Power and Solidarity in the Blue Nile Basin

The Legitimization and Subversion of Egyptian Dominance

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Master thesis in Culture, Environment and Sustainability

Centre for Development and Environment

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

November 2015
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2015

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http://www.duo.uio.no/

Print: Reprosentralen, University of Oslo
Abstract

The Blue Nile Basin has for the past century been characterized by Egyptian dominance, both directly and through British colonial rule. This dominance is institutionalized through the Nile Water Agreements and the Anglo-Italian Agreement of 1902, which grant Egypt and Sudan the right to divide between them the entirety of the Nile, as well as the right to veto any construction on the river.

This veto right and the treaties it is based on are currently being contested by the construction of “The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam” (GERD) across the Blue Nile close to the border with Sudan, which openly has declared support for the project. Given the historical relationship between Sudan and Egypt, this is a move of no small significance. Sudan has historically been a staunch ally of Egypt, who in turn has largely assumed Sudanese support for its Nile policy by default and for the past two centuries has been working towards greater integration between the two countries.

The point of departure for this study is the assumption that GERD represents not only a physical subversion of Egyptian dominance on the Blue Nile, but also a subversion of the ideas, narratives and discourses that support this dominance. Looking at the Sudanese support for the construction of GERD as an expression of this subversion and seeing representations of dominance as concrete acts either supporting or contesting that dominance, the aim of this study is to investigate the ideological dimension of the ongoing power shift in the Blue Nile basin through looking at how Egyptian and Sudanese media discourses represent Egyptian dominance.

The findings, in short, are that Egyptian discourse legitimizes dominance by representing the basin as characterized by equality and the rule of law, with Egypt inhabiting the position of basin leader due to historical and geographical conditions. Sudanese discourse entails a limited subversion of this, contesting the Nile Water Agreements as the basis of basin regulation and asserting greater rights for the upstream countries to utilize the river. At the same time, it is found that a prescriptive idea of ‘shared interests’ remains the focus of both ideologies.

A secondary aim of this study is to situate its methodology, theory and findings in relation to the established school of critical transboundary water studies known as hydro-hegemony.
Through addressing what it is argued is a lacking understanding of the nature and role of ideology in hydro-hegemonic theory, the aim is to provide a better foundation for further theoretical and empirical research on ideology both in the Blue Nile Basin and, it is hoped, in international river basins more generally.
Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my supervisor Terje Tvedt, without whose insight into Nile history and impeccable combination of criticism and encouragement this thesis would not have been possible. I am much obliged to his constant insistence that I keep my analysis grounded in history, geography and hydrology.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Nina Witoszek for introducing me to social semiotics and generously giving me her time and attention as I grappled with it. This thesis would likewise not have been possible without her.

I would like to thank Pesha Magid for her ceaseless support, even when my frustrations were threatening to drive us both insane. Alexander Lykke, for his kindness and understanding of the process of writing a master thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who have supported parts of the thesis. Professor Albrecht Hofheinz for providing considerable support in my search for sources. Jacob Høigilt, Kristian Kindt and Waleed Musharaf for their timely feedback. Hossam Khedr for his help with translation.
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1 Introduction

The Blue Nile Basin is currently seeing a historic shift in power. The dominance of Egypt, which has lasted for the past century, is being challenged by the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) across the Blue Nile close to the Ethiopian-Sudanese border. The aim of this study is to investigate the ideological dimension of this shift from the vantage point of Egyptian and Sudanese media discourse.

In order to properly contextualize these events, we begin at the beginning: namely with an outline of the hydrology, geography and history of the Blue Nile basin. In other words, why and how Egypt has dominated the basin for the past century, and why and how Ethiopia and Sudan now are contesting this dominance.

Changing Power Relations in the Blue Nile Basin

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Nile to Sudan and Egypt. To both it is, in the words of Nile Historian Terje Tvedt, “the all-encompassing and decisive geographical factor” (Tvedt 2012:167). To both, broadly speaking, it is what makes the desert habitable for large sedentary settlements – sedentary being the root of the Arabic word for ‘civilization’.

Few things illustrate this importance better than the contrasts in the landscape around Aswan. Set against the deep blue of the Nile, the brown of the city and the green on its banks, stand stark sand dunes. From the top of these dunes there is nothing to see but desert. “In order to understand what the Nile means to Egypt […]” writes Tvedt “one has to understand what [Egypt] would have been without the river […]” (Tvedt 2012:20). The short answer is simply a vast empty desert. With some minor differences – chief among them slightly more rainfall – the same is true for Sudan.

Located a few kilometres upstream from the city centre, the High Aswan Dam dominates the scenery. In the vast desert, where the sun is searing even in January, the water lies trapped in place by this tremendous engineering feat, which sits in the landscape like an artificial mountain. The dam, along with its reservoir and the treaties
that have made sure it is always full, are testament both to Egyptian power and dominance in the basin, and to Egypt’s extreme vulnerability.

Of the water that reaches the Aswan Dam, rainfall in the Ethiopian highlands make up over 85 percent – through the Blue Nile and some smaller tributaries. In different terms, Egypt and Sudan depend on Ethiopia – and to a lesser extent Eritrea – for almost 90 percent of their freshwater (Arsano 2010). The Blue Nile alone accounts for over 50 percent of Egyptian and Sudanese freshwater (Elsanabary 2012).

For most of the year it is less a river than a stream, but with the Ethiopian summer rains it swells to a torrent that carries with it great amounts of extremely fine mud known as silt. Responsible both for some of the world’s most fertile agricultural lands, and monumental engineering challenges and maintenance costs at Egyptian and Sudanese dams. In Sudan, which depends on hydropower for most of its electricity, the river flows through the Roseires and Sennar dams before finally joining the White Nile at Khartoum in what is known as the longest kiss in history. They then continue their flow towards Lake Nasser.

A brief note on the geography and hydrology of Sudan, which differs significantly from that of Egypt. Though all of Sudan’s river are part of the Nile Basin, multiple tributaries make their way through the country – the most significant being the Blue Nile, the White Nile and the Atbara. The Blue Nile and Nile proper; and the White Nile, moreover, mark distinct ecosystems. The Northern and central areas, surrounding the former, have historically been considered to constitute part of the Nile Valley – alongside Egypt. The perennial White Nile, on the other hand, flows through an enormous and near unnavigable swamp in what is now South Sudan, known simply as the ‘sudd’ which translates to “barricade” or “obstruction”\(^1\).

The foundations of current Egyptian Nile control were laid during the colonial era, when the British conceptualized the entire river as a means for transporting water to the downstream irrigation economies – namely Egypt and the Northern parts of Sudan (Tvedt 2006). This conceptualization of the river was enshrined in two colonial-era

\(^{1}\) The root of this Arabic word is the same as the one for dam, ‘sadd’.
treaties – the Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement of 1902, and the Nile Water Agreement of 1929 – still claimed by Egypt as the foundation of basin law (Taha 2010).

According to the Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement of 1902, Ethiopia is not permitted to barrage the flow of any of the Nile’s tributaries except in the agreement with Sudan and London (Tvedt 2006). The relevance of this agreement as a basis for contesting the construction of GERD is questionable given the increasingly clear Sudanese declaration of support for the project.

The Nile Water Agreement of 1929 between Egypt and Great Britain – although increasingly contested by the upstream countries – still resides at the core of Egyptian policy in the Nile basin. Despite the fact that no other Nile countries were party to it, the agreement purported to provide a legal foundation for the allocation of the full flow of the Nile – and moreover, asserted that Egypt has a veto right on all construction across the river or any of its tributaries that could jeopardize the interest of Egypt (Tvedt 2006:145).

When both Sudan and Egypt had obtained independence, they entered into a new agreement on the Nile, entitled “The Agreement for the Full Utilization of the Nile Waters”\(^2\). The average annual flow of the river was estimated to 84bn cubic metres, from which 10bn cubic metres were subtracted due to evaporation from the High Aswan Dam reservoir. Of the remaining amount, 55.5bn cubic metres were allocated to Egypt, and 18.5bn cubic metres to Sudan (1959) (Taha 2010).

It is in this geographical and institutional context Ethiopia in 2011 began construction of the GERD across the Blue Nile close to its border with Sudan. GERD, reported to be almost half-way complete (Peppeh 2015), is an immense project, part of the largest hydropower scheme in Africa. Upon completion its reservoir will have a total capacity of 63bn cubic metres (Salini Impregilo 2015), exceeding the average annual flow of the Blue Nile, estimated at around 48bn cubic metres (FAONILE 2008).

Of arguably equal significance to GERD with regards to the changing power relations in the Blue Nile basin is the increasingly clear Sudanese support for the construction of

GERD. This is a major historical shift. Sudan has long been a staunch ally of Egypt, which historically has campaigned for increased integration between the two, and largely has taken Sudanese support for its Nile policy for granted.

The integration or union between Egypt and Sudan has long been popular in both countries, and was an explicit aim in Egyptian foreign policy prior to and during the British colonial era (Tvedt 2012). Sudan was conquered by Muhammad Ali in 1820 and ruled as part of Egypt until the Mahdi revolt in the 1880s. Shortly after, the British reconquered it in the name of Egypt although it was ruled by London – primarily as a means to the two-fold aim of increasing Egyptian water allocations; and of asserting control over Egypt through the use of the Nile. Since Sudanese independence in 1956 there have continued to be periodic calls for integration from both sides (Taha 2010).

The close cooperation between the countries resulted in the Nile Water Agreement of 1959, and in their joint opposition to the Entebbe Agreement, a new legal framework set to substitute the two Nile Water Agreements as the foundation of basin regulation. As we have seen, the Nile Water Agreements are primarily expressions of Egyptian interests in the basin – allocating Egypt 55.5bn cubic metres from a total of 74bn cubic metres, and asserting Egyptian veto rights on all construction across the river. Accordingly, Sudanese support for GERD is – as we shall see – framed in a call for increased Sudanese influence in the basin.

Pains have been taken by Ethiopia to emphasize that GERD’s only objective is power generation – not irrigation of agricultural lands – but Egypt has remained unconvinced. Even if this is true, the argument goes, the flow to Egypt would be reduced while the reservoir is being filled – a period which may take up to 7 years (International Rivers 2014) – and more frightening still, the dam may allegedly not be up to adequate engineering standards in the case of an earthquake (al-Qawwy 2014, Reslan 2014b). As we shall see later, the potentiality that Ethiopia may use the dam to leverage its regional policy and/or cut off the Nile flow is also a significant worry in Egypt.

Egypt has remained similarly unconvinced of the Sudanese assurances that the dam is well-planned, well-researched, and likely to benefit Egypt as well as Ethiopia and Sudan – and that Sudan in any case would not support its construction if it were likely to cause Egypt harm.
At the same time, GERD’s reported benefits are many. Storing the water in temperate highlands rather than in a desert would reduce evaporation greatly. For Sudan the annual Blue Nile floods would be better regulated by a large upstream dam, and the maintenance costs on its own dams would decrease due to the reduced silt-flow. Ethiopia is in great need of electricity, and GERD would make a vital contribution. So large, in fact, that Ethiopia is claiming it would be able to sell excess electricity to Sudan, and even to Egypt – both in need.

According to this argument, as we shall see, the dam might even be a catalyst for increased regional cooperation: a shared electricity grid would need to be built, and a dam authority would need to be agreed upon that suits all three countries. In the long run, such cooperation might lead to increased cooperation in the Nile Basin as a whole.

The Social Dimension of the Nile

The problem with assessing the claims and counter-claims made by Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia is of course that they are politically motivated statements rather than objective assessments of hydrological or engineering facts. Whether or not GERD actually is unsafe in the case of an earthquake, Egypt most certainly serves its own political agenda when claiming that it is. On the flip-side, Sudan is acting in its own interests when it claims that GERD is well planned, well executed and an opportunity for further cooperation in the basin.

This study’s theoretical point of departure is the assertion that the Blue Nile – like other rivers – has a social dimension as well as a physical dimension. Hydrologically it is at the most fundamental level large volumes of water moving through a specific landscape. As mentioned, the water carries large amounts of silt due to the landscape’s composition, and it floods and recedes at regular intervals corresponding to annual rainfall in the Ethiopian highlands.

At the same time, the Blue Nile cannot be understood only as a physical phenomenon because it flows through three countries with a combined population of almost 200 million people. To all of these, the river means something. To millions upon millions of people it is their livelihood, their drinking water, the landscape of their daily-lives, their source of light, heating or cooling, and electricity for their cell phones, computers and
televisions. It lies at the centre of political, social and economic life, as it has done for millennia.

In other words, the Nile is more than just a collection of hydrological facts and figures, just as dams are more than engineering schematics and flow-rates, and societies are more than numbered populations with certain statistical properties. Different Nile societies engage with the river in different ways and tell themselves and others different narratives, part of different histories of what the Nile is and how they and others relate to it. These histories in turn relate to different ideas and knowledges, which define the river and its relation to those who live on or near it.

Crucially, the social dimension of the river is inextricably tied to its physical or hydrological dimension. In a number of historical studies, it has been shown to be no coincidence that the states which have assumed control over the river are extremely arid downstream countries (see for example Tvedt 2006, Taha 2010 and Elemam 2010). Egypt and Sudan have throughout their history been those who most rely on the river – unlike Ethiopia, temperate and rich in rain, they have always had everything to gain and everything to lose from how they interact with the Nile.

Egypt’s unique position has given birth to a powerful and vital impetus to control the river – both on the part of various Egyptian rulers and governments and on the part of the colonizing British. Thus the social river is married to the physical river and should be understood as an extension of this. The river shapes and affects human societies, which in turn seek to shape and affect the river.

The social dimension of the river – the narratives, histories, ideas and knowledges surrounding how different countries interact with the Nile and each other – is expressed through discourse. Seeing the conflict between Egypt and Sudan over the construction of GERD as an expression of the ongoing power shift in the basin, the ambition of the current study is to look at how the Egyptian and Sudanese media discourses represent this shift.

