

Uncovering the Blind Spot: How Ethnic Conflict Leads to Famine

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Abstract

Across the world, societies, collectively, make enough food to feed every person, yet one in nine are malnourished. Malnutrition creates developmental, economic, social, and medical burdens on countries, which can all be averted with adequate food supplies for every household. In the worst situations possible, famines cause thousands of deaths when food supplies are severely limited. In order to prevent famines, a clearer understanding of their causes is necessary. Previous research has concluded that more than half of all great famines can be attributed to specific actions taken by ruling authorities. Many of these actions, especially in Africa, are ethnically motivated. However, ethnic conflict as a cause of famine has not been fully considered before, yet when instances of ethnic violence are compared to episodes of famines and mass intentional starvation, strong connections become apparent. This research illustrates the reasons to consider the role of ethnic conflict in famines by beginning with a review of the previous literature and identifying the “blind side” of famine research. This paper adds to the research by suggesting that James Fearon’s theory that groups will mobilize along ethnic lines when there is competition over finite resources strongly applies to the availability of food during conflict. By researching all famine and mass starvation episodes in Africa from 1950 to 2019, it was found that 85% (or 17 out of 20) were worsened by ethnic conflict. This implies that ethnic conflict motivates groups to maximize injury of opponents by interrupting patterns of food availability. This is of public health significance because of the intersection among ethnicity, conflict and food security. As ethnicity-motivated conflict continues, entire human populations are impacted by lack of access to nutritious food, which may contribute to immediate health outcomes as well as long-term trauma. Understanding one source of poor nutrition can suggest strategies for addressing this issue.

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1.0 Introduction

The United Nations (UN) defines famine as a situation that is characterized by three factors: over 20% of households face extreme food shortage with a limited ability to cope; over 30% acute malnutrition rates, and a death rate of over two persons per day per 10,000 persons [1]. Trends in famine episodes have been declining rapidly since the 1970s, with the last catastrophic famines occurring in Cambodia from 1975-1979 and Ethiopia from 1984-1985 [2]. The Global Hunger Index's 2015 edition announced that famines could be eliminated for the first time in history [3]. This conclusion was based on databases of famines since 1870 (summarized in figure 1 [16]).

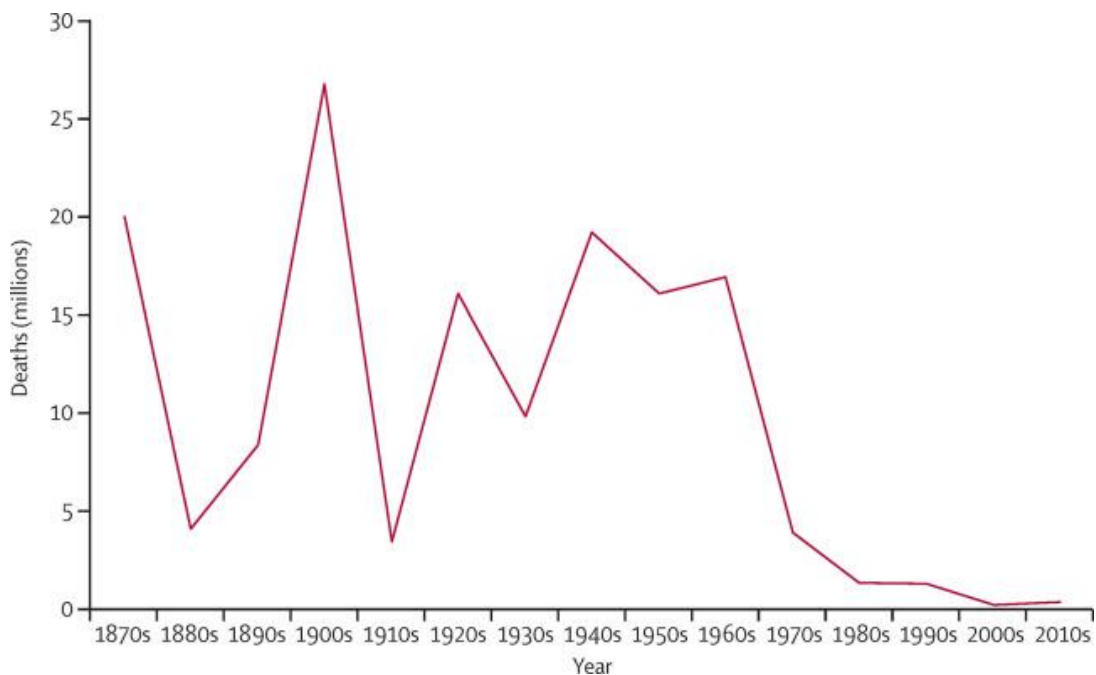


Figure 1: Deaths Worldwide from Great Famines between 1870 and 2015

The causes of famines are typically oversimplified and thought to be the product of overpopulation and limited food production. In 1798, British philosopher, Thomas Malthus warned that human population growth would exceed food production, leading to starvation and famine [4]. While this outlook may have seemed logical in the 18th century, it has been largely discredited today as the population continues to grow while famine incidences are declining. Amartya Sen's book, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, was the first theoretical attack on the Malthusian argument. He states: "Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food to eat" [5, p. 1]. Drawing upon evidence that some of the worst famines in history were not caused by any decline in food availability, Sen was the first person to create a framework to analyze the causes of famines.

Since the publication of *Poverty and Famines*, numerous theories building off of Sen's framework have been published; however, no theory explores a connection between ethnic conflict and famines. De Waal proposed that since those who study famine don't typically study political and military crimes and those who study genocide and mass atrocity don't typically study famine and starvation, the causal connections between armed conflict and famine have been largely overlooked [6]. Equally unnoticed is the connection between conflicts that are ethnically motivated and famine, but existing literature on the causes of famines as well as the ways ethnic conflict affects group interactions suggests that famines are caused by ethnic conflict.

This essay examines ethnic factors surrounding episodes of famine and mass intentional starvation beginning from the Ethiopian famine in 1957 to the present-day famine in South Sudan. The scope is limited to Africa because ethnic conflicts and famines have affected the area

and there is sufficient research on these events. The second chapter will provide a review of the previous literature on famine studies and ethnic conflict and end with the gaps that help fill in the “blind spots” of famine causes. The third chapter presents the methods used to explore the connection between famines and ethnic conflict, the fourth provides the results of the research, and the fifth is a discussion of the evidence found. The paper ends with a conclusion that calls for perpetrators of famine be tried for genocide and ethnic cleansing.

