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Abstract

Professional economists rarely write on questions of genocide. This surprises because a workhorse tool of the economics discipline concerns the analysis of behavior that takes place under constraints. All parties in genocide—perpetrators, victims, and third parties—face cost and resource constraints subject to which they seek to achieve their objectives, be it killing, surviving, or intervening. This essay characterizes and illustrates economic thinking about objectives, costs, and resources for each of the three groups. There is potentially much that economics can contribute to genocide studies and, vice versa, much that genocide scholars may learn from welcoming an economic perspective.

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Choices and consequences

Role Play: What if I were a Genocidal Dictator?

Mario Ferrero (2013, p. 333) poses an intriguing question: “Are rulers who kill more people more evil than those who kill fewer, or is their choice driven by ... costs?” Is genocidal mass murder a ruler’s explicit goal or is it that the cost of committing genocide is lower than the cost of alternative ways of removing people? Think about it: If you were a dictatorial ruler, a “strongman,” with an actual or perceived mandate—however come by—to remove members of an out-group from territory held or claimed by your own in-group, how would you go about it? If you were the acknowledged leader of the in-group, what would be the most efficacious way to remove the out-group? Posed this way, genocidal killing is not the obvious answer because the business of killing imposes a cost not just on victims but on perpetrators as well—and in this may lie opportunities for genocide prevention, at least in some cases. Genocide of the Nazi, Khmer Rouge, Rwandan, or of any other variety did not and does not “just happen.” Instead, it is shaped by the in-group’s cost of committing to one removal choice over another. Importantly, genocide is also the outcome of constraints that shape the out-group’s cost of evading removal. Indeed, victimhood may be defined by the effectiveness of binding constraints placed on victims by perpetrators or, conversely, by victims’ inability to remove the shackles that bind them. Furthermore, genocide is also the outcome of a set of choices made by third parties. While third parties are neither direct perpetrators nor direct victims, their choices nevertheless may block, deter, or accommodate genocide. Third parties for example can close their borders and remove victims’ exit options or they can open their borders at the potentially huge cost of hosting large numbers of refugees. As Ferrero observes, “[o]nce the problem is framed in this way, economics suggests itself as the natural tool of analysis,” (p. 333) because economics is—at least in the traditional textbook rendering—a social science that studies private and collective choices made under constraints and the political, economic, and cultural consequences these constrained choices entail.

Comparative Genocide Studies

Once one begins to think about genocide as a practical affair carried out in time and space, differences in the mechanics of genocide—differences in the choices made—quickly become evident. A plausible first cut at explaining these differences from an economic point of view is that different sets of constraints shape the different choices made which, in turn, generate different kinds of observed outcomes. Some of these outcomes formally rise to the level of genocide as defined under the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Other outcomes remain “mere” mass killings or other mass atrocities. For the purpose of this essay, we are not interested in whether genocide criteria under international or domestic law are or are not met; instead, we are interested in what factors may determine the choices made and especially in how constraints may shape choices.

Genocide is the outcome of a series of individual conducts or behaviors. Behavior itself is the selection—the choosing—of one option from among a set of options. The pursuit of any one option is constrained by two forces: One reflects an underlying structure of monetary and nonmonetary prices (costs) that alternative courses of actions require an actor to pay; the other reflects an underlying structure of monetary and nonmonetary resources available to an actor with which to do the paying, such as income, credit, grants, loot, connections, or goodwill. Both the costs to be paid and the resources available impose constraints on an actor. When costs are low and resources plentiful, the set of feasible options is larger than when costs are high and resources meager. Costs and resources impose an objective reality on one’s subjective preferences or wishes, goals, or objectives.

Constrained Optimal Choice

As an initial working hypothesis, then, economists posit that any actor in question—perpetrator, victim, or third party—optimizes subject to the constraints. This means to choose from among feasible alternatives the one option that, given the cost-resource structure of constraints, minimizes the actor’s expected net cost of achieving a stated objective. To be sure, all of the options may be wholly unpalatable—continue to suffer a tooth ache, or go to the dentist—but in

the end a choice will be made. The choice made is circumscribed by the constraints, and it then entails consequences that, when made over many individuals, accumulate into a collective outcome. When the constraints are so binding as to leave one no choice, then the remaining option is “chosen” by default, however reluctant the actor or lamentable the action.

