The Framing of a Famine
A case study of Ethiopia

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1. INTRODUCTION
In 2015, signs of Ethiopia being exposed to the toughest drought in decades first appeared (Al Jazeera, 2015a, BBC News, 2015, Schemm, 2016). Having a population of more than 80% relying on agriculture for subsistence, preexisting incessant malnutrition and pervasive poverty, conditions were further exacerbated when the ocean-warming phenomena, El Niño struck the East African country leading to extensive crop failure later that year. El Niño enabled a devastating change in weather patterns, leaving even a greater number of people in need of emergency food aid (Al Jazeera, 2015a). Furthermore, recent reports show that Ethiopia has over the past three years gone from a stage 3 (crisis) in the famine early warning system, to a 4 (emergency) and in some locations, close to or in the last and most serious level, stage 5 (catastrophe) (FEWS, 2017a). The Somali region, located in east of Ethiopia is today at its most vulnerable state, with severe levels of malnutrition and spread of disease (ReliefWeb, n.d., FEWS, 2017a, Johnston, 2017b, Jeffrey, 2017, MSF, 2017a). Still, there seem to be a lack of both domestic and international recognition of the ongoing famine, with the Ethiopian government continuously framing the situation as stable and food secure when addressing concerns of increasing amounts of people in need of relief (Wolde, 2017). The top donors of foreign aid and international non-governmental organizations (INGO’s) in Ethiopia have similarly to the government, emphasized the drought as the main culprit of the hunger and suffering since 2015, although they have been somewhat more critical of the situation.

Because of the immense economic prosperity Ethiopia has attained through recent years, governmental efforts to improve safety nets, outreach programs by both international and domestic aid agencies and a lowering of mortality rates, there seems to be a notion of Ethiopia finally escaping the devastating grip of famines (de Waal, 2016). However, the current number of 8.5 million people in need of food aid and the death toll of 67 children due to malnourishment in the Somali region in June alone, suggests otherwise (Addis Standard, 2017, Esat, 2017, Oxfam, 2018,). Therefore, this study attempts to look at how the actors have framed and portrayed the current situation in Ethiopia. One of the two main
actors relevant in this paper are the current government led by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), who has taken a clear stance and repeatedly refrain from calling it famine by pointing to the drought as explanation for the perceived widespread hunger. Similar to what the Haile Selassie government failed to do during the drought of 1972-73 and later the Dergue regime did during the 1980’s, delayed reactions by the current Ethiopian government to assess the severity of the situation have been observed (Riley, 2017:18). The second actor in this paper will be represented by a part of the international community, consisting of Ethiopia’s largest bilateral partner in development aid, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and an international non-governmental organization (INGO): Médecins sans Frontières (MSF).

The research problem presented in this paper derives from the absence of research and debate about how the government and international organizations have been framing the famine in Ethiopia. Four theoretical will be presented for a better understanding of the factors that may have led to the outbreak of the famine. These theoretical frameworks described in this paper have had prominent representations in the discourse and will consist of theories about the environment, governance, and overpopulation as causes to famine. An addition of aid and its casualty on famine will be acknowledged as well. Furthermore, the analysis will attempt to provide a detailed description of how the current famine in Ethiopia has been framed by the actors.

How has the current government and international organizations framed the current famine in Ethiopia?

2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Natural disasters and more recently, climate change have historically been prominent when describing key determinants for famine (Ziegler et al, 2011). In the 1970’s, theories about population and more significantly, excessive population, causing famine were developed. It was presumed that population growth was a threat to the global food security and needed to be controlled (Ehrlich, 1968). Then, a move from famines being explained with natural factors, to famines being man-made occurred. In 1999, Amartya Sen, a renowned Indian economist introduced the theory of the absence of democratic governance being a major determinant in famine-struck regions. Thus, the inclusion of democracy and its effect on famine prevention and management were and still is widely discussed (Sen, 1999). In recent years, the idea of aid
working counterintuitively in alleviating people from famine seems to have emerged. The argument lies in the assumption that aid cripples a country’s own development whilst also undermining the state’s own self-sufficiency and thus leading to a greater vulnerability to famine (Easterly, 2006).

In the case of Ethiopia, the country has long been tainted by the images of famine, mostly because of the iconography of people suffering that was projected to the world during the 1970’s and 1980’s. In contrast to the previous assumptions on the causes to famines emphasizing natural disasters as main catalysts, a switch to the question of governance occurred during the same period. The focus was directed towards socio-political causes, instead of natural ones following the Ethiopian famine in 1972-73, leaving approximately 200,000 people dead due to starvation (Keller, 1992:612, Sen, 1983). Emperor Haile Selassie at that time had refused to admit and assess the severity of the situation, until the state of the country was revealed in a British documentary in 1973 (Shepherd, 1975:34). The mismanagement of the famine and failure to efficiently respond to the famine, had a role to play in the eventual downfall of the imperial regime of Selassie and his government in 1974 (ibid:17). The regime was toppled by the Marxist-Leninst Dergue (Committee of armed forces, police and territorial army) led by Major Mengistu Haile Mariam which once again sparked the conversation of the importance of governance during the 1980’s as the escalation of the famine reached its peak in 1983-84 (De Waal, 1991). Similar to their predecessors, the Dergue was criticized for its late reaction to the ongoing famine, which further highlighted the unfolding warfare with the separatist guerilla movement in Tigray (northern Ethiopia) and Eritrea as triggering the escalation of the situation and implicating the food and water security (De Waal, 1991, Ziegler et al, 2011:198). This particular famine raised the most attention being the famine that had perished the most deaths in Ethiopian history and initiating one of the largest television broadcasts of all time with the motive of fundraising aid money (Live Aid).

