

Mass Media in Nile Politics: The Reporter Coverage of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

Yeshiwas Degu Bealy, Mr.¹

Abstract

The 'Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam' (GERD) project, started in 2011 on Blue Nile (*Abay*) trans-boundary river with tense political confrontation with Egypt, has received sizeable national and international media coverage in a manner of introducing customers and depicting vital and selected details about the project. However, it remains understudied, if not neglected, issue in media research. This article examines The Reporter, private owned national circulation newspaper in Ethiopia, salient frames pertained to the dam project and how these frames reflect Ethiopia's dominant perspective on Nile politics. To this end, a longitudinal qualitative content analysis of articles in thereporterethiopia.com dated between 09 March 2013 and 15 March 2014 was conducted. The findings reveal that six dominant frames emerged inductively from the data that rendered certain aspects of the dam construction more salient than others. These are 'Development'; 'National Image'; 'Right'; 'Victimhood'; 'Mutual benefit'; and 'War' frames. The article argues that The Reporter, using official sources mostly, engaged in cautious and selective framing weighting certain aspect of the GERD more salient so as to promote a particular interpretation to the project that is consistent with its editorial agenda in corollary with Ethiopian government interest and perspective on Nile politics.

Keywords: The Reporter; Ethiopia; the Renaissance Dam; Frame analysis; Content analysis

1. Introduction

The Nile is one of the longest trans-boundary rivers in the world with two major attributes; the Blue Nile (*Abay*) from Lake *Tana* (Ethiopia) and the White Nile from Lake Victoria (East African community) meet in Khartoum, Sudan, and flows through North Africa desert before empties into the Mediterranean.

¹ College of Law and Governance; Mekelle University, P.o.Box 451, 251 Mekelle, Ethiopia.
Phone: +251 934480843, E-mail: yeshiwasd@yahoo.com

The Blue Nile, accounts for 65%, is the largest tributary. The Nile flows through eleven African countries: Ethiopia, Burundi, Egypt, Eritrea, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Democratic Republic of Congo. Half of them are among the world's poorest nations (Kameri-Mbote, 2005, p.2), yet they have vast interest to use the river for poverty reduction and socio-economic developments. Downstream countries, Egypt and Sudan have been signaling their apprehension on upper stream countries interests' to on the river over the years. Thus, the Nile remains a bone of contention between the basin countries.

Despite the sturdy resistance from Egypt, the leadership in Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia, firmly determined to construct hydroelectric plant to achieve the country's 'Growth and Transformation Plan'. It's double digit economic growth for the past three years, and significance increase in population and urbanization, brought the anticipated energy scarcity and the urgency to tackle the problem. Subsequently, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam project on Blue Nile (*Abay*) has officially started in April 2011 in *Guba* area of *Beneshangul Gumuz* region near Ethio- Sudan border to reserve 74 billion cubic meters of water to generate 6000Mega Watt by 2017.

The project has echoed a substantial alarm in Egypt, who seeks to maintain the historical status qua of monopolizing the river. Ethiopia has affirmed its interest to use the Nile to ensure its energy security without affecting Egypt's water supply. However, the project becomes salient spiraling hydro-politics debate between the largest contributor to the river and the most dependent country, for almost 95% of its consumption and agricultural use, which perhaps relevant for virtually other basin countries.

Whether the renaissance dam is, argued to be, a source of conflict or cooperation among the basin countries, it has received a considerable media attention both nationally and internationally.

Government and private owned mass media in Ethiopia have been reporting the project since its inauguration. Most of the leading global news net works such as BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera reported to the event with a substantial coverage of Ethiopian and Egyptian governments' perspectives. Media accounts are crucial sources of information in a manner of introducing customers and providing selected details about the issue.

However, media coverage doesn't a plain presentation and description of the issue. Rather, it also involves selection and interpretation of events in particular way, which can be understood as framing, to solidify issues or events comprehensively (Watkin, 2001, p.83; Viney, 2008, p. ii) that can influence our understanding, or perhaps misunderstanding, about the GERD. To date, studies of mass media coverage on Nile politics let alone the recent Ethiopian dam construction are almost rare in any event; to my knowledge so far, it is a rather neglected issue and region in media research.

This article examines how *The Reporter*, private owned newspaper in Ethiopia, textually framed a major development project, to its readership, which certainly has a great ramification on the already tense hydro politics. It contributes in understanding how private media reflects the perspectives of Ethiopian government to make sense the construction of the dam. It addresses the following specific questions: What particular aspects of the renaissance dam construction did producers of news stories emphasized more than others? How the upper basin and lower basin countries are depicted in news frames related to the project? How news frames reflect Ethiopian government dominant perspectives on Nile politics? To this end, a qualitative longitudinal content analysis of online news articles and commentaries was conducted.