Economists refer to this optimization process—the expectation that, given their resources, people attempt to minimize the cost of achieving their objective—as rational. This means that if one feels that suffering the toothache is somehow “better” than going to the dentist, then one is not expected to go to the dentist. Not going to the dentist is the reasonable thing to do, at least for the time being. As indicated, this choice very much may have a coercive feel to it if, for instance, the nearest dental office is 500 miles away or if the office charge is \$10,000. The choice may be ordained by forces—constraints—over which one has no further control. The constraints may be so stringent as to lead to a singularity, the genocidal equivalent of an astronomer’s Black Hole, a default “choice” of destruction from which no escape is possible.

Contrary to what is sometimes written or said, there is thus nothing dire about economists’ rational choice model approach. In fact, the approach is remarkably unremarkable and might as well be called the constrained optimal choice model. Specifically, “rational genocide” does not mean that genocide is morally defended or defensible; it just means that perpetrators, victims, and third parties each have available to them larger or smaller sets of options, that each of these is constrained by an underlying structure of monetary and nonmonetary costs and resources, and that the selection of any one from among the available options, even if by default, is expected to best fulfill the chooser’s objective, however abhorrent the objective and however it is come by.¹

In this essay, we explore constrained optimal choice from three perspectives—those of perpetrators, victims, and third parties—and, given space constraints, do so in a necessarily simplified way. For perpetrators and for victims, we take the respective objective as given: For perpetrators, it is to remove the victims; for victims, it is to survive the removal. For third parties, it is not so clear just what their objectives may or may not be. Our own objective is to help scope out a potential field of study—the economics of genocide and its prevention—for little has been thought about or written on it.

Perpetrators

To understand the choices perpetrators make, one needs to characterize (1) their preferences or objectives, (2) the prices they face, as these determine the cost of actions, and (3) the resources available to fund the actions taken in pursuit of the objective. To simplify, we conceive of “the” perpetrator as if he or she were a unitary actor. Realistically, one would want to differentiate at least between architects of genocide who conceive of the horror, strategize about it, and issue orders for genocide to be carried out, and the rank-and-file members of an in-group who provide support services and who commit the actual killing.

Preferences (objectives)

If the desired ends, in most genocides, are to overcome a perceived threat to political or territorial control, purify a territory along racial lines, “finally solve” the problem of a persistent rival, grab territory and other assets, or scapegoat a group to solidify the power of the architects, then at least two issues arise instantly. First, we deal here with a *series* of objectives none of which, second, *requires* genocide as a means to accomplish any of the (possibly confused) ends. Certainly, in time, genocide can itself become the objective to be pursued but this need not be the case at the onset of an inter-group conflict, and so it is important to study precursors and possibly self-reinforcing path dependencies in order to prevent escalation to genocide.

Along with thinking about the objective(s) in regard to a group of people, the question arises of whom to identify as members of the in-group and out-group in the first place, and at what cost and with what size of a resource pool to do so. Who is a member of the out-group over which a perpetrator can form preferences? For Nazi Germany, it is frequently thought, identification was to do with designating people of full or partial “Jewish” heritage and necessarily implied a choice of just how partially “Jewish” a person would have had to be. But this is too simple. The list of victims was much larger, and included Poles, Slavs, “gypsies,” mentally and physically disabled persons, people of unwelcome sexual orientation or of undesired religious, political, or artistic views, and stemmed from an underlying ideology that, itself, was in a continual process

of formation. In South Africa, under apartheid, a similar issue arose with just how “colored” a person had to be in order to be placed in one group of people or another. (Newspapers carried periodic notices that announced reclassification of persons from one group to another.) In Cambodia, “the educated classes” were the target. In the former Yugoslavia, the present Syria, and in many locations in Africa today, identification and stigmatization are crucial.

The wider the net is cast, the larger becomes the ratio of the out-group to the in-group, with the consequence that the in-group becomes more highly “leveraged.” Identification and preference formation over an out-group are not automatic, in part because to identify and to assign people to an out-group entails a cost. All else the same, the larger this cost, the more risky leverage becomes as it may overwhelm the capacity of the in-group. Thus, preference formation itself may well be entangled with, and path-dependent on, perpetrator costs and resources. Preferences do not just exist; they come into being. To keep the leverage ratio high, and the preferences “pure,” one may expect that perpetrators invent ways and means to facilitate the identification of members of the out-group. It plays into perpetrators’ hands if victims are biologically or culturally self-identified, e.g., by physical attributes such as the color of their skin or by social attributes such as an overtly followed religion and style of dress.

