

Identity Crisis and Ethnic Cleansing in Myanmar A Constructivist analysis to measure the greater value of “identity” concerning Rohingya Crisis

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The continuing perennial debate over the gap between theory and practice in International Relations has been neglected by the vast majority of scholars. This paper is intended to examine whether or not constructivist consideration has a place within identity creating process and politics regarding the Rohingya crisis. The news of Rohingya crisis is not an unknown topic in every daily newspaper around the world. As well as the silent role of SAARC and ASEAN as each one of the most recognised regional institutions in South Asia and South East Asia in managing Rohingya’s refugee crisis in Myanmar has raised criticism on its effectiveness in dealing with such a regional problem. Despite the fact that many political leaders from adjacent regional states do not really find any relevance and interference of such regional institutions to deal with issues like forced migration, refugee crisis or ethnic cleansing in Myanmar. Perhaps states do prefer to enlighten their national and regional identity with conditional friendship and enmity relationship in this archetypal regional problem.

This paper offers possible contributions of constructivism in diagnosing this crisis from different perspectives and providing policy recommendations for SAARC, ASEAN and regional partners to solve the regional crisis. From the constructivists’ viewpoint, SAARC cannot do much intervention due to the lack of collective identity among its member states which is very true for ASEAN as well. On this note, there has not been enough “institutional commitment” to carry out collective action to mitigate such a bilateral emergency. Furthermore, constructivists’ perspectives may also provide strategic procedures by suggesting that all member states should give priority to the process of collective identity building through a regional institution with proper attention to own regional identity which can pave the way to solve the unending crisis.

Keywords: Constructivism, Theory and Practice, SAARC, ASEAN, Collective Identity, National and Regional Identity, Rohingya Crisis

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I. INTRODUCTION

As one of the country’s 135 ethnic groups, Rohingya, a Muslim minority group from Rakhine part are not still recognised by the Government of Myanmar and have no legal documentation and are therefore stateless with an estimated number of one million. With a history of large scale violence against them from 1974, the recent crisis in 2012 and 2015 became the most printed top news of every newspaper in the world. The world community silently witnessed one of the most brutal persecutions of human history while someone may call it ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and genocide. So many different names with different reasons come to find a distinguished identity of recognizing the most vulnerable refugee in the world.

In response to the crisis, international community have acted with their own identical interest, with some governments focused on supporting Myanmar's fragile democratic reform. On the other hand there are some states and organisations come with ample condemnation about the Government of Myanmar doing too little to protect the Rohingya population. More recently, Myanmar's de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, has been widely criticised by the international community for not sufficiently arbitrating the systematic violence.

After passing five years of such atrocities, the Rohingya crisis has become a full-scale humanitarian crisis that has regional consequences. It poses critical situation for SAARC and ASEAN like regional institution, highlighting a huge lack of political and legal framework in both of the institutions to deal with ethnic cleansing and refugees related concerns. We can critically analyse this crisis with the views of constructivism. Since the two dominant theories of International Relations, Realism and Liberalism deal with politics and institutional arrangements, all the time such kind of explanation is not enough.

Because, traditionally Realists remain very dubious of any form of cooperation aimed at the common good, let alone dealing with normative issues such as human rights. On the premise of interstate relations which basically calls for self- help approach is considered to be inappropriate to make a better solution of this regional problem. The anarchic structure of international politics, as well as the tendency of states to pursue national interests, are two main factors why realists tend to avoid talking about human rights (Dunne & Hanson, 2012, p. 63)¹.

Contrarily, there are neo-liberal institutionalists who can prescribe that multilateral and regional institutions to mitigate the crisis with mutual understanding. This theory also calls for negotiation to minimize the anarchic effects of international relations among states due to distrust and suspicion². On that note, Neo-liberal institutionalists would assume that the failure of SAARC and ASEAN can be theorised by the absence of regional regimes that facilitate cooperation among states. This is supported by the fact that there have not been any regional regimes that specifically address the issue of refugee and asylum seekers in South and South East Asia. Depending on above discussion this paper will address the Rohingya refugee crisis with the comprehensions from constructivism. The central research question of the paper is

What are the ways to describe the Rohingya refugee crisis with the insights of Constructivism mentioning the engagement of SAARC and ASEAN to mitigate the emergency?

