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Dossier: The Hunger Plan: The Holocaust, Resource Scarcity, and Preventing Genocide in a Changing Climate

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Introduction

All human beings experience an intrinsic need to feed ourselves and our families, and this need preoccupies vast amounts of psychological and physical energy. The anxiety of this need not being met, either for ourselves or for our loved ones, leaves us open to fear and manipulation.¹ Bad actors can use the resource scarcity—or even the threat of resource scarcity—as a propaganda tool for identity-based scapegoating and violence. The genocidal process hinges on the consistent, persuasive “othering” of an identity group.² This process can be linked to a population’s access to, or control over, their food, water, and energy resources.

This manufacturing of “otherness” can spiral into genocidal violence, pressing on pressure points between neighbors in an entangled system. As Raphaël Lemkin wrote, “like all social phenomena, [genocide] represents a complex synthesis of a diversity of factors.”³ The gray areas presented by these entangled systems refutes the linear narrative of what “causes” genocide, and turns attention to the structural conditions that allow a genocide to take place. The effects of climate change are putting pressures on groups in different ways than ever before, including the known stress of resource scarcity. As individual and collective identities shift to adapt in these complex systems, new stressors may emerge.

While there is a rich literature on the relationship between conflict and the effects of climate change, there is notably less research focused on the specific threat of mass atrocities. This is due in part to the aforementioned non-linear relationship between the effects of climate change and the perpetration of mass murder. But, it is also due in part to the persistent concept of the Holocaust as a paradigm that scholars use to understand what factors contribute to the structural conditions that bring about genocide. This paper argues that natural resource scarcity—not just the quest for abundance—was a factor in Nazi decision making and influenced specific propaganda against the Jews. This argument lays the groundwork for food, water, and energy scarcity to be included in the narrative of the Holocaust and integrated into the genocide studies and prevention discourse. If we accept that natural resource scarcity has a place in the genocide prevention conversation, we must then acknowledge that climate change does as well, inasmuch as the changing climate will cause new and less predictable strains on food, water, and energy resources on both micro and macro levels worldwide.

This paper analyzes the Holocaust trajectory through the lens of food, water, and energy resource scarcity, or the threat thereof. To that end, this paper is divided into four sections which will highlight the complex relationship between natural resource scarcity and identity-based violence. The first section will examine the Hunger Plan and Hitler’s concept of *Lebensraum*. This is followed by an outline of the ways in which the Nazi party discussed and understood food, food security, and the memory of World War I, as well as how that rhetoric influenced their policies and propaganda. These narratives built the framework of targeted

¹ Ervin Staub, “The Origins and Prevention of Genocide, Mass Killing, and Other Collective Violence,” *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 5, no. 4 (1999), 303–336, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327949pac0504_2.

² Lee Ann Fujii, *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009).

³ Douglas Irvin-Erickson, *Raphaël Lemkin and the Concept of Genocide* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 84.

antisemitic propaganda that hyperbolized tropes of Jewish parasitism.⁴ Finally, a discussion of how these policies and centralization of resources culminated in the “Holocaust by Bullets” in Eastern Europe and the eventual industrialized massacres in gas chambers. This paper will conclude with a discussion on the connection between genocide and resource scarcity, and its relevance to genocide prevention in the future.

“The Solution Lay, in Hitler’s Mind, in the Conquest of *Lebensraum*.”⁵

One of the fundamental struggles Hitler focused on was control over people and over nature. He wrote: “Nature knows no political boundaries. She places life forms on this globe and then sets them free in a play for power.”⁶ In his mind, and in the priorities set forth by the Nazi party, the power he speaks of here includes control over the food, water, and energy resources necessary to not just survive, but to live in plenty.

Two things were necessary for Germany to obtain the Nazis’ idealized *Lebensraum*: colonies to supplement the home farmlands, and fewer “unworthy” mouths to feed. Herbert Backe, under the direction of Hermann Göring, crafted The Hunger Plan as a solution to these twin goals. The Hunger Plan outlined a progressive attack on Soviet-held land, followed by the total export of food and other natural resources from those territories back to central Germany. In implementing the Hunger Plan, Lizzie Collingham argues, “[s]ecuring the nation’s food supply was a primary war aim in Hitler’s mind and the central importance of food was clear to the men charged with planned and executing [Operation] Barbarossa.”⁷ The plan intended for the total starvation of the native population of the occupied territories, including the expulsion of Jews and other “useless eaters” to Siberia, where they could work in forced labor camps until they starved or were killed.