These next sections will highlight the four discourses and what has been said about them, both referring to past research, but also contemporary. This is to create a greater understanding of the different arguments explaining outbreaks of famines and further deepen the comprehension of what the relevant actors have perceived and defined the current situation in Ethiopia. The first discourse is the one of the environment as causation, followed by overpopulation, governance and lastly the role of aid.
2.1. Environmental causes
Historically, natural disasters like flooding, hurricanes, crop plight and other unpredicted weather modifications have been prominent when addressing the vulnerability and causes to famine (Gráda, 2011). More specifically, droughts or a relative lack of rain are the most important natural triggers to famines, especially in already drier regions similar to Ethiopia (Cahill, 1982:6). In this section of the paper, there will be a specific focus on what droughts entail and what importance they have in relation to famines.

2.1.1. Defining drought
Drought is the lack of enough rain for an extended period that causes water imbalance and consequently crop damage, water shortage and soil moisture (Britannica, 2018, National Geographic, n.d.). Due to this, drought has been considered the most serious physical hazard to agriculture (Britannica, 2018). The causes of drought are ingrained in the interruption of regular weather patterns, inevitably disrupting the existing water cycle. This leads to extreme vulnerability due to the large reliance people have on a steady supply of water, especially in already drier regions like Ethiopia and especially for subsistence farmers and pastoralists (Rubin and Dahlberg, 2017). Certain climate patterns and droughts have been noticed to be interlinked, with El Niño as a clear example of one. El Niño is known to alter storm patterns, exacerbating the drought even further, as it has in Ethiopia (National Geographic, n.d.).

2.1.2. Drought and famine
When elements of the biological ecosystems are profoundly disturbed, famines usually occur (Cahill, 1982:7). With 80% of the global agriculture requiring rain for survival, low precipitation events and droughts have historically been the causes of many of the largest downfalls in crop productivity (Gornall et al, 2010:2974-2975). Consequently, drier regions with larger reliance on the weather for sustenance and crash crops are more vulnerable to climatic fluctuations and thereby famine (ibid.). Additionally, countries that are already experiencing food-deficits seem to experience more harsh impacts by droughts (Reed, 1997). This hits the pastoralist and farmers in especially Asia and Africa harder, due to the agriculture often being their only livelihood. Crop loss, because of the prolonged periods without rain can lead to unemployment for the pastoralists and farmers, livestock dying and elevated prices in basic commodities further worsening the conditions for a healthy and sustainable way of living (Britannica, 2018).
Seasonal drought has long been cited as being the cause of food insecurity in Ethiopia (Oakland institute). In the beginning of the 1970’s, drought initiated the famine that struck the northeastern Ethiopia province Wollo. The drought further had an important role in the escalation of the starvation in that region and elsewhere in the country during that decade (Sen, 1981:88, Cahill, 1982:6, Rahmato, 1991:99). Because most of the rural households were already food insecure prior to the drought occurring, conditions were exacerbated. As mentioned earlier, crop failure not only affects the food supply in a region, but as observed in the Wollo region, it also affects the employment of pastoralists and farmers, restricting access to purchasing food from marketplaces (Haylemarian, 2015). Drought in combination with poorly operated market systems and flawed food aid efforts, have historically speaking evidently lead to famine (Below, 2007:329). This eventually led to the death of approximately 200,000 people during the recorded two years (1972-73) (Keller, 1992:612, Sen, 1983).

2.2. Overpopulation

In 1798, Thomas Robert Malthus introduced a theory and idea that gave birth to one of the most regularly mentioned causes to famine, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa: Overpopulation. The theory encompasses the argument that there is no set restriction for how much growth a population can undergo, while there is a set maximum for the food production (Malthus, 1926). If population was to grow faster than the production of food, famine would be an inevitable consequence (ibid.). Malthus’s theory has enabled multiple adoptions and debates regarding the significance and implications of population growth.

2.2.1. The population bomb

One of the most prominent figures discussing the correlation between overpopulation and famine, is Paul Ehrlich, who in 1968 published The population bomb. The book employed the Malthusian theory and argued that mass starvation would occur in the later part of the twentieth century. It referred to the uncontrolled population growth as “cancer” and that “the birth rate must be brought into balance with the death rate or mankind will breed itself into oblivion” (Ehrlich, 1968:1). Although Ehrlich’s predictions showed to be over exaggerated and unsubstantiated, it did shed light on how overpopulation may affect famines. The argument of population pressure determining a country’s ability to feed itself has since then been widely discussed in the discourse of the causal effect of overpopulation of famine (FAO, n.d, Pan World Affairs, 1985:64, Gillespie, 1993, Tal, 2013, Furness, 2013). The basic logic behind the
argument of population growth causing strain on food production is argued to be that the more people there are, the fewer resources there are to meet basic needs of the people, especially in poorer countries with already limited assets like water and land (FAO, n.d.). Lower birth rates, have been seen as a paramount distribution to the disruption of the so-called ticking population bomb (Kennedy, 2012, Linden, 2017).

2.2.2. Population strain in Sub-Saharan Africa and Ethiopia
The fastest growing population in the world is located in Sub-Saharan Africa, with the continent as whole expected to grow from the current 1.2 billion, to over 1.8 billion people by 2035. This will equal an increase by 50% during the coming 18 years (Bello-Schünemann, 2017). By 2035, the population in Sub-Saharan Africa will also be the youngest in the world, which illustrates that the demographic transition that was expected has not come to the region as fast as predicted (World Bank, 2015). Much of this increase will be contributed by Ethiopia, which is one of the most populous countries in the region with an exponential population growth (Feyissa, 2017). The ability to sustain the population increase will not only be a considerable challenge for major economies, but arguably even more of one for the developing world. Although overcoming this challenge may be feasible, one of the key issues in regions with already scarce resources (aggregated by climate change and natural disasters) and high population growth lies in the concern of increasing competition for water and land putting a strain on agricultural productivity (Schade and Pimentel, 2009:251). Overpopulation has furthermore, been considered to cause land degradation and desertification, which will continue to prove as an implication for farming and evidently equal distribution of subsistence for people (Ziegler et al. 2011:341).