After a brief review of mass media in Ethiopian, the article reviews literature related to framing theory. The third section provides methods of data collection and analysis utilized. The fourth section discusses the main findings of salient frames emerged from selected articles. Finally, the conclusion section sums up the arguments of this article, and points out some implications of the findings.

2. The Mass Media Industry in post 1991 Ethiopia: An Overview

Since the downfall of *Dergue* regime in 1991, Ethiopia has witnessed a relatively increased number of both state and private owned mass media due to the reconfiguration the political system through liberalization and privatization. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Constitution, adopted in 1995, and other press proclamations recognize citizens' freedom of press and expression; right to hold opinions, thoughts, and free expressions is legally granted.

The Constitution protects freedom of expression without interference, including the freedom to seek and receive information. It also provides the freedom of press and mass media, and prohibits censorship (FDRE Constitution (1995) article 29). So far, then, the legal basis of the mass media is evident.

Among the mainstream media outlets, according to the Ministry of Information, there were 68 newspapers and magazines published and distributed in 2006 (Gebremedehnin, 2006, pp.24). In 2011, David Ward found 31 state and private owned newspapers published in different languages. Most newspapers were published in Amharic, the federal government working language, followed by English language editions (Ward, 2011, p.15). Three newspapers were produced on a daily basis and others were weekly. Government owned Ethiopian Press Agency (EPA) publishes four national newspapers: the daily *Addis Zemen* (Amharic edition) and The Ethiopian Herald (English edition), and the weeklies *Al Alem* (Tigreña edition) and *Berissa* (Oromi) (Ward, 2011, p.15-16).

The Reporter is one of private owned and 'independent' newspapers in Ethiopia founded in 1995 and published in Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia. Owned by Media and Communications Center with the motto of 'Free Press, Free Speech, and Free Spirit', it publishes English newspaper on weekly basis and Amharic newspapers twice a week that are available online for domestic and international readerships. The editorial choice for publishing articles is based upon the importance of the issue along with the quality of professionalism. The government, business groups and the general public are the main sources of information (Ward, 2011, p.68). It covers both the national, predominantly, and international events. Indeed, the quality and nature of its news coverage influences how the issue or the event is perceived in the public eyes. It has wide readership, online availability and a different editorial policy with the state owned newspapers make *The Reporter* important for research.

3. Theoretical Framework

This article employed framing theory. As developed by Erving Goffman (1974), Gitlin (1980) and Robert Entman (1991) it used to explain how media define issues in terms of what is significant and how to think about it. Most scholars have applied framing theory to media research and developed various definitions.

The concept of framing, however, remains what Entman (1993, p.51) opines as 'a scattered conceptualization', lacking straightforward clear conceptualization that can be applicable throughout the social sciences, to political science to linguistics and communication studies.

In this article, framing is defined as a way in which a set of ideas is organized and presented to readership to articulate a particular perspective(s) (see Goffman 1974; Gamson et al. 1992). Frames are crucial devices that help to organize ideas; so as to make sense of important issues or events and to suggest 'what is at issue' or stake (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989, p.3) and what the event is about (Tankard, etal 1991, p.11).

According to Robert Entman (1993, p.52-53), framing involves selection and emphasis of some issues and exclusion of others issues in a way to define problems and its causes and to make moral judgments and possible solutions and remedies. In other words, he described that:

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item describe.

It is a process of categorizing the issue in a specific way, paying more attention to some aspects and disregarding others, and deciding what it means and/or how it came about (Kitzenger, 2007, p.134). This can lead to a simplistic view of the issue or the event in which opposite perspectives might be silenced (Sharp 1993, p. 494).

The theory of framing is highly relevant to the study of media in politics (Reese, 2001) in order to analyze the most salient frames that determine readers' reception, as media frames influence not only the issue but also interpretations. This can be done through content analysis of articles, which refers to the study of the content of media outlet with reference to the meanings, contexts and intentions contained in it (Prasad, 2008, p.173-5). It is used to extract information, content and categories by objectively identifying specific characteristics of the communication (Smith, 2008, p.314).