Because discourse is not neutral or objective, however, but rather deliberately constructed and shaped by concrete agents for specific purposes, it is not sufficient for this study to take the discourse at face value. A critical analysis is needed to peer
through the different discourses, knowledges and narratives presented and identify the ideas and agendas behind them. Moreover, because Egyptian dominance and the Sudanese subversion of this dominance are based respectively in Egyptian and Sudanese histories of the Blue Nile, this must also be a study of history. In other words, a *critical diachronic* approach to discourse is needed. Without such an approach, the risk is reifying either this discourse or that, inadvertently supporting whichever discourse appears dominant.

*Ideology* is chosen as this critical diachronic perspective, defined by the Oxford Dictionaries as “a system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy” (Oxford Dictionaries 2015b). This choice is made on the assumption that socio-political interaction in the Blue Nile Basin is governed not only by scientific fact, but also by *ideas* representing the world in specific ways; and by *ideals* specifying goals for such interaction – both historically determined. Given prevailing constructivist perspectives in the social sciences, such an assumption is not controversial. Moreover, as we shall see in the following section, it is widely supported in the established theory concerning river basin interaction.

The study employs a methodological framework that allows for the understanding of ideology as a functional socio-political construct serving the interests of specific groups respectively seeking either to sustain or subvert structures of domination – in other words, seeing representations of dominance as concrete acts either supporting or contesting that dominance. The aim of the current study, then, is to investigate the ideological dimension of the ongoing power shift in the Blue Nile basin through looking at how respectively Egyptian and Sudanese media discourses represent Egyptian dominance.

Accordingly, the main research questions of this study are:

1. How does ideology in Egyptian media discourse represent Egyptian dominance in the Blue Nile basin?

2. How does ideology in Sudanese media discourse represent Egyptian dominance in the Blue Nile Basin, and to which extent is this representation a subversion of that dominance?
A grasp of the historical and socio-political origins of the ideas and ideals that Egyptian and Sudanese theories and policies in the Blue Nile Basin are founded in is, it is argued, of great importance to the understanding of these theories and policies. A comprehensive understanding of the theories and policies underlying basin interaction is, in turn, useful from the perspective of working towards and encouraging sustainable, equitable and effective frameworks and institutions for regulation in the basin.

In short, this study finds that the prevailing representation in Egyptian ideology is of Egyptian dominance not only as legitimate, but as natural. More specifically, the Nile Water Agreements are framed as representations of the natural order in the basin, whereby Egyptian leadership is a product of the basin’s historical and ecological characteristics.

Egyptian dominance is founded in an absolute principle of historical rights. According to this principle, Egypt was the earliest civilization to settle in the Nile Basin, and the first to develop irrigation due to incontrovertible geographical and hydrological conditions. Loosely based in the legal principle of easement and combined with a supreme conviction of Egyptian benevolence, capacity and superior scientific understanding, this is used to assert an Egyptian ideological position as a first among equals and natural leader guaranteeing shared benefit for all basin countries.

This view of the Blue Nile Basin is to a limited extent subverted in Sudanese ideology, which paints Egypt not as the first among equals – but rather as a coercive, self-interested and exploitative power skilled at deploying discourse and knowledge to support its own interests while denying others any support for their interests. Accordingly, the Sudanese discourse contests the Nile Water Agreements as the foundation of Nile regulation due to their colonial origins, and contends that while shared benefit should remain the goal, this should rather be founded in a more inclusive and egalitarian legal framework.

Significantly, the Sudanese support for GERD is in the Sudanese media framed as a realization of the fact that the geographical and hydrological position of Sudan differs

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3 Easement, in this context, is the legal right to use a river despite its origin in another states land (Abdelhameed 2014).
significantly from that of Egypt – meaning that an upstream dam on the Blue Nile would bring concrete and tangible benefits, as outlined above. The prevailing ideology in the Sudanese discourse covered by this study appears to have seized upon GERD as an opportunity to contest post-colonial Egyptian Nile policy. Calling for a less authoritarian basin-regime, with more influence for itself and the other upstream nations.

In short, while a physical subversion of the river’s role (GERD) lies at the heart of the current contestation of Egyptian dominance in the Blue Nile Basin, this appears to also be a subversion of the narrative, knowledge and ideology on which Egyptian dominance is founded and by which it is legitimized. The Nile envisioned by Ethiopia and Sudan does not appear to exist primarily for the benefit of the downstream countries, contesting the principles according to which the river has been governed for the past century.

I am aware of the limitations of this study, but I also consider them fully acceptable and justifiable. Firstly, this study focuses on the dominant state ideologies in Egypt and the Sudan. This decision is made primarily due to limitations in time and scope. More research on Ethiopian ideology and discourse in the Blue Nile Basin is needed; as is more research on the prevalent non-state ideologies in the Blue Nile countries.

Secondly, it bears repeating that this study only focuses on one, albeit very important aspect of transboundary river-interaction: namely ideology. The method used is social semiotic discourse analysis, and the sources are a selection of Egyptian and Sudanese newspaper articles. More research is needed to identify the way ideology interacts with the world outside political discourse.

As established above, there are different ways of understanding the Nile. The dominant one from a modern European point of view is the downstream perspective whereby it is all one river whose main purpose is providing water for irrigation in Egypt and Sudan. This is the contemporary perspective of Egypt, the long-time hegemon of the basin.

In other words, this means that the historical narrative and ideological perspective of Egypt holds a privileged position both in the Basin (Tvedt 2006, Zeitoun, et al. 2014), and in the European imagination (Tvedt 2006). It is therefore important for me to
plainly state that I am a European and a long-time resident of Cairo, and it is crucial to examine my own prejudice in order to avoid inadvertently supporting that which appears dominant or ideologically preferable.

While my personal and academic backgrounds lie in Norway and Egypt, my ideological convictions tend to favour the dominated and marginalized. This is not to say that a political or ideological programme lies behind this thesis, but rather to openly declare my ideological and academic leanings. Firstly, to aid me in addressing and compensating for these, and secondly so that they are clear to the reader.

Theoretical Perspectives on Ideology in International River Basins

The existence and significance of a social dimension in international river basins is not, in itself, a novel theoretical observation. The prominent school of critical water interaction studies known as hydro-hegemony posits ideology and discourse as the centrepieces of a theoretical framework aimed at the comprehensive inter-disciplinary study of power and state interaction in international river basins.

While it proposes the ways in which these concepts relate to larger power structures, however, hydro-hegemony does not feature a methodological framework for the study of ideology and discourse in their own right. A crucial failing, it is argued, given the emphasis placed on these as determinants of basin interaction. Nevertheless, there is clear utility in drawing some parallels between the methodological framework used by the current study, and the theoretical framework of hydro-hegemony.

Despite its flaws, it is argued that hydro-hegemony constitutes an important theoretical basis for the comprehensive and inter-disciplinary study of power and state interaction in international river basins. It is difficult to overstate the importance of such an inter-disciplinary approach to river basin interaction as a building block of ongoing efforts to understand state interaction in the Blue Nile Basin, and to design political and legal regimes and institutions for the sustainable, equitable and effective regulation of the basin.
Therefore, a secondary goal of this study is to situate its methodology, theory and findings in relation to the larger academic context of hydro-hegemony. This serves two important purposes: firstly it allows the current study to more easily draw from the theoretical insights of this framework regarding the nature of inter-state river basin interaction; and secondly, by combining the theoretical-methodological insights of the current study, and the theoretical insights of hydro-hegemony a better foundation may be provided for further empirical and theoretical research on the role of ideology both in the Blue Nile Basin and, it is hoped, in international river basins more generally.

In other words, there are two concrete aims for connecting the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress and hydro-hegemony: firstly, addressing, the lacking hydro-hegemonic methodology for the analysis of discourse and ideology; and secondly, addressing the generalized nature of the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress, which provides no theoretical-methodological framework for the study of how ideology relates to state interaction in the Blue Nile Basin outside the important albeit limited field of discourse.

In the interest of addressing these issues, the following secondary research question will be treated separately in chapter four:

3. How can the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress contribute to a deeper and broader understanding of the role of ideology and discourse in the theoretical framework of hydro-hegemony?

While a comprehensive discussion of this study’s findings as they relate to the concept of ideology in hydro-hegemony is given in chapter four, a brief introduction is given here, to enable the preceding chapters to draw on some useful theoretical perspectives.

Fundamental to the hydro-hegemonic understanding of power and state interaction in international river basins are two related ideas: firstly, that transboundary river basins are characterized by power asymmetries; and secondly that different forms of power are active in transboundary river basins.

Hydro-hegemony lies at the intersection of these ideas – a position of superior capacity for basin control, which draws on what Zeitoun et.al. call “subtle” mechanisms of power. These differ from overtly coercive power mechanisms such as military force or threats of military force, and relate primarily to ideology and normative frameworks,
and the capacity to construct and/or impose visions, agendas, discourses, realities, knowledges (Zeitoun, et al. 2014). In short the capacity to set and control the rules of the game.

The non-hegemonic states, meanwhile, are engaged in a struggle to resist or contest the hegemonic order – with the ultimate goal of transforming it “through the direct or indirect undermining of the foundations that underpin it” (Zeitoun, et al. 2014:3). Put in different terms, the non-hegemonic states work to subvert the hegemonic order.

In order to achieve this goal, the mechanisms they have at their disposal – like those of the hegemon – range from coercive to subtle power. Zeitoun et.al. theorize that just as the successful hegemon draws on subtle or ideological mechanisms, so the successful counter-hegemon must draw on similar subtle or ideological mechanisms.

Briefly, the currents study suggests – although additional research is needed – that a key flaw resulting from the inadequate methodological approach to ideology in hydro-hegemony is an overly compartmentalized understanding of the role and nature of ideology and discourse, whereby their impact is limited to more or less effective so-called subtle mechanisms.

On the basis of its findings, this study proposes that the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress provide a theoretical-methodological base with the potential to broaden and deepen the understanding of the role of ideology and discourse in hydro-hegemonic theory.

Finally, a brief note on language: while ‘dominance’ in hydro-hegemony is related to coercive or non-subtle mechanisms of power and thus differs from hegemony as a less effective means of control, this study uses the common dictionary definition – as it is also understood by the theoretical-methodological approach of this study. The Oxford Dictionaries define dominance as “power and influence over others” (Oxford Dictionaries 2015a). Because the current study’s analytical approach addresses precisely the ‘subtle’ mechanisms of power, these two terms (dominance and hegemony) are in this study treated as synonymous.
Methodology

As we have seen above, the doctrine of absolute historical rights is presented to the reader of the Egyptian newspapers studied as fact. As sure as the Nile flows from South to North, Egypt is the natural and indisputable leader of the basin. To the reader of the Sudanese newspapers in question, Egyptian exploitation and coercion is similarly presented as fact. Therefore, as established above, a critical diachronic approach to discourse in the Blue Nile Basin is needed.

Ideology, defined by the Oxford Dictionaries as “a system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy” (Oxford Dictionaries 2015b), has been chosen as the critical perspective of this study on the assumption that discourse, knowledge and policy are conditioned by such a system. This assumption is implicit in the general definition of ideology, and is as mentioned above not considered to be controversial.

More specifically, the methodology of this study is based in the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress. Semiotics fundamentally has to do with meaning, and social semiotics emphasizes the social dimension of meaning – meaning as socially constructed or negotiated.

While there are a multitude of critical approaches to discourse analysis, the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress is considered particularly appropriate to the current study due to its explicit understanding of meaning as a representation of the world, conditioned by ideas and ideals (ideology); its express emphasis on socio-political interaction as a key determinant of meaning; and its orientation to ideology as directly related to questions of power, dominance and the subversion of dominance. The above has clear utility given the stated aim of investigating the ideological dimension of the ongoing power shift in the Blue Nile basin through looking at how respectively Egyptian and Sudanese media discourses represent Egyptian dominance.

The reason Hodge & Kress have been chosen instead of other prominent semioticians such as Foucault, is their explicit treatment of solidarity alongside power as a determinant of socio-political interaction. The significance of solidarity has been an important issue in general and global debates on conditions for cooperation in
international river basins, and the term is also used due to its importance in the ideologies of the Blue Nile basin more specifically.

Hodge & Kress found their analytical framework on the Marxian concept of ideology, taking as their point of departure the following formulation:

Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc., that is, real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces, and of the intercourse corresponding to these up to its furthest forms. Consciousness (das Bewusstsein) can never be anything else than conscious being (das bewusste Sein), and the being of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their relations appear upside down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process (Hodge and Kress 1988:2).

In short, ideology is understood a historically determined image of the world. Like a picture taken by a camera, however, it is not an objective depiction of the world, but depends on the choice of perspective, the focus of the shot, the type of camera and film (or filters), lighting and much more. In the Blue Nile Basin, Egypt and Sudan are both proponents of different ideologies, that is, of images of what the world is and should be – ideas and ideals.

These images are expressed through Discourse, understood as “the social process in which texts are embedded” (Hodge and Kress 1988:6). A text is understood in the broad sense as “a structure of messages (...) which has a socially ascribed unity” (Hodge and Kress 1988:6). A message, Hodge & Kress write: “[is] the smallest semiotic form that has concrete existence (...). The message has directionality – it has a source, a social context and a purpose (...)” (Hodge and Kress 1988:5).

Messages link both producers and receivers; and signifiers and signifieds. Crucially, in linking signifiers and signifieds they refer to a world outside the text, implying some idea of reality. As already established, a point of departure in this thesis is that the social dimension of the Blue Nile should be seen as a concrete extension of the physical river.

Messages, in turn, are composed of signs. A sign is in semiotics defined as something that stands for something other than itself (Chandler 2007:260). In other words, signs are things which mean or represent something. The distinction between a sign and its
meaning lies at the heart of semiotics. In classical Saussurean semiotics, the form of the sign is referred to as the signifier, whereas its meaning is referred to as the signified: “the signifier is the carrier of meaning, whereas the signified is the concept or meaning” (Hodge and Kress 1988:17). In other words, the signifier is what is perceived (seen, heard, etc.), whereas the signified is the meaning this has.