2.3. Governance
Oliver Rubin explained famine as “the most extreme manifestation of the existence of poverty, inequality and political apathy” (Rubin, 2011:1). Governance is the third factor and may be the most important one in this particular case, when it comes to understanding the outbreaks and lack of prevention of famines, with a special emphasis on the role of democracy. The perception of famine being an institutional, organizational and policy failure have been widespread with some even arguing that “politics creates famines, and politics can stop it” (Von Braun, Teklu and Webb, 1998:2, de Waal, 2016).
2.3.1. Weak governance
One does not have to look for too long until the attribute of having “weak governance” in famine-stricken states around the world are found, both historically and currently (de Waal, 2016). Weak governance are environments in which public sectors are unable to protect rights, provide basic service and ensure that the public-sector management is effective (OECD, 2006). Failed government policies are amongst the most common features when analyzing previous famines (Basu, n.d, Sen, 1999, Pan World Affairs, 1985, Cahill, 1982). The implementation of policies that only benefit a part of the population is yet an example of weak governance and can be exemplified with the case of the Bengal Famine in 1974, in which the suffering and mortality rates could have been less severe if the state had not imposed a food-rationing system that often only benefited the urban population (Basu, n.d.). Similarly, the famine in Ethiopia in 1984 was aggravated by the restrictions the government had put on the transport of grains by private sector traders across the regional boundaries (Dorosh, 2017, Von Braun and Webb, 1994.). The blaming of weak governance and failed political efforts can also be observed by just looking at the way the recent famines in Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen amongst other nations are described today (Mercy Corps, 2017, O’Connell, 2017). For instance, famine in Somalia has been concentrated in the areas controlled by Al-Shabab (Kenny, 2011). Famine in South Sudan has been considered a direct consequence of the country’s fragile and nascent state-building combined with a political power struggle within the ruling party (UNDP, n.d.). On the other hand, the case of Ethiopia serve as an interesting case with regards to the governance being anything but weak.

2.3.2. Democracy and famine
Weak governance has often also been interpreted as “lack of democracy” in many cases. One of the most accepted and cited contributions to modern famine theory was made by the economist Amartya Sen, who claimed that “there has never been a famine in a functioning multi-party democracy” in his book Development as Freedom (Sen, 1999:178). This theory somewhat assumes that an existence of a political trade-off of famine prevention occurs in an autocracy in which the government are averse to distribute resources to the affected population, if these only represent a minority of the electorate and are not crucial for elections (Plümper and Neumayer, 2008). Sen argues that the incentive for the political elite in a democracy to satisfy the demands of those affected, stems from the inherent desire to survive politically,
which one could never do if held accountable for famine. It is because voters have power to replace the regime that the elected government is more responsive to popular demand (Sen, 1999). Sen asserts that periodic elections, active opposition parties and most significantly, free press is vital in a democracy and the prevention of famines (Sen, 1990:50). Societal institutions exercising checks and balances on the governing entity has to exist in a democracy and the free flow of information is a cornerstone for this process to function. The free press primarily has two integral roles in protection from famine: It works as a mediator of information and for accountability of the government, both domestically and internationally (Rubin, 2009:701). The protection of social and economic rights in a democracy, also offers a protection of the right to food and livelihood (de Waal, 2000:12). However, Amartya Sen fails to recognize the substantial differences in democracies themselves. Presidential democratic systems can contain more authoritarian traits than a parliament system (Rubin, 2009:711, Gerring, Thacker and Moreno, 2008). The democracy argument also assumes that the politicization of famine is the key driver for (effective) government action, although this can create counterproductive dynamics in a democracy due to the fact that pure state benevolence often is not the case when implementing policies and preventive measures (Rubin, 2011:171).

2.4. Aid

Ziegler et. al argued that even if aid is instrumental for the prevention and management of famines in fragile communities, donor entities sending emergency aid, rather than development aid has at times inhibited regions to “feed itself” by undermining the local production (Ziegler et al, 2011:196). It creates a sense of dependency on external actors to alleviate suffering. Similarly, Nicole Ball argued in 1976 that this kind of asymmetrical relationship between rich and poor countries can enable disaster. The relationship between the donor and the receiver allows the donor to intervene with little to no local knowledge about the societies they are trying to “help”, making matters worse (Ball, 1976:517-22).

2.4.1. Aid dependency and food insecurity

Today, Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the most food insecure regions in the world, yet one of the largest recipients of aid. The same goes for Ethiopia. How is this possible? William Easterly, one of the major critics of the processes of aid wrote “White Man’s Burden: Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good” in 2006. As the title implies, Easterly argues that aid from the West does more harm than good by promoting dependency in
the recipient countries. He further contends that recipient country governments “aim to please the donor instead of their electorate, by focusing on the wrong projects, project impacts are often not measured scientifically” (Easterly, 2006:32). Thus, aid has from the West neither been efficient nor sufficient enough to manage food insecurity, causing many implications for the receiving end because of the dependency on foreign intervention. One of these instances can be observed with the case of the famine in Bihar in 1968, in which the central government allegedly waited to send relief because of expected external resources to be put in place by the U.S (Plümper and Neumayer, 2009:52). In this case, aid functioned as incentive for government inaction. Timmer (2005) correspondingly argues that government policymakers’ investment in creating healthy rural economies and food security, can be undermined by the readily available food that is provided by donors completely dismissing a state’s own production and commodities.