This paper will first elaborate the vital concerns of Constructivism as a theory of International Relations to relate the situation of Rohingya refugee crisis. Basically this will be the primary concern of the paper to delineate this emergency with constructivist analysis particularly focusing on the Identity and Interest concept. Here we will try to establish a solution of the problem projecting the relevance of regional institutions' of South and South East Asia like SAARC and ASEAN. To find the answer of central question, the paper followed qualitative method based on existing literatures like books, journals, news articles like "Beyond Identity", Foreign Affairs, Who are Rohingya published in Daily Star and so on. Author also conducted two focus group discussions with some academicians, some noted interviews with some experts of International Relations.

This paper is divided in three sections: First section deals with all conceptual understanding of Identity, Identity Crisis, and Ethnic Cleansing as well as some glimpse of Rohingya Crisis. Next part describes the Constructivism with its particular concept of identity and interest however, making a relation with the quest of Rohingya identity crisis known as ethnic cleansing. Final section will be enumerated on the present role of SAARC and ASEAN as two of the regional institutions in South and South East Asia. There will be some possible recommendations for both of this institutions on how they can ensure peace and solidarity emphasizing a regional identity in the crisis situation.

Conceptual Knowledge:

All of the literatures of Ethnicity and Nationalism hunts for very old but commonly asked still today that is: Are identities fixed throughout history, or are they mere inventions produced by political struggles? Answering this critically important quest, all of the scholarly discussions focused on one common concept that is how identity is created and what factors are making them politicized. Here, we do know that identity is an ambiguous knowledge in theories of International Relations. Identity is not something to be discovered; it is not an intrinsic quality. Rather, it is 'multiple, unstable, in flux, contingent, fragmented, constructed, negotiated,' and so on and so forth (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 11)³.

Along with the contested definition of Identity, it becomes more difficult to define identity crisis. Whether going with the constructivist thought of identity crisis, we can find two spheres of explanation like: Social Identity Crisis and Political Identity Crisis⁴. Social identity crisis basically calls for people who are not socially accepted as a member of the society being an ethnic or minority group. As well as political identity crisis relates with the domestic and international political pressure to use the minority group of people simply to uphold self-interest. Here, we can get the idea that identity and identity crisis both relates with domestic and international politics. Moreover, identity politics is very much related with ethnic relations and national feeling in every state.

Now, ethnic cleansing is another theme we need to know. Generally, ethnic cleansing can be noted as the act of deportation, displacement and to some extent mass killing to remove targeted members of an ethnic

¹Dunne, T., & Hanson, M. (2012). Human rights in international relations. In M. Goodhart (Ed.), *Human rights: Politics and practice* (pp. 61-76). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²Keohane, R. (1984). *After hegemony: Cooperation and discord in the world political economy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press

³Brubaker, Rogers and Frederick Cooper (2000) "Beyond 'Identity'," *Theory and Society*, 29: 1-47.

⁴Guzzini, S., & Leander, A. (Eds.). (2006). *Constructivism and international relations: Alexander Wendt and its critics*. London: Routledge

group in order to establish homogenous society. At a formal document in 1993, the term ethnic cleansing was first used in the seventh UN Security Council resolutions. They introduced the term to mention the mass atrocities in the dissolution process of Yugoslavia. On the subject of this, the ethnic cleansing term was used at the International Court of Justice judgment on Bosnia to define the massacres.⁵ But, ethnic cleansing bears a more in-depth political meaning.

The Commission of Experts stated that ethnic cleansing as “a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas.”⁶ The commission also inserts that different types of atrocities like: murder, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, extrajudicial executions, rape and sexual assaults, severe physical injury to civilians, confinement of civilian population in ghetto areas, forcible removal, displacement and deportation and many more should be included on the study of ethnic cleansing.

Moving on to our next concept that is constructivism requires more attention since it is the centre of gravity in this paper. Dominant theories of international relations are considered as Realism and Liberalism for a long time. After the end of cold war and resurgence of new world order, there were a wave of new theories in the decade of 1980s and 1990s in the arena of international relations. Scholars tend to theorize the changing nature of global politics with new understanding, something different from the old writings.