The Nazis were able to build a narrative of the necessity of resource security through their use of propaganda against the Jews, as well as a heightened internal and external focus on food security. Resource scarcity in Nazi Germany, both real and threatened, contributed to the choices and timelines of mass murder. The Final Solution was an answer to not only the Nazi’s Jewish problem, but a solution to their food security issues as well.

The Nazis used many different kinds of rhetoric and propaganda to build the narrative of the necessity of resource security for the future of the German people. They built a sense of community based on racial purity, with clear legal and structural guidelines as to who is and who is not one of the *Volk*. They utilized and hyperbolized well-known prejudices against Jewish people, and entrenched narratives of Jewish parasitism as a threat to current and future German lives. At all levels of leadership up to and including Hitler himself, the Nazis centered their own anxieties around resource scarcity. In embracing this as a framework for their propaganda, the Nazi leadership sought to exploit the biological fear of starvation and scapegoat the Jewish population and other “useless eaters” for taking more than their fair share.

This rhetoric led to its intentional conclusion: “It had always been the intention of Hitler and a section of the National Socialist leadership to eradicate the Jews from Europe. The food crisis of 1941–1942 provided an ostensibly rational reason as to why the crime of murder should be committed. The Jews could not be allowed to continue eating the precious food which the German workers deserved: they must die in order to free up desperately needed food supplies.”⁸

Hitler’s position is made clear in a speech given on May 30, 1942 to a group of junior military officers. The speech was not public, but it was transcribed by one of his secretaries, Henry Picker. The speech itself was focused on why Germany had needed to go back to war. The speech, translated in part, reads:

⁴ David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁵ Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 30.

⁶ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1971), 140.

⁷ Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 38.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 205.

But there is another problem that determines our fight. *Every people comes to this earth with a mandate to multiply, and every nation finds a limit in the restraint of the Lebensraum. Here the eternal conflict arises, if one wants to let a people grow, as is given by nature and intended by providence, then also with this people the Lebensraum must increase. If one does not want to expand the Lebensraum, then one day a disproportion must arise between the number of people that is constantly growing and the Lebensraum that remains the same. That is the purpose of nature: it compels man to fight, just like every other being in the world. It is a battle for food, a battle for the basis for life, for the raw materials the earth offers, the natural resources that lie under the soil and the fruits that it offers to the one who cultivates it [emphasis original].*⁹

In the pursuit of the “circular idea” of *Lebensraum*, Hitler and the Nazis waged a war focused on both access to natural resources and the growth of the racially pure people to populate and colonize that territory.

“Arbeit, Freiheit, und Brot! Vote National-Socialism!”¹⁰

After surviving the starving years of World War I and then the economically depressed Weimar Republic, Hitler envisioned and campaigned on a well-fed Germany. But Hitler did not just view survival as scraping together the means of life. With enough territory, Germany could maintain their level of industry and still have enough food for Germans to thrive. With sufficient farmland and labor, the Nazis believed Germany could become a self-sufficient autarkic economy.¹¹

The years of starvation in a blockaded Germany during World War I was fresh in the minds of the German public, a trauma precisely deployed in the 1920s and 1930s election propaganda by the National Socialist German Workers’ Party. During the Allied blockade of Germany, the German Board of Public Health claimed that up to 763,000 German civilians had died from either starvation or disease caused by the blockade, from its beginning in 1914 through the end of December 1918.¹² While many scholars consider this number high, the constructed truth that hundreds of thousands of Germans had perished from starvation became part of the collective German-chosen trauma after World War I. Collingham dubs this the “spectre” that loomed over Nazi decision making processes and rhetoric. She writes, “[i]n 1936 food shortages and rising food prices combined with fears of inflation and a rise in unemployment to revive the spectre of November 1918. Hitler demanded that a brake should be put on food prices. Two years later he warned that unless sufficient foreign exchange was made available to overcome food shortages the regime would face a crisis.”¹³

Food was forefront in the minds of the Nazi leadership, and several plans were established in an effort to make sure that Germany never starved again. One of the main slogans for early Nazi elections was for the triumvirate of needs that the Nazis would provide: “Work, Freedom, Bread.”¹⁴ The Nazi party was concerned about food not only for their long-

⁹ Henry Picker, *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2003), 713.