2.4.2. The politics of aid
There is no guarantee that the government will efficiently and responsibly use the international aid, especially in an autocracy (Cohen and Werker, 2007). Food aid has and continues to be essential for saving lives and alleviate famine since domestic production cannot sufficiently meet the relief needs in already vulnerable regions. However, external aid has proven to create obstacles for the long-term development by directing its resources towards emergency relief, and often only that, when in actuality what is needed is more developmental aid (Ziegler et al, 2011:196). The aid also creates a dichotomy of some perceiving it as beneficial, while others experiencing it as victimization. Powerful groups can therefore exploit the less powerful through programs like food for work (FFW), in which power relations between the “giver” and “receiver” are obvious (Edkins, 2009:67). Furthermore, aid does not always come without strings attached. The previous executive Secretary to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Adebayo Adedeji contends that structural adjustment programs are to be blamed for the food crisis in Africa. This is due to the international donor community neglecting African leaders’ own perception of development which further deepens the dependency (Adedeji, 1990). The introduction and establishment of democracy and liberal institutions as precondition in order to receive financial support by Western donors such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) has had detrimental effects leading to a lack of African governments and states’ ownership of political and economic reforms (Andreasson, 2005:976). Still, democracies are shown to be more likely to allocate the
international aid to all the affected people during famine, while autocracies are as mentioned previously (see 2.4. Governance), are prone to channel larger parts of aid to the small elite (Plümper and Neumayer, 2009). Governments may also appropriate food supply to unaffected regions, if the famine already has generated externalities that is perceived as threat to the regime’s popularity in these specific areas (Plümper and Neumayer, 2009:55). The allocation of aid to regions not most in need of it, but rather the most beneficial and power-maximizing to the government poses a political incentive to receive aid.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN
This thesis will attempt to answer how the government of Ethiopia, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have framed the ongoing famine in Ethiopia, by analyzing previous discourses and assessing which ones the actors have chosen to ascribe to the crisis. The case of Ethiopia is a typical case study, which has been applied to this research for the purpose of doing an intensive study of a single case. It was purposefully selected in virtue of the neglect and lacking in-depth research about the current famine in the country. Typical case studies are utilized when the researcher is in search of a representative cases of a phenomenon (Seawright and Gerring, 2008).

The case of Ethiopia is a typical one because of the set of descriptive characteristics it has, such as a fast-growing population, criticized governance, environmental vulnerability and high dependency on aid, which are what the four analyzed discourses discusses as reasons for famine. However, one has to keep in mind that although the Ethiopian case is a typical case relative to the frameworks mentioned above, this typicality does not ensure representativeness (Gerring, 2007:97). Thus, when a “typical case” is referred to, it is the probability of a case’s representative that is high, relative to other cases (Gerring, 2007:96). Furthermore, an intensive single case study in many aspects probes for a high internal validity, though the case’s external validity and ability to be generalized can prove to be problematic (Gerring, 2007:38). The study further employs an inductive approach and an interest in how a country with one of the world’s fastest growing economic still deals with famine, supported a closer investigation with an attempt to contribute a cumulative study in the discourse of contemporary famines and how actors frame it.
### 3.1. Case selection

Today, Ethiopia is one of the most geo-politically and economically important states in the Horn of Africa. With an annual growth of 4 to 7 percent per year and providing lucrative opportunities for foreign investors, whilst being a respected authority amongst the countries in the region, much of the international attention is directed towards the nation (Flores, 2013:3). A strong ambition of reaching middle class has been made publicly known, with other international institutions, like the World Bank supporting and believing in the vision (World Bank, 2017a). However, repressive politics imposed by the current government (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front), limiting civil society organizations operating and free press are amongst other “democracy deficits” that has been acknowledged by international actors, but often neglected because of the “positive role played by Ethiopia within in the Horn of Africa” (USAID, 2012:12). However, the attention is solely not because of economic growth and important political value, but also because of the country’s high dependency on aid and struggles with lingering food insecurity and famines. Since 2015, a famine has been occurring in parts of the country, although there has been a clear disregard of this by both domestic and international actors. These conditions have proved to be fitting for a typical case study of famine in regards of the characteristics found in famines formulated by the four theoretical frameworks.

The actors studied in this paper consists of two relevant actors. Firstly, it is the current government, ruled by the The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the leftist four-party coalition, who have been in power since year 2000. Secondly, it is the international community. In order to limit the scope of this thesis, a main focus will lie on one of the most important INGO in Somali - Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the largest non-war state recipient of US aid (Flores, 2013). These particular actors were chosen because of the importance of narrowing the study, but also because of their relevance in coping with the crisis and their on-the-ground perception of how the situation in Ethiopia has developed.

### 3.2. Material and method

With the aim to answer the question of how the relevant actors have framed the famine in Ethiopia, the method of qualitative text analysis of various types of documents were utilized. This is due to text analysis allowing the researcher to identity and understand vital elements of a text, without interpreting the text as a whole (Esaiasson et al, 2012:210-211). Content stems from relevant research papers, legal documents, journal articles, books and news articles. When searching for material for the study, a time frame dating back from the end of 2015, up until
today (2018) was adapted. This was partly because the effects of the drought started escalating around this time with the emergence of El Niño and thus more information about the situation was made available.