4. Methodology

This article is based on a longitudinal qualitative research conducted independently (without sponsorship) by the author in order to adequately present various significant issues in the newspaper. It has employed a content analysis, an important tool of media researches since the 1940s, which involves systemic study of the content of communication messages (Stacks and Hocking, 1992; Smith, 2008) in collecting, selecting and analyzing the data consisted of online news articles published from 09 March 2013 to 15 March 2014. These dates were purposively selected to see media framing before and after Ethiopian government announcement of the diversion of the Nile from its natural course on May 2013. The methodology, selection of online articles, is justified by the idea that online media accounts can reach worldwide readers where as a printed newspaper can easily afford to only a fraction of its users, mainly domestic once.

The data was collected through an electronic database search engine using key words such as Ethiopian renaissance dam and GERD from <http://www.thereporterethiopia.com> website. The search generated a total of 61 articles ranging from headlines, in depth analysis, editorial, interview, commentary, viewpoints, and latter to editors. Purposively selected 26 articles consisted of 10 Headlines, 4 editorial, 4 in depth and 8 commentaries with in depth coverage of the dam as the main news story were taken as the unity of analysis in order to solicit adequate information on the issue.

This article has employed inductive approach in identifying dominant frames used in newspaper articles by refraining from analyzing news stories with prior defined news frames in mind. It examined frames emerge from the selected articles itself during the process of data analysis and interpretation (Vreese, 2005, p.53).

After data selection, a preliminary examination of articles was conducted during which certain dominant categories or frames identified on small scale and further refined through detailed readings. Finally, the dominant salient frames used by the journalists, editorial and commentaries were identified and analyzed.

5. Research Findings

This section examines the dominant frames that have been identified from selected articles and provides a detailed analysis. The findings indicate that six most salient frames emerged from the selected articles that rendered certain aspects of the dam construction more imperative than others. Each frames employed in various ways to depict and make prominent Ethiopian government dominant perspectives on Nile politics in general.

5.1 Development Frame

Development frame was by and large dominantly emerged from the newspaper articles positive portrayal of the GERD as having a special development importance, which is highly pronounced by the Ethiopian government. In this respect, conformity between the editorial position of the newspaper and the government policy in a context configured by the essentials of developmental state is not surprising. The Reporter is seemingly supportive to the country's major development project and also communicates to readers a sense of optimism.

The following excerpt from *The Reporter* (06 April 2013), which reveals the socio-cultural and symbolic value of the Blue Nile (*Abay*) as a source of arts and myth, illustrates the vast economic gains more than the symbolic attachments to the river;

[...] it's not because the dam is being built on the Blue Nile that we attach special importance to it; it is because of the significant benefits that can be derived from the dam once it is completed. [...] the dam will be a dependable source of energy. As such, it will play a crucial role in the growth of industry, agriculture, transportation, technology, and a host of other social services.

The article presents a broad picture of the GERD as indispensable for the economy in terms of providing sustainable energy supply to bring growth across different sectors, and therefore, portrayed as having the potential to address the mounting development needs of the nation. The excerpt conveys a more positive general sense that in the long term the dam will reduce the country's dependence on outside oil for power generation and contribute to green economy since it 'will be a dependable source of energy'.

On 08 June 2013 *The Reporter* writes, 'Ethiopia hopes that the ambitious hydroelectric project, scheduled to be completed in 2017, will throw the country out of poverty. [...] to achieve the growth and development goals it has set'. It appears a strong positive tone in the way the significance of the dam is presented to its readership. In addition, a commentary by Nurye Yassin (*The Reporter* 01March 2014) illustrates that the GERD is 'a central element in Ethiopia's efforts to escape from the repeated and painful experiences of famine, poverty [...].' These excerpts expose readers with the antecedents of 'poverty' and 'famine', dominant western narratives on Ethiopia for a long time, and portray the GERD optimistically as a key project to eradicate socio-economic miseries and to achieve the country's ambitious Growth and Transformation Plan so as to recover Ethiopia's glory of the millennia rooted in the discourse of 'Ethiopian renaissance,' which is the dominant media framing and public discourse in the country. It is quite evident that under this framing a national perspective of depicting the dam as an engine for Ethiopia's economic growth is much more prominent.

While it has been widely reported that the dam is projected to boost national economic growth, *The Reporter* (06 April 2013) expands the geographic focus of development frame to include other economies in the region by stating that 'the hydroelectric dam will be dependable source of energy for [...] neighboring countries' including Sudan, Kenya, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti to enhance their economies. Of course, it remains a bit questionable, at this moment of analysis, how other basin countries like Egypt will economically benefit from the project. Nevertheless, the finding shows that *The Reporter* envisages the value of the dam, is not projected exclusively for national endeavors, in bringing economic development across the region. In a nutshell, this development centered frame of the renaissance dam which reinforces Ethiopian government dominant perspective has been reproduced and reemphasized in news stories more notably, but marginalized ecological and human settlement concerns.

