

SKY NEWS AND ALHURRA FRAMING THE GRAND ETHIOPIAN RENAISSANCE DAM (GERD) WATER CRISIS – TRANSNATIONAL LEGAL-ETHICS AS SOLUTION?

Walaa Abdelrahman Fouda, American University in the Emirates (AUE)
Khaled Al-Kassimi, American University in the Emirates (AUE)

ABSTRACT

The following research is interested in analyzing the communicated political and legal reverberations of Ethiopia announcing in 2011 the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and the unilateral filling of the reservoir in July 2020 by ignoring the social consequences resulting from such unethical policy on Egyptian and Sudanese citizens. The primary question accenting the research paper is concerned in deconstructing how a *realist* approach to International Relations communicated by Ethiopia aggravates reaching a *cooperative* solution prioritizing the well-being of all parties in managing water scarcity. Since Ethiopia prefers adopting a *realpolitik* approach disregarding mutual cooperation reflecting ethical considerations between Egypt and Sudan, the research proceeds in revealing the attitude of Egyptian politicians and intellectuals through data obtained from 225 respondents (p=225) answering particular questions (i.e., preferred solution to the crisis and preferred news channel discussing GERD), including an analysis of Sky News and Alhurra news frames – between January 2020 until January 2021 – emphasizing either “negotiation”, “intervention”, or “internationalization” as solution to the GERD crisis. The research concludes by stressing that a realist approach to foreign relations informed by positivist law protracts the crisis since it necessitates framing parties involved using a self-other binary for ontological security thereby characterizing parties using a frame fueling a “cultural (security) dilemma” instead of prioritizing a principle of cultural cooperation.

Keywords: Alhurra, African Union (AU), Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), International Relations, Legal Positivism, Sky News, Realpolitik, News Framing, Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), Water Management.

INTRODUCTION

There are 276 rivers in the world which either cross or mark political boundaries and a total of 148 countries contribute their territories to international basins (GIZ, 2015). Due to this, the construction of dams on Transboundary Rivers has been a source of contention for countries for many decades. The decision to build a large dam on rivers which cross more than one country is not simply a national concern, but a transnational issue which debates the costs and benefits of dams as well as the distribution of benefits (World Commission on Dams, 2001). Because of this, one of the key issues that will continue to accent the 21st century is water-sharing or the equitable distribution of hydro-resources. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) has been a topic of contention between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan, which has led to rising tensions between the three countries since the construction and filling of the dam was, announced 2011. It is expected to be fully operational by the year 2023 and is projected to be the leading hydropower project in the African Continent (Gebreluel, 2014; Barnes, 2022). The resurgence of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) as an issue deliberated by speech actors in communication centers and political circles – across the Arab and African world – is one of the most pressing issues that raised the concern of Egyptian and Sudanese politicians and intellectuals since the government of Ethiopia announced in July of the year 2020 the filling of the reservoir without any

diplomatic reconnaissance between Sudan and Egypt. This is linked to the conflict over the waters of the Nile River – the lifeblood of several Arab societies – raising the Egyptian state's fears the impact GERD would have on Egypt's water share by exhausting the proportion of fertile agricultural land and the decrease in the capacity of the High Dam to generate electric power. In addition, the fear is also related to the Egyptian governments need to secure its water share thus meeting the steady population increase and the production of food which constitutes a threat to Egyptian national security. It should be noted that the crisis constituting the dam initially returned with Ethiopia announcing in February 2011 its intention to build a dam on the Blue Nile with the aim of exporting electric power. However, in the past decade it has become evident that Ethiopia delaying negotiations was simply a *realpolitik* tactic deliberately overlooking regional mutual cooperative principles. Controlling the waters of the Nile by commodifying water and selling it to the Nile Basin countries led to the escalation of the crisis by “internationalizing” the Renaissance Dam thereby leading the United Nations to issue a verdict obligating Ethiopia to abide by the water agreements adjudicated between the countries situated around the Nile Basin since Ethiopia's unilateralism would proliferate droughts in Egypt and floods in Sudan (Bearak and Raghavan, 2020).