Content about the EPRDF’s framing of the famine stems from Ethiopian newspapers such as the Addis Fortune, Addis Standard and the Ethiopian Herald. Interviews in which the Prime minister and other government officials from international news agencies, like the Washington Post and Al Jazeera were accumulated as well. The utilized content was on the basis of what had been said about the drought and the crisis by using the Ethiopian news websites’ search engines, using catchphrases like “Desalegn about drought” and “EPRDF about aid”. The criteria for utilizing the content in the analysis was that statements regarding the drought would preferably come from a government official directly, rather than from a spokesperson, making the perception of the EPRDF as legitimate as possible. Facts, regarding numbers were checked through other sources to make sure it was reliable. Additionally, many of the various articles found were repetitive and often talked about the same thing, so the task of dissecting the ones most important for this study was relatively easy.

The reason for why MSF was the choice of representing a part of the international community, was due to them being one of the few organizations that had reported mortality rates. When accumulating information about the framing of MSF, the website (msf.org) was the primary source. There, reports of the current state were publicized, as well as interviews with fieldworkers. Because the Somali region is the most hard-hit region in the country, one of the criteria that needed to be fulfilled in order to make use of a source in this paper was that it had to be about the situation in Somali in relation to the drought. Furthermore, the choice of USAID as the other organization was purely based on the premise that it is Ethiopia’s largest bilateral partner in development aid with many years of cooperation. USAID also had a prominent role during the previous two famines in Ethiopia, which added to the interest in observing how the agency would frame the current situation (USAID, n.d.). Once again, the website of USAID (usaid.gov) was used as the primary source. This is where the publications of the fact sheets were and because of their extensive and elaborate descriptions of the situation in Ethiopia, they were used for representing the framing of USAID. Although, fact sheets about every month were available, it seemed to be most effective to employ fact sheets for every year. This way, one could also detect any considerable changes in them.

Furthermore, an attempt to gather extensive and a broad range of material has occurred, although some information may have been neglected due to time and space constraint. Two
organizations are arguably not enough to represent the whole international community, but the decision to choose two organizations that were different from each other, considering one is governmental and the other one is not, was purposefully thought of. Additionally, the non-availability of certain relevant documents and articles from an Ethiopian perspective was lost as well, due to the restraint of free press in Ethiopia and lack of documents written about the subject in English. Another potential issue with this study is that it focuses on a contemporary crisis that little to no research has been written on.

4. ANALYSIS
In this section of the study, the two actors consisting of the current government (EPRDF) and international organizations (USAID and MSF) and their framing of the crisis will be presented and analyzed. Furthermore, the theoretical frameworks mentioned earlier and their relevance in these actors’ interpretation of the current situation will be recognized in order to offer a further understanding of why these discourses have been utilized the way they have. We will begin with the ERPDF’s stance on the issues and then continue with the arguments forwarded by the international organizations. At end of the analysis, there will be a discussion of why it has been so difficult to admit famine in some parts of Ethiopia as well as what implications this may entail.

4.1. The government frame
As the amount of people in need of relief aid substantially increased after the emergence of El Niño, worsening the already existing drought in the beginning of 2015, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front acknowledged these events in both Ethiopian and international media. These public acknowledgements and statements seemed to occur more frequently towards the end of the year after the government had received multiple warnings of the worsening conditions by the UN and other humanitarian organizations stationed in the country (AllAfrica, 2016, The Ethiopian Herald, 2016, Wolde, 2017).

4.1.1. Blaming the drought
Prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn explained that the food crisis and the high number of people in need of food aid in Ethiopia was due to “the El Niño effect” and the drought (The
Guardian, 2016). As previously stated, this has been a recurring theme used by the EPRDF when assessing the situation. Since the international attention of the worsening conditions in the East African nation was initiated in 2015, Desalegn, has been quick to emphasize that the causes of the drought (and effects of it) that emerged after the two consecutive failed rain seasons, were purely environmental. When speaking to the international press, a repeated rhetoric of directing attention to climate change and treating the crisis as a natural phenomenon can be observed:

“The Prime Minister emphasized that the cause of the drought was not in any way man-made and had rather to do with global climatic change, and the impact of the El Nino effect” (ReliefWeb, 2015).

Furthermore, Desalegn again emphasized the strain climate change has on certain countries, like Ethiopia, during the annual high level debate amongst the General Assembly in the United Nations (UN News, 2017). In October 2015, he was documented visiting the affected areas of the Afar and Somali regions and stressed that the government was committed to mitigating the impact of the drought, caused by the El Niño phenomenon (The Ethiopian Herald, 2015). This would occur through the distribution of early-maturing and drought-resistant crops in many of the affected areas, once again emphasizing the drought as the main culprit for the suffering (AllAfrica, 2016). Similar approach of treating the crisis as an entirely environmental issue has been observed with other EPRDF members having the same clear neglect of the situation as a deteriorating one. For instance, Ethiopian officials uttered optimistic forecasts about 2016, claiming that the situation was “under control” (The Ethiopian Herald, 2016). Furthermore, the Ethiopian embassy quickly debunked any apprehension regarding the state’s ability to cope with the situation with exclaiming that:

"There will not be famine of any sort, let alone anything remotely like the magnitude of that of 1984," (BBC News, 2015).

Similarly, the ERPDF ensured that the government was “ready to deal with the situation” on their own, if international assistance was no available (The Ethiopian Herald, 2015). President Mulato Teshome further contended that the lack of international attention was because of the international community’s faith in his country’s ability to cope with the current crisis in Ethiopia (Downie, 2015).
4.1.2. “Food security has been achieved”

When addressing the warnings by the UN about increasing amounts of people in need of relief and the deteriorating situation in especially the Somali region in March 2017, Desalegn made a rather contradictory statement:

“Agricultural productivity has declined to 2.5% from 7% due to the severe drought in the country but food security has been achieved” (Wolde, 2017).

