

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

Yeshiwas Degu Bealy, Mr¹

Abstract

The 'Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam' project, started in 2011 on Blue Nile (Aby) 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. Nevertheless, it remains understudied, if not neglected, issue in media research. This article examines The Reporter, private owned national circulation newspaper, salient frames pertain to the dam project and how these frames reflect Ethiopian government dominant perspectives 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, mostly official sources, 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 (*Aby*) from Lake *Tana* (Ethiopia) and the White Nile from Lake Victoria (East African community) meet in Khartoum, Sudan, and flow 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 use the Nile over the years. Thus, Nile River 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 caused a substantial alarm in Egypt, who seeks to maintain the historical status qua on the use of the river. Ethiopia affirmed its interest to use the river to ensure its energy security without affecting Egypt's water supply. Nevertheless, the project has become the most 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, certainly it has received a considerable media attention both nationally and internationally. Government and private owned national media in Ethiopia have been reporting the project since its inauguration.

Most of the leading global news media such as BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera reported to the event with a substantial coverage of Ethiopian and Egyptian government perspectives. Media accounts are crucial source of information, introduce customers and provide selected details about the issue. However, media coverage doesn't a plain presentation and description of the event.

Rather, it also involves selection and interpretation of events in particular way, that can be understood as framing, to solidify events comprehensively (Watkin, 2001, p.83; Viney, 2008: 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 over the development project on the Nile? 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 articles in *The Reporter* coverage of the dam. 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 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 the subsequent 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, in 2011 David Ward found thirty one 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). However, government mass media, whether it is newspaper or TV channel, have been subjected to criticism in recent years. There is an increasing concern about its partiality, credibility and quality of information which makes the growing needs for private media as a news source inevitable.

The Reporter is one of private owned and 'independent' newspapers 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 produces English newspaper on weekly basis and Amharic newspapers twice a week and makes both newspapers available online. As stated in its mission statement, its readers are the public in and outside the country. The editorial choice for publishing articles is based upon the importance of the issue along with the quality of professionalism. The government, private businesses, and the general public are 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 is perceived in the public eye. It has a wide readership, and online availability, with a different editorial policy with the state newspapers that 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 remains what Entman (1993, p.51) opines as 'a scattered conceptualization', lacking straightforward clear conceptualization that can be generally 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 (see Goffman 1974; Gamson et al. 1992). Frames are crucial devices that help to organize ideas; so as to make sense of important events and to suggest 'what is at issue' or stake (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989, p.3) and 'what the event is' (Tankard, etal 1991, p.11). Frames 'define problems', 'diagnose causes', 'make moral judgments' and 'suggest remedies' (Entman, 1993, p.52).

Framing involves 'selection, emphasis, and exclusion' of issues (Gitlin, 1980, p.7; Tankard, etal (1991, p.11). As Robert Entman (1993, p.52) interestingly describes,

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.

Framing involves highlighting, emphasizing and making some aspects of the issue more memorable, noticeable and meaningful while marginalizing and discarding others (Entman, 1993, p.53). 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).

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

The following sections examine the dominant frames that have been identified from selected articles and provide a detailed analysis. The findings indicate that six most salient frames emerged for rendering certain aspects of the dam construction more imperative, than others, each framing employed in various ways to depict and make prominent Ethiopian government political perspectives on Nile politics.

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, media conformity between the editorial position of the newspaper and the government policy in a political context reconfigured by the essentials of developmental state is, not surprising, supportive to the country's major development project and also communicate 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', dominant media framing and public discourse in the country. It is quite evident that under this frame, 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: '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 reproduced and reemphasized in news stories and commentaries more notably 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, this article 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 are also 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.

Further, *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. The renaissance dam, the country's historic achievement, symbol of political unity and modernity, and financial self-reliance, has brought about a positive effect on media coverage that promotes a different image of the country.

5.1 Rights Frame

This frame gives much more salience to Ethiopia's legitimate right to use the Nile 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 through challenging and marginalizing the dominant narrative of 'Egypt as a gift of Nile and Nile as the gift for Egypt' which 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 the using the natural resource; 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 making it 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 other basin countries through which the rights and interests of all can 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 countries.

Ethiopia's contribution to the Nile River which accounts for eighty five percent from the Blue Nile, Atbara and Sobat tributaries continually given attention by journalists and commentaries (*The Reporter* 08 June 2014) enforcing 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 embarking 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 the articles, readers are directed towards supporting and sympathy to the project as legitimate endeavor even recognized by Egyptians, for whom the Ethiopian government is highly 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 the legitimate right of other basin countries, but also as an isolated group, with opinion directed against their claim.

In final analysis, this frame portrays the construction of GERD as legitimate right with a substantial ground of understanding the interest of others. It implicates that if the country forced to stop the construction of the project it will have a direct repercussion on its entailment, and indeed will deprive internationally recognized rights to use the river and the subsequent right to development through available resources.

