welfare of Darfur. However, Clinton did not face these problems; Rwanda's coffee-based economy did not bear significantly on the decision making, and U.S. troops were not in short supply. Yet, after having recently suffered the debacle in Somalia, the Clinton administration was wary of intervention in such humanitarian crises, and as such had strong incentive to avoid repeating its embarrassments. Thus, it should come as little surprise that no Holocaust references can be found in official government releases.

The same aversion that Clinton had to intervention in Rwanda, Bush may have regarding Darfur. However, due to the structural environment in which each operated, the rhetoric varied widely. While Bush has "called these atrocities what they are—genocide"²¹, the Clinton administration notoriously avoided labeling Rwanda a genocide. One of the most well-known instances of this political side-stepping is indubitably State Department spokesperson Christine Shelly's Press Briefing²² of April 20, 1994 in which the definition of genocide and its applicability to Rwanda were discussed:

Q A British aid agency, OXFAM, today described what is happening there as genocide. Does the State Department have a comment on that or a view as to whether or not what is happening could be genocide?

²¹ Bush, George W. "President Bush Addresses United Nations General Assembly." 19 Sept 2006. (3)

²² Department of State Daily Press Breifing. DPC #68. Shelly, Christine. 28, April 1994.

MS. SHELLY: As I think you know, the use of the term "genocide" has a very precise legal meaning although it's not strictly a legal determination. There are other factors in there as well... there are three types of elements that we look at in order to make that kind of a determination. One is to look at the types of actions which are being undertaken... Certainly, in those elements there are actions which have occurred which would fit the first types of those categories. It appears that much of this is directed toward particular ethnic groups. Certainly, the types of actions being committed and the extent of the killings also would suggest that this type of activity is taking place.

This excerpt exhibits two very important concepts. First, the fact that the British news media had labeled the conflict a “genocide” while the United States government still had not relates to the press’ freedom to use such language because they have no direct power or responsibility for action (safety factors 1 and 2). Second, Shelly’s refusal to officially use the word “genocide” in reference to Rwanda is a “gesture that testified to both Lemkin’s success in imbuing the term with moral judgment and his failure to change the policymaker’s political calculus.”²³ Shelly’s department, under the Executive branch, was part of the Clinton administration. As described in the earlier sections of this paper, politicians are well-aware of how effective such loaded rhetoric can be in mobilizing the public. The Clinton administration was no different. Thus, Lemkin indeed succeeded in his endeavor to create a powerful word linked with moral condemnation, and as a result, politicians learned how to manipulate this by selectively employing it. As further explanation of the administration’s policy calculations and their aversion to the term, one ought to consider the following excerpt from the Office of the Secretary of Defense: “Be careful. Legal at State was worried about this yesterday—Genocide finding could commit [the U.S. government] to actually ‘do something’”²⁴

²³ Power, Samantha. (361)

²⁴ Office of the Secretary of Defense. (1 May 1994). “Secret Discussion Paper: Rwanda”.

The word genocide was an important issue for a number of reasons. Firstly, its connection to the Holocaust should not be overlooked. UNAMIR²⁵ Force Commander Dallaire reaffirms Lemkin's success at tying the word with Hitler's campaign of extermination: "I was self-conscious about saying the killings were "genocidal" because, to us in the west, "genocide" was the equivalent of the Holocaust... "Genocide" was the highest scale of crimes against humanity imaginable."²⁶ (Together, the cases of Dallaire and Shelly lend additional weight to the earlier assertion that use of the term genocide should be equated with use of the Holocaust.) Secondly, the question of the legal and moral imperative to act associated with the word genocide played a significant role. While international law did not actually demand that states intervene in genocide, this was a point of constant debate and uncertainty. The moral imperatives were clear. The important role that these three syllables played in the administration's calculations is evident in the following statement from the House of Representatives Resolution 88:

"the Clinton Administration refused to use the word genocide with respect to the situation in Rwanda and on April 28, 1994, the United Nations Security Council deliberately omitted the word genocide from a Council resolution in order to avoid its legal and international obligations to intervene"²⁷

This, from the administration of a President who, during his candidacy, stated, "If the horrors of the Holocaust taught us anything, it is the high cost of remaining silent and paralyzed in the face of genocide."²⁸ What accounts for the change of heart? The lack of safety factors.

²⁵ United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda

²⁶ Power, Samantha. (358)

²⁷ H. Con. Res. 88 (9 March 2005). (3).

²⁸ Krauss, Clifford. (5 Aug 1992) "U.S. Backs Away from Charge of Atrocities in Bosnia Camps" New York Times. (A12)

Prior to the presidency, he is clearly not in the position of power in which he found himself during the Rwandan crisis, and thus was free to make such criticisms.