An example of a sign is ‘equal’, this has no meaning in and of itself – it is perfectly possible to imagine this sequence of letters standing for any conceivable thing – it only gains meaning when “someone invests [it] with meaning with reference to a recognized code [see below]” (Chandler 2007:260). An example of a message is ‘all Nile basin states have equal rights to benefit from the Nile waters’. This message ties together both its producers and receivers; and signifiers and signifieds in specific ways:

Firstly, as we shall see below, this message has in various forms been published both in Egyptian and Sudanese government newspapers. This is to say that it purports to be a formal and factual view of the situation and that the text has an institutionalized legitimacy and authority. A private citizen is not free to participate in the composition of this text, and a text in disagreement with it would need to fulfil certain requirements pertaining to style and content in order to be published in the same papers.

Secondly, a key sign in this message is ‘equal rights’. The meaning of this is not necessarily clear, and differs depending on the point of view. As we shall see, Egypt bases its interpretation of ‘equal rights’ in the Nile Water Agreements, contending, among other things, that the water scarcity of Egypt and Sudan means they have greater need for Nile water than the upstream countries. Sudan on the other hand contests these agreements on the basis that they are colonial treaties and privilege Egypt above the other basin states. Contending that ‘equal rights’ should be based in a more inclusive and equitable legal framework with greater rights for upstream countries.

In other words, the Egyptian and Sudanese ideologies feature specific codes, according to which the signifiers and signifieds discussed above are correlated in different ways. Put differently, codes “provide a framework within which signs make sense” (Chandler 2007:245).
 Crucially in the context of language, codes are social conventions – they are constructed by and negotiated between social groups and/or individuals. The fact that codes are social means that they are inherently contested, signs and messages can and do mean different things to different people and different groups.

The fact that meaning is socially constructed and negotiated is precisely the reason the Nile cannot be studied simply as a collection of physical properties – it means or represents something to all who interact with it or think about it, and it represents different things to different people.

In a social context, meaning is always expressed from a specific point of view, which is to say that it always represents the world in a specific way as perceived by whomever holds this point of view – organizing the producer and recipient; and signifiers and signifieds in specific ways. This depiction of the world is ideology, a specific point of view held by a concrete social agent which, according to Hodge & Kress serves a specific purpose either for those seeking to impose dominance, or for those seeking to subvert dominance.

This representation of the world – ideology – is according to Hodge & Kress an expression of bonds of power and solidarity. Power broadly denoting hierarchy, control, order; and solidarity broadly denoting unity, cohesion. To describe the inherent contradiction between power and solidarity as determinants of ideology, Hodge & Kress use the term ideological complex, An Ideological Complex is thus:

a functionally related set of contradictory versions of the world, coercively imposed by one social group on another on behalf of its own distinctive interests or subversively offered by another social group in attempts at resistance in its own interests. An ideological complex exists to sustain relationships of both power and solidarity, and it represents both the dominant and the subordinate (Hodge and Kress 1988:3).

Power and solidarity coexist because power on its own is very ineffective in sustaining and legitimizing dominance:

In order to sustain the structures of domination the dominant groups attempt to represent the world in forms that reflect their own interests, the interests of their power. But they also need to sustain the bonds of solidarity that are the condition of their dominance. (Hodge and Kress 1988:3).
In the above statement about equal rights, the Nile Basin is tied together not only by geography and the Nile as a shared water resource, but also by the apparently common pursuit of development. Yet while asserting solidarity, both the Egyptian and Sudanese ideologies at the same time assert power. Egypt by privileging Egyptian rights to Nile water; and Sudan through asserting greater influence in the basin for upstream countries.

The reason these ideological complexes can function despite the inherent contradiction between power and solidarity is what Hodge & Kress call logonomic systems: namely codes or rules “prescribing the conditions for production and reception of meanings” (Hodge and Kress 1988:4). Logonomic systems “prescribe social semiotic behaviors at points of production and reception (…)” (Hodge and Kress 1988:4) thus regulating how messages can be constructed and how they can be received.

In both Egypt and Sudan, the state information services and state media are owned and controlled by the government, and run by those loyal to it. Similarly, many of the purportedly independent newspapers, as we shall see in the next section, have connections to the government. Accordingly, an article or opinion must fulfil certain requirements in order to be considered legitimate and be published by these institutions – these requirements are part of the logonomic system supporting the dominant ideological complex.

**Sources**

The object of study in this thesis is media discourse. A range of articles have been chosen from a selection of the most prominent Arabic-language newspapers in Sudan and Egypt to reflect the prevalent ideologies in the respective media discourses – with a focus on state discourse. The choice of newspapers over interviews has been made because they give a more official view and allow for a larger extent of inter-subjectivity, which is crucial given that the topic of study is highly conflictual. Because several of the newspapers used are either directly controlled by the respective governments or have strong ties to them, moreover, they are valuable sources of government discourse.

Accordingly, the selection has been made according to three criteria: to capture the government views; circulation; and to capture prevalent non-government views. The
following newspapers have been chosen, respectively from Egypt and Sudan: *al-Ahram, al-Masry al-Youm, al-Shorouq; al-Intibaha, Akher Lahza, al-Midan*.

The articles have been selected with an emphasis on editorials, and opinion-pieces by government officials and other prominent members of the public sphere. Articles have been chosen from the online archives of the respective newspapers in a period of approximately one year from spring 2013 to spring 2014. It was crucial to choose a period that covered the transition period from President Morsi to President Sisi in Egypt, as well as the increasingly clear Sudanese support for GERD and closer cooperation with Ethiopia. Below follows a profile of the selected media.

Finally, a couple of notes. Page numbers are not used when quoting from newspaper articles, as these rarely exceed two pages. In cases where there are five or more citations listed in one place, these have been placed in footnotes.

All translations are my own, with the assistance of the Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic (Wehr 1994). The original Arabic text of quotes is provided in footnotes.

**Egypt**

At the end of the Mubarak era Egyptian media was, according to Professor of Media Studies Kai Hafez, characterized by increased media-freedom and tolerance for plurality and criticism:

> Over the last sixty years since the revolution of 1952, Egypt has experienced a clear long-term trend towards increased media freedom from the presidency of Gamal Abd el-Nasser to the military coup of July 2013. The late years of Husni Mubarak can by and large be labelled as a “liberal autocracy”, in which it was possible to criticize the government although many red lines were not to be crossed (Hafez 2015:9).

Notably, the two private newspapers used as sources in this thesis (al-Masry al-Youm and al-Shorouq) were both founded in the late Mubarak period. According to Edward Webb, however, they “mostly reflected the agendas of their owners, who were never too far outside the Mubarak circle” (Webb 2014:35) In the immediate aftermath of the 25th
of January popular uprising, this process of increased media freedom seemed to be continuing.

After the 2013 popular uprising-cum-coup, the military took control of the government, and one of their first actions was to close all media they claimed were Islamist, including the Egyptian bureau of prominent international broadcaster Aljazeera, according to Hafez “ending the phase of pluralism in the Egyptian media system” (2015:13). The current situation is summed up by Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication Rasha Abdulla in the following way:

Successive Egyptian regimes following the revolution have taken steps to limit freedom of expression and control the narrative in Egyptian media coverage. Hopes for a more professional media sector have been dashed by a state media apparatus that has for all intents and purposes supported whatever regime is in power, private media outlets influenced by wealthy owners with ties to the Mubarak regime, and severe polarization between Islamist and non-Islamist outlets. (…) It has become increasingly difficult to air or publish voices that are not in total harmony with pro-regime propaganda. Indeed, several private, supposedly independent newspapers have refused to publish pieces by contributors that failed to follow the editorial line. Generally speaking, the media in Egypt are currently characterized by their seemingly unanimous support for the regime and an inflated portrayal of high hopes for the new president (Abdulla 2014:27).

**Al-Ahram**

Al-Ahram was founded in 1875, and has the largest circulation of any daily Egyptian newspaper. It is owned and controlled by the Egyptian Government, which controls appointments to key positions and bodies, including the appointment of editors-in-chief (El Shaer 2015). Moreover, most private newspapers – with the notable exception of al-Masry al-Youm – rely on the printing and distribution services of al-Ahram and the other state newspapers (UNESCO 2013).

**Al-Masry al-Youm**

Founded in 2004, al-Masry al-Youm is privately owned and has one of the largest circulations in Egypt (Caryle 2012), as well as a popular website. It has its own printing press, and briefly overtook the circulation of al-Ahram during the 2011 protests.
(UNESCO 2013). It is partly owned by prominent Egyptian businessman Naguib Sawiris, and has strong ties to the Sawiris family. This has according to Professor Edward Webb been reflected in the coverage of the paper: “the issue was not one of the state censoring content, but of the owners, all major businesspeople, having their own agenda, which much of the time did not conflict with Gamal Mubarak’s planned succession to the presidency” (Webb 2014:36). It featured an English-language sister-publication which was hailed by the Columbia Journalism Review as “a symbol of Egypt’s new freedom of press” (Salama 2013), however this was closed in 2013 allegedly due to financial trouble.

**Al-Shorouq⁴**

Founded in 2009, al-Shorouq is privately owned by the Shorouq publishing house, and while the print edition has a significantly smaller circulation than al-Masry al-Youm and al-Ahram, its online edition is widely read (Messieh 2012). It has a reputation for being somewhat more critical of the regime than al-Masry al-Youm and to have good relationship with elite circles at the American University in Cairo (Webb 2014). It has also featured a variety of contributors including avowed Islamist Fahmy Howeidy and liberal Amr Hamzawi, and has published op-eds by satirical broadcaster Bassem Youssef. At the same time is has a history of exerting pressure on those who go too far (Salah 2014).

**Sudan**

The below information is based on a 2012 report on Sudanese media from Media in Cooperation and Transition (MiCT 2012), a German non-profit organization which works with media research and monitoring. This report is a well-researched and authoritative account of the Sudanese media landscape, ameliorating the scarcity of other sources.

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⁴ The articles from al-Shorouq covered by this study are from the print edition. All previous editions can however be found in online archives, available at [http://www.shorouknews.com/pdf/](http://www.shorouknews.com/pdf/).
Since the military coup in 1989 which saw President Omar Bashir take power, media Scholar Roman Deckert writes that the Sudanese press has seen a careful opening and liberalization:

It seems as though the government of Bashir’s National Congress Party (NCP) learnt from the lessons of past regimes which had suppressed press freedoms to such a degree that public discontent resulted in their overthrow through popular uprisings (MiCT 2012:14).

More generally, Deckert summarizes the recent historical developments in Sudanese newspapers in the following way:

The factionalism of party-owned and part-affiliated newspapers has always been the main feature of the Sudanese press with its elitist focus on Khartoum affairs. Due to financial pressures, most newspapers increasingly served as in-house tools for the parties in power. (…) Only few papers could be considered as striving for objectivity at times (MiCT 2012:15).

Compared with Egypt, contemporary Sudanese newspapers have much smaller circulations. All the ones covered here number in the tens of thousands in a country of over 35 million. It is however estimated by MiCT that each copy is read by up to ten people.

Deckert summarizes the current state of the Sudanese press as: “a diverse range of papers for a narrow spectrum of society” (MiCT 2012:16). All the major newspapers are published in the capital Khartoum, and due to financial and logistical limitations are distributed only here and in a handful of other urban centres.

Sudanese press is nevertheless “fairly diverse”, despite its elitism and strong centralization. At the same time, suppression and crack-downs both by the National Congress Party (NCP), and the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) regularly take place.
Al-Intibaha

Al-Intibaha was launched in 2006, and with a circulation of 60,000 is by far the most widely circulated newspaper in Sudan. It is also the most visited online news site. It is controlled by the Islamist Just Peace Forum Party (JFP) and was founded by its head, who is the uncle of President al-Bashir. The JFP “is a radically Islamist and increasingly autonomous splinter party of the ruling NCP” (MiCT 2012:43). The paper’s columnists include members of President Bashir’s National Congress Party (NCP).

Akher Lahza

Akher Lahza was founded in 2005 and is controlled by the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS). It is loyal to the Sudanese Government, and has a circulation of about 20,000. It has ties to the Islamist movement (see above).

Al-Midan

al-Midan is controlled by the opposition Communist Party of Sudan and has a circulation of around 10,000. It was founded in 1954 and has suffered a long history of bans and re-openings. It vocally and aggressively opposes the government of President Bashir, and is regularly confiscated by the security authorities. Associate Professor at the University of Oslo Albrech Hofheinz (Hofheinz 2015) reports that its circle of readership is wider than the newspapers ideological background, including not only communists but also other regime-critics.

5 While the articles from al-Intibaha were sourced from the paper’s website, some of the links no longer appear to work. Copies of these articles can be provided upon request from knutmn@gmail.com.
2 Historical Context

The contemporary political and ideological events in the Blue Nile Basin do not exist in a vacuum, but should be seen as part of continuous historical processes. As we have seen above, this is made explicit by Hodge & Kress, who contend that ideology is a historically determined image of the world.

What follows is a brief account of the modern history the Blue Nile Basin, beginning with the British occupation of Egypt and Sudan and ending in the post-colonial era. This period is the focus because it was decisive in shaping the Nile Basin in the modern era, seeing the establishment of infrastructure which has altered the physical characteristics of the river, and treaties which have altered how the river is interacted with and understood.

The dominant contemporary conceptualization of the entire river as existing mainly for the benefit of the downstream irrigation economies is, as established in the chapter one, to large extent a product of the British Nile policies. These are the policies that have been codified and formalized in the Nile Water Agreements, which Egypt still considers the foundation of water regulation in the basin.

