

Book review of: Yihdego, Z., Rieu-Clarke, A., & Cascão, A. E. (Eds.). (2017). *The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the Nile Basin: Implications for Transboundary Water Cooperation*. Routledge.

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The Nile Basin is passing through very critical times – at the economic, political, and hydrological levels. In turn, the hydropolitical dynamics between basin countries are being ultimately tested. The old order, imposed by Egypt and institutionalised by past bilateral agreements of colonial times, is being challenged by an assertive upstream alliance. This alliance is born of the two-decades-old multilateral relations forged through the legal negotiations for the establishment of a Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) and the technical cooperation under the auspices of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI). The historical hydro-hegemonic role of Egypt in the basin has weakened at least since 2011, which marked both the beginning of the political uprising in Egypt and the decision of Ethiopia to start the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Now the GERD project is being built and becoming a reality; but what does this mean for the hydropolitics of the Nile Basin? What will its implications be?

This book investigates through an interdisciplinary lens the social, environmental, and political impacts that the GERD project is already having and will have on the riparian countries now and into the future. The result is a comprehensive volume analysing the meanings and impacts of such a gigantic project for the Blue Nile sub-basin (the Nile has two tributaries and sub-basins: the Blue Nile, originating in Ethiopia and flowing through Ethiopia and Sudan, where it meets the White Nile, before flowing through Egypt and into the Mediterranean Sea; and the White Nile, which flows from the sources of the Nile Basin in the Great Lakes region to Sudan, where it meets the Blue Nile and it forms the proper Nile River that flows through Egypt into the Mediterranean Sea), Nile Basin, and North-East Africa region at large. The chapters collectively capture the culmination of this history-in-the-making stage regarding Nile hydropolitics, as Ethiopia has challenged the status quo of the basin, signalling a turning point in Nile history. Several authors in the book concur that the GERD project can have the ability to bring countries together, strengthening cooperation not only in the Blue Nile Basin, but also in the entire basin. In order to untangle this complexity, 18 experts contributed to this volume to provide a comprehensive analysis of the GERD through multiple lenses: law, economics, politics, and hydrology. This volume makes a tremendously valuable contribution as no other current study provides such a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and rich analysis of the implications of the GERD project; in addition, this is the first book solely about the GERD written in English.

The guiding question of this volume is whether the GERD contributes to the changing dynamics in the Nile Basin through different disciplinary perspectives. This is explored in ten chapters. The first chapter, written by the editors, provides a concise and eloquent summary of the book, its findings, and themes. The editors identified eight themes guiding the book: the GERD has brought a new phase of cooperation in the basin; the GERD will be beneficial in terms of economic and energy production terms in region; an important issue will be about the filling of the reservoir of the GERD; a coordinated management of the dam would be more beneficial than a unilateral one; the GERD will have basin-wide implications; all countries in the basin should be ready to make compromises to solve the outstanding issues around the GERD; there is a need for a transparent and participatory decision-making process around the GERD and Nile hydropolitics; and there is an inter-relationship between local, regional, and global dynamics.

Chapter 2 by Salman provides an overview of the agreements and treaties governing the Nile Basin, unpacking the controversies surrounding them, the geographical, historical, and political background in which they were signed, and of the principles they embed. For instance, as further examined in chapter 3, the 1902 agreement between Ethiopia and Britain is strongly rejected by Ethiopia as it was not ratified by any of the Ethiopian governmental organs (Degefu, 2003). He then examines the CFA, NBI, and efforts of basin-wide agreement among the riparian countries, especially over the past two decades. Salman further investigates how international water law (IWL) principles guiding basin cooperation have evolved. Finally, he discusses to what extent the GERD project presents a new reality in the basin's hydropolitics, and its potential to disentangle the Gordian Knot of the CFA, meaning to solve the intricate and intractable problem of the CFA.

In chapter 3, Salman presents the history of dam construction in the basin, highlighting in particular the unilateral dam development that has taken place. Building on his previous chapter, Salman analyses the Declaration of Principles (DoP) on the GERD and the December 2015 Khartoum Document, and how these two new instruments replace the previous legal order established by the 1902, 1929, and 1959 treaties. The 1902 agreement was signed between Britain and Ethiopia, and the 1929 between Britain and Egypt, and the 1959 between Egypt and Sudan. These colonial agreements constitute the previous legal order, although they were disputed and not recognised by all countries in the basin, as they determined water allocation reflecting power relations in the basin until recently. For him, the new, post-colonial legal order, forged upon principles of IWL, should be used to foster cooperation among riparian countries in the basin.

In chapter 4, Yihdego and Rieu-Clarke analyse to what extent the principle of fairness is incorporated in the Nile basin legal order. Fairness is often associated with the concepts of equity and justice; in fact Rawls emphasises that "the fundamental idea in the concept of justice is fairness" (1958: 164), while Garner's definition of justice is "the fair and proper administration of the law" (1999: 579). Chapman instead focuses on the outcome rather than on the process, so for him justice is about "fairness being concerned with process, e.g. a fair trial, and justice relating to the outcome, e.g. a just

decision” (Chapman, 1963: 154). The authors adopt Thomas Frank’s definition of fairness, which suggests that

“the fairness of international law, as of any other legal system, will be judged, first by the degree to which the rules satisfy the participants’ expectations of justifiable distribution of costs and benefits, and secondly by the extent to which the rules are made and applied in accordance with what the participants perceive as right process” (Franck, 1998: 7).