2.0 Review of Relevant Literature

2.1 Classic Approaches

Classical famine studies still influence how famines are understood today. Olivier Rubin's book, *Classical Famine Analysis*, dissects three early prominent frameworks: the Smithian approach, the Malthusian approach, and the FAD approach, which were all developed in the Age of the Enlightenment. These frameworks are the first attempt at predicting, explaining, and producing policy advice for how to end famines [7].

2.1.1 Smithian Approach

Adam Smith's theories of famine, regarded as the Smithian approach, are outlined in his book, *Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776 [8]. His most well-known work is his theory of the invisible hand; however, he also proposed some lesser-known ideas concerning famine. Smith argued that famines are always caused by government's attempts to provide relief when there is a shortage of crops or staple products [9]. He theorizes that market mechanisms are to blame, namely, state interventions such as prohibiting free trade and exports as well as forcing merchants to sell their crops with price-setting policies [9]. For example, lowering grain prices could lead to overconsumption, which has the ability to create long-term damage through scarcity of grains. Therefore, he recommended nonintervention by states in the face of famine with the impression that the market will reach an equilibrium price for food.

Smith's fear that state policies could lead to famine are not entirely incorrect, but he was overly optimistic about the market's ability to create an equilibrium [7]. History has proved that markets cannot fully protect against famines, ultimately due to market failures such as the absence of free competition and the mismanagement of food supplies. Famines similar to the food crisis that occurred in Niger in 2005 is a telling story of how famines can occur in free markets [10]. The food crisis occurred against the backdrop of a locust invasion and drought, but it was economic reforms that led to the emergency situation. The government removed regulations on the cereal market, causing large fluctuations in prices that did not allow families to purchase enough stock for adequate nutrition. Niger also continued exporting grains during the crisis. Without market protections for crops, food crises are more likely to occur [10].

2.1.2 Malthusian Approach

The Malthusian approach was created by the British theologian, Thomas Malthus, in 1798. In "An Essay on the Principle of Population," he warned that human population growth would outstrip food production and ultimately lead to famine [4]. Malthus argued that the 'law of nature' and the 'power of the population' will remain in an equal balance by natural forces keeping population numbers regulated [11]. He reasoned that food production cannot keep up with the growing population and that this would lead to societies collapsing and "dearth, anarchy, and chaos [to] ensue," [7, p.24] but evidence for a causal link between population growth and famines does not exist. In effect, population growth is inversely correlated with famine incidences, as displayed in Figure 2 [16]. Over time, the population of the world has continued to grow as famine incidences have declined.

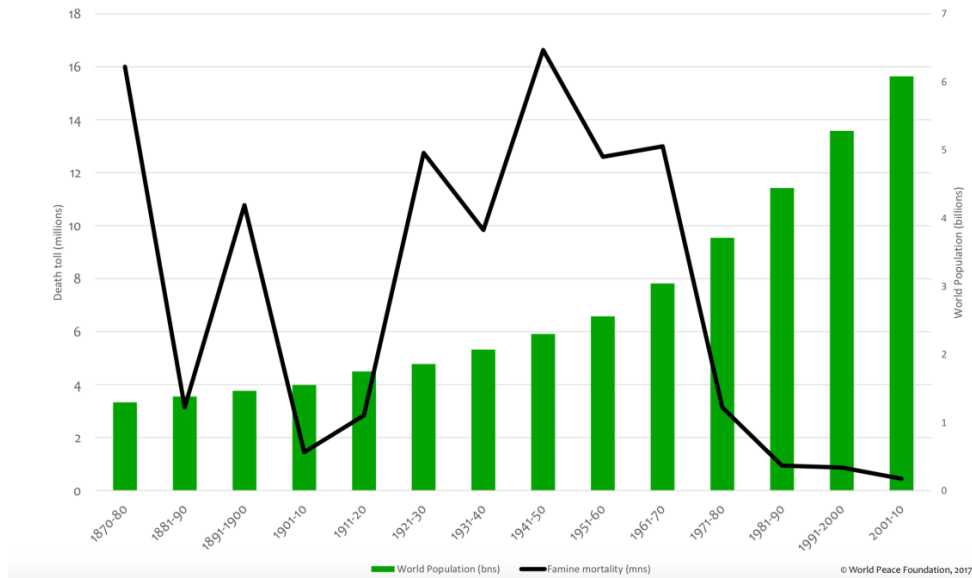


Figure 2: World Population Growth and Death Toll Rates from Great Famines: 1870-2010

2.1.3 FAD Approach

The Food Availability Decline [12] approach for explaining famine states that famines are a result of “spatial or temporal concentrations of food availability” [7, p. 31]. The roots of this theory cannot be traced back to a particular scholar, but its interventionist recommendations were being put into practice beginning in the late 19th century [7]. The FAD approach assumes that natural disasters, poor farming techniques, and limited infrastructure are the root causes of famine, so intervening in such situations could help avoid famine [7, p. 81].

Amartya Sen’s work largely refutes the benefits of intervening according to the FAD approach by using empirical evidence that shows some of the worst famines in history were not caused by any decline in food availability. For example, the Bengal famine in 1943 provides an example of the shortcomings of blaming food shortages. While the famine did occur after a poor harvest, food availability was the same in 1943 as it was in 1941 when no famine occurred. In

1943, other issues were at play, including flawed policies from the British parliament that continued to export rice out of Bengal despite warnings of food insecurity [6, 16].

2.2 Modern Approaches

2.2.1 Entitlement Approach

Amartya Sen's 1983 work in *Poverty and Famines* marked a truly innovative advance in famines analysis that has continued over the course of the past 30 years [7]. Rather than suggesting that famines are caused by food availability problems, Sen shifted the focus to the accessibility of food. He proposed that a social phenomenon, which he refers to as the "entitlement of food" is the force behind famines [5]. Every person has an "entitlements set" that is the "full range of goods and services that he or she can acquire by converting his or her 'endowments':...the assets and resources, including labor power through 'exchange entitlement mappings'" [5, p. 3]. Sen concluded that these entitlement exchanges enforced through the law are to blame. Analyzing famines using a socio-economic approach helped Sen explain how famine affected some populations while others living nearby were unaffected.