5.2 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 in comparison to the exclusive privileges of downstream countries entitled in 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 readership interpretation of exclusive and full utilization of the river, divided the water between downstream countries themselves without, even inviting and, considering other basin countries. Such a portrayal depicts uppers stream as 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 figures out the 1959 agreement which allocates 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. 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. These articles presented 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 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 Ethiopians to be thirsty and elevates feelings it created throughout generations. The public appeared disappointed in this excerpt. In doing so, the article aims to influence readers, 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 newspaper portrays the downstream countries as nothing other than political outsiders in the agreement. (2) It is 'illegitimate' action which 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 as a 'historical wrong'. This framing highly seems to legitimize the arguments put forth by Ethiopia, which received salient treatment by the newspaper anyway. In sum, beside much of the news stories skimmed over the agreement heralding the victimizing of Ethiopia and other upper stream countries, *The Reporter* news coverage has the intention for the need to improve water politics that can assure 'fair' allocation for all.

5.3 Mutual Benefit Frame

The mutual benefit frame, which often dovetailed with the development frame, appeared in a significant number of articles which seek to illustrate the greater common good that will be obtained from the renaissance dam. Salman Mohamed's (*The Reporter* 29 June 2013) article reports 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) reveals, 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 its overall contribution to peace, security and development in the region as a common good.

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 to illustrate its perspective on Nile politics and to reassure Egypt's water security.

The editorial article (8 March 2014) 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 the political agreement between the Ethiopia and Sudan over the possible impact and contribution of GERD. It released an interview report with Sudanese government spokesman and minister of information, Ahmed Belal Osman who said that:

[...]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.

Recognizing that the basin countries will benefit in varying degree, *The Reporter* (08 June 2013) makes use of government sources to demonstrate that other countries, including Egypt and Sudan, 'will benefit from the tremendous, cheap hydroelectric power the dam will generate, the power which all Basin countries need urgently'. It draws a set of shared assumptions among 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 benefit from the dam. This frame has emerged much more prominent on Neamin Ashenafi's (08 February 2014) heading '*Hydro-power energy should be the future source of shared benefits*'. To this end, this frame, which makes mutual benefit more salient, highly encourages understanding and cooperation between stream countries to maxim their benefit. It seems pretty clear that this framing, is reflective of the dominant perspective of Ethiopian government, reinforces support for the dam project and validates the justification the country has for pursuing its plan.

5.4 War Frame

Although the issue of Nile politics remains the potential center for water wars in 21 century for some scholarships, there has not been much media focus in *The Reporter* till the Ethiopian government official announcement of 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 the nationwide spotlight.

The prominence of war frame was inductively examined related to 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 Nile. It explicitly reproduced this confrontation, particularly in its emphasis on the possible Egyptian 'military attack' on Ethiopian dam project, which 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 doesn't compromise their monopoly utilization, perhaps seems inevitable source of war. Both governments' voices were pronounced in this frame portraying the gravity and epicenter of war over the Nile. This suggests that Egypt's politicians' reaction to the diversion of the river generated the prominence of war frame in *The Reporter* coverage of the dam.

However, journalists and commentators 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 experienced 'all the evils of war' and, therefore, are not interested to go to war with Egypt unless 'forced' to do so which 'would be a lesser evil'. It suggests the government to take necessary steps for a possible military retaliation, in case the attack occurs, or to pressurize Egypt's politicians to change their mindset.

The findings indicate that *The Reporter* relied on government sources and historical records produced more negative framings, exposing the readers with more stories of the possibility of war. It depicts the political history of the Nile in terms of tension, mistrust and diplomatic confrontation between the upstream and downstream countries, which 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 projects over the Nile that prevents 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 quotations 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.

6. 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 perspective of 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 and commentaries dated over a year this study reveals that six dominant salient frames were emerged that are used by journalists and writers to make sense the dam construction. These are 'Development', 'National Image', 'Right', 'Victimhood', 'Mutual Benefit' and 'War' frames, largely appeared within the same articles and reinforced each other. Many of the articles, however, 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.

The finding shows that *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 Nile politics.

Based on the articles in the database produce for this study, it is evident that *The Reporter* formulated more positive stories which might implicate, and position readers, about the prospect of the dam project. Despite this, some articles also dominantly reveal the possible 'military attack' or 'sabotage' from Cairo administration which enforces the previous narrative of the politics of Nile as full of tension and disagreement. This significant change in news framing witnessed since May 2013. However, essentially, the previous salient frames had not been entirely replaced by war frames; there is 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 portrayed in a way to encourage negotiation and cooperation and disfavored all forces that stood against the dam construction. These ideas prevailed in *The Reporter* promoted most vocally by the Ethiopian government.

Another interesting finding of this article is the representation of key actors which have a direct impact on the renaissance dam. Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan were largely referenced in news coverage. Other basin countries have 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, actor of historic injustice and self-centered and a 'threat' to development projects over Nile. By systematically defining Egypt as 'selfish' who wants to monopolize the Nile, *The Reporter* attempts to position readers to see critically the demands raised by Egypt.

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 gave much more depth and salience attention to favorable framing of GERD to explicit Ethiopian government interpretation of Nile politics although a bit demonstrated the prevailing diverse interests and elucidations of others basin countries.

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