Unsurprisingly, the main finding of this chapter is that while the pre-1990 treaties and agreements were not aligned with this principle, the post-1990 agreements are indeed in line with the principle of fairness. In fact, principles of fairness imbedded in IWL, especially equitable and reasonable use (which needs weighing and balancing of the competing (reasonable) interests of the riparian countries), distributive justice (a socially just allocation of goods), the duty to notify and consult (procedural justice), are present in the post-1990 agreements.

Cascão and Nicol in chapter 5 analyse the technical and political cooperation prior to the GERD announcement, situating their analysis within the critical hydropolitics school of the London Water Research Group (LWRG) (Zeitoun and Mirumachi, 2008; Zeitoun, Mirumachi, and Warner, 2011; Zeitoun et al., 2014; 2017). They see the GERD project both as an outcome of changing past hydropolitical relations in the basin, as well as a driver for future new directions of cooperation, at least at the trilateral level between Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt. The two authors conclude that while cooperation can co-exist at the sub-basin and basin-wide levels, in the long-term this may result in extremely high transaction costs, and perhaps even higher political risks than could be avoided through fully-fledged, basin-wide cooperation.

In chapter 6, Tawfik and Dombrowsky analyse to what extent the GERD transforms the hydropolitical relations in the Blue Nile from water-sharing to benefit-sharing cooperation, where a water-sharing approach focuses only on the allocation of the water resources, while a benefit-sharing considers the allocation of the benefits of the use of the water resources, for instance hydropower production. As Hussein and Grandi (2017) emphasised, it is therefore necessary to consider the broader context rather than investigating only water issues to understand hydropolitical dynamics. Tawfik and Dombrowsky also argue that the implications of the project will have to be analysed at the local, sub-basin, basin, and regional level. They conclude that the fact that the project is being financed and built by only one of the riparian countries shows that the benefit-sharing approach is yet to be fully adopted in the case of the GERD, and that in future years we will be able to see to what extent the GERD will lead to cooperation or lack of it in the Nile Basin.

In chapter 7, Boehlert, Strzepek, and Robinson provide an economic perspective on the impacts of the GERD project on the downstream countries, mainly on Egypt. This chapter builds on previous literature focusing on models, dams, and the economy of this basin. For instance, Strzepek et al. (2007) evaluated the impact of the High Aswan Dam on the Egyptian economy; and Robinson et al. (2008) used the same model to study the indirect impacts of the same dam on the Egyptian economy. By applying different scenarios, they conclude that the worst-case scenario would result in minor economic impacts on the Egyptian economy. Nevertheless, more research is needed in order to capture all variables and their inter-relations.

Kahsay, Kuik, Brouwer, and Van der Zaag also provide an economic perspective on the impacts of the GERD in chapter 8, highlighting the positive implications for the Ethiopian and basin-wide economies. They are less positive regarding the impacts on the Egyptian economy in the case of non-coordination between Egypt and Ethiopia. As a result, they suggest the establishment of a basin-wide power-trading scheme. They also recognise the necessity of further research able to include variables such as the impacts of climate change.

In chapter 9, Zhang, Erkyihun, and Block adopt a hydrological approach to analyse different scenarios of inflow and reservoir filling strategies, and their impacts on other riparian countries. The authors mention uncertainty in their findings due to climate vulnerability, and stress the necessity of coordination and cooperation between riparian countries to limit negative impacts especially in dry periods.

In chapter 10, Wheeler provides an analytical framework that quantifies the benefits and risks of any hydro-policy solution. This framework would be able to simulate complex reservoir operational decisions of a managed river system. With this framework, stakeholders will be more and better informed about the potential impacts of operations decisions, in-turn reducing negative impacts through coordination and cooperation. As such, the author recommends enhanced coordination between Egypt and Ethiopia in order to minimise negative impacts of the GERD on the downstream countries.

Overall, this book makes an important contribution to the literature on the Nile River Basin, and the authors have kept their promise of guiding the readers through the multifaceted complexity around the GERD project. An important lens, often overlooked, is the relation of hydropolitical dynamics and of the GERD project to principles of fairness; to this extent, this book is comprehensive because it incorporates this critical lens on IWL and fairness in theory and practice. Overall, while 18 experts in their respective disciplinary fields have contributed to this volume by using the Nile River Basin as a case study, this book would have benefited from more voices of scholars from the Nile countries. Notwithstanding, it must be recognised that scholars from all the three Nile countries (Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt) covered in the book are involved. In addition, while this book is empirically rich and disciplinary comprehensive, it leaves room for further research to study, in particular: the impacts of climate change on the GERD and on the hydropolitics of the basin; environmental issues; and water-energy-food nexus issues.

This book will interest academics, water-sector professionals, and those interested in international relations and regional politics, and makes an important contribution to the work of water practitioners and researchers in the Nile basin. This volume also speaks to policy-makers in the Nile River Basin, aiming to bring new insights and to show GERD issues from a variety of different perspectives, including the positive aspects that transboundary cooperation could bring to all riparian countries. It will also be a primer to newcomers to the subject as it provides a comprehensive picture of the implications of the GERD project to the Nile region. *The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the Nile Basin* is indeed a source of inspiration to those interested in the Nile Basin and willing to explore past, present, and future around the GERD project in all its complexity and multifaceted dimensions. This book provides new perspectives

and ideas that shall inform and influence hydropolitics in the Nile River Basin in the future years.

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