10. Scarcity and Genocide

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Few scholars have addressed the relationships between scarcity and genocide, and the few who have provide sweeping accounts that distort the facts. Richard Rubenstein, for example, has made the relationships between scarcity and genocide the heart of his explanation of genocide (Rubenstein 1978, 1983). He argues that modernization inherently leads to a “surplus” population, which in turn leads to attempts to eliminate those who are “excess.” Rationalism, which fuels modernization, dissolves both community and moral limits; persons become “resources” rather than “human beings”; efficiency becomes the chief value. There are, however, severe problems with his theory. The basic concept of a “surplus” population is never defined. Moreover, the problem of genocide mostly has not been that there are too many people for the resources available, but that those in power decide to eliminate groups that are perceived, not as surplus, but as having the “wrong” characteristics—wrong religion, race, social origin, ethnicity, and so on. Yet, in Rubenstein’s grammar of motives, there is only one motive—all behavior is reduced to economic motive. Such a theory, though suggestive, cannot explain any of the cases of genocide in the twentieth century.

Hannah Arendt also has some striking comments about the relationships between scarcity and genocide, but they are brief and not developed (Arendt 1958b, 457–59). She does not, in fact, speak of “scarcity,” but of “superfluous man.” Humans are becoming “superfluous,” and in the future, with an ever-increasing population, will become
even more so on an “overcrowded earth” (1958b, 457). They are superfluous in the sense that they no longer have a meaningful place in society: many are unemployed, many are homeless, they no longer contribute to the functions of society. They are not individuals, but lost in the swell of population; they become the “masses.” Given the prevailing utilitarian outlook, such humans are useless, they have no meaning. Arendt thinks that the very perspective involved in utilitarianism—judging in use—leads us into meaninglessness, for one can never come to the end of the ends-means chain: what, she asks, is the use of use? (Arendt 1958a, 154–59). Humans are thus viewed essentially in terms of efficiency and as resources, not in any moral terms: as with other things that become useless, they can be cast aside.

Without being specific, Arendt suggests that “political, social, and economic events” all work toward making “men superfluous” (1958b, 459). She thinks that the masses understand the “temptations” that are embodied in their lack of purpose and place. She also thinks that the Nazis and Stalinists demonstrated in their “factories of annihilation” the “swiftest solution to the problem of over-population, of economically superfluous and socially rootless human masses” (1958b, 459). In Arendt’s view, such a demonstration serves not only as a “warning” but also as an “attraction.” Her fear is that totalitarian solutions are not a part of the past, but may become part of the present and future. “Totalitarian solutions may well survive the fall of totalitarian regimes in the form of strong temptations which will come up whenever it seems impossible to alleviate political, social, or economic misery in a manner worthy of man” (1958b, 459).

Arendt’s vision is breathtaking but it misleads. If the killing she expects begins, it will have as its victims, not “men,” but members of groups who are, on noneconomic grounds, being singled out for death. The Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jews was not, contrary to her view, an attempt to solve the problem of overpopulation. Her mistake is that of Rubenstein, but on a larger scale.

Despite false starts, the question of the relationships between scarcity and genocide is important, both in understanding the causes of genocide and in anticipating the prospects for genocide in the next century. If current trends continue, a combination of environmental degradation, loss of agricultural land, depletion of fish stocks, dwindling of fuel resources, and a doubling of population to about 11 billion in the latter part of the twentieth-first century will lead to extreme hardship, even disaster, in many areas of the world (Homer-Dixon
These areas, mainly in the Third World, are the very places where much of the genocide since 1945 has taken place (Fein 1993, 87). The genocides that have occurred in Bangladesh, Burundi, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Rwanda, however, have not been brought about by material scarcity. Genocide, with some exceptions to be noted later, has seldom been the result of material scarcity, whereas material scarcity has often been a direct result of genocide. Nevertheless, in a world that in the twentieth century has displayed an unparalleled capacity for mass slaughter, it would be surprising if severe shortages would not exacerbate existing tendencies toward resolving social and political problems through the elimination of the groups thought to constitute the problem.

This chapter attempts to clarify "scarcity"; identify the historical relationships between scarcity and genocide; indicate why scarcities could be a more decisive factor in genocide in the future; and outline strategies for preventing genocide, partly through controlling scarcities and partly through political and institutional means.

To point out certain plausible scenarios of genocide, to make explicit the logic of genocide, and to analyze the relationships between scarcity and genocide does not mean that genocide is somehow the inevitable result of scarcity or of any other "cause." Genocide is never inevitable; it is a political choice. But political choices, including genocide, are affected by many different forces, internal and external, to the society in question. If present trends continue, scarcity will increasingly be one of those forces in the not-so-distant future.