¹⁰ Felix Albrecht, “Work, Freedom, and Bread!” in *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda* (Washington, DC: USHMM, 2009), 46.

¹¹ Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2016), 12.

¹² C. Paul Vincent, *The Politics of Hunger: The Allied Blockade of Germany, 1915–1919* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 141.

¹³ Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 29.

¹⁴ Albrecht, *Work, Freedom, and Bread!*, 46.

term goals of a thriving, racial pure *Volk*, but more immediately for the war morale of their soldiers and those on the home front throughout the war. There was mercurial support for another all-encompassing war in Europe, and food security was of pivotal importance. At a meeting of troop commanders in February 1939—a full seven months before German invaded Poland—Hitler declared the “food question” the most urgent problem facing Germany.¹⁵ As early as 1941, the intelligence agency *Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers-SS* found that food was omnipresent on the minds of Germans at home. Collingham points out, “The *Sicherheitsdienst* claimed that across the whole of Germany a psychosis of anxiety had developed over food...As [workers] stood queue for food outside the shops they had been heard to declare that ‘the alleged victories in the East were less important than the necessity of getting enough to eat.’”¹⁶ The Nazi leadership was highly tuned into this worry, with Göring reiterating to a meeting of Nazi leaders, including Hitler, “at military headquarters on 16 July 1941, ‘we must first of all think about the securing of our sustenance, everything else can be dealt with only much later.’”¹⁷

This focus on food and resource scarcity seeped into the public narrative through propaganda. As part of the Nazi energy conservation campaign, a 1940 poster features a rotund, mustachioed figure in black; the “coal thief,” was the symbol of wasted energy resources. The text on the poster reads: “There he is again! He’s always hungry, his sack is always empty. Greedily he skulks around the oven, the stove or the dripping faucet. He sneaks around the window, the door or the light switch, stealing what he can. He steals from armaments production, which needs every little bit he steals from city and countryside. Catch him! Read more about it in the newspapers.”¹⁸

In a similar vein, a poster advertising for the 1934/1935 Winter Aid Program (*Winterhilfswerk des Deutschen Volkes*) solicits donations for members of the *Volk* in need. The poster shows an older woman and young child, presumably a grandmother and grandchild, dressed in dark, potentially mourning attire. They stand looking toward the open arms of a male figure just out of sight. The text translates as: “No one shall go hungry! No one shall be cold!”¹⁹ The subtext of this poster, beyond the charitable spirit of the Nazi party, is that those who are unable to keep themselves in food or fuel are the minority. Additionally, being part of the *Volksgemeinschaft* means looking after others when they are in need, with the unstated assumption that should you need aid, your community will be there for you as well.

Nazi propagandists had to walk a fine line between admitting that resources were scarce in the Third Reich and inducing panic and hoarding. Active starvation was not the only fear. It is worth acknowledging that resource scarcity is inherently gendered, as women are socialized in almost all societies to be responsible for food, water, and energy resources, and Nazi propaganda reflects that reality. Collingham notes:

It is not necessary to be actually starving in order for food deprivation to cause psychological and physical distress. Women used up a great deal of mental and physical energy thinking up different ways of preparing the same foods and producing something edible out of a few potatoes and lentils, with barely any fat or green vegetables. Long and tiring food queues, anxiety about where the next meal would come from,

¹⁵ Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 29.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁸ Page managed by Randall Bytwerk; see “Nazi Posters: 1939–1945,” *German Propaganda Archive*, accessed October 10, 2018, <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/posters3.htm>.