Motivated thus, the primary question accenting the communicative political analysis of the following chapters seeks to analyze how a *realist* approach to International Relations aggravates reaching a *cooperative* solution managing GERD. To approximate an answer to such concern, the research is divided into 5 inter-related sections. The first section briefly situates the historical significance of the Nile River from a geostrategic perspective during the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial era. The second section examines the socio-political conceptualization of GERD during the Cold War by navigating the perspective of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia. The third section discusses the dynamics of the crisis by deconstructing the realist ideology adhered to – especially by Ethiopia – adamantly overlooking the principle of cooperation in managing the watercourse crisis. The fourth section is interested in analyzing how communication centers – particularly Sky News and Alhurra – framed the current dam crisis. By analyzing the narratives adopted by Sky News and Alhurra – using quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques – the data acquired through questionnaires answered by 225 participants sought to reveal: 1) preferences in either watching Sky News or Alhurra, 2) why the sampled population chose to watch Sky News, 3) why the sampled population chose to watch Alhurra, 4) preferred solution scenarios (i.e., military, negotiation or internationalization), and finally, 5) the overall attitude of Egyptian intellectuals and politicians seeking to remedy the water crisis. The collected data highlighted that sampled Egyptian academics and politicians are not primarily interested in internationalizing the crisis since that undermines Egyptian sovereignty, and more importantly, they do not valorize a realist approach to solving their national issues prioritizing a military intervention. The collected data through questionnaires and media frame analysis emphasized the importance of mutual cooperation based on principles of peaceful co-existence as being one of the primarily sought upon remedy to the GERD crisis and rejects communication centers intensifying powerful discursive symbols trivializing Egyptian sovereignty and/or prioritizing U.S. interest thus constraining transnational cooperation.

The final concluding section extends a critique of realism as the preferred approach adopted by Ethiopia to “solve” the water crisis and suggests transnational cooperation as a way forward. The section argues that realism and positivism are inter-related (ideological) concepts reifying secular belief claiming that national interest takes precedent over principles of ethics thereby naturalizing a separation between law and morality (Al-Kassimi, 2020). This critique – when brought into to the discussion analyzing GERD – reveals the political philosophy the Ethiopian state adheres to thereby allowing her to “think it legal” to take unilateral action undermining the watercourse of Sudan and Egypt. In other words, the critique highlights to the reader Ethiopia's *realpolitik* personality claiming that filling the dam is *legal* even though it will

lead to *immoral* consequences (i.e., starvation or deforestation) since the development of GERD is – according to Ethiopia – a justified *means* leading to an *end* advancing Ethiopian *nationalist* interest at the expense of its *threatening* foreign neighbors.

HISTORICAL GEOPOLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NILE RIVER

The Nile River is a significant feature of the Northeast Africa region which flows through 11 countries, and it has two tributaries: the White Nile and the Blue Nile. The two rivers meet north of Khartoum, Sudan's capital, forming a major stream which flows north of Egypt before draining away into the Mediterranean Sea. The White Nile originates in Burundi and moves through the Victoria Lake in Tanzania before flowing across the Sudd Floods of Sudan while the Blue Nile begins in Lake Tana in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian highlands produce 80% of the river's flow during the raining seasons which is deposited in the Blue Nile (Swain, 2011). The rights to the water of the Nile River have been highly contentious and can be understood by dividing history into three periods: pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial (Abteu & Dessu, 2019).

Pre-colonial Period

Amidst the dry weather of the Sahara, the Egyptian civilization began to flourish due to the River Nile—the Egyptians discovered the flooding period of the river, which was 6 months annually, and found that when the river retreated it left behind a layer of rich sediment over which they could grow various crops. Ancient civilizations then started to dig canals started from the river to irrigate the surrounding land which led to the start of agriculture and paved the way for civilizations to develop across the Nile valley. For millennia, Egyptians have developed their agricultural techniques which have led to the production of wheat beer and cotton clothes (Mark, 2017).