5.2 National Image Frame

What becomes more evident from the analysis of the data is that national image frame, a representation of the country in terms of 'political' and 'economic' variables among others (Hanan, 2006, p. 8), surfaced considerably salient in selected articles that attempts to challenge the pervious negative images hauled into the global media spotlight.

The editorial (06 April 2013) entitled '*Renaissance Dam: an embodiment of national, public achievement*' illustrates that 'we Ethiopians can make the GERD an embodiment of our history'. It portrays the dam as a demonstration to 'others', i.e., the world, how the people and the government work together cooperatively, and can accomplish 'huge' and 'seemingly impossible projects' independently.

The Reporter (06 April 2013) writes,

Beginning from planning to all the way to financing and execution **we** have taken charge of the entire process despite the reluctance and sometimes downright opposition of donors and lending institutions [Others]. [...] **we** are the masters of our fate. The Renaissance Dam provides with the perfect opportunity to show this to the world [Others]. Aside from proving that **we** are the architects of a dam that does Ethiopia proud, **we** can demonstrate to the rest of the world [Them] that **we** possess the requisite technological capability to undertake such a huge and complex project (Emphasis added)

This excerpt uses 'We/Us' and 'They/Others' categorization to invite readers to make sense of contrasting portrayal of Ethiopians, owners of the entire process of the project, with the outside world. It uses strong languages to inform readers that Ethiopians are 'masters' of their 'fate' and 'the architects of the dam' which makes them more 'proud'. Public/national voice is presented explicitly; pointing out that 'we can demonstrate' to the world that 'we possess the required technological capability,' 'finance, labor and expertise' to construct such a complex dam. Certainly, the excerpt attempts to show that (1) the GERD is a practical justification that rejects simplistic assumptions and narratives that Ethiopia lacks resource and capability to carry out 'huge and complex projects'; and (2) the implementation of the project 'independently' by mobilizing the country's internal capacity not only reflects its financial strength but also implicates financial aid and external assistance as dispensable to succeed development endeavors.

In this respect, *the Reporter* challenges the dominant narratives on Ethiopia and portrays the nation in a more positive light economically and technologically.

The article further illustrates,

Seeing through the construction of the Renaissance Dam is not an agenda of politicians, the ruling Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) or the government alone. Neither is it something which the people of Ethiopia are coerced into supporting. It is a feat which politicians, the public and the government alike are willing and determined to achieve through a collective effort.

Despite the differences in ethnic, political and economic background, the excerpt demonstrates the political willingness and determination among the public and politicians to accomplish the project. Opposition domestic political parties have been portrayed as supporters of the project. For example *The Reporter* (29 June 2013) writes, 'though they are opponents of and seek to unseat the EPRDF, they believe that the construction of the GERD is in the national interest and have not stooped to acting as instruments of the country's enemies.' This framing conveys a sense of political cooperation, harmony and unity amongst the general public and the politicians as well.

Furthermore, *The Reporter* repetitively depicted that the GERD is a 'world class' (*The Reporter* 06 April 2013), 'grand' project and 'the biggest of its kind in Africa' to signify the country's engineering capacity. It is interesting to note that this framing represents the view of Ethiopian government and some other engineering experts. The fact that dam will generate 6000 megawatts suggests Ethiopia will be the biggest hydro-power player in the region. Thus, the renaissance dam, the country's historic achievement, symbol of political unity and modernity and financial self-reliance, has brought a positive effect on media coverage that promotes a different image of the country.

5.3 Rights Frame

This framing gives much more salience to Ethiopia's legitimate right to use the River and reveals the decisive reactions to Egyptian interest of exclusive pre-eminence over the Nile.

Karandalo Kadami's commentary (*The Reporter* 09 March 2013) is the most explicit framing of Nile politics by challenging the dominant narrative of 'Egypt as a gift of Nile and Nile as the gift for Egypt'.

The commentary reinforces the idea that ‘the Nile water is a God given gift to all the peoples in the Nile River Basin and no one has exclusive right to prevent others from enjoying this gift of nature’.

In another article on the same issue, Salman Mohamed (29 June 2013) points out that;

Nobody can deny Egypt’s full dependence on the Nile water. But in the same measure, nobody can deny the rights of the other countries to the development and use of the Nile water and the right, rather, the duty of those countries to fight famines, darkness and thirst among their peoples by using the Nile water, exactly like Egypt and Sudan. Egypt and Sudan, which consume all of the Nile water for those purposes, have to acknowledge the rights of the other countries.