**Scarcity**

"Scarcity" includes both the relative and the absolute. For those used to affluence and abundance, a mild reduction in goods available to them will be perceived as scarcity; similarly, they may feel worse off if other persons improve their material condition while they remain at their previous level (Runciman 1966). Scarcity, in these instances, is not only relative but also psychological: desire is confused with need (Rousseau 1960, 275). Psychological scarcity is an important facet of the "developmental" genocide that indigenous peoples have faced, and, most likely, will face. Scarcity may also be both absolute and material: if one lacks the necessary food and water for a certain period, one simply dies.
Should one consider scarcity only in material goods, resources, or employment, scarcity can take at least two different forms. It is important to highlight these distinctions, which not only indicate different sources of scarcity but also suggest possible solutions to conflict that arises, at least in part, from the effects of "scarcity." First, there may be a scarcity of resources—little usable land, few fish, forests that have been depleted, minerals long ago extracted from the soil. Some of these resources can be renewed, others are simply no longer there. Whether resources are renewable is itself an important dimension of overcoming scarcity and any role it may have in prompting murderous conflict. Second, resources may be scarce because of the size of the population: even if all goods were distributed equally, there would still be generalized poverty. To overcome this kind of scarcity, either the material resources would have to be increased (the green revolution in agriculture, for instance) or the population would have to be decreased. Ominously, in the accounts of Arendt and Rubenstein, population reduction is procured through genocide. What are the other ways in which population can be reduced? Will they be tried and, if so, will they be effective? These are questions that we shall return to when we consider how the links between scarcity and genocide could be removed, leaving open the issue of whether they will be.

Besides psychological scarcity and the material scarcities described, there is a kind of scarcity—political scarcity—that includes material and political deprivation. Some scholars, however, note only the resource deprivation and thus think of this as a third type of material scarcity (Homer-Dixon 1994, 9).

Where political scarcity exists, there may be sufficient resources to meet everyone's needs (though not desires), but the allocation of resources favors certain groups and discriminates against other groups. In practice, there will often be a scarcity of resources and an expanding population, and both may contribute further to policies of unequal distribution of goods (Homer-Dixon 1991, 109–11). Such situations frequently exist in ethnically divided (or "plural") societies and help drive demands for equal treatment, demands that may be met with repression and, if the conflict persists, with an attempt at partial or total genocide.

The political deprivation consists of exclusion from power and from being viewed, and treated, as an inferior group. Each dimension of this deprivation is not only related to but also explains the material deprivation members of the group also experience beyond that of other groups.
There are psychological elements present; however, they are not just matters of desire but of substantial political need—to be assured of a stable, secure, and just place within society and the political system. The lack of this assurance in the plural society is one of the major sources of genocide in the twentieth century (Kuper 1981, 57–83, 93). Under conditions of material scarcity that are likely to worsen in the twenty-first century, such conflicts seem more likely still. But again, the solutions to this type of conflict are suggested by the nature of the scarcity. Power sharing, protection of basic rights, and equality of treatment could go a long way in overcoming the difficulties otherwise exacerbated by deteriorating resources and expansion of population.

**Relationships between Genocide and Scarcity:**
**The Basic Patterns**

The relationships between genocide and scarcity fall into five broad patterns.

1. Genocide that leads to scarcity. The scarcity is unintended but is the consequence of genocide, committed for any number of reasons, such as ideology or to remove a threat to the regime. Examples include Cambodia and Rwanda.

2. Genocide and direct conflict over resources. Direct conflict over scarce resources is most likely to occur in one of three situations: migration, “development,” and some instances of societal fragmentation.

3. Genocide as “advertent omission,” where the intent is to take advantage of a natural disaster to reduce the population of a despised group. Here the dominant power does not cause the fatal condition, such as famine or disease, but does not provide the necessary aid to support the afflicted group. An example that comes close would be Britain at the time of the Great Famine in Ireland.

4. Genocide that takes place largely through the creation of scarcity, most commonly by depriving the victims of food. The best modern example of this is Stalin’s attempt to force collectivization of agriculture and to suppress nationalism in the Ukraine through the manmade famine of 1932–33.

5. Scarcity as a contributing factor in the decision to resort to genocide. Here “scarcity” includes: degradation and depletion of natural resources, fewer goods per capita owing to population growth, and unequal resource distribution. It also includes the psychological and political scarcities that play a large role in the genocide of indigenous
peoples and minorities in plural societies. Each form of scarcity can contribute to the conditions that make genocide more likely: these include conflict over resources; population displacement and ensuing conflict between groups; allocation of resources along racial, religious, or ethnic lines, resulting in demands for autonomy or independence; weakening of the legitimacy of the state, followed by either revolution, an attempt at secession, or a growing authoritarianism that seeks to resolve social and political problems through force. New ideologies may also spring up with the decline of the state—these are likely to be formulated along lines of ethnicity, but other bases, such as religion, may also occur. In some instances, states may fragment into warring groups, with no group able to achieve dominance. Here a small-scale, but continuing, genocide may be acted out.