Colonial Period

Egypt and Sudan were under colonial rule by the British starting from early 1880's and ending in the late 1950's. During this period Britain paid attention to the value of the Nile water and secured large shares of it for Egypt and Sudan so that the cotton fields – the most important crop in Egypt – would remain irrigated and exported to European markets. In 1902, they signed the Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty with the Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II which forbade them from conducting any construction on the Blue Nile that would impede the flow of water to Egypt and Sudan. In 1929, an agreement was concluded between Egypt and the British Crown – known as the “Nile Agreement” – regarding the utilization and limit of water usage along the Nile River, and even gave Egypt veto powers over construction projects on the Nile River or any of its tributaries in an effort to minimize any interference with the flow of water into the Nile (Abteu & Dessu, 2019).

Post-colonial Period

After the Second World War, Britain started to lose its hegemonic status and it soon pulled out of both Sudan and Egypt. By 1960, most of the riparian states had gained their independence and Egypt had decided to construct a dam in 1956 named Aswan High Dam which was near Aswan city. The construction of the dam caused disagreements with the upstream riparian neighbors and led Egypt taking part in the Cold War (Samaan, 2017). In the meantime, Sudan started construction of the Roseires in 1966 (Kitissou, 2004). During this period the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) was signed in 1999 with a declared goal forming a

cooperative platform between the riparian states to discuss equitable distribution of water (Abteu & Dessu, 2019). In the past decade the intergovernmental initiative has registered commendable achievements among its member states in terms of maintaining a cooperation platform “generating knowledge and tools as well as building capacity to enable informed decision making on the management and development of the shared River Nile as well as preparing investment projects that contribute to water, food and energy security” (Rutagwera, 2019).

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam – A Historical Perspective

The conception of the GERD began in 1958 when Ethiopia began to show its discontent with the agreements regarding the Nile River which were overwhelmingly in the favor of Egypt. Ethiopia called it their “sacred duty” to develop the resources they had—namely the Nile River—for the development of the country’s expanding population and economy (Arsano, 2012). Geographical surveys conducted by the former United States Reclamation Service (USRS) – now United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) – began in 1956 and lasted until 1964 and four sites were offered for construction (Water Technology, 2011). At the time, Ethiopia could not start construction due to wars and instability but after a decade, owing to political economic stability, the discussion of initiating construction was more feasible (Abteu & Dessu, 2019).

The four proposed sites were considered, and French and Dutch companies were assigned to update the studies in 1998 before the plan and design started covertly. When the first milestone was reached, the construction was announced to the public as an accomplishment of the government and became a symbol of patriotism (Abteu & Dessu, 2019). The dam was publicly announced on the 12th of March 2011 and construction started in April under the supervision of the Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation (EEPCO) while the construction contract was awarded to Salini Costruttori (Water Technology, 2011). The conflict is caused by the differing sentiments and expectations of the three countries which are affected by the GERD project. In order to truly examine the cause of the conflict, the repercussions of the dam and the sentiments of the three countries is considered below.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia is greatly incentivized to construct the GERD because the hydropower generated from the project will cater to the acute energy shortage characterizing the country. Ethiopia has the lowest energy consumption in Africa—which means that much of the population is not connected to the grid—and most of the people still use biomass energy as they live in rural areas (Hailu & Kumsa, 2021). In addition, the excess hydropower can be exported—it is estimated that Ethiopia can earn \$1 billion, making it the lead hydropower exporter in Africa (Kumagai, 2016). This will greatly lessen the economic burden on the country. In addition, the dam will also power the industrial hub which extends from the capital which will in turn spur on Ethiopia’s industrial development (Bearak & Raghavan, 2021).

Egypt

Egypt is entirely dependent upon the Nile River for its water needs, in fact with its rising population, its need for water is also increasing incredibly but due to GERD, the water volume available to Egypt would decrease (Halawa, 2018). This is why Egypt considers the construction of the GERD to be a threat to its water resource. Egypt needs nearly 120 BCM of water and other than the Nile River, it also gets water through groundwater, recycling

agricultural drainage water, and treated wastewater (Mahmoud, 2016). This shows how the water supply to Egypt is inadequate. In addition, filling the dam will also affect the agricultural land in Egypt; if the dam is filled faster more of the land will be lost to desertification and drought (Haddad, 2020). This shows how grave of a threat GERD is to the interests of Egypt; in a country whose water resources are already scarce while demand for water is high, GERD presents another threat to the very precious resource of water.