¹⁹ Page managed by Randall Bytwerk; see “Nazi Posters: 1933–1939,” *German Propaganda Archive*, accessed October 10, 2018, <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/posters2.htm>.

interspersed with periods of real deprivation, all combined to cause great stress.²⁰

Another poster addresses just the kind of panic-induced hoarding the Nazis sought to avoid, euphemistically called “hamstering.” One such poster features an anthropomorphized hamster dressed as a frowning housewife clutching two baskets of wine, food, yarn, oil, and a box of new gloves tucked under her arm; the text on the poster reads, “Hamster—Shame on you!” Narratives of scarce resources, especially in the urban setting, required a response from the Nazi government. An excerpt from *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*, a leading medical journal in Germany at the time, exemplified the Nazi ideology on food: “The person who, in his greed for food, eats—or rather gobbles—more meat and fats than he needs for the maintenance of his health and working capacity, robs other racial comrades of these foods; he is a debauchee and a traitor to his land and his country.”²¹ The population needed to be constantly reassured that their experiences during World War I would not be repeated, and that the current war and its seemingly bottomless need for resources was worth the investment. As an answer to that question, the Nazi Party Central Propaganda Directorate published this “Slogan of the Week” on March 11, 1940: “Why we fight—for our children’s bread!!” This propaganda frames the war not as a drain on the nation’s resources, but rather as a necessary fight for the bread to feed current and future generations of Germans.

“He did not have to Earn his Bread by the Sweat of his Brow.”²²

The Nazis preyed on people’s worst fears about not being able to feed their families—a tangible fear in living memory—and intertwined these promises of stability with hateful ideology. It is within the context of this struggle for food and resource security that antisemitic rhetoric grew and adapted. One of the oldest antisemitic tropes is that Jews cannot and will not work the land, but rather only work in business, trade, and finance. Even during the lean times of the Weimar Republic, depression in the 1930s, and wartime rationing in Germany, Jews are consistently discussed and portrayed visually as fat and well-dressed, in direct contradiction to the everyday German experiencing food and clothing restrictions. In a 1935 brochure titled “Advice for Nazi Speakers on Anti-Semitic Propaganda,” this same narrative is repeated:

Although the Jew was not inclined toward agricultural labor, he was at the forefront of commerce in agricultural products. The exchanges for grain, flour, fat, and eggs, to name only a few, were his field of endeavor. He sat in the breadbasket of the German people, and could set the prices higher or lower, depending on what pleased him. In the fall when the farmer was forced to sell his harvest to get the money he needed, prices had to be low. But when over the course of winter and spring these important products were needed by the public, prices had to rise. The difference between the buying and selling prices was the “profit” of the Jewish grain trader, or whatever he was called.²³

In this propaganda piece, the Jew is not just useless in feeding the country, he is specifically profiting off of others’ labor and restricting the market by inflating prices. In a

²⁰ Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 381.

²¹ Robert N. Proctor, *The Nazi War on Cancer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 132, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691187815>.

²² “Advice for Nazi Speakers on Anti-Semitic Propaganda: What to Say in Fall 1935,” *German Propaganda Archive*, accessed October 11, 2018, <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/rim3.htm>.

²³ Ibid.

country that is hyper-focused on resources, centering narratives of farmers and peasants, and looking to reduce the population of “useless eaters,” this trope is more than dangerous, it is deadly.

This rhetoric is presented in educational forums as well. In a lecture entitled “Jewry, Its Blood-based Essence in Past and Future” presented by the Leader of the SS in the Chief of the Race and Settlement Main Office, a surviving slide shows a stereotypical caricature of a Jewish man with a full beard, payot, and a large, hooked nose, wearing a dark robe and kippah. He is alone on a road scowling at a field of tall corn, while an inset photograph shows a clamoring crowd, presumably a stock exchange. The text on the image reads: “The Rabbi: ‘Your ears [of corn] sway back and forth, but business is preferable to you!’”²⁴ While this propaganda is not subtle in its messaging, there is a subtext; not only do Jews not contribute to feeding their community and they would rather manipulate the financial system than get their hands dirty.