Genocide That Leads to Scarcity

Genocide typically produces scarcity: it creates social chaos, disrupts the economy, destroys the lives of hundreds of thousands, even millions, of persons who possess skills and productive abilities, whether in farming, manufacturing, or medicine, and diverts the perpetrators themselves from their role in economic life, turning them into those who destroy rather than produce and create. In extreme cases, such as that of Rwanda, economic production may cease altogether (Block 1994, 3–8). Moreover, in many instances, disease may sweep through the society, facilitated in part by famine, water sources contaminated by the dead, and by lack of sanitation. Where the genocide occurs in the context of war, as in Bosnia, human habitations, production facilities, and the environment itself may all suffer damage, creating additional material scarcities.

If genocide falls most heavily upon the intended victims, the perpetrators are not immune to the scarcities it induces. In Cambodia, for example, hundreds of thousands of those whom the Khmer Rouge tried to turn into the foundation of a peasant society died from malnutrition brought about by its agricultural policies (Martin 1994, 173–78; Becker 1986, 248–53). Although humanitarian aid in the form of food and medicine was available, the Khmer Rouge would not accept it for ideological reasons: its vision was of a self-sufficient peasant society; moreover, if food was scarce, it was due to sabotage by “enemies of the revolution,” not any failure of the revolutionary design itself. Similarly, in Rwanda, after the Hutu government had unleashed
its militias, resulting in the killing of half a million Tutsi and moderate Hutu within three months, its own army was driven from the country by an invading force of Tutsi refugees, victims of an earlier genocide in Rwanda. Several million Hutu thus fled into neighboring countries, where they were placed in squalid, disease-ridden camps; fearful of returning home, they eke out their existence on meager rations provided by humanitarian aid.

Perpetrators may be so intent upon destroying a group that they fail to calculate the effects that their actions will have on themselves. Or there may be a recognition of this, but the calculus used to assess costs and benefits stresses ideology, revenge, or power rather than the material well-being of the perpetrator group. Put differently, the political economy of genocide has its own logic.

In fact, since 1945 almost all genocides, Bosnia is the major exception, have taken place within the Third World in countries already impoverished; most persons in such societies, with their dense populations, fragile economies, and maldistribution of wealth, were already living amid scarcity. Nevertheless, genocide, except developmental genocide, has frequently brought the societies in which it occurs even closer to collapse. In one type of genocide, however, scarcity falls almost entirely upon the victims. In developmental genocide, the indigenous people's land is taken and their sources of food eliminated. The perpetrators, on the other hand, gain land, gold, timber, or cheap electricity from the hydroelectric projects erected on the indigenous people's territory.

Scarcities that stem from genocide may be either short-term (a temporary shortage of food, for example) or long-lasting (where much of the existing housing is damaged or destroyed, as in Bosnia). In some cases, the damage to the economy will continue for generations: eighty years after the genocide of the Armenians, lands once highly productive lie barren in eastern Turkey. In Rwanda the basic infrastructure (social and physical) of the country under the best of circumstances would take years to rebuild, but more immediate is restoring agricultural production, something hard to do with several million refugees afraid to return, and the continued threat of new wars and genocides as those ousted seek to return to power (Block 1994, 3–8). Rwanda will be almost completely dependent upon outside aid to overcome the impact of the genocide. At some point, however, donor fatigue will set in; how rapid is hard to predict, but for Somalia it took just a little more than a year.
There are three situations in which direct conflict over scarce resources is likely to occur and each of these is compatible with genocidal actions. The first is the result of migration into areas already occupied by other groups (Homer-Dixon 1991, 108–9). A well-known example is the Israelite exodus from Egypt, their migration into Canaan, and the ensuing wars over resources that the early books of the Bible invariably depict as wars of extermination. Migration may itself result from lack of adequate resources, but more commonly in the modern world from persecution, war, and genocide. Direct conflict over material resources is also likely where resources held by indigenous peoples are slated for “development” (Arens 1976; Bodley 1982; Burger 1987; Davis 1977; Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues 1987). Here traditional uses of the land will be replaced by cattle, timbering, strip mining, and hydoelectric plants. To some extent, development will involve migration, but much of the migration will be of machines and corporate enterprise rather than individuals and groups trying to establish a home for themselves. Moreover, much of the scarcity perceived by those who set development into motion involves a lack of abundance rather than economic hardship.

The second form of scarcity involved is that of a maldistribution of resources, particularly land, within the perpetrators’ territory, rather than a lack of resources. One of the reasons that development appeals to political and economic elites is that it offers a kind of safety valve to release the frustrations of the landless and the impoverished without requiring any redistribution of resources held by the elites. The costs of development will be borne instead by those whose lands are taken. Another reason that development is subscribed to is that it rests upon an ideology of progress, one that views an ever-growing economy and a limitless supply of goods as the goal of society (Bodley 1982, Walzer 1980, 23–53). That the encroachment on the territory of indigenous peoples will lead to direct conflict, the destruction of a people’s habitat, and the eventual disappearance of such groups is understood by those who pursue development strategies, but they are prepared to accept them in the name of progress and economic growth.