Sudan

Sudan is in an interesting position, caught between Ethiopia and Egypt because the dam offers both advantages and disadvantages to the state. From one perspective, the dam offers great risk to Sudan as it would affect the electrical production of the Roseires and Merowe dams. In addition, the dam will also pose a risk to the Sudanese people who are living downstream of the GERD project (Abdelaziz, 2021). But the dam also offers benefits to Sudan in the form of cheap electricity and increased irrigated agriculture. The dam will also reduce siltation and offer some flood control which would greatly benefit Sudan as the flooding in 2020 has led to 100 fatalities and has affected 875,000 people (BBC, 2020b).

The Dynamics of the Crisis

The conflicting interests of the three states have led to negotiations to occur immediately after the GERD project was announced in 2011 and continued until 2015 when the 'Declaration of Principles' was signed. The document was not a final agreement but rather a guiding framework including guidelines in case cooperation in the future was agreed upon (El Tawail, 2020). However, a series of contentious discussions continued to take place even after the 'Declaration of Principles' was signed and the conflict escalated when in July 2020, Ethiopia unilaterally started filling the dam during the rainy season which allowed for the turbines to be tested (BBC, 2020a). This decision was highly criticized as it led to a host of consequences for Sudan and Egypt. In Sudan, the water level dropped precariously and in Egypt there was also a lack of water with the issue being compounded due to drying irrigation channels because of climate change and the rising temperature requiring more water (El-Gundy, 2020; Bearak & Raghavan, 2021). Although the three countries had still not reached a binding agreement, the Ethiopian minister stated their intention in commencing the second round of filling the dam (Kandil, 2021). In response to this, on May 14th 2020, Egypt sent a letter to the UN stating that previous negotiations conducted under the African Union have failed and that Ethiopia's unilateral decisions would only harm the downstream states (Soliman, 2021). In Kinshasa, Congo the round of negotiations failed in April 2021 which resulted in Egypt releasing threatening statements stating that all options were available to protect the water of Egypt with Sudan responding similarly (Al Jazeera, 2021). In an effort to relieve the tension which had accumulated over the years, Ethiopia offered to share data about the GERD project before the second filling. However, this was rejected because there was no binding agreement alongside the said offer leading former Sudanese PM Abdullah Hamdok to request a quadripartite committee to be formed with the African Union, the European Union, the United Nations, and the United States to handle the negotiations thus guaranteeing a binding agreement between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia (Reuters, 2021).

A Possibility for Cooperation

In the past we have seen the GERD project as a source of conflict, but it can also prove to be a source of cooperation between the countries linked through the Nile River. While the Nile Basic Initiative (NBI) was established in 1999 to create a framework for equitable distribution of water, Egypt and Sudan withdrew in 2010 when Ethiopia formed a

different framework with upstream countries by undermining the water security of other member states. In addition, third parties like the World Bank can play a more effective role by applying the Cooperation in International Waters in Africa (CIWA) program which has proven to be effective in managing disputes over water especially in Africa (CIWA, 2020). An example of this is the Senegal River to which access is crucial for countries which are poverty-stricken. In 1980, the World Bank integrated the CIWA framework into The Senegal River Basin Development Authority to sustainably manage water resources (Komara, 2014). However, for this framework to work in the case of GERD two changes must occur; (1) Ethiopia must be transparent and cooperative, and (2) Egypt and Sudan must leave behind any expectations for a colonial-era agreement that would favor them greatly.

Media Communication Centers Framing the GERD Crisis – Sky News and Alhurra Assessed by the Egyptian Population