Despite the momentous gains made in understanding famine by Sen's theories, blind spots still exist [7]. Three points account for a majority of the shortcomings: the framework ignores food supply, it ignores war and collapses of legal structures; and it ignores politics [7]. The fact that the entitlement approach provides only a framework and not a causal explanation has led many to build upon Sen's theories to provide more in-depth explanations for famine occurrences.

2.2.2 Democracy Approach

In Amartya Sen's later work, *Development as Freedom*, Sen argued that authoritarian systems create famines by using evidence to show that famines tend to happen in places where the victims are oppressed by dictators [13]. He proposed that autocrats do not care about their population enough to prevent famine and democratic dynamics, such as free press and opposition parties, pressure democratic governments into providing timely and adequate interventions [7,13]. He used the abrupt disappearance of famines in India following the formation of a pluralist political system in 1947 as primary evidence to support his theory [13].

Although many incidences of famine support Sen's democracy argument, Alex de Waal opposes this argument with four counterexamples. In his working paper, "Democratic Political Process and the Fight Against Famine," de Waal lists four famines that occurred under democratic rule: Ireland from 1845-1849, India from 1966-1967, Bangladesh in 1974, and Sudan from 1986-1988 [14].

2.2.3 Armed Conflict Approach

Building on his own argument against Amartya Sen's theory that democracies do not experience famines, Alex de Waal proposed that famines are caused by violent conflict [6]. He not only correlates the decline in famines to the decline in armed conflict and tyranny, he also identifies a political or military factor that contributes to all 58 instances of famine since 1870 [2]. From World War I to the fall of the Berlin Wall, famines and starvation were an overwhelming consequence of total war, genocide, or totalitarian social engineering [2].

Barring famines that occurred in North Korea, armed conflicts have been the main drivers of famine since 1990 [2]. In his book, *Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine*, de Waal recommends that stronger mechanisms for preventing and resolving conflicts and international emergency relief systems be put in place to eliminate famine and acute hunger [3].

De Waal proposes that since those who study famine have a blind spot regarding genocide and mass atrocity and those who study political and military criminality tend to have a blind spot regarding famine, the causal connections between the two have been largely unnoticed [17]. In an effort to provide evidence for his theory, he created a dataset that includes two overlapping events: historic famines and episodes of mass intentional starvation¹. The dataset provides a brief cause for each of the 70 events between 1870-2011².

2.3 Gaps in Previous Research

While de Waal's Famine Trends Dataset provides brief descriptions of the causes of each famine, the descriptions overlook a critical component of famines: distribution and access. Distribution patterns of and access to food can be disrupted through conscious actions of

¹ It includes two kinds of overlapping events, which have hitherto largely been studied separately. One set of events is great and catastrophic famines. A famine is defined as a food crisis that causes elevated mortality over a specific period of time. Using the criteria developed by Stephen Devereux (Devereux 2000) for 'great famines' (100,000 or more excess deaths) and 'catastrophic famines' (one million or more excess deaths), it includes any famine for which the upper estimate of excess deaths falls above 100,000. Using the four-point scale for 'famine crimes' developed by David Marcus (Marcus 2003), it also includes episodes of mass intentional starvation. For these events, the threshold is 10,000 deaths by starvation for inclusion in the listing. However, only events of mass intentional starvation that caused over 100,000 deaths are included in the quantitative dataset, on which the graphs are based. There are major methodological issues with the estimation of excess mortality. Generally speaking, better demographic calculations lead to lower estimations of excess deaths than those provided by journalists and other contemporary observers. We might therefore reasonably expect an upward bias in the figures for earlier famines on the record. On the other hand, contemporary definitions of famine (e.g. Howe and Devereux 2004) provide thresholds for nutrition and mortality that correspond with normal or near-normal conditions in many historic societies (see Ó Gráda 2015, pp. 174-5). <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2015/10/12/historic-famines-and-episodes-of-mass-intentional-starvation/>

² The full dataset can be found in Table 3 in the Appendix

governments or groups to cause harm to others. There are numerous examples of groups being deliberately deprived of essential food needs as part of a widespread or systematic attack on their ethnicity. For instance, mass intentional starvation was a crucial component of total war tactics used during World War II [6]. Amidst gross genocide tactics pursued in Germany, Nazis carried out their Hunger Plan to free up resources for Germans by starving Jewish populations and cutting off supplies to the Soviet Union [6]. As many as one million Ukrainians died from plans that isolated them from their usual agriculture space for over 900 days from 1932-1933 [6].

David Marcus's four degrees of government conduct related to famine provides a framework to assess these events.

Faminogenic acts are categorized on a four-point scale:

1. *First-degree famine crimes: Governments or other authorities that deliberately use famine as a tool of extermination or a means of forcing a population to submit to their control;*
2. *Second-degree famine crimes: Public authorities pursue policies that are the principal cause of famine, and continue to pursue these policies even after becoming aware that they result in famine;*
3. *Third-degree of culpable famine causation: Public authorities are indifferent: their policies may not be the principal cause of famine, but they do little or nothing to alleviate hunger; and*
4. *Fourth-degree or non-culpability: Incapable or incapacitated authorities, faced with food crises caused by external factors (climatic, economic, etc.), are unable to respond effectively to needs [15, p. 246-275].*

Previous research has concluded that more than half (54.1%) of all great famines can be attributed to second-degree faminogenic behavior, meaning public leaders have used their power to influence access to food and cause harm to groups under their control [16].

The famine that occurred in Ethiopia in 1984 is a prime example of this; government policies of forced collectivization, grain seizures, and taxation were used to starve separatist movements [17]. Other examples include famines in Bengal, China, Burma, Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines, the Indonesian archipelago, Papua New Guinea, the South Pacific, and Manchuria [6].

The fact that governments pursue policies to destroy their enemies is well supported, but the reasoning behind the actual enactment of these famine-inducing policies is not well explained; however, ethnic ties are a strong motivating force for these public authorities.