This narrative is further bolstered by dehumanizing images depicting Jews as myriad of different animals feeding off the Germans or the German economy. The ideological narrative is clear; we must go on the offensive against this group before they starve us and our families and destroy our way of life. To this end, “useless” eaters of all kinds had to be removed from both the gene pool and the food chain. While the term “useless eater” applied to people of mental and physical disabilities, as well as Slavs and Jews, the key defining factor was that they were people who did not conform to the Nazi’s pseudo-scientific ideal of purity. Jews were chief among the “useless eaters,” often labeled as greedy and depicted as parasites or vermin. In one Nazi handbook published under the title, “Anti-Semitic Instruction for Girls,” this narrative is explained:

The word parasite comes from the Greek and in German is translated as “fellow eater” or parasite (*Schmarotzer*). In nature, nearly all plants get the nourishment they need from the soil. However, there are plants that suck what they need from other plants. That slows the growth of their hosts and may even kill them... Plants and animals defend themselves with all their resources against these foreign bodies. A person, too, has an instinctive aversion to all types of parasites. The body constantly makes defensive substances. That was known for a long time, yet people did not believe the Führer’s warnings. They found it uncomfortable to hear the Führer say: “If a person believes he can get along with a parasite, it is like a tree attempting to form a beneficial alliance with mistletoe.” The Jew works to infiltrate the peoples and hollow them out. He fights with his weapons, with lies and slander, poison and discord. He intensifies the battle until the bloody extermination of his hated foes. We say today, and forever more: The Jew is the parasite among the peoples! He can as a parasite attack individuals, whole people, indeed, all of humanity. Examples from nature teach us, however, that we have no other choice than to combat him with all our strength and finally to destroy him.²⁵

²⁴ Roland Klemig, “The Rabbi: ‘You Ears [of Corn] Sway Back and Forth, but Business is Preferable to You!’” Propaganda Slide #49804 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1936), accessed October 11, 2018, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1141732>.

²⁵ On Anti-Semitic Instruction for Girls issue dated February 1944, page managed by Randall Bytwerk; see “Germany Overcomes Jewry,” *German Propaganda Archive*, accessed October 10, 2018, <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/mainfranken-1944.htm>.

This handbook utilizes both science and pseudo-science in order to build a case for this interpretation of Jewish people. The handbook directly incites violence against the Jewish parasites not because they are evil per se, but as a reasonable defense of innocent lives. This rhetoric was used prolifically in both public and private speeches, lectures, and articles, as well as in propaganda posters.

“...as long as no German Collapses from Hunger.”²⁶

While the potential for food scarcity was far from the only reason to perpetrate the mass murder of European Jewry, there is evidence that the Holocaust was part of the larger overall plan for German *Lebensraum*. Food rationing in Germany was announced on August 28, 1939, just four days prior to the invasion of Poland.²⁷ While the variety and amount of foods were reduced for all Germans, Jews were allowed only a fraction of the food. As early as 1940, Herbert Backe expressed anxiety to the Nazi leadership that they would need to increase the speed of territorial occupation or there would be food shortages in central Germany. While Backe’s Hunger Plan was ultimately sparsely and inconsistently implemented in the Nazi occupied territories, the thought processes, fears, and rhetoric that led to the Hunger Plan still influenced Nazi policy. Through the lean winter of 1941–1942 and the following spring, food security became a pressing issue for morale of both German soldiers and Germans on the home front, especially in urban areas. The announcement of yet another ration cut on the home front in March 1942 resulted in the lowest public opinion survey since the beginning of the war.²⁸ Collingham points out, “[i]t was in the spring of 1942 that Hitler pronounced that other peoples should starve before the Germans. The response within his administration was to begin a campaign to exterminate ‘useless eaters,’ primarily the Polish Jews...The food problem provided his administration with a rationale for beginning a process of systematic extermination.”²⁹

The Nazi administration believed that eliminating the Jews, especially from the Soviet territories, would help their cause in several ways. Foremost, it would remove millions of mouths from the food chain and free up those meals, which they expected to be transported back to Germany. Secondly, they believed that the Jews were controlling the black market for food and supplies, and their removal would cause the black market to crumble and dissipate. Thirdly, as a result of the previous two actions, the local populations in these areas would feel more charitably towards their German occupiers, and their relationship would improve.³⁰ The antisemitic assumption that Jews “controlled the market” would come back to plague the Nazis when the black market for food and resources decidedly did not fall apart after the removal of the Jews.