The following research situated in this section is descriptive in that it does not conclude at the stage of data collection, but extends to its classification, analysis, and interpretation thereby drawing conclusions and indications useful for identifying and monitoring arguments adopted by interviewed Egyptian participants in response to the discursive frameworks deliberated by Sky News and Alhurra news channels in relation to the GERD crisis. The section includes (5) tables. Table (1) describes the characteristics of the sampled Egyptian population (p=225); Table (2) affirms the number of persons preferring Sky News and Alhurra; Table (3) elaborates on the reasons why they prefer Sky News; Table (4) elaborates on the reasons why they prefer Alhurra; and finally, Table (5) includes the scenarios chosen by the researched population in solving the crisis and this includes Military, Negotiation, or Internationalization. The monitoring of frames used by Sky News to discuss the GERD crisis relied on “Al Radar” TV show, and the framing of GERD by Alhurra relied on the “Al Haqiqa” TV show from January 9th, 2020, to January 21st, 2021. The results were scaled and were placed in a questionnaire form aiming at measuring the Egyptian attitude (i.e., p=225) towards the two news channels framing the GERD crisis. That particular period was chosen because the Ethiopian side insisted on completing the construction of the dam by ignoring international water agreements and was quite indifferent to the responses of the international community and how that effected Sudanese and Egyptian society.

Research population and sample:

The data in Table (1) highlights the characteristics of the participants with the asked questions extended to a sample of 225 individuals.

- 75/225 are academics located in the faculty of Mass Communication, Politics, and Economics at Cairo University and O6 University.
- 75/225 persons involved in media communication centers consisting of heads of departments, deputies, and heads of TV channels in both government and private media organizations.
- 75/225 persons from political parties including members, deputies, and heads of the Mustaqbal Watan Party, Al-Wafd Party and Al-Shaab Party

	Variables	Frequency	%
Gender	Male	145	64.4
	Female	80	35.6

	Total	225	100
Age	1-30-less than 40 years	138	61.3
	2-40-less than 50 years	47	20.9
	3-50 years and above	40	17.8
	Total	225	100
Education level	1-Bachelor’s degree	116	51.6
	2-Postgraduate	109	48.4
	Total	225	100
Income level	1-2000-3000 EGP	34	15.1
	2-4000-6000 EGP	76	33.8
	3-6000 EGP and above	115	51.1
	Total	225	100
Specialty	1-Academic	75	33.3
	2-Media professional	75	33.3
	3-political party member	75	33.3
	Total	225	100

Table 2
THE PREFERENCE OF THE SAMPLED POPULATION IN WATCHING EITHER SKY NEWS OR ALHURRA

Follow-Up Preferences	F	%
1-I prefer to watch Sky News channel.	94	41.8
2-I prefer to watch Alhurra channel.	68	30.2
3-Both channels	63	28
Total	225	100

The data in Table (2) indicates that 41.8% of the Egyptians from the study sample prefer to follow the crisis of GERD by watching Sky News and this is due to the fact that it provides information supporting a position emphasizing mutual debate and cooperation between Egypt and Ethiopia regarding the filling and operation of the dam to preserve social prosperity through water sharing. The preference is also related to the fact that the channel discusses Arab initiatives (i.e., UAE) seeking to bridge the rift between Ethiopia and downstream countries (i.e., Egypt and Sudan) without reverting to a military solution as the preferred narrative. However, 30.2% of the sample prefer to follow Alhurra because it presents the American point of view regarding the Dam crisis, while 28% navigate between both channels.

Table 3
REASONS WHY EGYPTIANS PREFER TO WATCH SKY NEWS CHANNEL

Reasons for their preference/F	F	%
It expresses the Arab viewpoint that supports Egypt in the management of the Renaissance Dam crisis.	119	75.8
It hosts officials and specialists expressing their opinions on the Renaissance Dam crisis	108	68.8
Information and data are obtained from official sources.	99	63.1
Total	157	

The data of in Table (3) indicated that one of the most important reasons articulated by the sampled population in choosing Sky News is that it “expresses the Arab viewpoint that supports Egypt in its management of the Renaissance Dam crisis”. The rate of 75.8%, can be explained in light of the fact that Sky News is an “Arab” media platform that supports Arab

countries in their issues and defends them. The reason that follows is that it hosts officials and specialists that express their opinions on the GERD crisis. With a rate of 68.8%, Sky News has been keen on attracting politicians and experts in hydroelectric power and water-crisis dialogues who revert to academic arguments and conclusions to support their reasoning thereby highlighting Ethiopia's *realpolitik* rational in controlling the Nile waters.