Ethnic conflicts are disputes over power relations between communities that view themselves as distinct from each other in their culture [18]. Extensive research on ethnic politics demonstrates the ways in which ethnicity directly affects one's livelihood and the opportunities available to groups in societies. In Africa, ethnic identity is a powerful motivator for action, with one theory reasoning that ethnicities have strategic functionality where subscribing to one ethnicity secures more political power and thus better access to resources than some other ethnicity [19].

When ethnic disputes erupt, resources often play some role in escalation or continuation of the violence. The most essential resources needed for human survival—food, water, and shelter—are no exception to this. Intuitively, it is easy to see how this scenario would unfold. Imagine a country that, for whatever reason, does not grow enough food to sufficiently feed its population and cannot import any. Everybody in that country needs food to keep themselves and their families alive, but their well-being comes at a cost of another person's because food is in limited supply. In such a situation, the best way to ensure your and your family's survival is to form coalitions based on ethnicity. In James Fearon's article, "Why Ethnic Politics and 'Pork' Tend to Go Together," he suggests that groups will mobilize along ethnic lines when there is competition over finite resources. These finite resources, or in Fearon's case, "pork," present a unique circumstance in which you want to limit the size of the winning group so that each person can have as much of the resource as possible—in this case, food.

Ethnicity works well as an organizing factor because there are strong incentives to form a coalition that can easily distinguish the winners from losers, and any common markers such as physical appearance, speech, or manners not easily misrepresented can be used as a means of group organization [20]. Therefore, it is logical to assume that ethnic conflict would motivate the group with more power to maximize its injury to the less powerful group by interrupting patterns of food availability.

The idea that ethnic conflict contributes to famine has already been proposed. Amartya Sen's "entitlement of food" theory reinforces this idea that accessibility of food, not a lack of food, can cause targeted groups to be affected by famine while other groups are spared [5]. In David Keen's book, *The Benefits of Famine*, he argues that ethnic groups, merchants, and political elites can benefit from famines [21]. The Nazi Hunger Plan did not only seek to cause harm to its Jewish and Soviet enemies, but was also carried out with Nazi hopes of seizing land for their Aryan race [2]. Similarly, colonial conquests in the Americas caused famines in ethnic native populations for the sole purpose of laying claim to their land [2].

There are numerous examples of populations being subjected to intentional starvation and famine due to their ethnicity, but the link between famine and ethnic conflict has been considered for particular events. The lack of a multi-event approach to studying ethnic conflict as a source of famine may be due to the "blind spots" between famines and mass atrocity studies, but logic and evidence support a strong connection [6]. Before delving into the evidence, it is useful to understand previous approaches to explaining famines and how they are studied today.

The previous theories that explain why famines occur serve as a theoretical juncture for testing the relationship between ethnic conflict and the occurrence of famine and mass starvation. As previously mentioned, the link between famine and ethnic conflict has been considered for

events only on a case-by-case basis without providing any assumption that ethnic conflict is a driver of all famines. The objective of this research is to determine whether such a theory can be built. The scope of this study is limited to Africa because ethnicity plays a powerful role in livelihoods, identities, and politics; and famines continue to inflict its burden on the population on the continent. Furthermore, because data on deaths are generally not as strong for events before 1950, the scope of this research is limited to the timespan between 1950-2019.

3.0 Methods

To determine whether famines in Africa are caused by ethnic conflict, two datasets describing famine incidences were combined and each data point was researched to determine if ethnic conflict was the cause. The Famine Trends Dataset assembled by Alex de Waal is the most comprehensive view of famines since it includes two sets of events: great and catastrophic famines and episodes of mass intentional starvation from 1870-2011 [2]. Criteria for great and catastrophic famine events were developed by Stephen Devereux whereby great famines are defined as incidences that resulted in 100,000 or more deaths while catastrophic famines are those with 1,000,000 or more deaths [22]. Furthermore, mass intentional starvation episodes were compiled by David Marcus using a four-point scale he created for faminogenic crimes. By including events of mass intentional starvation, a more complete conclusion can be made in regard to how ethnic conflicts lead to situations of famine because this research can conclude whether governments carrying out these mass intentional starvations are doing so along ethnic lines. De Waal includes only mass intentional starvation episodes that resulted in over 100,00 deaths in his research; however, this research includes all of Devereux's and Marcus's data to be able provide more data points, and thus, more inclusive results.

The datasets provided by de Waal and Dereveux include only famines for which mortality estimates are available, and therefore omit civil war-related famines because of the difficulties in separating deaths due to conflict and deaths due to famine [22]. Since the estimate of deaths resulting from all famines, regardless of an association with civil war, is highly incomplete and ambiguous, and famines during civil war may also be due to ethnic conflict, these events were included in this dataset [23]. De Waal's dataset ends in 2011, but the Somali

famine that began in 2010 extended into 2012 and the UN declared a famine in South Sudan in 2017, so alternate sources were used to provide data for these two events.

There is a chance that mass intentional starvations between 2011-2019 may not be represented in this newly created dataset, but any results based on the events used should carry over to any missing points of starvation. The information from these datasets provided a basis for further research on each, but no dataset exists that describes deaths by ethnicity. Therefore, each event was thoroughly researched to determine if ethnic groups were disproportionately affected by the famine or if starvation was a part of an attack on an ethnic group.

4.0 Results

As noted above, all episodes of famines and mass intentional starvation that occurred in Africa from 1950-2019 are included. Table 1 lists the 20 results yielded. This chapter provides in depth analyses of each episode to determine if, and the extent of, ethnic conflict on the situation.

Table 1: Famine/Mass Intentional Starvation, 1950-2018

Dates	Country
1957-1958	Ethiopia
1966	Ethiopia
1968-1970	Nigeria
1972-1975	Ethiopia
1974-1975	Angola
1977-1978	Zaire* (present day DR Congo)
1980-1981	Uganda
1982-1985	Mozambique
1983-1985	Ethiopia
1984-1985	Sudan
1988	Sudan
1992-1993	Liberia
1992-1993	Somalia
1993-1994	Angola
1997-2002	DR Congo
1998-1999	Sudan
2003-2005	Sudan
2003-2006	Uganda
2010-2012	Somalia
2017	South Sudan

*Zaire information is included in DR Congo analyses since Zaire became the DR Congo in 1997

Note: Devereux includes a starvation in Somalia from 1974-1975, but this was excluded because the international community considers government response to the drought a “success” and therefore, not a famine/starvation [24].