Many of the decisions to murder the Jews in certain areas were made locally in order to solve a regional resource scarcity problem. Local decisions to solve local supply “problems” by mass murder could appear rational, albeit deeply inhuman.³¹ That there was a real supply problem—or at least a perceived supply problem—played a role in justifying which Jews from where would die, and when. The nexus of ideational and material factors made the decision to engage in mass murder a matter of local politics within the larger system of antisemitic dogma. Approximately 800,000 Jews were shot and killed in localized massacres in Eastern Europe starting in August 1941, due at least in part by the need to free up resources for soldiers on the ground in occupied Soviet territory. Collingham writes:

²⁶ Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 211.

²⁷ Proctor, *The Nazi War on Cancer*, 171.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 183.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.

³¹ Jürgen Zimmerer, “Climate Change, Environmental Violence and Genocide,” *International Journal of Human Rights* 18, no. 3 (2014), 274, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2014.914701>.

The department of the quartermaster, food officers and the military commanders and commandants on the ground responded to the problem of the disappointing food deliveries by calling for the removal of Jewish mouths from the Soviet food chain...The quartermaster-general reported that he expected the annihilation of the Jews in central Lithuania, which began in August [1941], to significantly alleviate the food supply problems for Army Group North. In August, 15,000 Jews were shot in Polesje (Prijetsümpfe). Task forces moved through northern Ukraine massacring the inhabitants of village after village. Particular targets were Jews in urban areas where the civilian population was starving, especially in the towns where food and shelter were a problem for troops moving up to the front. In Kharkov 15,000 Jews were murdered that winter, supposedly in order to alleviate the food situation. In Kiev the German authorities claimed that a systemic massacre of Jews on 29 and 30 September had alleviated the food and housing conditions for the rest of the civilian population. By the end of 1941 there were virtually no Jews left in eastern Belorussia, northern and eastern Ukraine or other parts of the occupied Soviet Union.³²

As progress slowed on the Eastern front and supply lines became less robust and less reliable, there were only two paths forward: everyone eats less, or fewer people eat. After over a decade of antisemitic propaganda, scapegoating, and rhetoric of parasitism on their resources, the Jews were an easy population to target for elimination. Even prior to the industrialization of the murder of the European Jews, their status as “useless eaters” made them the first target for the mobile killing squads.

By the summer of 1942, food had become central to the decision-making process for the Nazi regime: “The ‘critical food situation and its dismal future prospects’ was constantly used as a justification for the course the war followed. While Nazi ideology provided the ‘value-rational’ reason for murder, the food situation in Germany and the occupied Soviet Union provided the economic rationale.”³³ That summer, the Nazi leadership in occupied territories further restricted the rations that local populations could keep of their harvest in order send more to German troops and the German home front. When confronted by local leaders that their own people would not have enough food if they continued to extract resources at this rate, “Göring declared: ‘it makes no difference to me in this connection if you say that your people will starve. Let them do so, as long as no German collapses from hunger.’”³⁴

By 1943, the large gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau became operational, allowing industrialization of the killing process and massive liquidation of smaller camps and ghettos.³⁵ Even more food could hypothetically be extracted from the occupied territories, on both the Eastern and Western fronts, now that the Jews were being removed en masse. Even so, the Nazis continued to enforce strict rationing and confiscation of all harvests in occupied Europe in order to feed the people and soldiers of Germany. Only after the Nazis’ disastrous defeat at Stalingrad in early 1943, and the German military move from the offensive to the defensive, that the Hunger Plan and the ideal of *Lebensraum* took a secondary position to the twin goals of eliminating the Jews and winning the war.

³² Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 189.

³³ *Ibid.*, 210.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

³⁵ “KL Auschwitz-Birkenau,” *Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum* (webpage, n.d.), accessed November 2, 2018, <http://auschwitz.org/en/history/kl-auschwitz-birkenau/>.