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, food security is: “when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 2003:29). The reason for why the statement appeared conflicting is due to the disregard of the registered 67 deaths of children due to malnourishment in the Doolo Zone in the Somali region and a tenfold increase in children suffering from malnourishment. This occurred only three months after the Prime minister’s statement (Addis Standard, 2017). A further 700,000 people in the same region did not receive aid because of “resource constraints” (Johnston, 2017a). Any reports of the government commenting on this were not found. Another contradictory stance on the issue can be observed in a report jointly written by the Ethiopian government and the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in July. 228 districts (out of 461 districts), were classed as “hotspot priority one”, which entails an immediate life-saving intervention (OCHA, 2017a). The report also warned that the situation was getting worse.

“Deepening levels of malnutrition and critical water shortages in the drought-affected areas…” (OCHA, 2017a:3).

This warning of exacerbated conditions in some regions coincided reports with alarms of 7.8 million people affected by the drought being left without food assistance by the end of June 2017 (Maasho, 2017). Though this was promptly denied by the government, stating that the although it may be true that the food in some areas will run out by the end of June, it would only affect 1.7 million people (BBC News, 2017). Once again, the accuracy of the people estimated to be in need of emergency aid is ambiguous with two kinds of reports stating different things, thus making it even more difficult to know what is exactly going on.

4.1.3. Appealing for aid

This part of the analysis will emphasize the rather contradictory behavior EPRDF has manifested, by presenting the various aid appeals they have required. This is to show that
although the efforts to mitigate the suffering have been widely appraised by themselves, large amounts of aid from foreign donors have been required without much comment on why the number of people in need keep growing and at often times, as depicted in the previous sections, a neglect of the most severely hit regions and number of people dying. Despite the optimistic attitudes of mitigating the effects of the drought and having the situation “under control”, the Ethiopian government appealed for $596 million in assistance from the international community in October 2015 (The Guardian, 2015). In 2016, the Food and Agriculture Organization in Ethiopia was seeking $50 million for its “Ethiopia El Niño Response Plan” to reboot agriculture and food production, commissioned with the support of the government (FAO, 2006). During the same year, the EPRDF and the UN jointly requested $1.4 billion of international assistance to feed 10.2 million Ethiopians, which was the third largest appeal after Syria and Yemen (Migiro, 2016). The EPRDF and Desalegn also attempted to remind the international donors of not “forgetting” Ethiopia, despite all the other various crises in the world (Gaffey, 2016).

“Ethiopia should not be neglected by any means despite all the other crises that are going on elsewhere in the world” (Meseret, 2016).

This statement came as a reaction to the insufficient food aid that Ethiopia had received by the foreign donors, according to Desalegn. Furthermore, in January 2017, the government once again launched an appeal for $948 million, of which $598 million was required for emergency food assistance (Ethiopian News Agency, 2017). Although it has been three years since the first appeal for aid to deal with the drought and the government’s constant self-appraisal of how effectively their work has been to mitigate the suffering, the aid appeals keep getting higher. In March 2018, National Disaster Risk Management Commissioner Mitiku Kassa assessed that the requirement to address the now 7.8 million people in need of humanitarian aid is estimated at 1.6 billion USD (AllAfrica, 2018). This proves to be a 37 % increase of people in need, compared to the 5.7 million people whom EPRDF had requested emergency assistance for in the previous year (OCHA, 2017b).

4.2. The international frame
In this section of the paper, the framing of the famine by two international organizations will be presented. For the purpose of this study, only two organizations have been chosen in order for a nuanced and elaborate presentation of the framing from external entities to occur. The
focus will lie in how Ethiopia’s largest bilateral donor, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have framed the situation since 2015. Additionally, the framing of one of the most prominent international non-governmental organization in medical assistance in Ethiopia, the Médecins san Frontiéres (MSF) will be displayed as well. While there will be an emphasis on how the organizations have talked about the crisis, evidence about what their relationship with the government, in terms of EPRDF’s response, has been like will be provided as well.

4.2.1. Drought but no government accountability
Similar to what the government have written and spoken about when touching on the subject of the causes of the dire situation, drought is once again the main catalyst according to Médecins Sans Frontiéres (MSF, 2016a, MSF, 2017b, MSF, 2017c).


MSF’s reports of the situation in the most affected areas in Ethiopia, has not included government accountability, which differs from what USAID has done, which will be further discussed down below. For instance, when commenting on the conditions due to the inadequate amount of resources and help, the focus has been shifted towards encouraging the international community and organizations to assist with humanitarian efforts, rather than criticizing the government.

“MSF calls on donors to step up their support to Ethiopia to ensure that a continuous supply of food reaches the people who need it. In conjunction, humanitarian organizations need to send teams and supplies to the hardest-hit areas to prevent the crisis from escalating further” (MSF, 2017a).

4.2.2. Disease and mortality rates
Phrases like “humanitarian emergency” and “malnutrition crisis” has been utilized by Médecins Sans Frontiéres (MSF) when framing the situation in Ethiopia, once again highlighting the rough and life-threatening conditions in the Somali region (MSF, 2017a). For instance, there have been declarations of outbreaks of acute watery diarrhea (AWD) and measles, amongst other issues (MSF, 2017c, ReliefWeb, 2017b).
“In the Somali region’s Doolo zone, MSF is witnessing the highest numbers of young children with severe acute malnutrition it has registered since it started working there 10 years ago” (MSF, 2017b).