While illustrating Egypt’s absolute reliance on the Nile River, this excerpt hardly suggests the deprivation of the right of other basin countries from using the natural gift; rather, all the basin countries have the right to make use of the river, and the duty as well, to address the recurring famine and drought. Therefore, the excerpt makes absolutely unacceptable for any claim of exclusive entitlement of the river. Besides, it exposes readers that upper stream countries have never been fairly benefited while downstream countries, who denied to ‘acknowledge the right of other countries’ reasonable share, have utilized ‘all of the Nile water’. A commentary by Henok Tadele (20 July 2013) strongly blames ‘Egypt’s self-centered approach of being the sole beneficiary of Nile water, while more than 250 million people in upper riparian countries get thirsty, lacks moral ground’. The article calls for the cessation of the exclusive historical right over the river in stark contrast to the Egyptian perspective.

This frame was again echoed in the editorial section of the newspaper (08 June 2013):

While the right of Ethiopia and the other upper riparian countries of the Nile —Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Eritrea — to use the river is internationally recognized, they cannot exercise this right in a manner that is injurious to the interests of Egypt and Sudan. All riparian countries need to accept that no one has absolute sovereignty over the Nile.

The excerpt depicts the basin country as having a legitimate right over the river without affecting the other; the rights and interests of all should be ensured. In this respect, the article is supportive of Ethiopian dam project prompting readers to perceive it in terms of its right. But it also communicates that the dam will not intrude on the right of other basin countries.

Ethiopia's contribution to the Nile River which accounts for eighty five percent from the Blue Nile, Atbara and Sobat tributaries has given attention for reinforcing the country's legitimate territorial right to utilize the Nile to achieve the development goals it has formulated. Therefore, *The Reporter* (08 June 2013) conveys that 'Ethiopia cannot be criticized for embark on the construction of the Grand Renaissance Dam on the Nile'.

On 4 May 2013 *The Reporter* reported the following;

El Sakaty said that Ethiopia has every right to construct the Great Renaissance Dam (GRD) over the Nile. Since the country has no other alternative sources of electric power, given the necessity of having it, the very right of Ethiopia is unquestionable to erect the dam, he said.

Alongside the salience of the right frame, in this news articles readers are directed towards supporting the project as a legitimate endeavor even recognized by Egyptians, for whom the Ethiopian government is demonstrating. At the same time, *The Reporter* used this frame to represent Egyptian politicians, who want to maintain their exclusive right over the Nile, as not only 'ignorant' of other's legitimate right, but also as an isolated group in which the public directed against their claims.

In final analysis, this frame portrays the construction of GERD as legitimate right that has a substantial ground. It also accepts the interest of other basin countries.

It implicates that if the Ethiopia is forced to stop the construction of the dam, it will have a direct repercussion on its entitlement and internationally recognized rights to use the river. Subsequently, it will deprive its right to development through the available resources.

5.4 Victimhood Frame

A significant number of journalists and writers who have critically questioned the 1959 Nile agreement between Egypt and Sudan pointed out that the upstream countries are victims of both being excluded in the political negotiations and denied their share of benefit from the river. 'Ethiopia is Victim' constitutes another predominant frame through which the reporter news coverage on the Nile politics was presented, in deepest contrasting of the 'victimhood' or 'suffering' of the upstream countries with the exclusive privileges of downstream countries entitled from the Nile agreement.

Reports such as the following from *The Reporter* (08 June 2013), sub-heading 'The waters of the Nile have been exploited extensively over the eons by two riparian countries- Egypt and Sudan', demonstrates how the 1959 agreement 'unfairly' distributed the Nile. It gives 'Egypt the right to use around seventy-five percent of the Nile waters and the rest [to] Sudan'. The article conveys the readership interpretation of the exclusive and full utilization of the river between downstream countries without, even inviting and, considering other basin countries. Such a portrayal depicts uppers stream as the victims of the agreement, exclusively adopted and imposed upon them by Egypt and Sudan.

In another article on this issue, *The Reporter* (25 January 2013) further shows that the 1959 agreement allocated 55.5 billion cubic meters of water to Egypt and 18.5 billion cubic meters of water to Sudan, and 10 billion cubic meters of water for evaporation. This article offers a convincing empirical evidence to support the frame that other basin countries, including Ethiopia, were totally denied to use the river. Furthermore, a commentary by Memar Ayalew (*The Reporter* 22 June 2013) demonstrates that using the agreement Egypt and Sudan imposed legal obligation and restriction on upper stream counties from utilizing a cubic meter of the river.