There are currently some 200 million indigenous peoples around the world, most of whom are already vulnerable to existing pressures for greater and more productive utilization of resources (Burger 1987,
11). Given an age of scarcity in the twenty-first century, the future of indigenous peoples appears to be bleak.

The third basis for direct conflict over resources occurs when a state collapses, followed by fragmentation, with no group capable of gaining power or control (Van Creveld 1991). When a state fails, with the consequent breakdown of security for life and property, scarcity can be expected to increase, leading to struggle over basic resources. This struggle will itself lead to further scarcity. Thomas Hobbes (reprint 1960, 82) captures this well in his description in 1651 of a chaotic and violent “state of nature.”

In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no art; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death.

In principle, a dominant group may arise out of the fighting and impose a repressive order. But it is possible that various groups, different perhaps in different areas of the former state, will sustain the low-level conflict for many years, repeated genocidal attacks being made by all sides. In this event, genocide, rather than being exceptional, would have become part of an equilibrium of destruction. Here, “the life of man,” as Hobbes put it (reprint 1960, 82), would truly be “poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” In this situation, any distinction between war and crime and war and genocide would blur or disappear.

**Natural Disaster, Advertent Omission, and Genocide**

Ben Whitaker, in his United Nations report on the Genocide Convention (Whitaker 1985) notes that some acts of genocide may not only be carried out by acts of commission but also “may be achieved by conscious acts of advertent omission. In certain cases, calculated neglect or negligence may be sufficient to destroy a designated group wholly or partially through, for instance, famine or disease” (par. 40). He therefore recommends that the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide be amended, adding at the end of Article II (which specifies what acts constitute genocide): “In
any of the above conduct, a conscious act or acts of advertent omission may be as culpable as an act of commission” (par. 41).

There seem to be two situations where genocide by omission might be possible: (1) where there are indigenous peoples, or other distinct groups, that live in relative isolation from the dominant population; (2) where there is a colonial relationship through which the people of one state control the lives of those in another society. Today these situations would be possible only where they could be hidden: once there is knowledge by the outside world that an epidemic or famine is decimating a particular group, it is likely that international relief efforts would be made. In this case, the group that wished to take advantage of the natural disaster would either have to yield or move from genocide by omission to genocide by commission. In genocide by commission, it would bar, for example, any relief, or adequate relief, to come into the afflicted areas.

Nevertheless, if we look into the middle-to-latter part of the twenty-first century, the increase of population and the continued loss of crop land, and depletion of fish stocks, will result in malnourishment in many countries. Should famine develop in any of these areas, and particularly several places at once, it seems unlikely that the rest of the world would provide the necessary food for more than a short period. In that case, genocide by omission would turn all wealthy nations into either perpetrators or accomplices.

Although genocide by omission by a colonial power would seem to be possible, even likely, no examples of it are fully convincing. The British government’s reaction to the Great Famine in Ireland from 1845 to 1848, however, is suggestive of what such a case might involve (Edwards and Williams 1957; O’Neill 1957, 209–59; MacArthur 1957, 263–315; Woodham-Smith 1962; Rubenstein 1983, chapter 6).

The Irish were a conquered people, ruled from abroad; most of the land was held by English landlords who rented small plots to tenants who were subject to eviction. Population growth in Ireland was high, and poverty was widespread and often pronounced. Not surprisingly, there were organized Irish political movements that sought the end of British rule.

Most people survived on a single crop—the potato—but in 1845 a blight ruined much of the crop; in 1846 the crop failed almost entirely, and again in 1847. By the time the blight was over, the population had declined by some 2.5 million, almost half of the loss due to emigration and half to starvation and various diseases that accompanied the famine (Woodham-Smith 1962, 411–12).
By all accounts, except that of Charles Trevelyan who was in charge of relief, the British response to the famine was a disaster. It was driven by an ideological commitment to laissez-faire economics even facing mass starvation, by a disdain, if not hostility, toward the Irish peasants, and by an extreme parsimony. Food was exported from Ireland amid famine; starving men unable to pay their rents were driven from the land and their huts demolished; and food in government reserves was made available (at market prices) in only the western part of the country. Medical attention, facing typhus and other diseases, was woefully inadequate, and disease was spread rapidly by concentrating the destitute in workhouses (MacArthur 1957, 263-315).

Despite the enormous loss of life, the British government treated the whole matter as a minor crisis. In all official reports, correspondence, and speeches the term used to refer to the famine was “distress” (O’Neill 1957, 259). As late as 1848, when the enormity of the Irish tragedy should have been clear, Trevelyan still spoke of “local distress” instead of famine (O’Neill 1957, 259).

Still, some relief was either provided or allowed, grudgingly to be sure, but without it many more lives would have been lost. Some food was made available, soup kitchens were finally opened, public employment (mainly building roads) was instituted for portions of the population, and others were taken into workhouses. Then, too, private groups, notably the Quakers, provided relief, importing food and operating their own soup kitchens.