While USAID and the government have provided numbers of how many people are in need and how many are expected in the forthcoming year, MSF has been stating the numbers of people dying and affected by specific diseases, like cholera, diarrhea and measles (MSF, 2016a, MSF, 2017a, MSF, 2017b). Additionally, the allegations of food running out in June in some parts of Ethiopia, as previously noted, seems to coincide with the tragic deaths of 67 children due to malnourishment in the Doolo zone in Somali that same month (MSF, 2017a). The same conditions were found in the region of Afar, located in northeast of Ethiopia, already in September 2015.

“We saw a field with many, many graves. One of the more recent ones contained a mother, a father and five children. Apparently they had all passed away from malnutrition or associated illness” (MSF, 2016b).

Out of all actors analyzed and presented in this study, MSF has by far been the most descriptive of the conditions on the ground and the closest one to actually call it a famine by emphasizing the extremely high levels of malnutrition and death that follows it.

4.2.3. “Complex emergency”
USAID has called the situation in Ethiopia a “significant humanitarian crisis” that has largely resulted from “insufficient rainfall exacerbated by El Niño conditions” (USAID, 2018a). The same rhetoric when addressing the causes of the vulnerable state the country is and has been in, can be discovered in the fact sheets conducted by USAID. Since November 2015, the agency has been assessing the situation in Ethiopia and what needs to be done in humanitarian efforts in order to lessen the suffering. One reiterating aspect that is shown in the reports from 2015, up until today (2018) is the hard emphasis on the drought, yet again, being the reason for why so many people are in need of relief (USAID, 2015, USAID, 2016, USAID, 2017, USAID, 2018b).

“Drought remains a major contributor to vulnerability in Ethiopia, as resulting crop and livestock losses have a profoundly negative impact on the lives and livelihoods of farmers and pastoralists” (USAID, 2015:4)
There also seems to be an idea of the drought and the effects of El Niño being “too much” for the Ethiopian government to handle, which is why USAID and other donors have to step in.

“The current El Niño weather event has compounded the drought’s severity and scale, outstripping Ethiopia’s capacity to cope on its own and leaving an additional 10.2 million people in need of emergency food assistance and many farmers without seed to grow more” (Dunford, 2016).

Once again, these statements reinforce the idea of the drought being the only reason for the situation. Although, the approach of USAID has shown similarities with the government’s, in terms of using the drought as the main object of focus, the agency does differ itself on one aspect. EPRDF has yet to call it an “emergency”, while this is something USAID has continuously referred to the state of Ethiopia as after 2015. The organization has overall adopted a harsher tone regarding the state of the country, compared to the government. For instance, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS), mentioned in the introduction, is led by USAID and has provided information of the severe levels of malnutrition in especially the Somali region being close to or in the last level of the scale, entailing famine (FEWS, 2017a, USAID, 2018b). Strangely enough though, there still has not been any mentions of a famine in any of the fact sheets or the webpage of USAID, neither has there been any comments on the deaths of the children in the Dollo zone in June 2017. (USAID, 2017, USAID, 2018b).

4.2.4. Not just hunger

Challenges as seasonal flooding, localized intercommunal conflict, above-average food prices, disease outbreaks and limited access to health services are repeatedly mentioned in the fact sheets, although in none of the fact sheets is the Ethiopian government criticized or scrutinized for its ineffective efforts in the most affected areas like the Somali region (USAID, 2015, USAID, 2016, USAID, 2017, USAID, 2018). In August 2017, the USAID administrator, Mark Green, met with Prime minister Desalegn to discuss Ethiopia’s economic development, drought response and food security and expressed concerns over deteriorating conditions for the people affected by the drought.

“Administrator Green encouraged the Ethiopian Government to demonstrate greater leadership and invest more resources to combat a worsening humanitarian crisis” (ReliefWeb 2017a).
The critique of the insufficient measures taken by the government can then be related to another aspect of the framing of the crisis in Ethiopia that does not only involve the so called “moral issue” which entails humanitarian actions being on a basis of feeling moral responsibility to act (Gaouette, 2016). What makes USAID’s framing of the crisis in Ethiopia so interesting is the additional emphasis on the drought posing threat to national security. This is because of the lack of food and work eventually leading to many joining extremist groups as well as larger influxes of refugees across borders.

“Climate-related threats pose an urgent and growing threat to our national security, contributing to increased natural disasters, refugee flows and potential conflicts over basic resources like food and water” (Gaouette, 2016).

Evidently, there is some self-interest in assisting the region with aid, in order to keep the area stabilized. Especially considering Ethiopia is located in the Horn of Africa – a location that encompasses Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti and South Sudan. Events in this region also often impact Yemen, Libya and Egypt, all countries the U.S has an interest in keeping calm and controlled, considering the counter-terrorism agenda the foreign policy of the U.S strongly adhere to now more than ever with the Trump-administration (Coulibaly, 2018).

4.3. The difficulties of admitting famine and what this may implicate
The government controlled by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) has in recent years opted a strong development rhetoric, often describing Ethiopia as a “development state” and referring to their fast-growing economy as the main manifestation of success (Flores, 2013). When exposed to critique, often about democratic deficits and authoritarian behavior, the party has pointed to letting Ethiopia’s own people judge them and “not somebody from the outside” (Al Jazeera, 2015b). This strong non-tolerance of western interference is similar to what Adebayo Adedeji (See 2.5.2.) was speaking about, when claiming that the World Bank and IMF have imposed their ideas of governance in order for recipients to attain aid and how this has embarked upon many African countries’ development. Thus, by admitting famine, Ethiopia’s legitimacy and image as this strong African nation with one the fastest growing economies in the world, would somewhat falter. Additionally, Ethiopia has finally recovered from the gross images that were attached to the country after the famines in the 1970-1980’s, which provides yet another incentive for the refusal to admit famine. They
worked hard to remove the image of only hunger and suffering, and it is therefore understandable why they would want to keep it that way.