There we get constructivism primarily criticizing all of the materialistic considerations thriving in the world. Notable constructivist scholars like Alexander Wendt, Nicolas Onuf started their writhing with alternative explanations and insights for events occurring in the social world. They show, for instance, that it is not only the distribution of material power, wealth and geographical conditions that can explain state behaviour but also ideas, identities and norms. Furthermore, their focus on ideational factors shows that reality is not fixed, but rather subject to change⁷.

According to Wendt, Constructivism is a structural theory of the international system that makes the following core claims: (1) states are the principal units of analysis for international political theory; (2) the key structures in the states system are intersubjective rather than material; and (3) state identities and interests are in important part constructed by these social structures, rather than given exogenously to the system by human nature⁸. From here we can pick one of the central issues of constructivism that is identities and interests.

Constructivists argue that states can have multiple identities that are socially constructed through interaction with other actors. Identities are representations of an actor's understanding of who they are, which in turn signals their interests.⁹ They are important to constructivists as they argue that identities constitute interests and actions. Social norms are also central to constructivism. These are generally defined as ‘a standard of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity’¹⁰. States that conform to a certain identity are expected to comply with the norms that are associated with that identity. This idea comes with an expectation that some kinds of behaviour and action are more acceptable than others.¹¹

So, such kind of constructivist analysis helps us to establish the fact that, identity is a crucial factor defining state activities toward domestic and international responses. On that note, this is also true that state actions to create its own identity based on its social and political desire indicates the reality of state involvement in ethnic cleansing. Because, we can trace numerous examples from Bosnia, Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sudan, Armenia, Cambodia, etc. where the authority of state was accused of ethnic cleansing in lieu of making one nation without any different blood and of course upholding their scared nationalism. And this attitude of state actually denotes the political action on both national and international field.

The same kind of arguments can be true for Rohingya minority people in Myanmar. We can trace a high voltage drama of Myanmar government recalling both of the military rulers and so called democratic regime with their engagement in the Rohingya refugee crisis. To know better, we need to go through the history and present crisis of this largest refugee group.

⁵International Court of Justice (26thFeb. 2007) General List No.91; “Case concerning the application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro” Judgment.

⁶ United Nations Office on Genocide prevention and the responsibility to protect, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/ethnic-cleansing.shtml>

⁷Dessler, D., & Owen, J. (2005). Constructivism and the problem of explanation. *Perspectives on Politics*, 3(3), 120-210.

⁸ Wendt, Alexander, 1999, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 193.

⁹ Ibid, 115

¹⁰ Wendt, Alexander, 1992, “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46, 291-92.

¹¹ Ibid, 295-96

Rohingya; a Muslim ethnic group, living in the western side of Myanmar, which is Rakhine, previously called as Arkan. This ethnic group, which constitutes 4% population in Myanmar, is living in miserable conditions and their source of income is largely dependent upon fishing and agriculture¹². Moreover, their dominated areas are totally deprived off basic necessities of life, while the poverty rate in the area is 78%¹³. Not only this, these people are having no legal documents, popularly known as national identity card since the Myanmar government does not own these people and consider them as refugee in Myanmar.

In addition to this, Rohingya do not have role in the state building process as well as in the institutions of the state. While on other hand, sporadically clashes flares up with other communities in the country, notably with Buddhists¹⁴. Therefore, each such clash mounts violence and gives birth to persecutions of Rohingya, in shape of death, injuries, hate, burning of property etc. As a result, such kind of violence further enlarges the gap of mistrust between Rohingya and Buddhists. In short, due to the recent unrest in Myanmar, which sparked in August 2017, have made more than 600,000 Rohingya to left their homes and have taken refuge in Bangladesh only¹⁵.

Therefore, we can connect the dots which shows that major actors of Myanmar are systematically weakening and eliminating the Rohingya population out from the country. Thus, due to this systematic weakening, the Rohingya community in Myanmar is often subject to mass killing, persecution ultimately forced to mass migration.