The following chapter is divided into two sections: the colonial era and the post-colonial era. In both, the focus is chiefly on the treaties and infrastructure which are relevant to the contemporary conflict surrounding the construction of GERD, and through these on the ideas which have shaped the basin through British, Egyptian and Sudanese interactions with it. The chapter is based primarily on two books by Terje Tvedt (Tvedt 2006, Tvedt 2012), as well as chapters by Fadwa Taha and Yacob Arsano in Tvedt (2010). These are considered sufficient, since an analysis of earlier Nile history is not the focus of the current study.
The Colonial Era

British Egypt and Sudan

From the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, Great Britain was the dominant power in the Nile Basin. Egypt was colonized in 1882, and Sudan in 1899. Although London maintained de facto control of both Sudan and Egypt, the former remained nominally ruled by the Khedive (and prior to the First World War part of the Ottoman Empire), and the latter, as we shall see, by Egypt.

While the initial goal of British conquest of Egypt was control of the Suez Canal as a route to India, the Nile quickly became a priority due to its unrivalled importance for Egypt. The aim of British Nile control was thus twofold: to cement British control over Egypt in order to secure access to the Suez Canal; and to improve cotton-production – at the time vital to the Egyptian economy – in order to improve the Egyptian ability to pay its debts to Great Britain and other European countries, which had run high due to considerable loans by pre-colonial Egyptian rulers (Tvedt 2006).

In order to increase the productivity of Egyptian cotton production – which before the construction of the High Aswan Dam could be grown only in summer in conjunction with the flooding of the Blue Nile – the seasonal fluctuations of the river needed to be evened out. This initially lead to plans for dams on the White Nile, because the Blue Nile was considered unsuitable for the construction of dams due to the amount of silt it carries.

The mud moved by the Blue Nile in one year was estimated to equal 160-180 million tons (UNESCO 2008), and this would cause any dam to become silted up in a short period. A dam on the White Nile, however, would be capable of storing water which could be sent down to Egypt during the dry season. Moreover, such a dam would be capable of expanding British control over Egypt through control of the Nile – Egypt’s only source of fresh water (Tvedt 2006).

In a quote that encapsulates the British conceptualization of the Nile and remains relevant in light of Egyptian Nile policy today, Cromer, the British Consul-General in
Egypt wrote that “the effective control of the waters of the Nile from the Equatorial Lakes to the sea is essential to the Existence of Egypt” (Tvedt 2006:29).

It was in this context the British Empire in 1899 took control of Sudan, having already set foot on Lake Victoria in their effort to control the White Nile from its sources in South-East Africa. The conquest of Sudan was largely paid for from Egyptian coffers and was made by Egyptian forces in the name of Egypt, where the idea of unity in the Nile Valley was popular (Tvedt 2006). Although the Condominium Agreement between Britain and Egypt nominally gave Britain and Egypt joint responsibility for the territory of Sudan, it became a de facto possession of Britain.

Shortly after this expansion of British Nile control, Sir William Edmund Garstin, the influential Under-Secretary of Public Works in Egypt, took Anglo-Egyptian Nile control to its logical conclusion when he in 1904 authored a plan for the British Government which for the first time conceptualized the Nile as “one river that existed for the benefit of the irrigation economies in the north […] (Tvedt 2006:73). In a project emblematic of the contemporary belief in Western rational superiority, the British aimed to completely control the Nile from its sources in Ethiopia and around the Great Lakes to its mouth in the Mediterranean – all for the benefit of London, Egypt and to a lesser extent Northern Sudan.

The British plans for developing Sudan conceptualized the Southern part of the country more or less exclusively as a way to transport water to Egypt and the North. In North Sudan, the most significant development project was the Gezira Scheme, which was to become the largest cotton farm in the world. In order to provide adequate water for it and increase both the water supply to, and control over Egypt, Great Britain planned to construct the Sennar Dam on the Blue Nile in Sudan – a project that was controversial in Egypt for reasons similar to the ones surrounding GERD.

Construction began in 1914, but due to the outbreak of the First World War, the dam was not completed until 1925. Despite the fact that almost 80 percent of the dam’s water was reserved for Egypt, the project caused outrage there. It was at the time seen as a threat to the Egyptian Nile and a way for London to pressure Egypt – where the Wafd Party under the leadership Saad Zaghloul was campaigning for independence (Tvedt 2006).
At the hands of London, and through the continued development of infrastructure, Sudan became at once a carrot and a stick to be used for control over Egypt. This increased control became especially urgent in the context of an increasingly restive political climate, which culminated in the Egyptian revolution of 1919 and the unilateral British declaration of Egyptian independence in 1922.

This independence nevertheless left London in control over the Suez Canal and with considerable influence in Egypt. The following quote from the Foreign Office in 1923 shows that British aims towards control over Egypt had not diminished: “the power which holds the Soudan [sic] has Egypt at its mercy, and through Egypt can dominate the Suez Canal” (Tvedt 2006:87).

The case of the Sennar Dam shows that there is historical precedence for the Egyptian worry about upstream Nile control. Dams both in Sudan and in Ethiopia – as we shall see below – were considered instrumental in British Nile control, and the capacity to withhold water from Egypt was an explicit part of London’s strategy.

**The Nile Water Agreement of 1929**

In 1929, an Exchange of Notes between the British High Commissioner in Egypt and the Egyptian Government laid the foundations for the first Nile Water Agreement, which aimed to provide a legal basis for water allocation and construction of infrastructure in the entire basin. This agreement, writes Tvedt:

>(…) can partly be seen as an expression of Britain’s weakened position as compared to the years before the Egyptian revolution, and partly as a reflection of the convergence of Egyptian perceptions of the Nile as basically an Egyptian river and British strategic thinking. (Tvedt 2006:148)

The agreement did however not directly specify water amounts. Based on the 1920 Nile Project Commission report, it was estimated that Egypt had the right to 48bn cubic metres, while Sudan was allowed to take a limited amount – estimated at 4bn cubic metres – for the Gezira Scheme. No other state was party to the agreement. Still of importance today, it specified that “no works that might prejudice [Egypt’s] interests could be executed on the river or any of its tributaries upstream” (Tvedt 2006:145).
Clearly biased towards Egypt, this agreement has caused a long-term divide between it and Sudan – as we shall see below.

**Ethiopia and the Plans for a Dam on Lake Tana**

Unable to seize control of Ethiopia, the British allied with its emperor Menelik II, whom they did not see as a threat. London partly supported the emperor for two reasons. Firstly, he served as a bulwark against Italian power in the Nile basin – Italy considering Ethiopia to be inside its own sphere of influence. Secondly, London was trying to obtain his permission to build a dam on Lake Tana. Great Britain’s assertion of its influence also on the Ethiopian Blue Nile was enshrined in the 1902 Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement, which assured that neither Ethiopia nor Italy could construct a dam on the Blue Nile without the express agreement of London and Sudan (Tvedt 2006).

In the same way as the Sennar Dam, the prospective dam on Lake Tana was after the British declaration of Egyptian independence in 1922 regarded by Great Britain potentially both as a carrot and a stick towards Egypt. As is clear from the following British secret memo:

> His Majesty’s Government are indeed in the position of being able to threaten Egypt with the reduction of her water supply, and this is sufficient in itself to create a feeling of anxiety and resentment in Egyptians: on the other hand His Majesty’s Government cannot offer to increase the water supply of Egypt unless the construction of the Tsana reservoir is undertaken. Once this work is completed they will be able, without in any way abandoning their power to damage Egypt by reducing the supply, to tranquillize Egyptian anxiety by offering to increase that supply to a very great extent. (Tvedt 2006:117-118).

According to the British plan for the Tana dam, Egypt and Sudan would each receive fifty percent of the water, although Egypt would shoulder the brunt of the construction cost. In addition to leveraging power over Egypt, the British administration in Sudan wanted to use the dam as a way to provide more water for the Gezira Scheme.

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6 Lake Tana collects the rainwater of the Ethiopian highlands before sending them down the Blue Nile.
The construction of the dam proved difficult, however, and with the advent of the Second World War it had not come to fruition. In 1935, Mussolini took power in Italy and instituted a much more aggressive policy in East Africa. He occupied Ethiopia, and a couple of years later he sent his engineers to Lake Tana to plan for his own dam there, which he planned on using to put pressure on Britain and Egypt. His plans came to nothing, however, and in 1941 a British force defeated the Italians and reinstated Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie.

At the beginning of World War Two in 1941, it was suggested that Sudan should pay for, build and operate the dam with Egyptian observers present. Egypt wanted a dam at Lake Tana under its own control, but did not want Sudan to be a formal partner in a future agreement on the lake because Cairo regarded Sudan as part of Egypt. At the end of the Second World War, at the cusp of a dramatic decrease in British power both regionally and globally, no clear and agreed upon plan for a Tana dam existed.

Despite the failure to construct the dam, there are important lines to be drawn between the events surrounding the Tana dam and the current situation surrounding GERD. Egyptian fears of a dam in Ethiopia has a historical precedent, and as with the Sennar dam, so do Egyptian fears of upstream powers threatening to use water control to wield power over Egypt.

**The Post-Colonial Era**

**Egypt and the High Aswan Dam**

In July 1952, King Farouk – the figurehead monarch of British power in Egypt – was overthrown, and power passed to the military – where it has remained since but for President Morsi’s brief and ultimately unsuccessful reign. Great Britain remained in control of the Suez Canal for a few more years, and Sudan remained formally under Anglo-Egyptian control, as it had been since the 1899 Condominium Agreement.

In 1956 President Gamal Abd el-Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, partly in response to the withdrawal of financial support for his grand development project the High Aswan Dam by a coalition consisting of Britain, The US and the World Bank. The Egyptian search for new funders set the stage for a geo-political struggle between the
United States and the Soviet Union, the latter eventually prevailing and funding the dam’s construction (Tvedt 2006).

The High Aswan Dam was a project of immense value both symbolically and practically, asserting and expanding Egyptian control over the Nile waters, it would be able to store the water sent down the river two tears in a row. Thus it may be argued that Egypt’s independence was born from Nile Control, just as Nile Control previously had been used to keep Egypt dependent. Tvedt writes:

The Aswan project came to be regarded as the cornerstone in the policy of the new regime, which saw it as no less than Egypt’s salvation. It should provide life-giving waters throughout the year and cheap electricity in abundance for industrial development and rural electrification, and protect the country from devastating floods. It would, Nasser declared, make Egypt the Japan of Africa. But most important – it would ‘nationalise’ the Nile. The Sadd el Ali, or the Nasser dam as it was also called, was a grand and potent symbol of national sovereignty and revolutionary zeal (Tvedt 2006:261).

A quote it may be useful to keep in mind when considering the significance of GERD for Ethiopia.

**Sudan and the Nile Water Agreement of 1959**

In 1951, the Egyptian government unilaterally declared Egyptian rule over Sudan, however after the 1952 coup in Egypt, the new government dropped these claims, and instead demanded Sudan’s independence from Britain:

During the final years of the [Egyptian] monarchy, the Wafd had demanded the unity of Egypt and Sudan under the Egyptian crown. Although Britain tried to separate Egyptian issues from the question of the Sudan, Egypt insisted on linking the two. By the time the RCC\(^7\) came to power, Britain had recognized that in order to clear the way for discussions on the status of the Suez Canal, it would have to settle the dispute over the Sudan. The RCC, for its part, did not give the retention of the Sudan a high priority and went so far as to drop Egyptian claims for sovereignty over the country and to demand instead the granting of Sudanese self-determination. Britain, eager to settle its outstanding differences with Egypt, accepted the RCC’s terms.

\(^7\) The Revolutionary Command Council, led by the Free Officers Movement of which Nasser was a member.
The Anglo-Egyptian Agreement, signed in February 1953, recognized the Sudan’s right to self-determination and set forth the steps that would achieve that goal. Two years later, the Sudanese parliament proclaimed independence (…) (Cleveland and Bunton 2009:287).

Meanwhile, the burning question was the division of water between the two states. In Sudan, opposition to the Nile Water Agreement of 1929 was growing, and the Sudanese National Assembly demanded a larger portion of the Nile waters. At the same time, the plans for the High Aswan Dam were controversial, as it was set to flood Sudanese lands.

The Egyptian Government’s way of dealing with Sudanese dissatisfaction with the allocated water amounts was not helpful. The initial response of Major Salah Salem, a spokesperson of the Egyptian Government, was to minimize Sudanese water scarcity:

Salem spoke on relations between Egypt and Sudan and how these were tied to the Nile issue: Britain’s Nile policy was the main obstacle to unity of the Nile valley; the imperialists had convinced the Sudanese that their inability to obtain sufficient water was because of Egypt’s control over the Nile under the 1929 Agreement, a ‘fallacy’ exposed by the Army Movement. After the completion of the High Dam scheme Egypt ‘could supply the Sudan free of charge with 11 times as much Nile water as she was now obtaining’ (Tvedt 2006:282).

In other words, the Egyptian government adopted a line whereby they criticized the British rhetoric of water scarcity by in Sudan, and claimed this was all part and parcel of an imperial plot to destroy the relationship between Egypt and Sudan, and to hinder Sudanese development. This was not only incorrect but harmful, because it gave the impression that no opposition or conflict existed between Egypt and Sudan when the opposite was true:

The British in Khartoum noted yet again, as they had done since 1900, that the Nile issue was a question of a vital conflict of interest between the two countries. At this crucial juncture in regional politics, the British should not let ‘Salem or any other Egyptian get away with propagating the specious idea that this conflict does not exist’ (…) (Tvedt 2006:282).

The characterization of the basin as free of conflict over water allocations is an important part of contemporary ideology in the Blue Nile Basin, and is something we will return to in later chapters.
It was in the context of negotiations on the High Aswan Dam and Sudanese dissatisfaction with its water allocations that Egypt and Sudan went to the negotiation table in 1954 to amend the Nile Water Agreement of 1929. While accepting the established rights of the countries, the Sudanese delegates demanded that further allocation of water be based on the Cory Award of 1920, according to which any unappropriated water should be divided between the two countries according to their potential irrigable land. The result of this would be a total of 23bn cubic metres to Sudan based on the allocations when the Cory Award was first formulated, although the water required to develop all suitable land in the 1950s was estimated at 35bn cubic metres. Egypt first offered Sudan 5.9bn cubic metres, and finally 8bn cubic metres. The gap between this and the Sudanese demands caused the negotiations to break down (Tvedt 2006).