Frequency and ratio	F	%
1-It presents the American viewpoint on the Renaissance Dam crisis.	131	92.4
2-More daring when dealing with the crisis of the Renaissance Dam.	93	71
3-Impartial, unbiased and presents the facts with objectivity.	81	61.8
Total	131	

The data of in Table (4) emphasized that one of the most important reasons why the Egyptians watch Alhurra is that “it presents the American viewpoint on the Renaissance Dam crisis.” With 92.4%, sampled Egyptians mentioned the high degree of professionalism but were not convinced that Alhurra was impartial or neutral, but rather emphasized that it reflected American policies and perceived Arab-African interest as trivial.

Solution scenarios	F	%
Negotiation	178	79.2
Military solution	10	4.4
Internationalization of the file (United Nations)	37	16.4
Total	225	100

Data of in Table (5) showed that 79.2% of Egyptian citizens in the study sample would prefer a solution emphasizing peaceful negotiation and cooperation as they are aware that negotiation is the best option to settle any crisis in order to avoid entering a long-term war that will be devastating for all three parties. This reflected Egyptian citizens and intellectuals being weary of a *realpolitik* approach to foreign policy being adopted as solution to the GERD crisis and are conscientious of wanting to solve the crisis thereby all three countries can move forward by expanding and securing their electric and agricultural needs.

Media Frame Analysis: Political Stance of Egyptian Intellectuals and Politicians

As mentioned earlier, the media frame analysis dealing with GERD aired on both channels – Sky News and Alhurra – were monitored by “Al Radar” and “Al Haqiqa” respectively from January 1st, 2020, to January 21st, 2021. The results of the aforementioned tables highlighted that Sky News focused on a frame emphasizing Ethiopia's *realist* approach to foreign relations by spotlighting its unilateral approach overlooking a mutual agreement between Egypt and Sudan as a possible recourse to solving the crisis (i.e., NBI). In addition, the framework, therefore, foreshadows and cautions about the consequences of a devastating war striking the stability of Arab-African security if transnational cooperation is not prioritized. Egyptian politicians and intellectuals realized – as emphasized by the sample – that if political negotiations are exhausted as a primary means of engagement, then, Egypt may resort to military intervention to preserve its watercourse share. The study presents an important descriptive exposé stipulating Ethiopia seeking to commodity water by selling it to

Egypt and Sudan after the completion of the dam. This is evident with the World Bank adopting concepts relating to GERD emphasizing “pricing” and “privatizing” by using a narrative seeking the establishment of a “global” and “regional” water market (Moussa, 2020). In response, Sky News focused on a frame emphasizing the “losses” incurred by Egypt because of the construction of the Renaissance Dam which included the desertification of lands, the lack of electric power from the High Dam, fishery depletion, and the obstruction of agricultural development forcing Egypt to find alternatives to compensate for water scarcity. On the other hand, Alhurra focused on a framework emphasizing “international efforts”, “internationalization”, and “the war” relating to GERD. While the sample does highlight the importance of international efforts in being an important method mitigating the crisis in order to avoid a war outbreak, it also focused on the interest of the U.S. administration. Nevertheless, the Egyptian government stood by Sudan and the World Bank in a meeting which took place on January 28th to the 31st of 2020. The meeting – brokered by Egypt – included a communiqué released by the U.S department of the Treasury stating that Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, and the World Bank:

...discussed and agreed to finalize a mechanism for the annual and long-term operation of the GERD in normal hydrological conditions, a coordination mechanism, and provisions for the resolution of disputes and the sharing of information...they also agreed to address dam safety and pending studies on the environmental and social impacts of the GERD. The Ministers have instructed their technical and legal teams to prepare the final agreement, which shall include the agreements reached above, for a signing of the three countries by the end of February 2020. The Ministers recognize the significant regional benefits that will result from this agreement and from the operation of the dam with respect to transboundary cooperation, regional development, and economic integration. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of transboundary cooperation in the development of the Blue Nile to improve the lives of the people of Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan (US Treasury, 2020).