Prices (costs)

To do harm to an out-group entails a cost. At a minimum, members of the in-group forgo productive activity in agriculture, industry, or the professions. On occasion, costless random elements may come into unexpected play such as the transmission of diseases against which targeted out-groups have no natural resistance. But as a rule, time, energy, goodwill, physical, and financial resources need to be withdrawn from one use to be employed in the pursuit of another. This is costly and can adversely affect an in-group itself, even to the extent of generating non-compliance within the in-group. To keep the cost of in-group resistance low, perpetrator-architects must control the in-group as much as they must control the out-group. This can lead to police-state kinds of political structures whose cost rises until out-group extermination is accomplished or the in-group regime collapses from within. In contrast, one

imagines that societies that deliberately and steadfastly encourage a measure of discussion, debate, and dissent—open societies—are less at risk into spiraling into committing genocidal mass murder as the leverage ratio would likely be small.

Putting aside the rising moral cost, and the cost of dealing with the moral cost, there are other, more “practical” costs to consider. To (re)move victims requires transport, for instance. It requires a minimum of facilities, holding areas, and transshipment areas, along with a minimum of food, drink, shelter, and hygiene. The brutal inhumanity of genocide stems, in part, from perpetrators’ recognition that these costs can impose a binding constraint on accomplishing their objective. Removal of victims thus becomes an acute “productivity” problem. Turning victims on themselves can “help.” Hence, the frequently observed use of victims in the destruction of other victims.² Rounding up victims is costly, too. It is costlier the more wide-open and unconfined is the geographical space into which victims might escape, the less distinguishing are their physical attributes, language, or cultural symbols, the less compliant the in-group, the more inadequate the infrastructure (e.g., radio stations to incite hate), and the more overseas goodwill a perpetrator has to lose, and so on.

All these observations contain pointers. To help devise strategies of how to adversely affect the cost structure of perpetrators, the construction of a comprehensive, systematized, and prioritized list of costs incurred could be helpful. Critically important in this regard is that one not overlook the relative ease with which perpetrators may substitute one means of victim removal with another. Thus, if mass murder by chemical weaponry is made more expensive by the credible threat of intervention, the slaughter need not stop. If no-fly zones are imposed, the slaughter may continue on the ground. If railway lines are bombed, victims can be convoyed in other ways. If genocide architects are credibly threatened with international human rights law only *after* the slaughter has begun, there is little reason for them to stop. Changes in contemporaneous or intertemporal cost differentials induce substitution. Here is a telling quote about substitution from an article authored by Barry Posen: “Insofar as the Serbs were fighting a tough counterinsurgency campaign [against the Kosovo Liberation Army] under the unprecedented condition of direct support of the insurgents by a greatly superior air force

[NATO], they may have decided that only the most extreme brutal measures would permit success. Thus the normal brutality of counterinsurgency campaigns that usually stretch out over many years was concentrated in time, and intensified in breadth and depth.”³

Resources

Perpetrators of genocide need monetary and nonmonetary resources. The larger the resource pool, the “better,” and vice versa. Resources consist not merely of cash-on-hand and a steady stream of tax revenues. Tax rates on current income and on savings or other assets can be increased on the general population or specifically on the targeted out-group. Other monetary resources include debt rescheduling, debt forgiveness, or outright debt repudiation, all of which increase cash flow that can be directed toward genocidal purposes. Monetary resources also include the creation of new voluntary or coerced lines of credit, voluntary or coerced grants, theft and looting (for instance of real estate holdings or works of art), the issuance of counterfeit currency, or the unscrupulous sale of natural resources harvested in an unsustainable manner and sold via black markets.