Remarkably, Clinton's language underwent a complete turnaround post-Rwanda. During his 1998 address in Kigali, President Clinton stated, "We did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide."²⁹ He uses the term genocide nine times in this speech, not once attempting to eschew its applicability to Rwanda- in stark contrast to prior policy. Indeed, in this post-conflict environment, Clinton even makes a direct comparison to the Holocaust:

The government-led effort to exterminate Rwanda's Tutsi and moderate Hutus, as you know better than me, took at least a million lives. Scholars of these sorts of events say that the killers, armed mostly with machete and clubs, nonetheless did their work five times as fast as the mechanized gas chambers used by the Nazis.

Clinton is free here to use such sensational language- stating the Rwanda genocide was even more intense than the Holocaust- because the conflict has come to an end. There is no longer any need to intervene, no danger of embroiling troops and sinking resources into a dangerous region, so the field is safe for such statements. As earlier, now these statements act to the benefit of the administration's public relations, because they show not only remorse, but the high ground of acknowledging the gravity of the situation- placing it on par with a well-known reference point: the Holocaust.

The Case of Kosovo

Having explored the uses of Holocaust references and the use of the term genocide in the cases of Darfur and Rwanda, where the U.S. was *not* directly involved, one ought to test the "safety factor" theory in the case of Kosovo, where the U.S. did intervene, via NATO. Upon

²⁹ Clinton, President William. (25 March 1998) "Remarks by the President to Genocide Survivors, Assistance Workers, and U.S. and Rwanda Government Officials."

inspection of political rhetoric, it is clear that Holocaust references were made in political speeches. For example, in a May 1999 address, Clinton states:

Though this ethnic cleansing is not the same as the ethnic extermination of the Holocaust, the two are related – both vicious, premeditated, systematic oppression fueled by religious and ethnic hatred. This campaign to drive the Kosovars from their land and to, indeed, erase their very identity is an affront to humanity and an attack not only on a people, but on the dignity of all people.³⁰

The invocation of the Holocaust here exemplifies many of the structural and emotive stratagems discussed earlier. Unlike the instances with Rwanda and Darfur, because Clinton is actively involved in Kosovo, Holocaust rhetoric serves him well in garnering support. He employs not only the structural comparison but the emotional, moral appeals to the “dignity of all peoples”. By directly relating Kosovo to the atrocities sixty years earlier, he sets it up as the “next Holocaust”- exploring the potential for destruction and devastation, and thus augmenting the severity and scope of the crisis to that of the multi-national anti-Semitic campaigns of the Nazis. He later mentions Hitler in direct relation to Milosevic, stating:

Political leaders do this kind of thing. You think the Germans would have perpetrated the Holocaust on their own without Hitler?... We've got to get straight about this. This is something political leaders do. And if people make decisions to do these kinds of things, other people can make decisions to stop them. And if the resources are properly arrayed it can be done. And that is exactly what we intend to do.³¹

By naming Hitler, Clinton brings to the front the popular conception of evil and moral duty that a majority of Americans associate with him. Thus, his succeeding calls to action and affirmation of pro-active U.S. policy are delivered to an audience who is already prepped with feelings of a moral necessity to intervene, transposing the history lessons of World War II they were taught as

³⁰ Clinton, President William. (13 May 1999). “Remarks by the President to the Veterans of Foreign Wars on Kosovo.”

³¹ Ibid

school children –images of valiant soldiers in a fight for good against evil- to the present situation in Kosovo.

Clearly, Clinton’s employing Holocaust reference reaffirms not only the relevance of safety factors, but the potency of Holocaust rhetoric itself. Because U.S. policy favored engagement in Kosovo, the safety factors are reversed: no longer wanting to downplay the importance of the conflict, but instead to garner support for action which Clinton himself has the power to initiate, employing Holocaust references becomes a strategic maneuver. Additionally, the use of these references attests to their potency in collecting popular support- as detailed earlier.

Conclusion

It has been show that references to the Holocaust can be used in a number of effective ways. Its potency for motivating an audience, based in the popular “Holocaust consciousness” (as detailed in other literature), thus makes it both a tool and a danger for political officials. Use of Holocaust rhetoric, then, depends on the ends to which the speaker attempts to take his audience. While it may be employed to manipulate audience support for intervention in genocide- as displayed in Clinton’s Kosovo addresses- its non-use in relevant cases implies its intentional avoidance – as seen in the case of Rwanda. The decision to employ Holocaust references in a speech rests heavily on the presence of at least one of two safety factors: the power to act and the responsibility for the action. In the case of most activists, journalists, NGO’s, and lower government officials, these safety factors are present, and thus most of the Holocaust rhetoric is seen in their works. Presidential and high-ranking officials, however, do not enjoy these safeguards, and so are less likely to use Holocaust references, or do so in a controlled political environment where their actions are otherwise checked or restrained.

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