Certainly, these news articles present substantive thematic information and draw attention towards the historic political drama that 'victimized' Ethiopia from implementing any development project over the Nile River.

Another commentary by Henok Tadele (15 June 2013) illustrates the blunder that the Nile agreement had made;

The 1959 deal, which doesn't even consider Ethiopians as people worthy of drinking water from the Nile, has created a deep feeling of betrayal and animosity in the hearts of generations of Ethiopians ever since towards the deal was masterminded.

The article reproduces the institutionalized act of 'deliberate injustice' made by Egypt and Sudan. Implicitly, to solicit sympathy from readers, this excerpt heralds the intention of the agreement, which declined to recognize Ethiopians deserve to drink water from the Nile River, to make the people thirsty. The article also elevates the feelings that the agreement has created throughout generations. The public appeared disappointed in this excerpt. In doing so, this framing influences readers, and perhaps decision makers in Cairo and Khartoum.

The analysis shows that *The Reporter* attempts to expose the 1959 agreement in two senses. (1) It portrays the agreement as the practice of institutional marginalization of other basin countries from taking part in political negotiation that affects their national interest. The downstream countries portrayed as nothing other than political outsiders in the agreement. (2) The agreement is seen as 'illegitimate' that deprived others from obtaining sufficient resource distribution. To the end, the coverage contributes for the production and reproduction of negative public attitude towards the agreement, considered it as a 'historical wrong'. This framing legitimizes the arguments put forth by Ethiopian government, which received salient treatment by the newspaper anyway. *The Reporter* news coverage has also shown the need to improve water politics that can assure 'fair' allocation for all basin countries.

5.5 Mutual Benefit Frame

The mutual benefit frame, which often dovetailed with the development frame, appeared in a significant number of articles which seeks to illustrate the greater common good that will be obtained from the renaissance dam.

Salman Mohamed's (*The Reporter* 29 June 2013) article revealed the views of Ethiopian Prime Minister, Hailmaraim Desalegn, who firmly noted that the GERD is in the best interests of both stream countries. The dam is essentially depicted as 'water security' and 'energy security' maximizing project in downstream and upper stream countries respectively.

The following from a commentary by Nurye Yassin (7 December 2013) describes, The GERD hydro project is one manifestation of a genuine vehicle for mutual benefit that will reduce floods, sedimentation, and siltation to lower riparian countries, as well as avoiding evaporation from the deserts of Egypt and Sudan. In other words, it will increase the amount of water available. The overall impact will unquestionably make an immense contribution to the sustainable development and lasting peace and stability of the Nile Basin countries and to the normal flow of the river.

Similarly, the editorial (15 June 2013),

the dam does not harm Egypt's interest and actually benefits it, that the amount of water that is lost through evaporation at the High Aswan Dam is much more than the reduction in the flow to Egypt of the Nile waters projected to be caused by the GERD, and that Egypt should work together with the other riparian countries in a spirit of cooperation to ensure its water security.

The editorial (8 March 2014) additionally reads,

Ethiopia has called for Cairo's collaboration in negotiations and claims that the dam will have no adverse effect on Egypt. It would, in fact, decrease evaporation and improve water flow.

These articles offer a typical example of, challenging the view of endangered 'national interest' which the Egyptian politicians used to justify their resistance to the dam, heralding the contribution of the project for Egypt's water security. If not, it doesn't reduce the flow of water (*The Reporter* 08 June 2013).

Quite positively the excerpts remind the link between the dam and persistent concerns like flood, siltation and over evaporation in downstream countries, and reveal the overall contribution of the dam to peace, security and development in the region.

The Reporter (01 June 2013) reports,

Government officials from Addis Ababa are assuring that the Dam will not significantly affect Egypt's water security.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Berhane Gebre- Christos speaking to reporters at the African Union summit in Addis Ababa, he said that the dam will be used exclusively for power generation and not for irrigation.

In this article statements made by the Ethiopian government was framed from its vantage point which guarantees Egypt's water security. The editorial article (8 March 2014) further shows Ethiopia's goodwill for cooperation and negotiation to maximize the significance that dam will have for both countries.

The Reporter news headline (08 June 2013) '*Sudan stands by Ethiopia on dam project*' describes certain political agreement between the Ethiopia and Sudan over the possible impact and contribution of GERD. It reported that the Sudanese government spokesman and minister of information, Ahmed Belal Osman, reveals,

[...]Sudan would benefit from the dam, including better supply of electricity and year-long regulation of the Blue Nile's flow. Our view would not please the Egyptians and will upset them but Sudan will benefit greatly from the dam.