4.1 Angola: Famines 1974-1975; 1993-1994

Angola gained its independence from Portugal in 1974 only to become entangled in its own civil war. The civil war, which lasted over 20 years, was ignited over challenges to a power-sharing agreement between three former liberation groups: the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA), the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) [42]. Each group had its own vision for the future of Angola, and each was backed by opposing ethnic groups. The FNLA was supported by the Bakongo ethnic group, the MPLA was rooted in Mbundu and Mestiqo views, and the UNITA was backed by the Ovimbundu people [42]. Government instability from the war is one reason for the lack of food resources, but ethnic tensions seem to have played a much larger role as these tensions stretch back centuries [43]. Although ethnicity did not play a significant role in the war, there is no evidence that it also did not in relation to the famine. On the other hand, there are no data on the deaths from famine so no determination could be made.

4.2 Democratic Republic of Congo: Famine, 1977-1978; Mass Intentional Starvation, 1997-2002

Famine occurred in the Bas-Zaire region of Zaire (present-day Democratic Republic of Congo) in 1977 following a reduction in crop production associated with drought and flooding [25]. All analyses of the causes of this famine conclude that drought is its cause, but previous theories concerning famines suggests that other factors are also at play. The report "The Consequences of the Drought in Bas-Zaire," published in 1980, concluded that in all areas of the

region, the famine was “particularly severe” in the Bas-Fleuve sub-region [26]. The only major difference in the Bas-Fleuve sub-region compared to all of its neighboring areas was the dominant tribe, Yombe people surrounded by Bakongo people [26]. Since drought does not follow along ethnic lines, the only explanation for the disproportionate burden that the Yombe people faced is ethnic discrimination. Additionally, a *New York Times* article reported that the Zairian government diverted relief supplies for its own use instead of using them to prevent additional deaths from famine [25]. Therefore, ethnic conflict between the Yombe society and the government is a cause of this famine and the government second-degree famine crime.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo) second civil war, which drew in many of its neighboring countries and international attention, is known as “Africa’s first world war” [27]. The war began in 1998, but the country’s civilians had been subjected to extreme violence since 1994, when Hutu genocidaires fled into the country to escape potential retribution in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide. These genocidaires fueled ethnic hatreds in Congo upon their arrival, which led to violence between groups, communal massacres, and attacks on people solely based on their ethnicity [28]. Congolese security forces detained thousands of ethnic Tutsis and rebel sympathizers then tortured and executed them based on their ethnic identities and broadcast hate messages over the radio [28]. Although the war is fueled not only by ethnic hatred, much of the fighting has led to cycles of retaliatory violence so ethnic conflict is a large source of the fighting [29].

Similarly, the mass intentional starvation that transpired from 1998-2002 struck the Tutsi-majority Kivus region in the northeast of the country the hardest. The insecurity of this region made it extremely dangerous for aid groups to provide any humanitarian support or report on what was happening, but strong evidence suggests that the government was either deliberately using

starvation as a weapon against Tutsis, which would result in a first-degree famine crime, or at the very least, pursuing policies that were the principle cause of the starving of thousands, a second-degree famine crime [15]. The number of deaths from starvation is difficult to estimate; however, reports range from 290,000 to 5,400,000, most of whom were women and children. Rebel groups are known to have spread fear and the threat of famine throughout parts of the country [27]. The fighting in Congo continues today and famine may occur again, according to the UN [30].

4.3 Ethiopia: Famines 1957-1958, 1966, 1972-1975, 1983-1985

Famines are no rare occurrence to Ethiopians, who have experienced four of them since 1950. The government constantly blames recurrent droughts, but the government is actually to blame. Kenya, the country that borders the southern part of Ethiopia, also experiences similar drought patterns, but has been able to save its populations from famine through government actions [31]. Conversely, each famine in Ethiopia, regardless of any ethnic violence concurrently occurring, is a prime example of ethnic conflict as a cause of famine and first- and second-degree famine crimes. The famines of 1957-1958, 1966, and 1972-1975 were deliberately created by Haile Selassie's administration, through both violent and nonviolent means [32]. Haile Selassie was ethnically Amharan and wanted to see an Ethiopia unified under Amharan culture. He used the recurring droughts in his country as a way to wipe out the other ethnicities by depriving them of any relief.

The 1966 famine was labeled "The Hidden Famine" because the government denied any existence of starvation and covered up the evidence [31]. Attacks on ethnic groups eventually exploded and Haile Selassie was overthrown in a military coup in 1960. The systematic attacks

fueled secessionist movements along ethnic lines, but this became more of a reason for the government to starve certain ethnic groups for retaliation purposes. In 1973, the Oromo ethnic group was subjected to the government's antagonism and were specifically chosen to starve and perish since they were rivals of the ruling party's ethnic group [31].

Furthermore, the 1984 famine was also caused by ethnic conflict. Government policies of forced collective farming, grain sequestration, and taxation were used to starve separatist movements in the Wollo, Tigray, and now-independent Eritrea regions [17]. Ethnic tensions continue to fuel violence around the country and droughts continue to impact the population, but appropriate government responses have been able to keep Ethiopians from starvation as of late.

4.4 Liberia: Mass Intentional Starvation 1992-1993

Between 1989 and 1993, Liberian government forces clashed with the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) in a conflict that is characterized as one of the most gruesome civil wars [33]. The civil war from 1992-1993 was characterized by gross crimes against humanity including wide-ranging killings along ethnic lines, executions, rape, torture, and the use of child soldiers [33]. Most of the NPFL's violence was directed at the Krahn and Mandingo groups due to their strong backing of the government. Observers suggest ethnic cleansing of Krahn and Mandingo occurred at the hands of the NPFL [34]. Several towns were cut off from receiving any aid or supplies, which exacerbated the situation and allowed for the NPFL to hide their actions. These ethnic groups were intentionally starved, and all aid was blocked from reaching those located in the northern part of the country [33]. Since the government was unable to provide relief, it is a fourth-degree famine crime. The country's first civil war ended in 1996, but a second civil war

began in 1999 and lasted until 2003. Ethnic tensions continue to flare up, but effective government response seems to have eliminated famines in all instances.