At the end of 1958, there was a coup in Sudan, and the new leader requested negotiations reopened. Around the same time, Sudan withdrew water from the Sennar Dam earlier in the year than allowed according to the Nile Water Agreement of 1929, and was consequently accused of breaking agreement. In response the Sudanese government claimed they were not party to the agreement – a treaty between Great Britain and Egypt – and therefore could not break it. The return to the negotiating table was nevertheless welcome by Egypt, who needed an agreement in order to construct the High Aswan Dam, which as mentioned would flood Sudanese territory.

November of the same year the Nile Water Agreement of 1959 was signed. It was a compromise between the Egyptian and Sudanese positions, however Egyptian compensation to Sudan for flooding Sudanese territory was set at half of the original demand, and the costs of inflation and resettlement were not taken into account (Taha 2010:190). Sudan made its acceptance of the High Aswan Dam contingent on Egyptian acceptance of the Sudanese construction of the Roseires Dam, which would increase Sudan’s ability to utilize its share of the Nile water. A dam initially opposed by Egypt on the basis of the Nile Water Agreement of 1929. The final compromise between the two countries permitted the construction of the High Aswan Dam providing the following conditions were met:

The Sudan’s ultimate share in the natural flow of the Nile as measured at Aswan must be determined before work was started: the Sudan would then
have the right to build on the Nile or any of its tributaries such dams or other control works necessary for effective utilization of her share in the natural flow of the Nile; and the population of the town and district of Wadi Halfa must be provided with an adequate alternative livelihood in some part of the Sudan before the water level at Halfa was raised above its present maximum. Egypt must bear the entire cost of providing this alternative livelihood and of transferring the population (...) (Taha 2010:188).

Furthermore, this highly controversial agreement finally quantified Nile water allocations between the two countries. As mentioned in chapter one, the average annual flow of the Nile was estimated at 84bn cubic metres, from which 10bn cubic metres were subtracted due to evaporation. The allocations were then based on the estimations made in the agreement of 1929, which granted Egypt 48bn cubic metres and Sudan 4bn cubic metres.

According to the Nile Water Agreement of 1959, Egypt took 7.5 of the unallocated 22bn cubic metres, and Sudan took 14.5. Making the final allocation 55.5bn cubic metres to Egypt and 18.5bn cubic metres to Sudan. Again, no other Nile country was allocated any water or was even party to the agreement. Because Sudan did not have the capacity to use its entire allocation, an agreement was made for Egypt to borrow 1.5bn cubic metres a year from Sudan (Taha 2010).

As it stands, Sudan has never been able to utilize the full amount allocated to it. Much of the problem lies in the fact Sudanese water management institutions since independence have lacked funding and capacity. Moreover, the compensation for flooded Nubian lands and resettlements proved woefully inadequate at half of the original demand, leaving Sudan to pay most of the bill (Taha 2010).

According to Taha, relations have in general been good between Egypt and Sudan on the issue of water (2010). After independence, Egypt has been considered an important Sudanese ally and there have been sporadic but continual attempts at increased integration between the two countries. For more information see Taha Hussein 213.

Nevertheless, there have also been conflicts, the most significant ones here concern the negotiations surrounding the Nile Water Agreement of 1959 over water allocations,
discussed above; the Hala‘ib triangle, discussed below; and mounting tensions after the 1989 coup in Sudan which saw the Islamist President Omar Bashir take power. The relationship deteriorated further after Sudan was blamed for an attempt at President Hosni Mubarak’s life in Addis Ababa in 1995.

**Hala‘ib Triangle**

Due to the difference between the political border established by the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium of 1899 and the administrative boundary set by the British in 1902, control over the so-called Hala‘ib Triangle on the Sudanese-Egyptian border is disputed. The area measures about 20,000 square kilometres, and there continues to be considerable political tension over who controls it. Since independence, both Egypt and Sudan have laid claim to it, although it has *de facto* been controlled by Egypt since 1992 (Guo 2006).

**Ethiopia**

Not party to any of the Nile Water Agreements, the Ethiopian position has been concerned with the need to exploit its water resources in order to develop. In this context it has played a key part in promoting the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) as an – from the Ethiopian perspective – equitable and comprehensive legal and political framework for the basin. Ethiopia has stuck to the principle of ‘absolute territorial sovereignty’⁹, defending its rights to exploit the water resources falling within its border (Arsano 2010). GERD may be read as a concrete expression of this principle.

**The Nile Basin Initiative**

The Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) was founded in 1999 with the dual aim of improving cooperation between the Nile Basin countries and working towards the establishment of a legal and institutional framework for the regulation and management of the Nile river

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⁹ The opposite is “absolute territorial integrity”, asserting that any development in an upstream state that would interfere with the natural flow of a shared water course should be prohibited (UNWC 2015).
There has been some success in the former endeavour, however the latter has been plagued by problems.

In May 2010, Ethiopia was among five original signatories to the Cooperative Framework Agreement (CFA) – also known as the Entebbe Agreement – which is intended to substitute the Nile Water Agreements as the legal basis of the basin. The remaining members of the basin signed the CFA in quick succession – with the exception of Egypt and Sudan. Taha writes:

Notwithstanding the ups and downs in other areas of Egyptian-Sudanese relations, the two nations have joined forces in all matters concerning status quo with regard to the Nile waters. This is also evident in the ongoing Nile Basin Initiative process. Throughout this process Egypt and Sudan strongly uphold the “existing agreements”. The seven upstream nations [eight after the secession of South Sudan], however, insist that a new agreement be reached to supersede the already existing agreements, which do not take into consideration the rights and interests of all riparian nations (Taha 2010:216).
The Legitimization and Subversion of Dominance in the Blue Nile Basin

Egypt – ‘A First Among Equals’

A good point of entry into how the Egyptian ideological complex in the Blue Nile Basin represents Egyptian dominance is an article by former Interim Prime Minister Hazem Bablawi in al-Ahram entitled “The Nile is Common Property, Not a Private Commodity” (Bablawi 2013). In it he presents the claim that because the Nile is not produced by anyone it cannot be owned by anyone – comparing it in this respect to air.

Bablawi apparently forgets the history of engineering projects in the basin, claiming that it is not for anyone to make choices regarding where a river begins and how it flows. It allegedly does not need humanity to strive for obtaining it, the rain falls where it falls without human interference, thus the river begins where it begins and flows where it flows.

He goes on to declare the Nile a “Global Public Good” and states that “no state has the right, by itself, to change the conditions of these rivers or lakes without coordination with the other states which that share these” (Bablawi 2013). Affirming the right of every state to develop so long as they coordinate to avoid negative effects for any other state: “and when the issue relates to adjustments of the Nile course for the sake of increasing the capacity to use [the river], whether for irrigated agriculture or electricity generation, all of this is legitimate and desirable” (Bablawi 2013).

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10 “النيل ملكية مشتركة وليس سلعة خاصة.”

11 “وليس من حق دولة ـ بمفردها ـ أن تغير من أووضاع هذه الأنهار أو البحيرات دون تسييس وتوفيق مع الدول المشاركة فيها.”

12 “و عندما يتعلق الأمر بإجراء تعديلات على مجري النيل من أجل زيادة كفاءة استخدامه في المستقبل سواء لمزيد من الزراعة المروية أو لتوليد الطاقة، فكل هذا أمر مشروع ومطلوب.”

13 Here he likely refers to the fact that Ethiopia has changed the course of the Blue Nile in order to be able to construct GERD – while at the same time appearing to contradict his earlier statement that it is not for anyone to choose where the river flows.
The issue, he claims, is how to achieve benefits for all. In other words, the correct approach should concern not the good of one state, or a few states, but the common good. Ethiopia – like all Nile states – has the right to develop, but in a way which helps everyone else develop and harms nobody, because all are in the same boat. This view on common development is echoed in a range of articles, both from al-Ahram and from the other Egyptian newspapers.

Crucial to this view, the discourse is eager to emphasize the Egyptian focus on negotiation and cooperation as the only viable solution to the crisis. In the words of then-Foreign Minister Nabil Fahmy: “the solution to the crisis with Ethiopia [will not come] except by dialogue” and “there is no zero-sum [solution] in the case of a vital issue like water, in other words [there can be] no solution which realizes the interest of one party without also realizing the interests of the other party” (al-Istiwiayya and Aman).

While asserting these principles of solidarity between the basin countries, however, Bablawi at the same time asserts the power and privileged position of Egypt: leaning on a conviction of historical rights – another idea evident in a vast array of articles across all three newspapers – Bablawi claims that “the Egyptians are the oldest to interact with the Nile [standing for the first “organized exploitation” of the river] and the family

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16 The consensus around this was made clear from the backlash following the infamous televised meeting in the summer of 2013 between then-President Morsi and senior political figures where they discussed military actions against GERD. There are one or two mentions of military action as a potential course of action (Agag 2013), but these do not appear to be widely agreed with and the meeting is in general sharply criticized as a serious misstep and misrepresentation of Egypt (Ramadan 2013a, el-Din 2013, Ezzat 2013).

17 “حل الأزمة مع إثيوبيا لن يكون إلا بالحوار.”

18 “لا توجد معادلة صفرية في قضية حيوية مثل قضية المياه. أي لا يوجد حل يحقق مصلحة طرف دون الطرف الآخر.”

of Egypt all came from Africa”\textsuperscript{20}. The latter point again asserting solidarity between Egypt and the upstream states.

Moreover, he claims that Egypt’s role in the Nile basin is a product of geographical and hydrological factors: the “calmer and more stable” flow of the river downstream allegedly favouring agricultural development – causing agriculture to be invented in Egypt rather than the upstream states, and accordingly the emergence of Egypt as the oldest civilized state in Africa (Bablawi 2013).

This statement is characteristic of Egyptian ideology in the Nile Basin: projecting strong bonds of cohesion between the Nile countries – social cohesion, hydrological cohesion and geographical cohesion – while at the same time, allegedly due both to the ecological and geographical characteristics of the river and to its superior capacity for leadership (discussed below), asserting that Egypt is the natural leader of the basin. This ideological complex and be summarized as ‘a first among equals’.

Relatedly, the basin is in the Egyptian media discourse consistently divided into the apparently distinct and opposing units ‘dawlatain al-masab’ and ‘duwwal al-manba’\textsuperscript{21}. ‘Masab’ refers to the outlet or drain of the river, whereas ‘manba’ refers to its spring or origin. In this context they may be translated as “upstream states” and “downstream states”. In the Blue Nile Basin, Egypt and Sudan are in both Egyptian and Sudanese newspapers considered downstream states, whereas Ethiopia is considered upstream.

Here, a brief but – it is hoped – useful digression is the perspective of one of the most prominent Egyptian geographers, Sulayman Huzzayin. Shortly before Egyptian independence from Great Britain Huzzayin sought to divide the Nile Basin into two distinct geographical areas. He theorized that the Nile Valley – encompassing Egypt and the Northern and central parts of Sudan – was distinct from the Nile Heights – encompassing the remaining countries (Tvedt 2012). As we have seen in chapter one, this distinction makes geographical and hydrological sense, and is how the basin has been conceptualized throughout the modern era.

\textsuperscript{20}"فالمصريون هم أقدم من تعامل مع النيل وأهل مصر قد جاءوا جميعا من إفريقيا"

Tvedt writes:

From a geographical point of view, only the parts of the Nile Valley which comprise Egypt and the central areas of Sudan represent what [Huzzayin] referred to as a (...) a distinct Nile Environment. Only [these areas] consist of similar geographical and ecological characteristics, forming an integrated geographical unit where the Nile (...) is the decisive and all-encompassing geographical factor. (...) In this part of the Nile Basin, [Huzzayin] claimed, the people formed a common organic unit which over time tended to develop similar ideologies, religions and institutions. Culture mirrored and served, so to speak, the ecological and social structures in society (...) and thus ensured [society’s] integrity and stability. In this perspective, Egypt is not only the civilizing force, but an actor which merely does what nature demands from it (Tvedt 2012:176-177).

Bablawi appears to draw on a similar perspective in his conviction that Egypt is the natural and almost God-given leader of the basin:

And as the Creator chose [where] the rain falls and the start of the headwaters without any human interference or choice, He also determined the path of these rivers to their estuaries. For the rivers are a blessing from the Creator to humanity [both in where they begin, and in where they flow]22 (Bablawi 2013).

Bablawi presents no proof of his claims, but historical accuracy is in any case not the point of this political and ideological statement. It establishes a regional hierarchy, with Egypt in the role as the oldest civilization in the Nile Basin – its natural leader – while emphasizing the solidarity both of Egypt with the other Nile states; and of the other Nile states with Egypt. All ostensibly belong to the same family and all have equal rights to development.

Laying the explicit foundations for the logonomic system of Egyptian ideology, former Vice Minister of Irrigation and Head of the International Commission on Large Dams, Abdurrahman Shalaby makes the question of law explicit. He claims, like Bablawi, that Egyptians have lived in Egypt for “a hundred thousand years”, and ties this to the right of easement. This, he claims, legally establishes the right of Egypt to its share of the

22”وكما اختار الخالق موضع سقوط الأمطار وبداية منابع الأنهار، ودون أي تدخل أو اختيار بشري. فإنه أيضاً حدد مسار هذه الأنهار لمصلاتها، فالأنهار نعمة من الخالق للبشر في مساقتها عند المنبع. كما هي نعمة منه أيضاً في مسارها حتى المصب.”
Nile waters, because it can document its historical use of these waters (Abdelhameed 2014).