The Reporter (08 June 2013) makes use of government sources to demonstrate that other basin countries, including Egypt and Sudan, 'will benefit from the tremendous, cheap hydroelectric power, which all Basin countries need urgently'. It exposes the readership that the interests of both Egypt and Sudan remain unaffected if Ethiopia accelerates its development by making use of the Nile; rather these countries will benefit from development projects on the Nile. Mutual benefit frame has emerged much more prominent in Neamin Ashenafi's (08 February 2014) article headline, '*Hydro-power energy should be the future source of shared benefits*'. To this end, *The Reporter* highly encourages understanding and cooperation between stream countries to maxim their shared benefit.

It seems pretty clear that this framing, is reflective of the dominant perspective of Ethiopian government, reinforces a huge public support and validates the justification that Ethiopia has put forward to pursue its plan.

5.6 War Frame

Although the issue of Nile politics remains the potential center for water wars in 21 century for some news networks like Al Jeezera, there has not been much media focus on war framing in *The Reporter* till the Ethiopian government officially announced the diversion of the Blue Nile (Abay), to make way for the dam construction, on 28 May 2013. Since then, the newspaper has been presenting and highlighting the struggles or disagreements, and the possible military engagement between Ethiopia and Egypt, which has occupied nationwide spotlight for some time. The prominence of war frame was inductively examined related to news coverage on threats of war and/or tense military and diplomatic confrontation over the GERD.

A commentary by Memar Ayalew, *Water diplomacy or water war? Which way?*, (08 June 2014) illustrates,

The politics of the Nile is full of tension, mistrust, anxiety, mystery and diplomatic confrontation among the downstream and upstream riparian countries since time immemorial. Historical records have shown evidences that demonstrate the occurrence of diplomatic struggle and direct military confrontations between the upstream and downstream countries. Declaring war and launching a military attack on Ethiopia could be one of the possible Egyptian strategies in approaching the new developments.

[...] destabilizing and weakening Ethiopia through proxy war has been one of the Egyptian security strategies in order to ensure the sustainable flow of the Nile waters from its source. The current political stand in Egypt concerning the construction of the Dam and the diversion of the Nile, reflected through Egyptian media, clearly indicates that Egyptians intend to use either water diplomacy, water war or a combination to stop the construction of the dam or to attack the country. Thus the Ethiopian government has to be aware of the changing foreign policy and security strategies of Egypt.

This thematic framing of Nile politics demonstrates the general disagreement between upstream and downstream countries over the years.

It explicitly reproduces this confrontation due to its emphasis on the possible Egyptian 'military attack' on Ethiopian dam project, which has been understood by the politicians in Cairo as a 'threat' to Egypt's national security, 'water security' in particular.

Further war frames over the GERD are found in the following articles. *The Reporter* in its publication on 08 June 2013 reported that 'some politicians' have suggested 'to declare war' and to 'destabilize' Ethiopia as well as 'to destroy the dam'. In another article (08 June 2013) on this issue Getachew Reda, Ethiopian Prime Minister Spokesperson, said that Egyptian leaders in the past have 'unsuccessfully tried to destabilize' Ethiopia. In his view they have continued to suggest 'attacks' and 'sabotages'. The Reporter commentator Salman Mohamed (29 June 2013) communicates that the former President Mohamed Morsi declared that Egypt 'will defend with blood every drop of the Nile water. If a single drop decreases, our blood will be the substitute'. These articles depict that 'a single drop' of water has huge value to Egypt, who wants to monopolize the river, and make war highly inevitable. The voices of both governments were presented in this frame portraying the gravity and epicenter of conflict over the Nile. The analysis shows that the reaction of Egypt politicians to the diversion of the river generated the prominence of war frame in *The Reporter* coverage of the GERD.

However, journalists and commentators have uncovered that not all Egypt politicians are determined to wage 'war' against Ethiopia; and not all support a zero game water politics. The editorial (15 June 2013) reported the following on this matter:

It should be re-emphasized here that it's an insignificant minority within the Egyptian political establishment that have called for the destruction of the Renaissance dam and cling to the zero-sum paradigm over the Nile.

Henok Tadele (15 June 2013), *War with Ethiopia over Nile water a mother of all naivety!*, illustrates,

We in Ethiopia understand all the evils of war [...] 1984 famine in Ethiopia killed over a million and half people.