On June 10th, 2020, Steven Mnuchin – US Treasury Secretary – praised Egypt’s decision to broker the agreement which included rules for filling and operating the dam in Ethiopia. However, what is noteworthy is that he warned Ethiopia from filling the dam before an agreement is reached thereby giving credence to the framework advanced by Sky News emphasizing “negotiations” and Alhurra’s framework emphasizing “internationalization” and preference to “American interests”. The Sudanese government also warned against filling the reservoir before finalizing an agreement between all three parties since according to Mohamed Saleh – Minister of Culture and Information – that would affect Sudan more than any party involved due to the dam’s proximity to the *Roseires Dam* in southern Sudan (Egypt Today, 2020).

CONCLUSION

A Realist Approach to International Relations is the Problem, not the Solution

David Campbell (1998) cautions of the ethical danger induced by a *realist* foreign policy by developing a poststructuralist ethics emphasizing foreign policy as *constitutive* and *productive* of an oppositional binary between Self and Other. That is, Ethiopia’s foreign policy being founded on a *realpolitik* stance adheres to positivist jurisprudence imagining “cultural differences” between Sudan and Egypt not only as an ontological threat to its national security, but a prerequisite revealing the ontological “double requirement” of Ethiopian nationalism needing to be secure by demanding a threatening Arab as Other to define its identity – only then – realizing national security (Al-Kassimi, 2020; Assefa, 2020). It is therefore imperative to interrogate the power of discursive representations and news

frameworks communicated by centers such as Sky News and Alhurra thereby allowing researchers to proximate a descriptive argument revealing how Ethiopia's foreign policy being *constitutive* and *productive* of a culturally relativist representation is the ideological cause advancing a policy rejecting ethical considerations. With the critique of culturalist discursive representations occupying an important place in the discipline of International Relations (IR) in the last few decades (Al-Kassimi, 2020), the discursive representation of the GERD crisis is therefore interpreted by aligning with critics who claim that the foreign policy adopted by Ethiopia fails to articulate a non-realist political solution since their narrative is premised on an ethno-centric nationalist argument. The foreign policy extended by Ethiopia reinforces an idealized version of the Self with the narratives encapsulating its water management stressing the "external deployment of instrumental reason on behalf of an unproblematic internal identity situated in an anarchic realm of necessity" (Campbell, 1998:37; Al-Kassimi, 2020). This is particularly true since realism as approach has "rendered culture not merely epiphenomenal, but invisible and mute" (Mingst and Warkentin, 1996:171) since the adoption of a *realpolitik* lens to deduce foreign policy *a priori* makes "culture invisible by suppressing difference in favor of sameness" (as cited in Mingst and Warkentin, 1996:171, emphases added; Al-Kassimi, 2020). The Ethiopian government valorizing a foreign policy based on a "cultural security dilemma" necessitating the production of a Self-Other binary for ontological security risks simply recognizing the Arab-Other as embodying a threatening "Other-culture" or an "underdeveloped version of the Self" (Al-Kassimi, 2020). According to Shimelis Dessu – a researcher at the Institute of Water and Environment at Florida International University – the way forward in solving the GERD crisis is for Nile nations to communicate and cooperate while the international community continues to facilitate dialogue, provide technical and financial support for a positive outcome in the Arab-African region (2019). Since the African Union's (AU) thematic goal of "silencing the gun" by 2020 has not been achieved, it is however important to remember that the theme arose from the observation that ongoing conflicts on the continent are a direct hinderance to socio-economic development, and the idea of water scarcity and mismanagement will only further protract conflict and underdevelopment. According to Dessu, the adoption of proactive cooperative measures as a way forward by all three stricken parties in the AU is needed in order to:

...bring the needed socio-economic development of the continent. Constructive public engagement...can go a long way to creating a solid economic, social, and cultural bond among those countries. It's vital to negotiate towards a common goal that's beneficial to all nations in the Nile Basin. The dam is an opportunity to craft a realistic cooperation framework as a blueprint for similar future endeavors in the basin and elsewhere" (2019)

The GERD project has a vast and contentious history which has sprung due to the riparian countries' reliance on the water from the Nile River, but also because of abstract territorial demarcations at the turn of the 20th century by foreign colonial powers reifying realism as approach to foreign policy, liberal capitalism as means of exchange, and finally, positivism as standard for judgment. Due to this, the three countries—Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan—have responded differently to the project due to their critical geopolitical concerns and because of this, the GERD project has become a source of conflict between the three countries. However, there is an opportunity here which has so far gone unseen, which is an opportunity for cooperation emphasizing ethical considerations rather than simply interest-based politics. Of course, this fertile opportunity will require some measure of compromise from all parties involved, however, from these concessions, new opportunities—social and economic—could and would spring up.