He also takes the necessary stance – obviously shared by the Egyptian government – that international law recognizes agreements authored by occupying (colonial) powers (Abdelhameed 2014). In other words, the right granted Egypt in 1929 to veto construction on the Nile is still valid, as are the water allocations from 1959 – built on the Nile Water Agreement of 1929. For that matter, so is the right granted Sudan in 1902 to veto Nile construction – a right Egyptian ideology considers it is incumbent upon Sudan to use, as we shall see below.

In short, Egyptian ideology asserts that all Nile states are fundamentally equal in their pursuit of development, and that because they share the Nile River all should take care that their interactions with it do not cause others harm. A stance that appears almost self-evident.

The catch is that Egypt by virtue of alleged historical, geographical and hydrological facts, and a certain view of international law takes it upon herself to be the executor of this purportedly natural order – and in doing so lays claim to the vast majority of the Nile waters and asserts a veto right on all Nile construction. To paraphrase George Orwell – all Nile Basin countries are equal, but some are more equal than others.

The contradiction implicit in Egyptian Nile ideology should be clear: Egyptian dominance in a basin ostensibly characterized by equality – or in the words of Hodge & Kress, solidarity. What Bablawi describes above appears almost a ‘survival of the fittest’: Egypt was the first to claim rights on the Nile due to incontrovertible hydrological and geographical factors, therefore it has supreme Nile rights.

A related contradiction lies in Egypt’s vehement opposition to unilateral action on the Nile – when Egypt and Great Britain have a long history of unilateral action on the Nile, and the former still claims the products of such action (The Nile Water Agreements) are the legitimate basis of Nile regulation. Obscuring the fact that the treaties which today seek to prevent unilateral action in the Blue Nile Basin themselves were created by unilateral action is thus – as we shall see – key to the functioning of Egyptian ideology.
The following chapter provides an in-depth discussion of this ideological complex, and the logonomic system which supports and enables it. Firstly, it is argued that a key function of Egyptian ideology in the Blue Nile basin is to legitimize Egyptian dominance. Fundamental to this function, the logonomic system is outlined, and the ways in which it is institutionalized are discussed. Secondly, the Egyptian ideology’s representations respectively of Ethiopia and Sudan are discussed and compared, demonstrating how Egyptian ideology works to legitimize Egyptian dominance over these states. At the same time, Sudan and Ethiopia serve as examples of the consequences for breaking the logonomic rules. Finally, the findings of this section are summarized, and it is argued that solidarity is a key principle of the ideology of Egyptian dominance.

The Logonomic System and the Institutionalized Legitimization of Dominance

In constructing and/or propagating a specific reading of the history, geography and hydrology of the Nile Basin, Bablawi works to sustain the contemporary basin order through the claim that it is a consequence of natural factors, and is based in scientific knowledge. More specifically, he works to legitimize the contemporary order through an image of what the basin is and what it should be.

In other words, he claims that concrete rules pertain to the Nile Basin, rules purportedly given by nature and/or God (in this context, the difference is unclear) and expressed through scientific knowledge. These rules are enshrined in the Nile Water Agreements, privileging Egypt as the main beneficiary of the Nile, and the guarantor of stability and shared interests. In the theoretical-methodological framework of Hodge & Kress, these rules constitute the foundations for the logonomic system of the Egyptian ideology.

The reason the Egyptian ideological complex, summarized as “a first among equals”, can function despite its inherent contradictions is this logonomic system. As discussed in chapter one, this system regulates who can produce and receive which messages under which circumstances.

The logonomic rules statements regarding legitimate interaction in the Blue Nile Basin must follow are outlined by Bablawi above. On the most fundamental level, these are:
1) the Nile Water Agreements are the basis of basin law; 2) this law guarantees Egypt’s historical right to its share of the Nile waters; 3) it also guarantees the Egyptian right to veto construction on the Nile River in order to protect its water allocation; 4) all other Nile countries have equal rights to benefit from the river provided 1)-3) are not interfered with; and 5) the goal of basin interaction is mutual development through the pursuit of shared interests, understood as the pursuit of the equal rights established in 4).

Within Egypt, this logonomic system is explicitly taught and policed by a range of institutions tied to knowledge production and the spread of information. In this case most significantly through the news-media and official state discourse; and the institutions which regulate media and discourse. These also enforce rules regarding who can make official or legitimate statements concerning the Blue Nile Basin.

Media discourse in Egypt is regulated by the state, both through the state media, through the security forces which occasionally confiscate publications or stop printing, and through the judicial institutions, which occasionally sanction legal action (Mada Masr 2014, Afify 2014, Mada Masr 2015). Moreover, the Egyptian logonomic system leads to a degree of self-censorship by those who fear sanctions, and/or by those who internalize specific norms regarding news coverage (Hughes 2014).

The result of this is – as pointed out in chapter one – that it is very difficult to publish messages not in harmony with the state view. The relatively homogeneous character of Egyptian media coverage indicates that the logonomic system within Egypt is quite effective. The articles covered by this study corroborate the picture given in chapter one, with both al-Ahram and the private newspapers sticking close to the state line when it comes to GERD and the Nile.

Unsurprisingly, all al-Ahram articles studied in this thesis tell of a clear editorial policy towards the issues of GERD and the Blue Nile basin, strongly opposing any construction on the river or alteration of its course or flow without express Egyptian agreement. The coverage appears coordinated and unanimous – dissenting voices hardly

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appear and Sudanese and Ethiopian points of view are given very limited and highly editorialized coverage.

The articles from al-Masry al-Youm analyzed in this study suggest that their coverage of GERD and the Blue Nile basin is at least somewhat more pluralistic than in al-Ahram. While the state view is not explicitly challenged by the newspaper or its journalists and columnists, it allows Sudan and Ethiopia more of a voice, and editorializes them to a somewhat lesser degree than al-Ahram. The articles from al-Shorouq suggest it takes a similar position to that of al-Masry al-Youm when it comes to GERD and the Blue Nile Basin. The state position is not directly criticized by the newspaper or its writers, yet it publishes less editorialized Sudanese and Ethiopian voices than al-Ahram.

According to Zeitoun et.al., these rules and the ideology they support are not necessarily explicitly imposed. Hegemony is – among other things – characterized by the more or less willing adoption by the dominated or non-hegemons of the ideology, knowledge, discourse and/or rules of the dominant or hegemon – potentially without awareness that such adoption is taking place (Zeitoun, et al. 2014).

Egypt has long been the hegemon of the Blue Nile Basin – which is to say that its ideology – its world-view – has held a privileged position. According to Zeitoun et.al., this means that decision-makers in non-hegemonic countries may internalize ideas held by the hegemon. The dominated, Zeitoun et.al. suggest, may sometimes adopt the ideology of the dominant without any form of overt imposition.

To the extent that Egyptian ideology is hegemonic in the basin, in other words, Zeitoun et.al. contend that these rules have a strong standing also outside Egypt. Here they are perhaps most clearly taught and enforced through the Nile Water Agreements, and asserted through the Egyptian position in fora for negotiation and cooperation.

As it stands, however, this logonomic system and the ideological complex it supports appear to be losing at least some efficacy outside of Egypt. The Egyptian logonomic rules are to a limited extent being subverted in the Sudanese discourse – as we shall see below. This is combined with an express aim for increased Sudanese influence in the basin, explicitly disputing Egyptian ideology and contesting its logonomic system.
As exemplified later in the discussion of Sudan and Ethiopia, an important part of the Egyptian logonomic system is the construction of scientific knowledge that supports Egyptian dominance. More specifically, this entails an Egyptian claim to a superior understanding of the history, hydrology and geography of the Blue Nile Basin, and a refusal, as we shall see, to recognize scientific knowledge authored by Sudan and Ethiopia allegedly due to their inferior research methods and capabilities. In other words, the claimed Egyptian control of scientific knowledge seeks to establish Egyptian ownership and control both over the construction of this knowledge, and over the assessment of what is ‘good’ or ‘correct’ knowledge.

The claimed Egyptian control over the production of scientific knowledge is exemplified by the following statement by then-Egyptian Minister of Irrigation Muhammad Allam:

[Egyptian fears are supported] by American and Egyptian studies on the highest scientific level and with the use of the most modern mathematical models (…). The information we have from the Nile Basin States does not at all measure up to the Egyptian technical level in the field of Information Technology, and not to the level of Egyptian technical and diplomatic [expertise] present in these states25 (Metwaly 2014).

In a similar vein, an article published in al-Ahram entitled “The final report of the tripartite committee on the Renaissance Dam: the Ethiopian designs for the dam are inadequate (…)”26 criticizes the provided Ethiopian technical information concerning the construction of GERD for not being up-to-date and for being founded on inadequate methodologies and simplified models of simulation. It also criticizes the methods for designing parts of the dam (Farhat 2013).

The Egyptian control claimed over knowledge-construction and the assessment of the value of knowledge is used to propose increased Egyptian control over the construction of GERD. If the Egyptian expertise is heeded, it is argued, the dam should be smaller,
or else it should be substituted by several smaller dams, a suggestion made in both al-Ahram and al-Masry al-Youm (Samy and Fathy 2013, Karam 2013). This would reportedly have equal benefits without the risks.

On this absolute conviction of scientific fact, Egyptian discourse – as we shall see – builds a critique of Sudan and Ethiopia for either misunderstanding the issue and/or playing political games around it – i.e. making it a game either about alliances and domestic politics, or about power grabbing, rather than what it should be: simply a question about engineering, hydrology and indisputable legal rights.

Aside from the system tied to the production and spread of knowledge, discussed above, the most important institutional expression of the logonomic rules tied to Egyptian ideology is the Nile Water Agreements and to a lesser extent the Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement of 1902. As discussed in chapter two these give Egypt a veto right on all construction in the Nile Basin, and allocate the entire Nile flow to Egypt and Sudan.

The fact that the logonomic rules which support the Egyptian order are enshrined in what are claimed to be legal documents, it is argued, may cause the premises of Egyptian dominance to become more opaque. The circumstances of the authorship and related bias of the Nile Water Agreements towards Egypt may be obscured because law intrinsically is tied to justice, and because an important principle of law is that it apply equally to all.

In other words, the solidarity or equality projected by Egyptian ideology in the Blue Nile basin is potentially strengthened because the logonomic rules which support this ideology are claimed to have legal status. Thus, it is suggested that despite having been constructed unilaterally by Egypt, Great Britain and Sudan primarily to serve Egypt, the alleged legal status of Nile Water Agreements is used to represent solidarity through equality.

Because the rules governing the basin are framed in a manner which makes them appear self-evident, the discourse covered by this study frequently do not mention non-cooperation with the respective agreements explicitly, but rather suggests it is simply accepted practice to seek Egypt’s agreement. For example, Bablawi in the introduction to this chapter simply asserts that it is common practice to consult all members of the
basin before constructing any infrastructure – without making any reference to the legal basis for this.

Bablawi embodies the role of the basin leader, imbued with authority, and outlines the logonomic rules of the Egyptian Nile order, hinting at the consequences if these were to be broken. The consequences of breaking the rules of the Egyptian basin ideology do not in this instance entail any sanctions from Egypt or supra-national bodies, but simply the implication of a basin characterized by self-interest and opportunism rather than the justice and equality which Bablawi and Egypt ostensibly guarantee – as we shall see in the following section. The logonomic rules are self-evident – and ideally self-enforcing – in the sense that any other rules would likely lead to the ruination of the basin.

The result of the self-evident manner in which the rules of the basin are presented, their claimed legal authority and the Egyptian scientific supremacy that lie at the base of the Egyptian logonomic system is that Egyptian dominance is represented as non-political, in the sense that nobody could legitimately contest it.

**Ethiopian Transgression**

As we have seen, Egyptian ideology posits that all states in the basin have equal rights to pursue development so long as they do not challenge what through its logonomic system is defined as legitimate and in service of what is good for all without being detrimental to any. Thus the ideology projects solidarity with all who are seeking what Egypt defines as legitimate basin activities; and Egyptian power as the arbiter of what is and is not desirable in the basin, and the defender of order and the common good.

An illustration of the bonds of solidarity is that Ethiopia commonly is referred to as a brother ‘akh’ part of the apparent family of the Blue Nile Basin (further discussed below) – casting Egypt and Ethiopia in a close relationship which Ethiopia apparently is choosing to ignore.

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27 Incidentally, the idea of self-evident or even self-enforcing rules is fundamental to the understanding of ideology in hydro-hegemony (see chapters one and four).

Accordingly, the Egyptian ideology represents Ethiopia first and foremost as selfishly and opportunistically crossing the line of what constitutes legitimate use of the Blue Nile, and as a direct consequence of this, as putting both Egypt and the rest of the basin at risk. Briefly put, the prevailing argument is that Ethiopia has ambitions of becoming a regional power, and is likely to use the increased Nile control resulting from GERD to project power in the Blue Nile Basin – asserting Ethiopian control over the basin, and through it, over Egypt.

Consequently, GERD is referred to as a question of National Security (Jaballah and Zahran 2014, Aman 2014b) and a question of life-and-death (al-Qawsy 2014, Salem, et al. 2014a). In an extreme example, the prominent opposition politician Hamdeen Sabahi is even quoted stating that the dam “is tantamount to a declaration of war on Egypt” (Sarhan 2013).

There appears to be consensus across all three papers that GERD will considerably change the balance of power in the region (elHendi 2013, Fahmy 2013, Reslan 2014a, Reslan 2014b) – potentially throwing the entire basin into disarray due to its unilateralism and blatant disregard for cooperation and consultation, values at the very heart of Egyptian ideology. Ethiopia is chastised for its lack of solidarity, and is reported to “claim that the [Nile] water is its private property” and to work towards being the sole controlling party of the Nile waters, ostensibly with the aim of selling water outside the basin (Reslan 2014a).