Was the British response to the Irish famine a case of genocide by advertent omission? Not if by “genocide” one means an attempt to eliminate an entire group. But the case for a partial or “managed” genocide, though not conclusive, cannot be easily dismissed. We know from Trevelyan’s own words that he was grateful to “an all-wise Providence” for bringing about a sizeable reduction of the population in Ireland, allowing for, in his view, a better balance between population and resources. In October 1846 he wrote to Lord Monteagle: “This [problem] being altogether beyond the power of man, the cure had been applied by the direct stroke of an all-wise Providence in a manner as unexpected and unthought of as it is likely to be effective” (O’Neill 1957, 257).

Whatever may have been the case with others involved in the making and implementation of British policy, the person who was at the center of the government’s response to the Irish famine held views that are compatible with partial genocide by advertent omission.
Genocide with Scarcity as a Principal Means

The history of genocide provides many examples of the act being carried out primarily through depriving the victims of food. Ancient warfare was synonymous with genocide, the men being killed and the women and children enslaved. When a walled city offered resistance, the perpetrators would resort to siege warfare, cutting the inhabitants off from fresh supplies of food and drink. Most cities would lay in large quantities of necessities, but sieges could go on for months. When supplies began to dwindle, the leaders within the city would often drive out their own sick, elderly, and young to conserve food for those capable of fighting if the walls were breached. In time, those within the city would starve or they would capitulate and then be killed or enslaved (Jonassohn 1991, 3–10).

In other places, as with the Spanish “conquest” of Mexico, Indians would be forced into submission or would die by starvation when their supplies of food were confiscated and their crops burned. Then, too, the control of food in the ghettos and the camps was a calculated, if sometimes wavering, act by the Nazis to weaken and destroy Jews and others while also extracting labor from them; in the case of the Soviet prisoners, millions were starved to death (Browning 1992, 28–56; Streit 1990, 142–44). Another modern example, but one not well known, will be used to illustrate further the creation of scarcity as the primary means to genocidal ends: the Stalinist manmade famine of 1932–33 in Soviet Ukraine (Conquest 1986; Dolot 1985; Krawchenko 1986, 15–26; Mace, 1986, 1–14; Commission on the Ukrainian Famine 1988).

In 1932–33 the Ukraine suffered a manmade famine that led to the death by starvation of some five million Ukrainians, most of them the very peasants who had produced the grain that was confiscated from them (Conquest 1986, 306). A calculated policy to force peasants into collective agriculture and to crush a rising Ukrainian nationalism led, in two years, to the death of almost 20 percent of the population (Conquest 1986, 306). The means was the setting of impossibly high quotas for grain to be turned over to the Soviet government. When signs of mass death through starvation were everywhere, the Soviets ignored them. People were shot for taking a single ear of wheat or a sugar beet (Mace 1986, 7). Borders were sealed between Russia and the Ukraine to prevent the starving to find food. For the few who did manage to travel into Russia and find food, it was seized on their attempt to return to the Ukraine (Conquest 1986, 327–28).
James Mace summarizes some of the survivors’ testimony:

[T]hey tell us of an “entire village population swelling up from starvation, of the numbers of dead exceeding the capacity to bury them decently so that each day a dead wagon would pick up bodies which would then be dumped in large pits; they tell of whole villages becoming deserted, of literal armies of homeless children…roaming the country in search of a way to survive and of railway stations literally flooded with starving peasants who had to beg lying down because they were too weak to stand.” (Mace 1986, 8)

Meanwhile, the Soviet response was to hold back food contained in state reserves in the Ukraine, continue to export grain to buy machinery, reject offers of international aid on the grounds that there was no need for it, and ban foreign journalists from the areas affected by famine (Krawchenko 1986, 21; Conquest 1986, 328).

In 1930 Stalin learned the uses of famine for political purposes, and this by accident. When he attempted to force the Kazakhs, who were mainly herdsmen, onto collective farms, they resisted and slaughtered most of their livestock rather than turn it over to the state. As Mace (1986, 6–7) observes: “Rather than extend them aid, the regime decided to teach them a lesson by letting them starve. So many died that the 1939 Soviet census shows 21.9% fewer Kazakhs in the USSR than there had been in 1926. But resistance among them ceased. The lesson was obvious. Famine could be a highly effective weapon.”

The lesson was applied with thoroughness in the Ukraine, but was also supplemented with executions of intellectuals and by the reassertion of control by Moscow. By 1934 Stalin had achieved his goals in the Ukraine: the peasants were defeated, and the flowering of Ukrainian religious and cultural life had been brought to a halt (Conquest 1986, 328).

Scarcity as a Contributing Factor in Genocide

Genocide is a calculated act rather than an explosion of passion. Once genocide is set in motion, unless more powerful forces from either within or outside the society can intervene, it runs its course. Barring intervention, which need not always be military intervention, the destruction of the “enemy” will continue until the goals of the perpetrators are realized. Genocide is resorted to largely because it has so often been successful—undeterred, not punished, later forgotten, and
highly effective in achieving its goals of, for example, eliminating any threat to the dominant group's power, creation of a homogeneous society, or enriching the perpetrators at the expense of groups that have assets that the perpetrators covet. Motives for genocide are typically mixed, but in their pure form include conquest, retribution, power, material gain, and, where certain ideologies are involved, a kind of salvation/purification that requires the total remaking of society (Smith 1987, 23-27).

