

Letter from Tayfun Sönmez (shared with his permission)
Professor of Economics, Boston College
February 22, 2021

Dear Yeon-Koo, Michael, Scott and Shengwu,

Yeon-Koo Che has alerted me about the paper “Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War” in the International Review of Law and Economics, and let me know about the letter you have participated in drafting on this excessively offensive paper. Last week I have also seen a facebook post by Michael Chwe on this paper, but did not have time to read the content of the post, and subsequently forgot about it.

First of all, you have my gratitude for taking this initiative as a game theorist, as an economist, and as an individual. The offensive paper and your letter affected me on multiple levels, and I want to share them briefly with you.

As an ethnic Turk, I have been raised in an environment where the dominant culture and the government position has always denied the crimes of the Turkish Government (or its predecessor the Ottoman Empire) against humanity, most notably but not limited to the Armenian Genocide. It is not easy to confront this situation in Turkey, although I have been doing my best to educate my friends in Turkey and family on this issue to the best of my ability. One thing that really bothers me at a very deep level is, denying people any closure.

So when I learn about this manuscript attempting to vindicate a very clear crime against humanity, it hurts me on multiple levels. Thank you for your effort and initiative in the name of simple decency...

I also want to thank you as an economist and a game theorist. It is this kind of tasteless, irresponsible, and perhaps opportunistic "garbage" that gives economists a bad name. While this one is especially extreme, the fraction of papers in economics that are offensive to people from other fields is not negligible. Too many economists tend to write papers that are completely detached from the real world, and worse many economists either believe in their models or pretend like they believe in them.

A very high priority in my own research is doing a very good job with the modeling of the problem at hand, so that my results or policy suggestions have a real value in the field. And for the studies where a realistic model is not possible, it is very important to acknowledge this shortcoming.

Apart from the "elephant in the room" that even the modeling attempt of the author is extremely offensive as you clearly articulated in your letter, making huge historical claims based on utterly stupid and irresponsible models gives such a bad name for our profession. I thank you as an economist and game theorist for your effort to show the world that many of us are better than this.

Best regards,
Tayfun