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Introduction to the Special Issue

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Introduction to the Special Issue

This issue of Genocide Studies and Prevention is the beginning of an important discussion on the role of humanitarian technologies in genocide prevention. As technology continues to develop and change the world around us, it is only fitting that we find new and creative ways of making technological advances work in the interests of humanitarian action. The articles in this issue contribute to this effort, opening up new directions in the field of genocide studies and prevention that will hopefully spur new forms of scholarship, advocacy, and humanitarian work.

The field of genocide prevention is a well established subfield in the discipline. One could say it extends back to 1948 with the work of Raphael Lemkin. Or, as professors Gary J. Bass (*Freedom's Battle*) and Davide Rodogno (*Against Massacre*) have shown in their recent books, genocide prevention is perhaps as old as the tradition of humanitarian intervention. Regardless, the study of genocide prevention was first systematized in the 1990s. This scholarship focused on risk analysis models, early warning signs, and strategies for coordinating early intervention at the state and civil society levels—nationally and internationally, locally and globally.

Genocide prevention as a distinct field of study gained global recognition in 2004 when Juan Méndez was named as the first United Nations Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide. The Office of the Special Advisor was created following the genocides in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and Rwanda in 1994. These were genocides that the UN organizations and the world community failed to prevent or respond to, even though the cases were easily preventable. Independent scholars and UN investigations determined there were two causes for this failure. These included information and communications weaknesses within the UN. But, more important was the UN member states' clear lack of political will. The Special Adviser's office was tasked with collecting information on serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that might lead to genocide, and providing recommendations for dealing with each case. Genocide prevention was now institutionalized in global politics, with clear channels of conveying information and recommendations to the Security Council. But, when comes to shifting political will towards actually preventing genocide, much work still needs to be done.

States, and the leaders of states, often deny that genocides or humanitarian crimes occur in their own regions or, for that matter, in the regions of their neighbors and geopolitical "friends." What is more, even when the facts of genocide and mass atrocities are clearly established, states, governments, and leaders who have the authority and capability to act often deny the facts, or downplay the significance of the evidence. While the technologies discussed in this issue will probably have little effect on the political sensitivities surrounding genocide prevention, they do promise to help smooth out some of the complexities of this work. Recent developments in crisis mapping, crowd-sourcing, and citizen-based monitoring have introduced real-time data into early-warning and early-response systems. High-quality satellite imagery and remote-sensing technologies are increasingly available to civil-society actors. Through these technologies, scholars and human rights organizations can analyze and monitor the development of armed conflicts anywhere in the world, at unprecedented levels of accuracy and timeliness. This makes it difficult for states and governments to deny that genocide is being committed, and it can help move political will by making the humanitarian costs of denial very clear to the entire world.

Indeed, technology will not prevent genocide, but it can help fill important gaps in our global efforts to do so. Preventing genocide begins with ensuring that all individuals enjoy equal rights, dignity, and belonging as citizens regardless of their group belonging or identity. Genocide is more than mass killings. A complex social process, genocide includes the manufacturing of imagined, social differences. Yet, it is not simply differences in identity that generate genocidal conflict and violence. Rather, as the Special Advisor Adama Dieng has often pointed out, it is the implication of these differences in terms of power, wealth, resources, economic opportunities, citizenship and basic rights. For the Special Advisor's office, the early prevention of genocide is therefore a question promoting good governance and an equal respect for human rights and diversity. In terms of the office's mandate, this means working to oppose discrimination, hate speech, the incitement of violence, and other violations of human rights. But it also means working to eliminate political and economic inequalities, and promoting a common sense of belonging, both in states and national communities, but also in the world.

Humanitarian technologies fit into this larger project by helping to raise public awareness of ongoing conflicts to pressure governments and international organizations to act responsibly. They can also contribute to deepening the genocide risk analysis frameworks—used by scholars, advocacy groups, and the Special

Advisor's office—by helping to monitor for increases in discrimination or human rights violations committed against groups, revealing the deployment of state security forces around vulnerable populations, or even detecting and monitoring genocidal acts themselves.