What is striking about the motives for genocide is not that material gain has often been a factor in such destruction. Rather, it is that, from ancient times to the present, initiating genocide to overcome material scarcity, in the absolute sense of maintaining the group's physical existence, has rarely been a factor. There are exceptions, previously mentioned, but mostly, one will come closer to understanding the historical role of scarcity in genocide if one views scarcity in its psychological form—desire rather than need—and in its political form—insecurity and inequality. Thus, to consider the plight of indigenous peoples in the twentieth century is not to focus on some kind of material necessity, but on the psychological and political dynamics of what has come to be called "development."

It is not only a question of understanding the historical relationships between genocide and scarcity but also of finding ways to overcome the psychological and political scarcity that can feed genocide. Later we shall consider measures that can reduce scarcity, helping reduce the pressures that contribute to genocide. First, we consider the possible effects of material scarcity—declining resources and increasing population—on genocide in the future. It is likely that many of the motives and pressures for genocide that have existed up to the present will continue, but there will likely be additional pressures that stem from material scarcities expected to characterize the twenty-first century. What are these pressures? How do they relate to possible decisions to commit genocide? And what can be done about them to lessen the likelihood of genocide, at least that related to the material basis of society?

The possible effects of scarcity in contributing to genocide and other mass violence are many; similarly, circumstances in particular cases can vary greatly. One, thus, can neither predict every outcome nor indicate in full how various forms of material scarcity can contribute to genocide. What is possible, however, is to suggest certain sce-
narios, illuminate particular tendencies, and point to a logic of atrocity that is furthered by scarcity in societies with particular characteristics.

For example, where the legitimacy of the state or the ruling group in a plural society is challenged, it is likely that the old regime will resort to authoritarian solutions to hold onto power. But in so doing, it will further alienate the minority groups that it has previously excluded from power. This effect will provoke further challenge to the elite’s authority, which will be met with greater force, including massacres. This is, in fact, the classic case of what leads to genocide in ethnically divided, plural societies (Kuper 1981, 57–83). If there is also the problem of material scarcity, increasing demands will be made on those in power. These demands, owing to lack of resources, competence, or fairness, will not be met, resulting in further erosion in the legitimacy of rule by the dominant elite (Homer-Dixon 1994, 25–31). In such a situation, the tendency is to crack down on those making the demands, but also to allocate scarce resources even more decidedly along ethnic lines, favoring those of the dominant group. This favoring in part might be called a politics of identity, in which one favors one’s own group, but also in part a strategy to reward those thought to be loyal to those in power. The result will be that in times of scarcity, the regime will move from its usual pattern of discrimination to a policy that increases hardship and, at the extreme, leads to destitution. At that point, migration will take place, leading to possible violence from neighboring societies, or the destitute will, if they have the means, resort to counterviolence. This violence will in turn initiate a new spiral of repression, beginning with massacres, which are a way of keeping a group in its place, and possibly ending with genocide, which attempts to eliminate the group itself.

In this scenario, a type of society (plural), a type of regime (authoritarian), a type of policy (unequal allocation of resources), a challenge to that policy (by the group that is viewed as inferior and excluded from power), and material scarcity (whatever its sources) come together in a fatal mix.

Or one might look to examples of state collapse, or being on the verge of collapse, because of, for example, defeat in war, the persistence of internal war, loss of legitimacy, or prolonged ecological crisis. In such cases, one possible outcome is that a new power arises, often buttressed with an ideology that will form the basis for a new legitimacy. Typically, such ideologies will create cleavages between groups
that belong to the society ("the people") and those that are perceived as either "the enemy," groups to be eliminated, or groups that are seen as marginal and inferior, but that can have a second-class existence within the society (Melson 1992, 18–19, 267–71). In the case of a second-class status, we are back again to the plural society.

Where resources are available and are distributed in ways that are not equal, but at least meet the needs of the suppressed group, violence might be avoided; where resources are scarce, however, the likelihood of confrontation and repression increases (Gurr 1985, 71). Those in power will fall back upon the ideology to determine who gets what: in a given case, the ideology may make the division along lines of class, race, religion, or ethnicity, but judging from the rise of religious fundamentalism and the power of ethnicity in the post–cold war era, religion and ethnicity seem the most likely bases of ideology in the age of scarcity.

**Preventing Genocide**

Those who study genocide do so to understand why such extreme violence takes place and why it is directed at particular groups. The quest to understand, however, is not only a desire to know but also to find ways in which that understanding can be used to prevent future acts of genocide. As previously mentioned, nothing is inevitable about genocide; nevertheless, there are certain predisposing elements and the likelihood of preventing genocide is enhanced if these can be overcome. The chapter will conclude with some reflections upon possible means of removing the links between genocide and scarcity.