4.5 Mozambique: Famine 1982-1985

The causes of Mozambique's famine are traditionally thought of as combination of a drought lasting from mid-1982 to 1983, followed by a cyclone and flooding in 1984, and a civil war lasting from 1976 to 1992 [44]. The civil war was not fought along ethnic lines; rather, it was a power struggle between the liberation movement, Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO), and an armed rebel group, Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO) [45]. RENAMO was particularly gruesome in its violent acts, which account for over 80% of the violent incidences throughout the war [45]. The power struggle was primarily instigated by and supported from outside actors and internal factors such as FRELIMO's socialist policies, but ethnic conflict was a deep-rooted feature of this conflict [45]. Disparate treatment of ethnic groups during Portuguese colonialism created resentment between groups, which further fueled the conflict [46]. Despite this, there are no data that specifies the ethnicities of those who died from famine because many of the deaths were throughout all over the country [46].

4.6 Nigeria: Famine 1968-1870

Nigeria maintained a fragile peace between its Hausa-Fulani ethnic group in the north and its Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups in the south following Nigeria's independence in 1960,

but this peace was disrupted in 1966 with the rise of Supreme Commander Yakubu Gowon [35]. Gowon, who was from the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group, considered the Igbo group his enemy and encouraged targeted attacks against Igbo civilians. In response, an independent 'Republic of Biafra for the Igbo people' was established in 1967 [35]. Civil war broke out between the Republic of Biafra and Gowon's government, lasting from 1967- 1970 [36]. Deliberate starvation and withholding aid from reaching Biafra, first-degree famine crimes, caused famine to occur in the region. Eventually Biafra collapsed and was reunited into Nigeria, but the outspokenness of the Igbo Biafran people has ensured that they will not be primary subjects of famine in the future.

4.7 Somalia: Famines 1992-1993, 2010-2012

Somalia's recurrent famines are caused by more than just its lack of functioning government. Somalia is considered to be a mostly homogenous ethnic state, but sub-ethnic clan conflict has disrupted any promise of peace. Clan politics also caused the droughts in the early 1990s and 2010 to disproportionately harm certain groups over others. This point is generally overlooked by analysts because the failed government and recurring droughts provide enough reasoning itself. Nevertheless, the deaths from the famine in 1992-1993 were centered in Bay, which had some of the most fertile agricultural land and is home to the Ashraf minority group [37]. The Marauding clan invaded the region in 1991 and used food as a weapon against their enemy. The international community provided aid, but the Marauding clan continually intercepted the aid, preventing it from reaching the population in need of food. [38]. A similar situation created conditions of famine to reappear in 2010, but this time the Al Shabab terrorist organization was to

blame. Al Shabab blocked aid from reaching ethnic groups it was trying to pull under its control. The famine was felt the worst in the Bakool and Lower Shabelle regions, near the Bay region. A study published in *Food Policy* determines that the Rahanweyn and Bantu/Jarar ethnic groups had the highest mortality during the famine [24]. The government cannot be blamed for any culpability in these famines since it was overthrown in 1991 and the country has lacked a functioning central government since then.

4.8 South Sudan: Famine, 2017

South Sudan has been embroiled in a civil war since 2013 due to unresolved issues between members of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and its army (SPLA). The conflict's origins were primarily political, but ethnic conflicts and communal mobilization spiraled out of control [39]. In 2013, tensions became patterned along ethnic lines after allegations that the vice president was planning a coup against the president. The vice president is from the Nuer ethnic group and the president is from the Dinka ethnic group. These ethnicities have been in conflict with each other for centuries. In 2017 the UN declared a famine in the country's Unity state. The famine is a direct result of the ethnic conflict; however, current reports suggest that the famine is a somewhat equal burden to both the Nuer and Dinka ethnicities, but Nuer communities in the Unity state are under more attack because the government and armed groups have restricted humanitarian assistance into the area [40]. The famine conditions are improving around the country, but the threat of starvation still haunts many.

4.9 Sudan: Famines 1984-1985, 1988, 1998-1999, 2003-2005

Sudan has experienced numerous periods of ethnic violence as well as periods of famines and starvation. David Keen, in *The Benefits of Famine: A Political Economy of Famine and Relief in Southwestern Sudan 1983-1989*, argues how wealth held by the Dinka ethnic group has exposed them to human-made famine in the context of a lack of protection from the government [41]. In the absence of their full support, the government targeted Dinka, Dengo, Jur, and Bongo ethnic groups and blocked relief aid, resulting in a second-degree famine crime. The government continued these tactics and forced untimely deaths of secessionist groups in the south in 1988, 1998-1999, and 2003-2005, but Dinka ethnicities were affected the most [41]. These groups separated from Sudan in the creation of South Sudan in 2011, but problems between these groups continue to cause starvation today.

4.10 Uganda: Famines 1980-1981, 2003-2006

Similar to many of the other cases in Africa, Uganda experienced famines during war and drought, and equally similar is the fact that ethnic conflict caused some people to starve while others lived. In Uganda, the famines of 1980-1981 were the result of repression of the Acholi ethnic tribe. The government began to take revenge against the Acholi in 1986 when Yoweri Museveni overthrew Milton Obote to become president. The Acholi supported Obote, who used the military to violently repress southern Ugandans.

The famine that occurred from 2003-2006 was caused by an ongoing insurgency between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Ugandan government forces. The famine was

concentrated in the Kitgum district, where the LRA and Acholi resided. Due to their tension with the government, the government did not provide relief to the rebels. The LRA was eventually forced out of Uganda and threat of famine is tempered with stronger government responses.

4.11 Summary of Evidence

In conclusion, out of the 20 instances of famine that were researched, 17 have credible evidence to support that ethnicity played a role in famine or mass intentional starvation episodes. Two famines in Angola and one in Mozambique did not have information to support the theory that ethnic conflict is a cause of famine, but instances in the other eight countries do. Table 2 lists the results of the extensive research of each episode of famine and starvation.