There is a final aspect of humanitarian technologies that is relevant to genocide prevention: criminal prosecutions. The International Criminal Court is empowered to investigate and prosecute alleged perpetrators for genocide, among other crimes, if a state is unwilling or unable to exercise jurisdiction. In such prosecutions, remote sensing technologies can be vital for identifying conflict sites, or even mass graves, after genocide has occurred. As several of the articles in this issue point to, technological advances are also crucial for improving our ability to collect and preserve courtroom evidence—including evidence of mass rapes. This is not simply a matter of documenting evidence digitally, but analyzing and preserving forensic evidence, and improving the chains of custody of this evidence. Combined, these efforts contribute to the larger goal of building a culture of prevention and fighting impunity.

The four research articles in this issue are written by scholars working at the cutting-edge of humanitarian technologies. Tommy O'Connell and Stephen Young use high resolution and medium resolution satellite imagery from the Gereida region of Darfur, Sudan to help identify useful tools for supporting eye witness testimony and reports on human rights violations. In the second article, Nathaniel A. Raymond, Brittany L. Card, and Isaac L. Baker discuss the development of Mass Atrocity Remote Sensing, or MARS. Looking specifically at the Abyei region of Sudan, on the boarder of South Sudan, Raymond, Card, and Baker highlight the potential methods for standard forensic approaches for analysing high-resolution satellite imagery to identify evidence of alleged mass atrocities. In the third article that compliments O'Connell and Young, Card and Baker outline an innovative methodology for integrating witness testimony and satellite imagery analysis to document mass atrocities. In the fourth article, Jaimie Morse considers three principal forms of medical evidence to document sexual violence and their use in these settings: the patient medical record, the medical certificate, and the sexual assault medical forensic exam (commonly known as the "rape kit"). Combining archival research with interviews of activists, healthcare practitioners, lawyers, investigators, and other experts, the author traces the collection and use of medical evidence to document mass rape since the establishment of the ICTR and ICTY, and argues that medical evidence collection techniques represent an emerging humanitarian technology that may influence what comes to count as sexual violence, which crimes are deemed justiciable, and how sexual violence comes to be remembered.

The issue concludes with two review essays. Christopher Tuckwood, the executive director of The Sentinel Project, reviews the state of the field, outlining the ways technologies are being used by non-state actors to gather, analyze, and communicate information for the sake of predicting, preventing, and mitigating atrocities. For those readers who are new to the use of humanitarian technologies, Tuckwood's essay provides a fine introduction to the other articles. In the final review essay, Colette Mazzucelli provides a critical evaluation of the state of the field, charting the development of humanitarian technologies amidst concerns for privacy, the rights of victims and the accused, and new ethical considerations raised in the era of "big data."

Finally, issue 8.3 marks the beginning of a new feature of *GSP*: film reviews. Much like academic book reviews, film reviews will present scholarly reviews of films that are of interest to readers of the journal. In the inaugural essay, Film Review Editor Lior Zylberman reviews Rithy Pahn's documentary, *The Missing Picture*. The film reviews will be a forum to assess the aesthetic, entertainment, social, cultural, and academic merit and significance of current and classic films that are of interest to *GSP*'s readership. While scholarly in form, the reviews need not be written only by film and media scholars and we encourage submissions from across the disciplines. With this issue, the journal also launches a reformatted book review section under the direction of Tetsushi Ogata. Moving forward, *GSP* welcomes reviews of books written in any language in the world, encouraging submissions that will help bridge linguistic divides between scholars of genocide around the world. This includes reviews of English books written in other languages, as well as non-English books reviewed in English. As a goal, in addition to reviewing books from around the world, each issue of *GSP* will present reviews of major, recent books in genocide studies as well as reviews of books that push beyond the immediate boundaries of genocide studies to consider issues that are of immediate concern to our readers.

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