The means fall into two broad patterns. First, there is the question of how "scarcity" (in all the senses that have been identified) can be dealt with so that it does not put pressure on regimes to commit genocide. Second, there is the more general question of how genocide can be prevented, even if such pressure cannot be wholly removed.

**Reducing Scarcity**

As we have seen, "scarcity" takes three forms: psychological, political, and material. Let us consider each in turn.

"Desire" and its control were central features of the work of thinkers such as Plato, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and Durkheim. On the other hand, the more modern view, one that underlies ideas of progress and
development, is that the expansion of desire and continual efforts to satisfy the expectations thereby created is the principal reason for social existence (Walzer 1980, 23–53). This artificial scarcity, a scarcity created by desire rather than need, largely drives the development projects that have destroyed the lives of indigenous peoples in the name of "progress" (Bodley 1982).

Given the central place that the expectation of ever-increasing material satisfaction plays in the modern worldview, it may be impossible, for example, to curb the destruction of rain forests. But if there is to be a check on such destruction, with the resulting deaths of individuals, peoples, and cultures, there seem to be only two ways in which this could be done. The first would require a reorientation within the modern worldview: instead of attempting to dominate nature, we would respect it and work with it, seeing ourselves as part of nature, and dependent upon it for our very existence. The other approach, which is compatible with the first, would call attention to the fact that cutting down rain forests is not the best use to which they can be put, in part because their ecosystems are extremely fragile and in part because the forests are the lungs of the earth. Moreover, many large-scale development projects in indigenous areas have been failures, but failures at great cost in lives, money, and damage to the environment (Davis 1977, chapter 9). If it is not possible to still the desire to "open up" the Amazon, it is possible for organizations like the World Bank in making loans for development projects to exert much more scrutiny in the viability of proposed schemes and their ecological and human impact.

Deprivation, on the other hand, is the hallmark of political scarcity. It contains three elements: deprivation in power, material well-being, and respect. Plural societies often display these forms of deprivation, prompting challenges to the structure of authority, and leading in turn to repression, renewed demands for equality or autonomy, and, without outside intervention, genocide. In fact, the most frequent source of genocide in the twentieth century has been that which springs from the political scarcity imposed by domination and exclusion (Smith 1987, 25–26). This is a question, however, of not only a divided society but also an authoritarian government. The widely held view that democratic regimes do not commit genocide, while not valid for the nineteenth century, is borne out by the history of genocide in the twentieth century (Fein 1993, 79; Rummel 1994, chapter 1).

The conditions for averting genocide that arises in part from political scarcity are reasonably clear. First, genocide would not occur if
the society were homogeneous. Oddly, homogeneity is one of the goals of perpetrators of genocide in plural societies. Second, assuming that the society is divided, some form of power sharing would be necessary. The precise form this would take could vary from society to society, but it might involve, for example, federalism, a degree of autonomy, or certain offices, or a percentage of offices in the military, bureaucracy, or parliament, being reserved for members of the previously subordinate group. Third, it would require justice in the allocation of goods. Finally, it would require some degree of acceptance of the minority group as persons, and the repudiation of stereotypes and prejudices that had served as justifications for exclusion from equal treatment.

The conditions are easily stated, but societies have their own histories, and their social arrangements, including political domination and prejudice, are not accidental, though some of them are of very recent origin. If one gives up on changing the existing arrangements, but still believes that genocide must be prevented in such societies, the only other solution is outside intervention. But the refusal of states to intervene in Rwanda both before the genocide (there was strong evidence that it would take place) and after half a million persons had been killed does not bode well for this approach either (Adelman 1995).

The third form of scarcity is, at once, the most obvious and the most difficult to overcome. Material scarcity has two possible sources: resources are either not available or have been degraded in ways that make them less productive; and there may also be fewer goods per capita because of population expansion. The solutions to resource scarcity and population explosion are technical and political. Further, these two sources of scarcity are so entangled that it is not possible to solve one without the other.

Rapid population growth in an affluent society, with a large resource base and fair allocation of goods, could be accommodated with few adverse effects on the stability of society or material satisfaction of individuals. But high growth rates in population tend to occur precisely in societies that can least afford them, those that are already resource scarce or that allocate resources in ways that favor some groups and deprive others. Given the existing strains in such societies, rapid population growth will lead to increased scarcity, violence, and possible genocide. The spiral of scarcity will increase both because goods now have to be divided among more people and because attempts to
increase production (especially of food and shelter) often produce severe ecological damage, undermining further the ability to meet material needs (Homer-Dixon 1994, 15–16). Fish will be taken at a rate that depletes their stock; forests will be denuded of their timber, with major consequences for erosion and silting of rivers; and, with the complex changes in the fragile ecosystem, there will be loss of topsoil and, in some cases, the ability to continue irrigation (Homer-Dixon 1991, 91–97). Those unable to provide for themselves will migrate to the cities, where they will be viewed as a burden, or they will migrate to neighboring states, with prospects of either squalid refugee camps or being turned back by violence (Gurr 1985, 71). On the other hand, if great development projects are begun on the lands of indigenous peoples, these groups will likely face extinction within a few years, as their habitat is destroyed, retributive attacks are made upon them as they defend their territory, and they are brought into contact with diseases from the outside world. Finally, as the society struggles with the effects of a sharp increase in population, the usual cleavages in plural societies may reassert themselves, with a rise in authoritarianism, challenges to the regime, increasing repression, material rewards for those in the dominant group and deprivation for others, and, in the end, if there has been no outside intervention, a distinct possibility of genocide.