The Egyptian opposition to GERD is founded in a near-universal denunciation of the project as harmful and dangerous to Sudan, Egypt and the basin at large. Aside from contravening the Nile Water Agreements, it reportedly suffers from “catastrophic” design flaws (Salem 2013a), which leave the dam open to risk from earthquakes (al-Qawsy 2014, Reslan 2014b) – threatening to flood vast areas, including parts of Egypt:


31 “وذلك في الوقت الذي تزعم فيه إثيوبيا أن المياه ملك خاص لها”

(…) the possibility for the dam’s destruction is great, due to Ethiopia’s lacking concern for necessary research at the location of the dam’s construction, in order to ensure the suitability of the ground, and the absence of faults or earthquakes (…)\textsuperscript{33} (al-Qawsy 2014).

What Egypt is fighting for according to this view, is not only its own interests but also the interests of all basin countries and the basin as a whole. If there is a threat, whether by speech or action, against this common good – here represented by GERD – Egypt takes it upon herself to bring about change to maintain stability and shared interests.

Given the representations of GERD and Ethiopia in Egyptian discourse, such a guarantor appears needed in a basin clearly under threat. Indicative of its ruthlessness, Ethiopia is represented as exploiting Sudan by pressuring it and interfering in domestic policy in order to ensure its support for GERD. It is accused of taking advantage of internal strife in Sudan and of supporting the Sudanese opposition (al-Shaykh 2014, Shury 2014b), and is reported at the same time both to pressure Sudan, and to seek closer cooperation with Sudan by forging an alliance – potentially to the detriment of Egypt (EFE 2013, Sarur 2013, Aman 2013a).

Ethiopia is furthermore portrayed as stubbornly seeking to push through GERD by any means necessary in order to increase its regional power. Aside from allegedly breaking regional and international law, this – as we have seen – includes impeding or refusing to carry out research on GERD, its construction and consequences despite Egyptian requests (Farhat 2013, Aman 2013b, Salem 2014, Salem, et al. 2014b), and stalling the negotiations (Shury 2014b) with the aim of forcing Egypt into accepting the dam (Abdelwahab 2013).

As for Ethiopian diplomacy and negotiation, the image brought across is one of Ethiopia conducting the bare minimum of effort to respond to and keep up a semblance of participation and exchange with Egypt, while at the same time seeking to impede any cooperation with Egypt and hinder any progress in the negotiations (Aman 2013a, Aman 2013c).

\textsuperscript{33}”إمكانيات انهيار السد كبيرة نتيجة عدم اهتمام إثيوبيا بعمل البحوث الضرورية في موقع إنشاء السد للتأكد من صلاحية التربة وعادم وجود ثقوب وعدم حدوث هزات أرضية أو زلازل.”
The image is one of Ethiopia engaging in cooperation and diplomacy in an underhanded and dishonest fashion, using the legitimacy that these mechanisms are associated with in order to push through its agenda. In other words, diplomacy and negotiation is apparently used as part of the Ethiopian arsenal in its attempt to coerce Egypt and others into accepting GERD.

The sum of the above is a representation of Ethiopia as threatening to plunge the basin into uncertainty and conflict due to its own selfishness, opportunism, power hunger and shoddy understanding of the basin and scientific knowledge. This obviously legitimates Egyptian control over the basin in order to ensure stability and equal rights.

Finally, the above indicates what the consequences may be for breaking the logonomic rules of the dominant Egyptian ideology in the Blue Nile basin. GERD and related Ethiopian policy is represented as selfish, dangerous, opportunistic and blatantly disregarding the rights of others – even as an act of war or a threat to national security. GERD is represented as an Ethiopian device to gain more power, and importantly as a distinct absence of solidarity – a purely coercive mechanism.

**The Ideological Impossibility of Sudanese Agency**

Like Ethiopia, Sudan is represented in the Egyptian discourse as transgressing what constitutes legitimate rights to development, and as selfishly putting the basin at risk. While the Ethiopian construction of GERD is strongly condemned as a deliberate and planned threat to the basin, however, the Sudanese support for this construction is framed in slightly different terms.

More specifically, it appears as though the Sudanese contestation of the current Nile order hits closer to home than the Ethiopian contestation. While Ethiopia, as we have seen, is represented as power hungry, opportunistic and destructive, Sudan is represented as “abandoning” Egypt (Aman 2013d), and its actions are described as baffling, a mystery (al-Shaykh 2014) and a riddle (al-Qawsy 2014). It is even suggested that the Sudanese support for GERD constitutes a downright betrayal of Egypt (Nasser 2013, Farhat 2013).
The following quote from an article published in al-Ahram indicates the reason for the different discourse surrounding Ethiopia and Sudan:

The complete and unconditional Sudanese support for the construction of what is called the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam caused surprise, astonishment and even condemnation from many in Egypt, because the government of Khartoum [pays no attention] to the established principles of the strategic relationship between the two brother countries\(^{34}\) (al-Shaykh 2014).

Sudan is portrayed as letting down Egypt, which “at first thought that the two countries form[ed] a historical unit against the Ethiopian project”\(^ {35}\) (Nasser 2013). Rather, it is affirmed, Sudan should always stand with its brother Egypt (al-Shaykh 2014) and they are referred to as one body (Aman 2013e) and as united or even a single unit (Farhat 2013, Nasser 2013).

This discourse of extreme solidarity is further illustrated by the consistent reference to Sudan as ‘brother’ in the Egyptian discourse. While the same, as we have seen, is widely true of Ethiopia, they are apparently brothers of different calibres. Ethiopia is referred to as brother “akh”, just as other African countries are “ikhwat”, in the sense that I might call my neighbour or friend brother, whereas Sudan is referred to as “shaqiq”, which translates to “full brother”, or brother from the same mother and father\(^ {36}\).

Corresponding to this is the distinction discussed in the introduction to this chapter between ‘dawlatain al-masab’ and ‘duwwal al-manba’, or “upstream states” and “downstream states”. All of the above suggests that Egyptian ideology draws on the shared history between the two, and on the Huzzaynian conceptualization of the basin in order to represent Egypt and Sudan as an integrated unit when it comes to Nile policy.

From this ideological perspective – which represents Egypt and Sudan not just as allies, but as brothers engaged in the same struggle to ensure their mutual water rights – the

\(^{34}\) أثار تأييد الحكومة السودانية الكامل وغير المشروط لمشروع بناء ما سمي بسد النهضة الإثيوبي دهشة واستغراب بل واستهجان الكثيّر من الأوساط في مصر. وذلك لتجاوز حكومة الخرطوم مبادِّئ العلاقات الاستراتيجية بين البلدين الشقيقين.

\(^{35}\) بالنسبة للقاهرة التي ظنّت للوهلة الأولى أن البلدين يشكلان تكتلا تاريخيا مضادا لمشروع الإثيوبي.

Sudanese contestation of the basin order simply appears to make no sense. What this amounts to is that while the Ethiopian support for GERD is strongly denounced as a threat to the basin, Egyptian media discourse, while denouncing Sudan, almost appears to be looking to explain how this vital and long-time Egyptian ally could contest Egyptian dominance.

Fundamental to this is the categorical and near-complete denial in the Egyptian discourse that GERD stands to benefit Sudan and Egypt in any way, discussed in the previous section. Based on which it is asserted that the Sudanese support for GERD cannot have been based on an accurate understanding of the situation.\footnote{See for example: Farhat 2013, Nasser 2013, al-Qawsy 2014, al-Ahram 2014, Reslan 2014a, Shury 2014b, al-Shaykh 2014, Reslan 2014b.}

Given such a complete dismissal of the benefits of GERD, combined with the ideological conviction of Sudan and Egypt as an integrated unit, the Sudanese support for the dam’s construction is sought explained by claiming that Sudan is politically unstable, and that the Sudanese government is caught up in internal crises (Reslan 2014a). Accordingly, the choices of the Sudanese leadership are represented as constrained, and they are claimed to be distracted from the actual issue at question – namely the threat posed by GERD – by domestic political problems:

> It appears that the current Sudanese position has changed from merely agreeing to the dam, to (...) marketing and advertising the Ethiopian position. With this [change] it is clear that the Sudanese position has [changed] to favour short-term political considerations related to the [domestic] balance of power (...) and its internal challenges, with no regard for the strategic changes related to water and security issues in the Eastern Nile [basin]\footnote{ثيوبي، وبذلك يتبين موقف الإيذاء الموقف الحالى للسودان تحول من مجرد الموافقة على السد إلى دور آخر هو التسويق والدعاية للموقف الإيزيديي، ويتبين يتبين أن الموقف السوداني قد اتجه بالفعل إلى تخلياب الاعتبارات السياسية الحالية بتوارثات السلطة القائمة وتحتاجها الداخلية، دون النظر في التغيرات الاستراتيجية في أوضاع المياه والأمن في النيل الشرقي.} (Reslan 2014b).

The nature of these short-term political considerations and internal challenges allegedly relate to a disgruntled opposition and an unpopular and incompetent government – amounting to a situation which threatens the very unity and cohesion of the Sudanese state (Reslan 2014b). Khartoum reportedly faces serious economic problems, as well as
an internal division that increases day by day (al-Shaykh 2014). Moreover, Ethiopia is allegedly key to understanding these challenges:

The fact of the matter is that Khartoum’s puzzling position requires [the deciphering] of the domestic crisis which the ruling [government] is facing. [That is to say], the conditions of the war this government is leading against the Sudanese oppositional forces, and the [facts on the ground] of this war make it difficult for Khartoum to refuse Ethiopian demands39 (al-Shaykh 2014).

The reason this reportedly may be difficult is that Ethiopia allegedly supports the armed opposition in Sudan and administrates the negotiations between the Sudanese Government and the armed opposition, as well as negotiations between Sudan and South Sudan surrounding the status of oil-rich disputed area Abyei (al-Shaykh 2014).

All of which reportedly gives Ethiopia considerable influence over Sudan. The head of the Sudan Unit at the Ahram Centre for Political Studies, Hany Reslan elaborates:

Sudan has political reasons related to the stability of its rule [for supporting the construction of GERD], and for this reason is not able to anger the Ethiopian regime. The regime of Bashir (…) lost legitimacy, suffers from economic and political problems and [is dependent on American aid]. Moreover, there are revolutionary bodies fighting the regime in Darfur, Kordofan and by the Blue Nile, as well as troubled relations between North and South Sudan, the negotiations between which take place in Ethiopia. [In addition] there is the question of Abyei, to which Ethiopia is party due to the presence of 4200 Ethiopian soldiers on Sudanese territory (…). [Finally] there is the negotiations between the regime of Bashir and armed revolutionary front “Ukumbu”, also taking place in Ethiopia. Due to [the above] Sudan has put all its [eggs] in the Ethiopian basket40 (Shury 2014b).

In the context of this laundry list of reasons for Sudanese political instability, the current regime’s support for GERD is represented as a PR-campaign for the improvement of

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39 “وفي حقيقة الأمر أن موقف الخرطوم المثير يحتاج ممن يريد فك طلاسمه التأمل في الأزمة الداخلية التي يواجهها النظام الحاكم في السودان، فظروف الحرب التي يقودها ضد قوات المعارضة السودانية وواقع ميدان هذه الحرب يجعل من العسير على الخرطوم أن ترفض لإثيوبيا طلبا’.”

40 “السودان لديه أسابيع السياسة المتعلقة باستقرار الحكم، لذلك لا يستطيع إضعاف النظام الإثيوبي، فضلاً عن أن نظام "البشير" بات مراعياً وآمناً للشرعية، ولديه مشكلات اقتصادية سياسية، ويعيش على الحفقة الأمريكية، ولذا تلك جهات ثورية تقاتل ضد النظام في دارفور وكرفان والقيل الأزرق، كما أن العلاقات المضطربة بين شمال وجنوب السودان، تدار مفاوضاتها في إثيوبيا، ومسألة "أبيه"، إثيوبيا طرف رئيسي فيها، يوجد أكثر من 4200 جندي إثيوبي على الأراضي السودانية، وهي إرادة حادة وحساسة بالنسبة للنظام السوداني، وهناك المفاوضات بين نظام البشير والجبهة الثورية العسكرية "أوكومبو", تدار أيضاً في إثيوبيا، وبالتالي النظام السودان "وضع كل أوراقه في سلة النظام الإثيوبي.”
relations between Khartoum and Addis Ababa (al-Ahram 2014) and as a way to mollify the Sudanese public opinion, reportedly eager for Sudan to stand up to Egypt (Nasser 2013).

Given the reported disadvantages from GERD, and domestic political motivations for Sudan’s support, an editorial published in al-Ahram asserts that the Sudanese position simply cannot be taken seriously. The leadership should pull itself together and look at the facts of the matter:

The time has come for Sudan to regard the issue of The Ethiopian Dam from a technical and scientific perspective in order to ascertain its damaging effects, [ignoring political points of view] that have no place in the current debate41 (al-Ahram 2014).

In other words, it is alleged that the question of GERD is a question of technical and scientific facts, and the Sudanese leadership is admonished for its myopic domestic policy which allegedly stands to harm both Egypt and Sudan itself. Bashir is accused of either supporting the dam on a misinformed basis and/or of being deliberately blind to the problems of GERD in part due to the Ethiopian influence on Sudanese politics. In short, it is suggested that if Bashir had the actual benefit of both Sudan and Egypt in mind, he could not but oppose GERD (al-Qawsy 2014).

In the most extreme instance, it is suggested that Egypt should “wisely intervene [in order to] end the civil war and prepare the way for the stability of Sudan and the election of a rightly guided (‘rashid’) government”42 (al-Shaykh 2014). In the absence of Egyptian intervention, it is warned that we may see a repetition of Somalia at the Southern border of Egypt.

The result is a representation of Sudan as relatively powerless, and its government as incompetent and/or self-serving, eschewing the bonds of solidarity between Egypt and Sudan and ignoring the larger issues at stake. The conflict between Egypt and Sudan, then, is represented as merely political conflict rather than a conflict between actual or

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41 "لقد أن الأوان أن تنظر السودان قضية السد الإثيوبي برؤية علمية وتقنية، حتى يتأكد من الآثار المشرقة للسد، بعيدا عن أي مواقف سياسية لا مجال لمناقشتها الآن."