Identity Crisis of Rohingya refugee:

The primary cause of violence against Rohingya is the unsettled questions, which is regarding their identity and origin. At present, the Myanmar government does not accept these people as their citizens or nationals. The government believes that Rohingya are illegal immigrants, living in the country from long ago. Even the government has classified them as Bangladeshi, it is because Myanmar government opinions that these Rohingya share similar physical and cultural characteristics with the people of Bangladesh¹⁶. Further, government also endorses that their ancestors had migrated from Bangladesh and settled in Rakhine state during the British colonial rule¹⁷. While on other hand, Bangladesh government refutes the claims of Burmese government and condemns the later government, for the use of force against the Rohingya people. In fact, it was the Ne Win regime (1962-1988), which enacted the Emergency Immigration Act in 1974, according to the act Rohingya were declared as foreigners, consequently they lost their national identity¹⁸. Thus, the government considers Rohingya as illegal immigrants, so for this reason most of the time government has adopted very anti approach in dealing them.

Generally, people belonging to Buddhists community in the country assume that Islam is an emerging threat to Myanmar. They fear that this community is infusing their ideology in the country, which with the passage of time will ultimately overshadow their state religion¹⁹. Their fear is because, there are some armed groups, which are operating within the country and most of the time, found in terror incidents. Therefore, to justify their threat from Muslims, Buddhists put the example of Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO); it is an armed organization of Muslims, which has taken the responsibilities of several coordinated attacks, in which Myanmar security personnel's have been targeted. Further, they believe that Rohingya are also having links with some global Jihadi organizations, whose aim is to promote Jihad in Myanmar against Buddhists somewhat like that, which is going in Afghanistan. So, based on the perceived threats to their religion, Buddhists since long are purposefully trying to get rid of Rohingya²⁰.

¹² Special Issue on Growing Poverty (2016) Independent Journal of Burmese Scholarship.

¹³ Dutta PV (2015) Risks and vulnerabilities along the life cycle: Role for social protection in Myanmar. World Bank Group Social Protection and Labour 24.

¹⁴ Davies, M. (2015). The Rohingya and regional failure. Retrieved from <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2019/06/16/the-rohingya-and-regionalfailure>

¹⁵ Rohingya refugees have been fleeing violence in Myanmar at a staggering rate – and the numbers keep growing (2017)

¹⁶ Jones, W. (2015). Myanmar's Rohingya: Culture, violence, and human rights abuses. Retrieved from <https://www.westeastinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/William-J.-Jones.pdf>

¹⁷ Nemoto K (1991) The Rohingya Issue: A Thorny Obstacle between Burma (Myanmar) and Bangladesh. Journal of Burma Studies, pp: 1-5.

¹⁸ Kipgen N (2014) Ethnicity in Myanmar and its Importance to the Success of Democracy. Ethnopolitics. pp: 19-31.

¹⁹ Kundu, S. (2015). The Rohingyas: Security implications for ASEAN and beyond. Retrieved from http://www.idsa.in/issuebrief/TheRohingyas_skundu_280515

²⁰ O'Hara, EB (2015) The Rohingya and Islamic Extremism: A Convenient Myth.

Identity crisis of Rohingya and Citizenship law of 1982 in Myanmar

Things became completely worsen, when in 1982, Myanmar's government under the leadership of Ne Win, took its first step to push Rohingya towards identity crisis. It was basically the enactment of Citizenship Law of 1982. According to law, there were three types of citizenships; Full, Associated and Naturalized citizenship.²¹ And according to these categories of citizenships Rohingya were excluded from the Full, Associated, as well as Naturalized citizenship because this group cannot meet up any of the criteria which was purely intentional²². Thus, it is racism and religious prejudice due to which Myanmar does not consider Rohingya as their indigenous citizens²³.

Constructivism explaining identity crisis of Rohingya Refugee:

Constructivism provide a set of basic assumptions which are essentially different from materialist explanations can be used to understand world politics. Generally, constructivism contains two main premises: first, non-material elements that are more important than the material ones, and second, the actions of international actors are determined by these nonmaterial elements (Wendt, 1999, p. 1)²⁴. "Non-material elements" refer to ideas that shape identities and interests, norms, as well as culture, religion to form social environments in which actors are embedded. Here we can also add that this non-materials realities ensure more integrity to diagnose policy problems.