Populations in the past have been reduced within a specific territory by migration, disease, famine, war, and genocide. These causes may operate in the future: Hannah Arendt saw genocide as the likely “solution” to a world overcrowed with “superfluous men”; others foresee a global threat from infection from emerging diseases that will kill off billions of people worldwide (Arendt 1958b, 457; Garrett 1994). Less apocalyptic visions, however, are possible, though they are not without their own difficulties in implementation. High birthrates will tend to fall where four conditions are present: a low mortality rate; a relative improvement in earnings; the availability of family planning and birth control; and an equal status for women.

Where there is a low mortality rate, parents do not need to produce many children to improve the odds of having one child survive to look after them in old age. An improvement in economic condition provides an incentive to limit the number of children to live better oneself. Family planning services and birth control provide the technical means for men and women to exercise choice. And an equal status for women has several effects in the number of children: it
usually means a later age for marriage and leads to women taking more control over their fertility. Where these conditions are not met, the surge in population will most likely continue, leading both to increasing impoverishment and long-term environmental damage.

Solutions to the problems of resource scarcity are likewise difficult to implement, but some progress can be made if the size of the population can be stabilized. Too often, however, the response to growing population has been to adopt means that may offer some temporary relief, but lead to even more resource scarcity in the future. Thus, fish stocks may be depleted, forests devastated, and soil eroded in the unending quest to provide the necessary resources to care for the expanding population. What is required in part is a more careful assessment of the long-term implications of resource utilization. It may also be possible to use resources more efficiently. Or it may be necessary to reduce utilization of dwindling resources, allowing the standard of living to fall. All of these solutions require bureaucratic and entrepreneurial competence, and many would require a high degree of social discipline. International aid in the form of technical assistance can also be of great help, but in the past, it too often has itself been hitched to programs that end up damaging the environment (Burger 1987, 250–56; Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues 1987, 109–31). Finally, in some instances, international aid in the form of food may be necessary on a long-term basis. To say that it is necessary is not, however, to say that it will be provided.

Institutional and Political Means

Scarcities exacerbate the conditions that favor genocidal choices, but they do so within societies already divided along racial, religious, or ethnic lines and governed by authoritarian regimes. We come, then, to the more general question of how genocide can be prevented, even if not all of the pressures exerted by scarcities can be removed (Kuper 1985; 1992, 135–61; Hirsch 1995, 161–216). This question encompasses the cases in which scarcity is the result of genocide, not a source of it; where a perpetrator takes advantage of scarcity to commit genocide, but does not create the scarcity; and where the scarcity, usually famine, is deliberately created for carrying out genocide. This question, in other words, brings us back to the full range of cases involving various relationships between scarcity and genocide.
Numerous steps can be taken to prevent genocide. A carrot-and-stick approach might be adopted by states and international organizations to support social and political transformation in divided and repressive societies. Societies that are likely to resort to genocide can be identified and closely monitored. Early warning systems can be devised to forecast the likelihood of genocide, allowing governments and international bodies time to decide upon appropriate responses. Publicity and the mobilization by nongovernmental organizations of a human rights constituency to pressure governments to act are also important in this context. Efforts can be made to dry up the ready supply of arms that repressive governments turn against their own people.

Not only must international law be strengthened, but there needs to be brought into being a standing, permanent tribunal to judge those who commit war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Punishment can play only a limited role in deterring genocide, but it would strengthen international norms against mass killing for political ends. Also, the right of humanitarian intervention must both be recognized and made effective (Harff 1991, 146–53). Individual states now have the ability to intervene, and the United Nations can put together a coalition of forces, as in Bosnia and Somalia. But far more effective, and most likely a precondition for preventing genocide, is a permanent, standing international force that can be rapidly deployed. What is also crucial, for it is unlikely that the other steps will be undertaken to any extent without it, is for states to enlarge their definition of national interest to include the prevention of genocide (Smith 1992, 232–33).

**Conclusion**

Many, if not all, of the strategies for preventing genocide and reducing the scarcities—psychological, political, material—that can contribute to it could be effective, if implemented. The prevention of genocide, however, is less a matter of knowledge than of political will. Two related questions thus hang over the future: Will the states, and international organizations, of the world continue to be bystanders to genocide, looking on and doing little? Or will a human ability to resolve political and social problems in a manner befitting humankind finally assert itself in the next century? The questions are real; the answers uncertain. The consequences of doing nothing, however, are not in doubt.