Natural Resource Scarcity and the Genocidal Continuum

As evidenced by this analysis of Nazi rhetoric and decision-making, the reality or threat of food, water, and energy scarcity can be manipulated to scapegoat and target a specific identity-group. Though the debate about the existence of climate change and humankind's participation in it are outside the scope of this article, the scholarship is clear about the future of our climate. The effects of climate change will, and already have, created new and significant resource scarcity. The cascading effects of climate change, in addition to its overall unpredictability, make the threat of resource scarcity feel as tangible a danger. Climate change does not linearly cause genocide; but, "it will certainly create conditions and mind-sets conducive to the development of intergroup hostility, tension, and violent conflict."³⁶ In addition to other potential triggers for mass atrocities, the effects of climate change are putting new or different strains on networks of societal pressure points.

As the climate changes, populations' ability to anticipate food and water availability, including agricultural growth cycles, may be heavily impacted. Droughts, poor rainy seasons, and inconsistent water access contribute to issues of economic instability that compound feelings of unpredictability and insecurity.³⁷ The powerful combination of ideology and tangible resource supply issues opens the door for bad actors to prey on religious, ethnic, and racial biases and fears. Localized massacres, like those seen across Eastern Europe in 1941, could be just the beginning as resources are strained in one town or region, and then another. Growing violent extremism, as seen now across the Sahel, provides both ample cover and concrete threat for these actors to appeal for offensive rather than defensive tactics. In this way, groups that had previously lived harmoniously with their neighbors may find themselves suddenly in competition for formerly abundant resources.

Resource scarcity is not the only problem raised by climate change. When disastrous weather events increase in intensity and frequency, so do refugee flows and the potential for conflict over basic needs, which in turn have the potential to destabilize neighboring states and regions. The presence of refugees and internally displaced persons, especially those displaced to areas of differing ethnic or religious identities, are a well-known conflict indicator.³⁸

Conditions in urban areas, though more resilient to the daily fluctuations of climate change, are forecasted to deteriorate quickly in the face of natural disasters or extreme food and water shortages due to the fragility of water and energy grids. But even barring catastrophic weather events, urban structures and the needs of an urban population are vastly different from the needs of people living in rural settings. Sites of informal housing, or slums, are increasing as more people leave the countryside seeking opportunity or relief. This growing population often does not have access to water, food, or energy resources in their immediate area. Sewage and rainwater runoff do not have a local treatment plant, nor a way for the fluid to travel there, and garbage is often burned because there is no formal waste removal service. This informal housing means many youth lack an address to use for public schooling, compounding a host of known mass atrocity triggers. In addition to making public services like police and fire protection harder to access, urban sprawl breaks down traditional community and kinship ties.³⁹

The Holocaust looms large in the established norms of what is and is not a factor in the potential for genocide. This article points to the ways in which food, water, and energy

³⁶ Alex Alvarez, *Unstable Ground: Climate Change, Conflict, and Genocide* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), 89.

³⁷ Hanne Seter et al., "All about Water and Land? Resource-Related Conflicts in East and West Africa Revisited," *GeoJournal* 83, no. 1 (February 2018), 169–187, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-016-9762-7>.

³⁸ Adrian Martin, "Environmental Conflict between Refugee and Host Communities," *Journal of Peace Research* 42, no. 3 (2005), 329–346, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343305052015>.

³⁹ Sheridan Bartlett, "Climate Change and Urban Children: Impacts and Implications for Adaptation in Low- and Middle-Income Countries," *Environment and Urbanization* 20, no. 2 (October 2008), 501–519, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956247808096125>.

resources were an influential part of the Holocaust narrative and propaganda. Antisemitic ideology, in combination with the collective memory of resource scarcity, and the very real threat of future scarcity, all combined to facilitate the Nazi perpetration of mass atrocity. By integrating this resource lens into analysis of the Holocaust, we can broaden the discourse around genocide prevention in the face of the growing potential for real and threatened resource scarcity due to climate change. Genocide prevention scholars and policymakers must acknowledge the compounding effects of climate change and their role in the potential for genocide, or risk missing the triggers for future mass atrocities.

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