Limitations

1. “The river became a lake...the Nile is ours.” – Ethiopian FM Gedu Andargachew, July 2020
2. “I am telling our brothers in Ethiopia; let’s not reach the point where you touch a drop of Egypt’s water, because all options are open.” – Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, April 2021
3. “Ethiopia should stop its unilateral filling of the dam which exacerbates the dispute and poses a threat to regional and international peace and security” – Sudanese FM Mariam Sadiq al-Mahdi at UNSC, June 2021
4. “There is plenty of water in the universe without life, but nowhere is there life without water” – Dr. Sylvia Earle.

Acknowledgments

Naturally, we are solely responsible for any infelicities in this manuscript.

ENDNOTES

1. In 1959, Egypt and Sudan signed a bilateral agreement which effectively “reinforced the provisions of the 1929 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. The 1959 agreement increased water allocations to both Egypt and Sudan—Egypt’s water allocation was raised from 48 billion cubic meters to 55.5 billion cubic meters and Sudan’s from 4 billion cubic meters to 18.5 billion cubic meters...the agreement stipulated that in the case of an increase in average water yield, the increased yield should be shared equally between the two downstream riparian states (i.e., Egypt and Sudan). The 1959 agreement, like the 1929 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, did not make any allowance for the water needs of the other riparian states...Over the years, especially as the populations of the other countries of the Nile River Basin have increased...disagreements have arisen over the fact that Egypt has insisted that the water rights it acquired through the 1929 and 1959 agreements (collectively referred to as the Nile Waters Agreements) be honored and that no construction project be undertaken on the Nile River or any of its tributaries without prior approval from Cairo. Upstream riparian states such as Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Ethiopia, have [historically] argued that they are not bound by these agreements because they were never parties to them. All the upstream riparian states have since argued in favor of a new, more inclusive legal framework for governing the Nile River Basin” (Kimenyi and Mbaku, 2015).
2. In an effort to find a mutually acceptable basis for cooperation in the Nile basin, “the riparians states established NBI – an intergovernmental partnership – with the objective of developing the river in a sustainable and equitable way to ensure prosperity, security, and peace for all its peoples...External third parties, especially the World Bank, played a crucial role in bringing all riparian countries together, and almost all basin states joined the NBI, except for Eritrea, which has an observer status” (Climate Diplomacy, 2021).
3. The site of the dam was identified when the US Bureau of Reclamation first made a survey of the “Blue Nile River” between 1956 to 1964. Two site surveys were also carried out in October 2009 and between July-August 2010, with the design being submitted in November 2010. The Ethiopian government “kept the design phase of the project secret until one month prior to the laying of the foundation stone for the Renaissance dam project. The planning phase of the project was carried out under a name called Project X, which was later changed to Millennium Dam and finally to its present name” (Water Technology, 2017).
4. Most riparians were motivated by the expectation “that a cooperative framework would facilitate substantial investments in large (hydraulic) infrastructure projects in the basin. Rather than focusing primarily on the highly divisive issue of water allocation, the NBI was purposely set up with a complementary investment programme based on benefit-sharing...The NBI was conceived as a transitional institution until the negotiations around a permanent Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) could be finalised and a durable institution created. The CFA aimed to be inclusive of all the Nile riparians, deciding on principles, structures and institutions to jointly govern the Nile water resources...In 2010, Egypt and Sudan withdrew from the NBI in protest against the decision by upstream countries to start the ratification of the CFA in the absence of agreement on a ‘water security’ clause, although both countries have since resumed participation in NBI activities, with multilateral cooperation among the other riparian countries...However, unilateral developments of water projects continue in parallel, with a potentially negative effect on the prospects of a comprehensive agreement” (Climate Diplomacy, 2021).

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