If forced, war with Egypt would be a lesser evil; since no war with Egypt would cost a million lives [...] Egyptian politics are beating the war drum against Ethiopia, which is purely an act of a bullying neighbor. Ethiopia has to give considerable attention to the possibility of military confrontation.

This commentary aims to present the views of Ethiopians, who have experienced 'all the evils of war' and, therefore, are not interested to go to war with Egypt unless 'forced' to do so. War with Egypt, as described in the article, 'would be a lesser evil'. The commentary also suggests the Ethiopian government to take necessary steps for a possible military retaliation, in case the attack occurs, or perhaps to pressurize Egypt's politicians to change their mindset.

Certainly, *The Reporter*, relied on government sources and historical records, has produced more negative framings and exposed the readers with more stories of the possibility of war. It has depicted the political history of the Nile in terms of tension, mistrust and diplomatic confrontation between the upstream and downstream countries. The latter, however, are portrayed in a different light with regard to the GERD. While it doesn't indicate any visible diplomatic or military confrontation with Sudan, seldom referenced in news stories related to war frame, it illustrates its concern about the possible 'military attack' from Egypt. Strong vocabularies of war such as 'military confrontation', 'military attack' 'proxy war' and 'water war' were also repeatedly used that shows the salience of war frame in media coverage. The emphasis on hostile remarks by the Egyptian politicians to stop Ethiopia from building the dam provides 'a persistent' portrayal of the country as a threat, or potential threat, to Ethiopian peace, security and development, and prevents the readership from looking the country positively otherwise. The coverage is, however, in the widest sense indicates no sign of support for military confrontation between Egypt and Ethiopia over the Nile. The predominance of quoted speeches from politicians produces a sense that the issue is a problem to be solved not by ordinary newspaper readers but by the politicians themselves who speak about it.

Conclusion

This article employed media framing framework to analyze the salient frames used in *The Reporter* coverage of the GERD and how these frames reflect the dominant perspectives of the Ethiopian government.

The availability of a total of 61 articles over a year in online database shows how newsworthy is the issue. Relying on a qualitative longitudinal content analysis of selected 26 news articles dated over a year, this study has found that six dominant frames were emerged to make sense the GERD construction. These are 'Development', 'National Image', 'Right', 'Victimhood', 'Mutual Benefit' and 'War' frames. However, news articles and commentaries have marginalized various important aspects such as the ecological and environment issues and nearby communities' livelihood and resettlement concerns caused by the dam construction. Risks of flood and landslide received extremely diminutive media coverage.

In this manner, *The Reporter* engaged in cautious and selective framing highlighting certain aspect of the GERD more salient so as to promote a particular interpretation to the project that is largely consistent with its editorial agenda in corollary with Ethiopian government perspective on the Nile politics.

Based on the articles in the database produced for this study, it is evident that *The Reporter* has formulated more positive stories which might implicate, and position readers, about the prospect of the dam project. Despite this, some articles also dominantly revealed the possible 'military attack' or 'sabotage' from Cairo administration that reinforces the previous narrative of the politics of Nile as full of tension and disagreement. The significant change in news framing is witnessed since May 2013. However, essentially, the previous salient frames had not been entirely replaced by war frames; there was no overwhelming shift from positive to negative framing. Therefore, it sounds to say that *The Reporter* coverage of the renaissance dam has been mixed: illustrating mutual development benefits that reinforce understanding and cooperation, while indicating war signals which might create a greater misunderstanding between the basin countries. However, it largely encourages negotiation and cooperation and disfavors all forces that stood against the dam construction. These ideas prevailed in *The Reporter* are promoted most vocally by the Ethiopian government.

Another interesting finding of this article is the representation of key actors. Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan were referenced mostly in news coverage. Other basin countries had a second place followed by the outside world, who ruled out support to the project. Upper stream countries have been represented as cooperatives. Sudan's genuine support to the dam in recent years was more emphasized.

Apparently, *The Reporter* negatively categorized Egypt, as actor of historic injustice and self-centered and a 'threat' to development projects over the Nile. By systematically defining Egypt as 'selfish' who wants to monopolize the Nile, *The Reporter* attempts to position readers to see the demands raised by Egyptian government critically.

This article, therefore, argues that by no means uniquely *The Reporter* provides a blank platform upon which its readers uphold their version of the issue. Rather, the newspaper gives much more depth and salience attention to favorable framing of GERD to explicate Ethiopian government interpretation of Nile politics although it has a bit demonstrated the prevailing diverse interests and elucidations of others basin countries.

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