Calling upon the Rohingya refugee crisis, such non-materials forces are really influential. Like, if we take religion as a dominant factor we can find local community is merely concerned of this genocide. There are several newspaper asking for fundamentalist attitude in race and religion which caused the marginalization of ethnic minorities especially Rohingya people in Myanmar. The Bamar, the country's dominant ethnic group that comprises roughly 70 percent of the population, are primarily Buddhist, with Buddhism being Myanmar's *de facto* state religion. An estimated 90 percent of people living in Myanmar identify as Buddhist²⁵. There are also proclamations that a rising wave of nationalism and anti-muslim sentiment led to the Rohingya crisis. Scholars tend to establish that xenophobia, Buddhist-nationalist extremism, and propaganda using state media and social media all are playing as a catalyst in the Rakhine violence to persecute Rohingya minority group. Being a British colony, Myanmar carries the picture of discrimination against Muslims. However, Buddhist nationalism is making room in the transitional democracy in Myanmar. Figures like Ashin Wirathu, a prominent extremist Buddhist Monk, has grown increasingly popular in Myanmar for promoting derogatory rhetoric against the Rohingya and Muslims in Myanmar²⁶.

Therefore, we can make co-relation with the extremist religious norms creating discriminatory nationalism and identity crisis of Rohingya people forcing them to ethnic cleansing. The influence of critical identities on states policy is very crucial because identities will define goals and actions. In other words, identities shape national interests, which in turn shape policies. Consequently, constructivists notified that national interests are not taken for granted but constantly changing, depending on the nature of interactions²⁷.

It is important to note that identity is not a single analytical framework. Constructivist scholars argue that identity is a socially constructed entity. Using "looking glass self" theory borrowed from American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley, constructivist asserted that identity is formed through a series of actions and reactions involving interpretation between actors (Wendt, 1992, pp. 404-406)²⁸. Conceptually, there are many kinds of identity. Constructivism distinguished four kinds of identity: corporate, type, role, and collective identity (Wendt, 1999)²⁹. Similarly, collective identity is formed through social processes and the common

²¹ Holliday I (2010) Ethnicity and Democratization in Myanmar. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, pp: 111-128.

²² Simbulan KP (2012) A Legal and Structural Analysis of the Violence in Rakhine State Against the Rohingya Muslim in Myanmar.

²³ Kipgen N (2013) Conflict in Rakhine State in Myanmar: Rohingya Muslims' Conundrum. *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs (IMMA)*, pp: 298-310.

²⁴ Wendt, A. (1992). Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics. *International Organization*, 46(2), 391-425.

²⁵ O'Hara, EB (2015) The Rohingya and Islamic Extremism: A Convenient Myth, 145-48

²⁶ "Crimes Against Humanity By Burmese Security Forces Against The Rohingya Muslim Population". 2018. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/25/crimes-against-humanity-burmese-security-forces-against-rohingya-muslim-population>.

²⁷ Wendt, A. (1994). Collective identity formation and the international state. *The American Political Science Review*, 88(2), 384-396.

²⁸ Ibid. pp 404-406

²⁹ Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

perceptions and feelings among actors engender shared interests and actions.³⁰ Here, constructivist idea of identity can be referred in two different ways; in one way we can track the sense of subjective identity of the Buddhist nation to exclude Muslim ethnic community and to generate Rohingya crisis and in another way we can take the concept of collective identity to mitigate the emergency focusing on regional collectivism.

On this note, the first argument is easy to measure that because different literatures have already documented the plight of Arakan people blaming the fundamentalist practice of one particular religion. In the previous section, the same concept was discussed as identity, culture and religion. There we get to know about Buddhism and its wide acceptance in a more non-secular form. At this point, we can quote,

“Myanmar also has a Muslim population distinct from the Rohingya who live in a mostly assimilated manner in other parts of the country outside Rakhine. Yet Muslims of every kind become targets of scapegoating in times of tension, a trend that has grown in recent years” (AP)³¹. This statement truly prove the first argument of Constructivism and subjective identity mentioning the widespread acceptance of Buddhism as the national religion of Myanmar shading Islam in a terrorist form.