Just as important as money, however, are nonmonetary resources, especially the loyalty, probity, and rectitude of members of the in-group, sympathetic outsiders, and apathetic bystanders. To “circle the wagons” around the in-group so as to increase self-awareness of a manufactured and trumped-up identity is a common tactic, especially so since Napoleonic-style nation-state building commenced some 200 years ago. Nationality is deeply enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights: Article 15 states that “(1) Everyone has the right to a nationality [and] (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.” Nationality is the default position. That everybody has to belong makes for a ready pool of recruits to the cause of nationhood. Self-identification with the in-group is fostered from kindergarten onward and continually reinforced, especially via broadcast and print media. Control of mass media, and of information more generally, is both a cost but also, if successfully applied, an immensely valuable resource for perpetrators. That identification is also a psychologically and socially legitimate expression of belonging to a culture is not

disputed. Our point is that the more members of the in-group can be induced to self-identify with ever more extreme versions of belonging, the fewer resources genocidal architects will have to spend in this regard.⁴ They thus free up those resources to be put to other purposes. The issue can be turned around. Nationality, ethnicity, or other forms of group-identity, can become a helpful rallying point around which to mobilize resistance against genocide or mass killing. Perpetrators will want to deflect or destroy such resource-building identity in others, just as they will want to strengthen their own.

Victims

We mean to be careful not to blame victims of genocide for the horror they suffer. The key insight is not that victims choose their misery; instead, the key insight is that victims' choices are *constrained* choices. If, in the end, there is "no way out," then the remaining "choice" is the default option, the singularity of victimhood.

Preferences (objectives)

The study of victimhood entails three questions: What do perpetrators do to constrain victims' choice sets? What factors characterize victims' inability to resist constraints put upon them? And what is the role of third parties in expanding or limiting victims' choice sets? Nonetheless, before considering victims' price and resource constraints, it is important to reflect on their preferences and to appreciate just how *conditioned* they can be.

One preference, presumably, is simply not to be caught in the dragnet of group identification in the first place. However, having been identified—and labeled—victims' preferences revolve around daily living, acquiring basic necessities, plotting escape, avoiding capture, or, if captured, avoiding removal, deprivation, torture, or death. What superficially may appear to be a preference change is the result of one's most preferred option having been made infeasible by perpetrators' imposition of ever more binding constraints. The objective then becomes how to carry on *with* the label. Living with a label, however, can lead to desperation and destitution and, among some victims, perhaps also to ever more clouded reasoning and judgment in assessing the

best remaining (or optimal) option. This suggests that preference formation and preference switches may not be independent of cost and resource constraints, and that it may be the very objective of perpetrators to place victims into a condition where their only remaining “preference” is to submit, obey, and perish, having given up on life because living is too hard.⁵

A heart-wrenching, yet in its way inspiring change of preference comes from the many cases where persons deliberately sacrifice their desire for life to save the lives of others. Price and resource constraints that once may have been binding in the pursuit of self-preservation are binding no more. One’s choice (behavior) changes. One sacrifices one’s own life so that others, one hopes, may live. At times, the outcome of such preference changes truly are world-changing. For example, after setting himself on fire on 17 December 2010 over an oppressive bureaucrat’s order regarding the location of his fruit stand, Mohamed Bouazizi died of his wounds on 4 January 2011 and became the catalyst for the events since known as the Arab spring.

Prices (costs)

Victims are constrained by costs. We mentioned at the outset that victimhood may be defined by the degree of effectiveness with which perpetrators place binding constraints on victims. Thus, exit may be made costly. For instance, booking passage may be made prohibitive. To obtain an exit visa may involve forfeiting all one’s assets and savings. Herding victims far inland not only increases the travel and time cost of exit, but raises the cost of being discovered *en route* if exit is attempted clandestinely. Beyond this, the cost of earning a living may be made unduly difficult, for instance with requirements regarding where to set up shop, inspection and license regimes imposed by in-group bureaucrats, restrictions placed on which customers may be courted, which suppliers solicited, and which workers employed. Restrictions may be placed on housing, on schooling, on transportation, on freedom of movement, on congregation for any cultural purpose, and, especially, on communication, particularly with cultural compatriots or third parties beyond the oppressive in-group’s realm. Further, restrictions may be placed on, or requirements made, in regard to dress, appearance, and symbols. Food rations may be restricted and medical aid and comfort may be denied. If costs such as these are too severe to bear, the cost constraints become

binding.

Conversely, consider how quickly the entire Soviet empire fell once unrestricted passage was granted to East Germans via an opened Hungarian border to Austria. When Mikhail Gorbachev then signaled that Soviets troops stationed in East Germany would not stand in the way of mass migration (a Soviet preference change), the Berlin Wall fell, and for millions of people the cost of movement dropped to near zero, hardly more than a tram ticket and some shoe-leather cost. Selectively reading genocide literature through the lens of the logistics of (attempted) exit and the attending cost helps to bring home the meaning of *constrained* choice. When and where transport infrastructure is inherently limited, strictly controlled, or purposely disabled, constrained logistics helps to explain the corresponding, desperate countermoves by victims to lower any attending costs and highlights the difficulty that third parties may experience in offering exit options.