How come even international organizations are not speaking about it though? One has to keep in mind that Ethiopia is an authoritarian state, with freedom of expression being highly constricted. This entails that even if there were human rights groups or organizations speaking up about the famine, they would be shut down. This is due to the restriction of both social media and Internet but also the passing of an “Anti-Terrorism” law in 2009, that has been used to justify arrests of critical journalists (Flores, 2013). Furthermore, similar to how a famine-ridden nation does not fit the image Ethiopia wants to project in both the national and international arena, the international community seems to have the same agenda. Ethiopia has long been a “donor baby” of the West, being one of the largest recipient of aid, despite many reports of human rights abuses and democracy deficits (ibid.). Still, the aid money has kept flowing into the country from all over the world. As previously touched upon (in not only hunger), this is largely due to the stabilizing impact Ethiopia has in the region it is located in. The country has a major role in the African Union; as well as being one of the largest hosts of refugees on the continent. The international community being on good terms with Ethiopia is vital for the stability of the region (Flores, 2013, Coulibaly, 2018, Louw-Vaudran, 2018, Schemm, 2018).

One of the most detrimental implications of not admitting a famine or at least the close proximity to it that Ethiopia is currently in today, is that the required assistance and resources are not able to be allocated where they are needed the most. The less recognized the severity of the situation is, the less resources are committed to the cause. This can be manifested in all the actors’ continuous pleas to external donors to help more and to send more resources and not “forget” Ethiopia in the sea of humanitarian emergencies around the world. (Dunford, 2016, Meseret, 2016, Gaffey, 2016, MSF, 2017a). By not admitting that it is the government efforts that are lacking as well, this can create a situation like the one observed in Bihar in 1968, in which the Indian government expected external donations and did not act to alleviate the suffering and mitigate the mortality rates (Plümper and Neumayer, 2009:52). As stated before, because of the image of Ethiopia being a “donor baby”, the expectation of receiving large amounts of aid can lead to inactivity, connecting back to the concept of aid enabling dependency, inevitably undermining a state’s own abilities.

Additionally, the reluctance of the Ethiopian government to admit a famine in the most affected regions does somewhat create a sense of history repeating itself, which is considering the history of famines in Ethiopia, a dangerous territory to be in. When famine erupted in the
beginning of the 1970’s in Ethiopia, Emperor Haile Selassie undermined the suffering and hunger of the people and was criticized for its late reaction and response (Shepherd, 1975). Likewise, in 1980, the Dergue was scrutinized for its non-responsiveness to the ongoing famine (see page 8). Similar traits of late responses and underestimated number of people in need of aid can be observed with the current government. Although this government were better prepared and had measures taken in beforehand, one cannot avoid detecting the similarities.

5. CONCLUSION
As presented in this study, both of the relevant actors have framed the root causes of the crisis similarly: It has been due to environmental conditions, which manifested itself through drought and the El Niño effect that emerged in 2015. However, there has been a differentiation in how the actors have talked about the famine. The Ethiopian government has been reluctant to admitting famine whilst also neglected its own responsibility for the outbreak of it, once again only directing attention to the drought. Failing coping mechanisms have instead been blamed on the lack of international support and aid. Whilst Médecins sans frontières (MSF), one of the main international non-governmental organizations in the most affected regions and United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Ethiopia’s largest bilateral partner in development aid, have correspondingly adapted the same rhetoric of blaming the drought and lack of international support, there is still a difference in how the famine has been framed. MSF have emphasized the level of malnutrition and most importantly the amount of deaths since 2015, while none of the other relevant actors have touched upon the subject of mortality. On the other hand, USAID, have focused on the drought being a major threat to human security and survival but also a threat to international and national security. This is why USAID decided to criticize the Ethioopian government for not doing “enough”, which in turn can imply that there is somewhat of a self-interest in USAID’s cooperation with Ethiopia, connecting back to what William Easterly argued: Aid often leads to dependency. There is an interdependent relationship between EPRDF and USAID, where the USAID is in need for the country to be politically stable in the region it is located in, while EPRDF are in need of the aid USAID and other external donors provide.

Famine is a socio-economic phenomenon. While drought can work as a catalyst and is most definitely an inconvenience for food production in already poorer areas, the response of the governement is what counts and makes it escalate into a famine. One of the main purposes of this paper has been to provide a cumulative and innovative study, in hopes of opening up for further discussion about the situation in Ethiopia and especially the role of the Ethiopian governance
in crises like these. In the analysis, the role of governance was only slightly touched upon by USAID, but much more is needed. How is it that one of the largest recipients of aid, whilst also being one of the fastest-growing economies still allow a famine today? Drought cannot be the only reason. Although this study has a predetermined understanding of the decision to not declare a famine all over the country, it is of great importance to acknowledge that some regions, even if they are few, have already reached that stage. However, the government did emphasize that some regions, especially the Somali region was more vulnerable than others, but there was still a lack of information regarding the severity of the situation and most importantly, there has not been any commentary on the deaths due to starvation.

Another purpose in the peripheral of this paper has been to touch upon the question of why the famine has not been recognized and why the actors have chosen to just blame the drought, especially the international community. Now is not the time to shy away and show apprehensiveness when it comes to authoritarian states. Yes, Ethiopia has responded to the food crisis better and more effectively than before, though this cannot stop the asking of questions and criticizing in fear of how the government is going to perceive it and their image being tainted. Thus, the current situation in Ethiopia suggest that the era of famine, as Alex de Waal liked to call it (see introduction) may not be completely over yet. Ethiopia may be on their way, but there is still so much work to do.
6. LITERATURE REVIEW


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