Moving on to another claim, there is constructivist assumptions stressing collective identity analysing cooperation within the region and it is relevant to provide policy framework. Nevertheless, interdependence, common perception, and homogeneity are necessary yet not sufficient circumstances for collective identity building³². Without self-control, the notion of collective identity would not be successful in creating international solidarity. With respect to the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, constructivist offers communal collaboration between states and regional institutions to draw an end. Constructivist would argue, as mentioned earlier, that the Rohingya issue cannot be explained solely by the traditional concept of national interest as well as the absence of regional institutional arrangement that facilitate cooperation³³. Instead, it reflects identity conflict and to some extent regional norms for a purpose of ethnic cleansing. The world media and international community consistently claims that the autocratic regime of Myanmar has committed crimes against humanity on the ground of calling Rohingya community as non Burmanese outsider ethnic minority because of their contested origins and culture³⁴.

Constructivism clarifying external actors' role:

In addition, external actors' contribution with their identity-driven foreign policy is further salient feature of Rohingya refugee crisis. As the neighbouring state, Bangladesh was the first and only receiver of recent Rohingya refugee on the ground of its religions identity as well as regional identity to gain more solidarity from the international society. Whether, India also shares border with Myanmar but it did not give shelter to any of this boat people. There are reasons behind Indian self-centric engagement such as; Indian million dollar economic projects in Myanmar. Nevertheless, India has to counter Chinese influence in Myanmar, from weapons to food grains selling there, and projecting power in the Indian Ocean. It will become an even greater challenge to face Chinese increased naval presence in Myanmar. No wonder, Myanmar is at the heart of Modi government's Act East policy with the India-Myanmar-Thailand Asian Trilateral Highway, the Kaladan multimodal project, a road-river-port cargo transport project, and of course BIMSTEC, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation³⁵. There is a 1,600-km border between India and Myanmar notoriously known for the Naga insurgents and on this account India is also working closely with the security forces of Myanmar to target the insurgents operating in the country's northeast corner. So, here we can decode the Indian identity occupied with national and regional interest overlooking the humanitarian crisis.

Accordingly, if we consider China in the framework of identity driven policy maker, we can draw the best picture. China has become the biggest supplier of military and with this it has managed to engage in domestic politics of Myanmar. China became a crucial partner for all political entities in Myanmar calling for a creation of pure Buddhist nation in all sense. With its all economic, security and political ambitions in Myanmar, China has invested to create an ethnically homogenous society including all the powerful ethnic

³⁰Wendt, A. (1994). Collective identity formation and the international state. *The American Political Science Review*, 88(2), 384–396.

³¹Grant, Peck. "Myanmar Rohingya Hatred Has Roots In Buddhist Nationalism". 2018. AP News. <https://apnews.com/bcf889617f2341e5888019937595431d>.

³²Acharya, A. (1998). Collective identity and conflict management in Southeast Asia. In E. Adler & M. Barnett (Eds.), *Security communities* (pp. 198–227). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³³Busse, N. (1999). Constructivism and Southeast Asian security. *The Pacific Review*, 12(1), 39–60.

³⁴Bowen, J. (2015, May 15). Refugee crisis tests limits of Southeast Asian cooperation. *Global Observatory*. Retrieved from <http://theglobalobservatory.org/2015/05/asean-rohingya-refugees-myanmar/>

³⁵Davies, M. (2015). The Rohingya and regional failure. Retrieved from <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2015/05/16/the-rohingya-and-regionalfailure/>

groups. There are additional example as, Indonesia's diplomatic and humanitarian assistance to the Rohingya people recently were influenced by the identity as a world largest Muslim country.³⁶

With the above discussion, we can relate the identity driven domestic and international politics regarding the Rohingya crisis. Since we are advocating constructivism and the concept of identity and interest to explain Rohingya refugee problem, we can state that;

- The advent of the crisis lies on historical reasoning of cultural, social and political circumstances to create a pure Buddhist identity excluding all the ethnic minorities especially focusing on Muslim minority. Prior to that, we can track Rohingya torment since 1948 after the independence of Myanmar.
- The ancient hatred on the basis of false determination of not to accept Rohingya as members of Arakan land which become a myth of Burmese nationalism, can be acknowledged as one of the major causes to Rohingya genocide.
- Last but not the least, neighbouring states participation in this ethnic cleansing can also be enumerated on the light of identity backed foreign relations in South and South East Asia.