Table 2: Famine and Ethnic Conflict

Country	Dates of Famine/Starvation	Was ethnic conflict involved?	Primary Ethnic Group Affected	Faminogenic Act Degree
Angola	1974-1975	Unsure		
	1993-1994	Unsure		
DR Congo	1977-1978	Yes	Yombe	2
	1997-2002	Yes	Tutsi	2
Ethiopia	1957-1958	Yes	Tigray	2
	1966	Yes	Wollo	2
	1972-1975	Yes	Wollo, Tigray	2
	1983-1985	Yes	Wollo, Tigray, Eritrea	1
Liberia	1992-1993	Yes	Krahns, Mandingos	4
Mozambique	1982-1985	Unsure		
Nigeria	1968-1970	Yes	Igbo	1
Somalia	1992-1993	Yes	Ashraf	4
	2010-2012	Yes	Rahanweyn, Bantu/Jarer	4
South Sudan	2017	Yes	Neur, Dinka	2
Sudan	1984-1985	Yes	Dinka, Dengo, Jur, Bongo	2
	1988	Yes	Dinka	2
	1998-1999	Yes	Dinka	2
	2003-2005	Yes	Dinka	2
Uganda	1980-1981	Yes	Acholi	2
	2003-2006	Yes	Acholi	2

5.0 Discussion

Out of the 20 occurrences of famine and starvation in Africa from 1950-2019, 17 had sufficient evidence that deaths during famines are caused by ethnic conflict. In every situation, there was a systematic way death occurred when conditions ripe for famine were present. Ethnic groups at odds with majority forces were starved to death and denied critical supplies to sustain their lives. Over a third of these events were a direct cause of the government, which was a second-degree famine crime.

Extensive research was conducted on every event to provide an accurate overview of ethnic conflicts in Africa to avoid the common trap of misinterpreting all conflicts as being ethnically motivated. During that research, it could not be determined if three episodes, the Angolan famines in 1974-1975 and 1993-1994 and the Mozambique famine from 1982-1985, were worsened by ethnic conflict. It is important to note, however, that ethnic conflict was not ruled out as a cause of the deaths of some and not others; there simply is not enough evidence to make any conclusions.

6.0 Conclusion

In order to achieve the UN's second Sustainable Development Goal: to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture, famines must be eliminated. In 2015, The Global Hunger Index alleged that famines could be eliminated for the first time in history; yet we continue to see famine situations in 2020. A full understanding of the causes of famine is necessary to make strong progress towards this goal.

Previous theories have attempted to identify the primary causes of famine, as a situation with too many people and too little food, to entitlement patterns, to the outbreak of armed conflict. All of these theories are grounded in logical explanations, but they do not describe the entire cause of famine. By including ethnic conflict in the picture, a clearer understanding of the causes of famine is made. In Africa, famines may be threatening to break out because of droughts and armed conflict, but it is ethnic conflict between individuals that decides who starves and who eats. The evidence is not clearly on the surface, so it has been easily overlooked. Conversely with a deep, investigative look below the surface, it is clear that one's ethnicity in relation to those around them, is the reason for deaths during famine.

Researching all famine and mass starvation episodes in Africa from 1950 to 2019 found that 85% (or 17 out of 20) were worsened by ethnic conflict. This implies that ethnic conflict motivates groups to maximize injury to their opponents by interrupting patterns of food availability.

While the research and evidence are strongly supported, a number of limitations affect interpretation. The first is that original data were not used, and two datasets were combined. Only sources available in English were accessed, which may limit the number and accuracy of the

evidence collected. There is a likely chance that using interviews and first-hand accounts of each situation would lead to a more accurate and complete picture, but that was not possible for this research. Further research should build upon these sources to fill in the gaps.

It is particularly important to recognize the connection between ethnic conflict and famine in order to make progress on ending mass starvation around the world. Eliminating famines will not be easy, but the international community should sincerely commit to resolving or easing ethnic tensions if famines are to be eliminated. One recommendation to raise the costs for those who carry out faminogenic acts is to refer them to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for committing a crime against humanity. When these famine and starvation events are caused by human actions, it appears to be akin to “deliberately inflicting on the [ethnic] group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part,” [47, p. 111] which is in the UN’s definition of genocide and forms of ethnic cleansing.

Genocide and ethnic cleansing are terms that are not used carelessly by any stretch. They are understood to be among the most severe violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and therefore are not applied to just any act, but only to the most egregious forms of violence and persecution. Ethnic cleansing, although not formally defined, is broadly recognized as “a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas” [47, p. 111]. Genocide is formally defined in Article II of the “Convention of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime on Genocide” as:

Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, such as:

- A. Killing members of the group;*
- B. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;*

- C. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;*
- D. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;*
- (E) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group [47, p. 111].*

Cases of genocide must include not only the physical attack, but also an element of intent. Proving intent on the part of the perpetrators is the most difficult element to determine, and therefore, makes genocide a unique case. At any rate, famines and mass intentional starvations caused by human actions seem to meet both criteria for genocide.

Therefore, in order to eliminate famines in Africa, it is recommended that perpetrators of famine and forced starvation be tried for genocide or ethnic cleansing. If past perpetrators are charged in the ICC, then there is hope that this will raise the costs to others who may want to do the same in the future.