We already pointed to the importance of the concept of *substitution*: If perpetrators' costs of one action against victims becomes too costly, they attempt to substitute toward another action that can also help achieve their objective. And so it is with victims: Perpetrators aim, it might be said, to remove all substitution options, and the victims themselves and any concerned third parties must therefore aim to make as many substitution options available as is feasible. Genocide may be viewed, in part, as a struggle over either the imposition or deflection of costs. Possibly, this can lead to strategic behavior. For example, when perpetrators do aim at mass killing and genocide, they can induce panicked mass migration such that third parties are overwhelmed and attempt to purposely close borders, thereby helping the perpetrator to "bottle up" victims and driving up their cost of escape.

Resources

Victims do have resources. Of these they must be deprived, if one takes the perpetrators' view. A startling nonmonetary resource are families. A targeted out-group's generational survival inheres in its families. It is for this reason that family structures appear especially targeted. Elisa von Joeden-Forgey argues that if genocide is a crime "against the generative power of the group and

the institutions that support it,” then organizers of genocide target out-group members “in accordance with the roles that they are perceived to play in the group’s biological and social reproduction.”⁶ One distinction between genocide and mass killing is that genocide often aims at the out-group’s ultimate resource: its reproductive ability.

Punitive taxes, limited education or employment opportunities, underpaid jobs, coerced labor, forced dissaving, asset surrender, and outright confiscation, theft, and looting are other tools in the perpetrator’s arsenal. In addition, especially in societies based on agriculture, grazing, or hunting, restrictions on or removal from land limits the out-groups’ resource base to sustain its livelihood. The poisoning of wells, salting of vegetation, and burning of homesteads are means of subjugating, reducing, or eliminating members of the out-group. However, victims with international connections, those with foreign-language skills, those already settled overseas and with a degree of lobbying influence over the governments of their adopted countries, those with special ingenuity and easily portable skills, those with charm and verve, those with well-placed in-group family members, friends, or colleagues, those still young, agile, and swift, those who perchance live near stretches of relatively open borders, all possess resources which widen their options by enabling their choices. Undermining actual and potential external connections by limiting or monitoring communication and transportation, by requiring residence registration, passport confiscation, and the issuing of special identity cards, correspondingly restrict the sets of feasible choices over which victims could optimize.

But even if one has the resources to escape, resources by themselves are not enough to determine the choice made. They must be weighed against both the cost and the objective. Even in the face of plentiful resources, the cost of leaving friends and family behind, of consigning them to fate, and possibly to death, has kept many eventual victims from leaving when they had the chance. The sparse language of economics—preferences, prices, resources—takes in all possible combinations to help one understand the production of terror, or of triumph against the odds.

Third parties

Preferences (objectives)

Since the 1990s, a theoretical and empirical literature in economics and quantitative political science has begun to emerge, which explicitly considers the nature and role of third parties in actual or threatened violent conflict. Third parties can act, or fail to act, unilaterally or multilaterally and with respect to either or both sides of a conflict. Third parties bring their own distinct interests (preferences) to bear. This was, of course, always clear but the modern interest in third party conflict intervention lies in understanding the nature and role of the United Nations in its peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peace-enforcement functions (see, especially, the Preamble and Chapters VI and VII of the UN Charter). UN peacekeeping of any description is an intervention in the affairs of its sovereign nation-state members and, under UN rules, subject to prior approval by the UN Security Council, especially its permanent members. In practice, therefore, UN peacekeeping reflects the diverse private interests of its members. But even when UN missions are approved, yet other private interests determine who will supply bullets, bodies, and bucks (i.e., equipment, troops, and money). The collective UN preference that eventually emerges is a complex amalgam of very many private, member-state interests and perhaps explains why since the end of the cold war period more intervention missions appear to have been “parceled out” to regional groupings such as NATO and ECOWAS within which member interests might be somewhat more aligned.