Well, the next approach identity can be used to formulate solutions to end the crisis. At this point, we can take SAARC and AESAN to promote regional identity which can aid to create policy framework of the emergency.

A way to resolution of the conflict:

The region of South and South East Asia sometimes fails to protect refugees and asylum seekers in the absence of domestic and regional legal instruments. On this account, scholars suggest a significant role for the regional organisations in institutionalising refugee protection norms. However, the most significant regional platform like SAARC and ASEAN seems reluctant to address forced migration, as it is predominantly viewed as a domestic matter or a bilateral issue concerning only the country of origin and the host country.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the dominant multilateral body in the Southeast Asian region, plays a limited role in addressing forced migration issues. ASEAN's fundamental principles, as laid out in the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, include "mutual respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and national identity of all nations" and "non-interference in the internal affairs of one another."³⁷ Like ASEAN, the South Asian Association for Cooperation (SAARC) emphasises non-interference. SAARC's basic principles, as outlined in its Charter, include "respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, political independence, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States."³⁸ ASEAN and SAARC's state-centric approaches suggest that, in the absence of the willingness of member states to address forced migration, there is limited potential for the organisations to establish a regional protection framework. Furthermore, SAARC's Charter states that "bilateral and contentious issues shall be excluded from the deliberations."³⁹

Thus, in the region, forced migration has been framed as a bilateral, rather than transnational or multilateral, issue. This is problematic because migration flows are rarely limited to only one host country. In the case of the Rohingya, refugees have sought shelter in multiple countries in the region, including Thailand, Malaysia, India, and Bangladesh, among others⁴⁰. While the number of refugee arrivals varies between countries, the involvement of numerous countries necessitates a regional, multilateral response to effectively address the situation. In terms of migration policy, ASEAN focuses primarily on issues related to economic migration. The 2012 ASEAN Human Rights Declaration discusses the inalienable rights of migrant workers⁴¹ but leaves the rights of refugees and asylum seekers up to the laws of the host country.

The lack of attention given to forced migration is also evident in the Plan of Action for Cooperation on Immigration Matters⁴². This plan was developed against the backdrop of increased regional integration. It aims to enhance and streamline region-wide immigration procedures and strengthen cooperation on immigration between South-eastern nations. However, as ASEAN has focused primarily on economic integration, the Plan of Action only concerns economic migration matters and makes no reference to the terms "forced migrant",

³⁶Satria, N., & Jamaan, A. (2013). Islam dan Kebijakan Luar Negeri Indonesia: Peran Indonesia dalam Konflik di Rakhine, Myanmar [Islam and Indonesia's foreign policy: The role of Indonesia in the conflict in Rakhine, Myanmar]. *Jurnal Transnasional*, 5(1), 945–964.

³⁷ Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (1976), Article 2.

³⁸ Charter of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (1985), Article II.

³⁹ *ibid.*, Article X.

⁴⁰ Al Imran H.F. & Mian M.N. (2014) The Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh: A Vulnerable Group in Law and Policy. *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences* (8)2 pp.226-253

⁴¹ ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (2012), Article 4.

⁴² ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (2012), Article 16.

“refugee”, or “asylum seeker”.⁴³ Similarly, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has no legal or policy framework for addressing forced migration issues⁴⁴.