Appendix Supplemental Table

Table 3: Famine Trends Dataset

Date	Place	Cause	Deaths	Source
1870-71	Persia	Economic crisis, drought	500,000-1.5 million	Foran 1989, Okasaki 1986
1876-1879	China (Shanxi, Henan, Shandong, Zhili, and Shaanxi)	Drought, lack of state capacity due to rebellion & colonialism	9m	Edgerton-Tarpley, 2008; Fuller, 2015; Davis, 2002; Li, 2007.
1870s	India	Drought, colonialism	6m	Davis, 2002
1876-79	Brazil	Drought, economic crisis	500,000	Cunniff, 1970
1885-99	Congo	Colonialism, forced labor	3m	Hochschild, 1998; Acherson 1999
1888-89	India (Ganjam)	Drought, colonialism	150,000	Dyson, 1989
1888-92	Ethiopia	Drought, war, rinderpest	1m	Pankhurst, 1968
1888-92	Sudan	Drought, war	2m	de Waal, 1989
1891-92	Russia	Drought, economic crisis	275,000	Robbins, 1970
1896-7	India	Drought, colonialism	5.5m	Dyson, 1989
1897-1901	China	Drought, economic crisis, colonial warfare, internal rebellion	1m	Mallory, 1926; Li, 2007; Esherick, 1987; Cohen, 1997.
1896-1900	Brazil	Drought, economic crisis	1m	Smith, 1946
1899-1901	India	Drought, colonialism	1m	Dyson, 1989
1899-1902	S Africa[1]	Boer War camps	42,000	Carver, 2000
1904-07	Namibia[2]	Genocide	34-110,000	Olusoga and Ericson, 2011
1905-7	Tanganyika	Repression of rebellion	200,000	Ilfie, 1979
1906-7	India	Drought, colonialism	250,000	Dyson, 1989
1913-14	Sahel	Drought, colonial conquest	125,000	Schove, 1977
1914-16	East Africa	War	300,000	Paice, 2007
1915-18	Greater Syria (including Lebanon)	War, blockade, locusts	350,000	Schilcher, 1992 p.229; Antonius 1946, p.241; Fawaz 2015
1915-16	Turkey (Armenians)	Genocide, forced deportation	400,000	Morgenthau, 1918; Gilbert 1994; Suny, 2015; Kevorkian 2011
1917-18	Germany	Blockade	763,000	Vincent, 1985
1917-19	Persia	War, drought	455,200	Afkhami, 2003
1919	Armenia	Post-conflict	200,000	Hovannisian 1971 p. 130

Table 3 Continued

1920-21	China (Henan, Shaanxi, Shandong, Shanxi, Zhili (Hebei))	Drought, economic crisis	500,000	Mallory, 1926; Fuller, 2013; Peking United International Famine Relief Committee, 1922; Li, 2007
1921-22	Russia	Civil war	1m-10m (5m official)	Lowe 2002; Patenaude 2002, pp. 196-8.
1928-30	China (NW – Gansu, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Henan, Shandong and Zhili (Hebei))	Drought, War between Chiang Kai-Shek and warlords	5.5m – 10m	Li, 2007, p. 304; Fuller, 2015
1929-30	China (Hunan)	Drought, war	2m	Devereux, 2000; Becker, 1996; Ó Gráda, 2009
1930-31	Libya[3]	Concentration camps	50,000	Baldinetti, 2014
1932-34	USSR (Ukraine)	Collectivization	3.3m	Snyder, 2012
1932-34	USSR (Russia, Kazakhstan)	Collectivization	1.5m	Snyder, 2012
1934, 1936-7	China (Sichuan)	War, economic crisis	5m	Ó Gráda, 2008; Wright, 2000
1941-44	Hunger Plan[4]			
	Germany/USSR	Starvation of Russian POW's by the Wehrmacht	2.6m	Snyder, 2012
	Germany/USSR	Siege of Leningrad	1m	Snyder, 2012; Collingham 2012
	Germany/USSR	Deaths of Soviet Citizens due to starvation in the USSR, including those killed in the occupation of Kiev and Kharkiv	1m	Snyder, 2012
	Poland	Death of residents of the Warsaw Ghetto from starvation	83,000	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.
1941-50	Germany/USSR	Death of German POWs in Soviet captivity	1.1m	World Peace Foundation forthcoming
1941-2	Greece	Blockade	300,000	Mazower, 1993
1942-3	China (Henan)	War	1.5m	Muscolino 2015; Garnaut, 2013
1941-45	East Asia (various locations)	Japanese soldiers who died of malnutrition and starvation	1.044m	Collingham 2012
1942-45	Indonesia	Japanese occupation	2.4m	Van der Eng, 2008
1943	India (Bengal)	Govt wartime policy	2.1m	Dyson & Maharatna, 1991
1943-44	Rwanda	Drought	300,000	Devereux, 2000
1944-45	Vietnam	Japanese occupation	2m	Gunn, 2011
1945-47	Eastern Europe	Reprisals against Germans	250,000	Lowe, 2013
1947	USSR (Moldova and other areas)	Food shortage and policy	600,000-1.5m	Ganson, 2009; Ó Gráda 2015, pp. 12-13.
1958	Ethiopia	Drought	100,000	Wolde Mariam, 1986

Table 3 Continued

1958-62	China	Govt policies	18.5-32m	Ashton et al. 1984; Peng 1987; Ó Gráda 2015, p. 159;
1966	Ethiopia[5]	Drought	50,000	Wolde Mariam, 1986
1969-70	Nigeria	War/blockade	500,000	Leitenberg, 2006
1970-73	Sahel[6]	Drought	0-101,000	de Waal, 1989
1972-73	India (Maharashtra)[7]	Drought	130,000	Dyson 1991; Devereux, 2000
1973	Ethiopia	Drought	200,000	Wolde Mariam, 1986
1974	Bangladesh	Flood, cyclones, economic crisis	1.5m	Alamgir, 1980
1975-78	East Timor	Conflict	104,000	Van Klinken, 2012
1975-9	Cambodia	Year Zero	1.21m	Kiernan, 2008
1983-5	Ethiopia	War, drought	600,000	de Waal, 1997
1984-5	Sudan (Darfur, Kordofan, Red Sea)	Drought, economic crisis	240,000	de Waal, 1989
1988	Sudan (South)	War	100,000	Burr, 1998
1992-3	Somalia	War	220,000	Hansch et al., 1994
1991-1999	Iraq	Sanctions, war and dictatorship	166,000-300,000	Garfield 1999; Ali and Shah 2000.
1995-7	North Korea	Food shortage and govt policy	240,000-600,000	Goodkind et al., 2011; Spoorenberg and Schwekendiek 2012
1998-2002	Democratic Republic of Congo	War	290,500-5.4 million	Roberts et al. 2000, 2001, 2003; Coghlan et al. 2006, 2007.
1998-9	Sudan (South)	War	100,000	Medley, 2010; Burr. 1998
2003-05	Sudan (Darfur)	War	200,000	Government Accountability Office, 2006
2003-06	Uganda	War	100,000	Mazurana et al. 2014
2011	Somalia[8]	Drought, war	164,000	Checchi and Robinson 2013; Maxwell and Nisar, 2015

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