In addition, Alan Kuperman has articulated the potential for “moral hazard,” that an emerging norm of perceived promise or prospect of third party intervention by outsiders (the notion of the Responsibility to Protect) “encourages the excessively risky or fraudulent behavior of rebellion by members of groups that are vulnerable to genocidal retaliation, but [the emerging norm] cannot fully protect against the backlash. The emerging norm thereby causes some genocidal violence that otherwise would not occur.” Thus, preferences may not only be conditioned on costs and resources, they may be conditioned across perpetrators, victims, and third parties as well, giving rise to strategic behavior.⁷

Prices (costs)

If neighbors unconditionally opened all border gates to accept all deportees or refugees, could genocide ever occur? Yes, it could, if a perpetrator deliberately closed its side of a border. But if the perpetrator's preference is for removal rather than extermination, borders would not necessarily be closed. Presumably, it would be cheaper to just let the out-group go. However, a recipient state may be unwilling to open its border if it fears facing potentially huge costs in welcoming victims. Jordan, for instance, with a population of about 6.3 million people (in 2011), hosts about 2 million Palestinian refugees, 1 million Iraqi refugees, and 600,000 Syrian refugees.⁸ Inasmuch as a neighboring state has sufficiently strong border-protection forces (and the budgetary resources), it may thus choose to close off the relevant borders and trap potential genocide victims in the perpetrator state. But where population density is low, borders are long, and terrain is vast, difficult to patrol, or ill-controlled, the cost of sealing borders is high. Thus, whatever the preferences of the potential recipient state, it will likely receive refugees. For example, during the Rwandan genocide in 1994, it was widely reported that about 2 million people fled westward toward the DR Congo. Less well-known is that about another 1 million people fled eastward into Tanzania.

Geographically distant interveners incur considerable costs of troop mobilization and logistics, one reason why probably only the United States could effectively invade Saddam Hussein's Iraq and, in time, depose him. Apart from monetary costs, there are internal political or audience costs in that any intervention may have to be justified to one's own voters. For instance, whereas the U.S. did intervene in Iraq, France and Germany stood apart. Transportation, communication, and information costs can play a huge role in addressing genocide. Although we are not aware of any evidence-based, statistical study on distance and intervention, as a rule of thumb it would appear that where news travels slowly or over long distances, the cost is necessarily high, and a particular crisis may have run its course by the time potential interveners, even if willing and able, hear about it. Modern, electronic communications have brought down this cost, even to the extent that commercial news media and not-for-profit humanitarian organizations can acquire satellite images and broadcast news of impending or developing atrocities. For instance, although one cannot tell just what effect the media may have

had, the violence perpetrated against Rohingya people in Rakhine state in Myanmar/Burma in 2012 could conceivably have been worse than it already was, were it not for the mobilization of global opinion that media attention may have brought to the long-standing violence.

If any third party faces potentially high costs, it may look for cost-sharing. This introduces an element of delay and coordination costs, as the joint willingness and ability of various third parties need to be coordinated. This is a particular bane of the United Nations of course: Intervention almost always seem to be too little, too late. Effective measures to lower this cost may lie in multilateral agreements aimed at creating a permanent UN intervention force, pre-funded, with pre-positioned equipment, and a mandate of automaticity, that is, automatic intervention when predetermined trigger point (or set of trigger-points are breached).⁹ A problem with coordination lies in free-riding: Intervener A waits for intervener B to go ahead and bear the cost. Hence, the oft-experienced complexity with and delay in multilateral action. A potential solution here is to create as many partially private benefits as possible, prior to a crisis, so that as many parties as possible have a privately-motivated, but consequent joint public interest in sharing the cost of an intervention.

Resources

As is true for perpetrators and victims, the resources of potential interveners are limited. The most prominent case again is that of UN peacekeeping. As there is no permanent peacekeeping budget, each mission is separately staffed and funded, an ominous signal to potential perpetrators and victims alike. But third parties do have other resources that can be brought to bear. The internet, smart phones, and social media have raised global audience costs to local dictators. No longer is it possible to hide in the shadow of news dispatches that, in years past, could take weeks and months to cross the oceans. Third parties, especially nonstate parties, can mobilize and generate severe audience costs for perpetrators. But audiences—and the media needed to generate them—are a fickle resource, one that can wax and wane with astonishing speed. Building trade and investment links may prove more durable in this regard, as well-connected people within potential perpetrator states may stand to lose important private benefits, e.g.,

tourism receipts. This may be considered a type of resource for would-be interveners, as the loss of in-group member's private gain may induce them to lobby for the reduction of violent behavior against the out-group. However, the benefits of trade and investment need to be well-spread among the elite (call this an "inclusive elite") as it may be of little use to create a highly restrictive elite that is able to squirrel proceeds into safe heavens overseas while committing heinous crimes at home, or simply standing by when they are committed. Perhaps much can be learned from the literature on "smart sanctions" that emerged in the aftermath of the 1991 Persian Gulf war. Initially, sanctions aimed at Saddam Hussein adversely affected the poorer population and left the elite largely untouched. Smart sanctions examined more closely how to design, target, and implement sanctions that would help protect vulnerable people while pressuring decisionmakers to change course. Smart sanctions are, in part, about leveraging third party resources to impose costs unacceptable to perpetrators.