Considering constructivist school of thought regarding collective identity, we need to initiate both of the institutions’ common interest to mitigate the Rohingya crisis. There procedures can be:

- In the reality of interdependency, more cooperation should be introduced. Whether, cooperation can be followed by non-material interests and states in South and South East Asia should come forward to share cultural differences with respect to regional problems like; cross border migration, trafficking and smugglings, marine piracy, terrorism and religious extremism.
- For this reason, the region, prone to transnational security threats should endorse some commonalities in resolving regional crisis. Because, if the Rohingya persecutions will not fixed the number of refugee will increase rapidly. There is less capacity of Bangladesh to shelter the millions of Rohingya refugee already we bear. Thus, increasing number of asylum seekers may intensify cross border relations as well regional tension.
- Since many of the states got independent from British colony, a few of them practice proper democratic values, that why there is less concern to human rights violation. On this account partners in this region need to accelerate collaborative arrangements to solve such refugee problem since all of the states are highly ethno based. Many of the states do obtain numerous ethnic, indigenous and minority communities. In this context, states have to come in one umbrella to ensure safety of ethnic minority groups either this can prolong regional ethnic crisis, for example Indian approach to push back Assam Bangladeshi people living in Assam to Bangladesh causing same false determination same as Myanmar.
- Finally, we can assert that collective identity promotion in the SAARC and ASEAN definitely bring a change in emphasizing regional interest more than identical interest.

After all for a sustainable solution, international agencies including the UN, different non-governmental organisations must take serious actions. Not only UN or international monetary aid is sufficient in the crisis but also the noted regional associations have to take responsibility as members of these organs have been directly affected by the crisis. There requires a mutual political determination and harmonization between SAARC and ASEAN for a comprehensive settlement that is in the mutual interest of both sub-regions of Asia.

While significant effort is required to improve SAARC’s effectiveness on the whole, ASEAN has, to a certain extent, begun to overcome non-interference to cooperate in certain humanitarian contexts. For example, in 2008, ASEAN worked to compel Myanmar into a more powerful humanitarian response to the impact of Cyclone Nargis⁴⁵. Individual member states will need to play a more significant role in facilitating this regional cooperation. Malaysia and Indonesia, having already expressed concern for the plight of the Rohingya and their desire for constructive engagement through ASEAN to solve the crisis, demonstrate a pathway for individual states to lead a more coordinated regional response⁴⁶.

Finally, all the Asian states and regional institutions should crucially learn from the ongoing crisis and develop legal and policy frameworks, at both regional and national levels, that define, regulate, and protect refugees and asylum seekers. With such national and regional frameworks states will be able to reduce uncertainty and enable quicker and more effectual responses to future crises. On this note, the tension between competing national interests and transnational policy issues must be addressed. Moreover, each and every nation of South and South East Asia must work on forced migration which used to be framed as a national security issue and instead needs to be recognized as a transnational and humanitarian issue requiring a transnational and humanitarian response.

The ongoing Rohingya crisis is not for international society. From the emergence as an independent nation, Myanmar has been systematically erasing the Rohingya minority clan. Time to time this violence had been alleviated through neighbours’ support. Bangladesh, India, Thailand, Malaysia sheltered many of the asylum seekers. But the latest persecution limits no bound causing thousands of death, uncounted injury, numerous rapes, and side by side destruction of ethnic property. From 2012, Bangladesh being the only state provide home to the world largest refugee millions in number. This crisis situation demands a long term solution for the benefits of every ethnically diversified states in South and South East Asia. Nonetheless, such transnational problems can have after effects like Domino theory. With a view to finding the root causes of Rohingya crisis, this paper takes Constructivism and concept of identity and interest to distinguish the non-material forces belonging the crisis. The theme of subjective identity can clarify the relationship between rise of extremism in religious nationalism and systematic violence of ethnic minority in Myanmar. On the other hand,

⁴³ ASEAN Plan of Action for Cooperation on Immigration Matters (2012]

⁴⁴ Mohammad N. (2012) Refugee Protection Under the Constitution of Bangladesh: A Brief Overview. Refugee Watch (39) pp. 120-35.

⁴⁵ Shivakoti, R. (2017) ASEAN’s Role in the Rohingya Refugee Crisis. Forced Migration Review, 56, pp.129-48.

⁴⁶ Yesmin S. (2016) Policy Towards Rohingya Refugees: A Comparative Analysis of Bangladesh, Malaysia and Thailand. Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (61)1 pp.71-100.

the theme of collective identity describes the possible solution of the emergency calling for greater regional cooperation through SAARC and ASEAN. States in this region remarkably need to build trust and solidarity to meet the transnational crisis either in near future this can become an unavoidable circumstances in the veracity of ethnologically segregated Asia.

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