Public sector resources are built on private sector foundations that, beyond some threshold, tend to strengthen and reinforce the workings of the private sector. Thus, infrastructure related to public transportation, public education, public health, public safety and emergency services, and the like, ultimately are built from tax contributions spent so as to enhance private sector productivity. Importantly, this includes fundamentals such as a clear, swift, and reliable civil and commercial system of law, stable money and a well-supervised financial system, land registries, zoning, management, and environmental services, and so on. Even culture, such as aspects related to the building of a pluralistic and tolerant outlook on life, is a resource that third parties can (fail to) bring to bear when dealing with questions of impending genocide. To help build these private and public sector economic, political, and cultural resources in locations potentially vulnerable to genocide should be viewed as part of an overarching, long-term genocide prevention strategy.

Conclusion

Just three words—preferences, prices, and resources—can go a long way to help focus and systematize one's thinking about and understanding of genocide. Economists generally take

preferences as given, but behavioral economists (and other specialists) have begun to unravel preference formation, and there may exist important interaction effects and path-dependencies connecting preference formation to cost and resource constraints. But even on their own, these constraints help shape behavior that can impede or facilitate genocide. Thus, genocide is not fate: Instead, it is an *option*, a chosen behavior, facilitated or impeded by the constraints within which it is to be carried out. The possibility or actuality of genocide very much comes down to a struggle over making cost and resource constraints binding. Inasmuch as economics is a social science that studies the optimization of constrained choices, there is potentially much that it can contribute to genocide studies.

Notes

For further reading

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1. In addition, it has long since been recognized that humans' ability to think rationally through multiple constellations of preferences, costs, and resources is limited. This is not only because of finite intellectual resources per se (bounded rationality) but also because of psychological limitations in making choices under duress or because of choice-framing effects or inherent biases to which humans are subject (behavioral economics).
 2. To raise perpetrator cost, one should consider to assist groups of victims to band together (although not necessarily physically as this could assist targeting them), even if, post-crisis, they disband again into their original groupings.
 3. Posen (2000).
 4. The empirical literature by and large confirms that ethnic factionalization appears more consequence than cause of genocide or, at least, of civil war and the mass atrocities that go along with it.
 5. Several historical examples of this are given in the case studies in Totten and Parsons (2013).
 6. Von Joeden-Forgey (2010, p. 78).
 7. Actual or potential intervention is not limited to nation-states. Very many non-state actors exist such as diaspora communities (e.g., Tamils in Canada; IRA sympathizers in the northeastern U.S.; Jews around the globe; Kurds in Germany, and so on). In addition, many thousands of not-for-profit, humanitarian relief organizations such as Médecins Sans Frontières, Oxfam, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and Catholic Relief Services operate, and whose work includes a conflict prevention, in-conflict intervention, and/or postconflict assistance component. Furthermore, non-state party conflict transformation, negotiation, and resolution specialists have also sprung up, often referred to as "Track Two" or "Second Track" diplomacy.
 8. Most of the Palestinian refugees have been granted Jordanian citizenship. Still, the ratio of the noncitizen-to-citizen population in Jordan is very high.
 9. Any trigger-point agreement, even if initially set high, is probably better than not having any trigger-point at all. A counter-argument, that genocidal murder then might be "free of charge" up to the trigger-point, does not convince since it is "free of charge" without any trigger point also. Another counter-argument, that an offender could kill up to the trigger-point, wait, and then kill again up to the trigger-point, is valid and would need to be addressed in negotiating a practical

definition of trigger-point (or points) and automaticity. One would not want to institutionalize counter-productive incentives. For example, one could think of combining an “automatic” with a “probabilistic” scheme, i.e., automatic beyond a certain level of misconduct, and probabilistic before then.