42 "يتطلب من مصر تدخل حصلفا ينهي الحرب الأهلية ويمهد السبيل لاستقرار السودان وانتخاب حكومة راشدة له."
real interests – as would be the case if GERD were beneficial to Sudan and harmful to Egypt.

The above amounts to a representation of Sudan as not in its own right an agent on par with Egypt and Ethiopia when it comes to the Nile Basin. More precisely, the country can apparently only adopt one of two stances: either it maintains its historical unit with Egypt, or it betrays this and gives in to Ethiopian pressure. Egyptian ideology, in other words, appears to take an extreme ‘with us or against us’ approach. Complete with the assumption that one side is right and one is wrong.

When ideology is the topic – as it is in this context – this representation of Sudan as lacking agency manifests in an ambiguity regarding whether or not it propagates its own ideology in the basin, or whether it propagates the Ethiopian or Egyptian ideology either because of Ethiopian pressure; or because it is seen almost as an extension of Egypt. There is no room for a middle position – which is what both the Sudanese media discourse discussed later, and Sudanese spokespeople in the Egyptian newspapers actually argue for43.

Egyptian ideology, in other words, projects with Sudan bonds both of extreme solidarity and of extreme power. The Egyptian discourse represents the two as integrated to such an extent Egypt apparently takes it upon herself to act on the behalf of Sudan. The solidarity is apparently such that given the instability of the country, and the incompetence of the current government, Egyptian assistance is necessary to avoid catastrophe.

All in all, the integrity, stability and agency of Sudan and its government do not fare well in the Egyptian discourse. The result is that Egyptian discourse denounces Sudan for supporting GERD and suggests that the Sudanese government is incompetent and failing; while at the same time giving the impression that Sudan or even Bashir and his government can hardly be held responsible for their actions because they are based on Ethiopian pressure and/or a poor understanding of the situation.

It appears as though the Egyptian discourse is excusing or not willing to take Sudanese behavior seriously, while at the same time denouncing it. As mentioned above, this may be indicative of an Egyptian inability or reluctance to accept a change in Sudanese policy and interests (or at least acknowledgement of these) in the Blue Nile Basin and a corresponding political move away from Egypt towards Ethiopia. From the vantage point of Egyptian ideology, it seems, such a move simply makes no sense given the representation Sudan and Egypt not just as allies but brothers engaged in the same struggle to ensure their mutual and shared water rights – established beyond any doubt by Egypt, with no possibility for any conflict of interest.

**Solidarity as Key to the Ideology of Egyptian Dominance**

A main finding of this study is that solidarity is key to the Egyptian ideology’s legitimization of dominance. According to this world-view, Egyptian policy in the Blue Nile basin is the manifestation of mutual interests and rests on solidarity with all basin countries, albeit in a way which privileges Egyptian interests.

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the basin is represented as characterized by strong bonds of cohesion – social, political, hydrological and geographical. This is demonstrated by the Egyptian ideological conception of itself as a first among equals, and by the claim that all Blue Nile basin countries should work together in pursuit of mutual development, while avoiding harm to any basin country.

As we have seen, both Sudan and Ethiopia are consistently referred to as “brothers”, and – especially in the case of Sudan – denounced as one might family members. In the Egyptian discourse, in other words, the ideological world of the Blue Nile Basin almost appears to be as much a family as it is a river basin or a geo-political region.

Breaking the rules related to solidarity, institutionalized in the Nile Water Agreements and the Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement, Ethiopia is castigated in the Egyptian discourse for its unilateral and self-centred perspective, and for adopting a negligent, ignorant or even deliberately destructive stance with no regards for other Nile countries or common interests. Similarly, the asserted solidarity between Egypt and Sudan is used to denounce the latter for actions siblings presumably do not commit against each other.
Sudan is as we have seen criticized both for “abandoning” and “betraying” Egypt, and its actions are described as “baffling”.

This normative idea of solidarity as a more or less straight forward path to the common good lies at the foundations of the ideological legitimization of Egyptian dominance in the basin. Egypt readily dismisses all policy not based in this prescriptive conceptualization of solidarity as, in and best case scenario ignorant, and in the worst case scenario deliberately destructive.

The argument seems to be that legitimate development which benefits all Nile states is largely a straight-forward thing to identify. There seems to be an ideological conviction in the Egyptian discourse that it has the clear answer of what is best for all parties, and that no conflict of interests exists.

Given the alleged scientific fact and legal documents that lie at the heart of the contemporary Nile order, any contestation of this becomes an action that cannot be motivated by anything other than power hunger, recklessness and/or a poor understanding of the basin – exemplified by the representation of Ethiopia and Sudan discussed above. In the articles covered by this study, this is internalized to the point that the Egyptian opposition to GERD is framed not as a political agenda, but as a fait accompli pertaining to the natural order of the basin.

Given the hydrological context discussed in chapter one, and the historical background discussed in chapters one and two, it seems no coincidence that it is solidarity which is represented by Egyptian media discourse as a necessity in the Blue Nile basin. To say that an every-state-for-itself mentality would be potentially catastrophic is a gross understatement.

As discussed in chapter two, the prospect of upstream Nile control is not an abstract concept in the Egyptian imagination, but a relatively recent experience. The Egyptian discourse thus suggests that solidarity is more than simply a mechanism to assert Egyptian dominance in the basin, but rather fundamental to Egyptian ideology and apparently perceived as, or at least represented as, crucial to Egyptian existence.

In other words, the foundation of Egyptian ideology in solidarity can and – it is argued – should be seen as a response to the history, geography and hydrology of the Nile. There
is every indication that Egypt is painfully aware of its geographic and hydrological position, and of its extreme vulnerability. Indicative of this vulnerability is the Egyptian conceptualization of the Nile as a question of National Security and a question of life-and-death, discussed above.

**Sudan – ‘A Middle Party’**

In subverting Egyptian dominance, Sudanese ideology is naturally oriented in relation to this dominance. In other words, because Egyptian dominance has shaped the ideological and political landscape of the Blue Nile basin, the Sudanese ideology necessarily exists with reference to this.

As a consequence of this, the current section is organized along slightly different lines than the previous discussion of Egyptian ideology. It begins at the heart of the Sudanese ideology: namely its limited subversion of Egyptian ideology through a representation of it as hypocritical in its foundation in solidarity. Following this is a discussion of how GERD is represented as a legitimate Sudanese interest, and catalyst for cooperation in the basin.

The final two sections look at the implications of these representations from a more theoretical perspective, discussing the Sudanese ideology’s limited subversion of the Egyptian logonomic system, and the implications of these limitations for the Sudanese subversion of the dominant ideology in the Blue Nile basin.

**The Hypocrisy of Egyptian Solidarity and a Limited Subversion of its Dominance**

Echoing Egyptian ideology, Sudanese ideology founds its critique of Egyptian dominance on a prescriptive idea of solidarity. Herein lies also the chief contradiction of the Sudanese ideology, and, it is argued, the reason its subversion of Egyptian dominance is a limited one.

The Sudanese critique of lacking Egyptian solidarity is exemplified in the following quote, which appears almost passive aggressive in its formulation:
We ask not for recompense for all that Sudan has given and continues to give to Egypt. We question the fact that Egypt stands against all which serves Sudanese interests, and [we question] the absence of its support – even once – for Sudan in international or local issues. Why does Egypt distance itself from the involvement in any [difficulties] which concern Sudan, and [stick to] the position of an onlooker, when it wants [Sudan] to not be [an onlooker] in what concerns [Egypt]?44 (al-Baquer 2014).

It is made is made even more explicit in the following quote:

(…) the Egyptian policy towards Sudan is not at all built on attachment or compassion, nor on common interests, it is built on [Egyptian] ambitions in the area. The proof of this may be that [Egypt] solved its problem with Israel, Taba, and yet it does not solve its problem with Sudan, Hala ‘ib45 (al-Sayyed 2013b).

Not unlike how Ethiopia is represented in the Egyptian discourse, in other words, Egyptian ideology and policy in the basin is in the Sudanese discourse widely represented as built primarily on a desire for control of the river, with little or no regard for solidarity – a representation evident in a range of articles46.

Egypt is criticized for adopting an exploitative policy in the Blue Nile Basin, and for considering Sudan a dependent whose support is taken for granted:

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44 "ولنحن بدورنا نتساءل ليس عن المقابل حيال كل ما قدمه السودان ويقدمه لمصر بل نتساءل عن وقوف مصر ضد كل ما من شأنه يخدم المصاهل السودانية وعدم الوقوف ولو لمرة واحدة مع الجانب السوداني في قضاياه الدولية والإقليمية؟ ولماذا نتأيا مصر بنفسها عن الخروج في أي عصار بخص السودان، وتتفق موقف المنتشر، في حين أنها تردها إلا يكون كذلك فيما يخصها؟"

45 "كما أن سياسة مصر تجاه السودان لا تبنى على العواطف إطلاقاً ولا المصاهل المشتركة، بل تبنى على المطامع في المنطقة، ولعل الدليل على ذلك أنها حلت مشكلتها مع إسرائيل طاباً ولم تحل مشكلتها مع السودان حلاً.

We find that Egypt deals with all issues related to Sudan according to a strategic vision limited in frame and features which is the result of [its] system of government. We also find that the focus of the Egyptian Government in its dealings with Sudan, that is to say its strategic vision, is that the political and governing system of Sudan be the subordinate to the Egyptian system. And that if this were to be rebuffed, Sudan would slip into a state of instability and attrition such as “the war of the South or Darfur”\textsuperscript{47} (al-Sayyed 2013b).

This apparently exploitative strategy is claimed to manifest most notably through the Nile Water Agreements’ lacking benefit for Sudan (al-Sayyed 2013a, al-Midan 2013c), the High Aswan Dam which lead to Sudan having to fund the relocation of those dispossessed by the filling of dam’s reservoir, and the agreement between Egypt and Sudan for Egyptian use of a part of the Sudanese allocation Sudan has been unable to exploit\textsuperscript{48}:

Egypt has since the Nile Water Agreement of 1959 taken from the allocation of Sudan [what Sudan could not utilize], [with Sudan] receiving nothing in return (…). In other words, Sudan [is in a position] to demand compensation for over 65 years of water\textsuperscript{49} (Abdalqader 2013).

Sudan’s perspective on the High Aswan Dam is illustrated by the following quote, which again emphasizes the role of solidarity in basin interaction:

Certainly the Egyptian people will not forget the positions of its brothers [\textit{ashiqqa}‘], for without their agreement [the High Aswan Dam would not have been built], and [their] generosity extended to shouldering the cost of resettling the families of [Wadi] Halfa, and the destruction of their crops, livestock and homes at Lake Nasser.\textsuperscript{50} (Hayder 2013, al-Intibaha 2013c).

\textsuperscript{47} See chapter two.
\textsuperscript{48} See chapter two.
\textsuperscript{49} “الجانب المصري لطالما كان يأخذ من نصيب السودان الفائض دون مقابل مادي أو معنوي خلال عقود بعد اتفاقية 1959م حتى اليوم، بما يعني أن السودان عليه المطالبة بتعويض سنة أكثر من 65 عاماً.”

\textsuperscript{50} “إن الشعب المصري لن ينسى موقف أشقائه، فلولا موقفنا لما كان السودان في حالة من عدم التفاهم والاستنزاف "كحرب الجنوب ودرفور".”

58
Adding insult to injury, the tactics of continued attempts at Egyptian dominance are outlined:

These days, Egyptian elites return with a single voice to the discussion of [GERD] and how Sudan – the defeated Egyptian ally – could agree to its construction, even though it is the main signatory and the second beneficiary of the Nile Water Agreement of 1959. Excusing [their] attacks on Sudan by [claiming] that it betrayed the agreement and was swept away by its own interests, destroying its shared interests with Egypt51 (al-Baquer 2014).

And:

What currently most disturbs the relationship between Sudan and Egypt are two issues: the first is Hala’ib and Shalateen which the Egyptian political elite has always put at the centre of the Egyptian-Sudanese relationship. And which they push and bring up whenever something is implied about it indirectly, or there is a leaked announcement or an action from Sudan’s side for the sake of its relationship with another country [than Egypt]. [This elite] considers that any decision in such a case [affects] the relationship between [Egypt and Sudan], as well as Egyptian interests directly. Just like what is happening now regarding the Ethiopian dam [the second issue]52 (al-Baquer 2014).

The claim that any action Sudan undertakes for the support of its relationship with a country other than Egypt is considered by the latter to directly impact the relationship between Sudan and Egypt certainly appears to have some substance based on the Egyptian ideology discussed above. As much is indicated by the strong denunciation, shock and outrage, and the reports of Sudan abandoning or even betraying Egypt expressed as a result of Sudanese support for GERD and aim for closer cooperation with Ethiopia.

In short, an image is painted of Egypt as a calculating basin ruler, interested in a semblance of solidarity only to the extent that it furthers its own control over the river,

51 "وجوع التخلي المصري من أيام البلدين واحد من المسألة التي نوقشت سابقاً على إنابة وهو الحليف المصري المغلوب على أمره وهو الموقع الرئيس والمستفيد الثاني من اتفاقية مياه النيل الموقعة في العام 1959 مبررين الهجوم على السودان بأنه خان الاتفاقية وانجرف وراء مصالحه متقاضياً عن المصالح المشتركة مع مصر.

52 "بأثر ما يعكر صفو العلاقات بين السودان ومصر في الوقت الراهن. قضيتان اثنتان، الأولى قضية حلايب التي طالما واضعتها النخب السياسية المصرية سهماً في خصر العلاقات السودانية المصرية وتعلت على عثرها وتآثرتها عمداً كلاً من أجل التصريح أو عمل من السودان لصالح علاقاته مع دولة أخرى وتعتبر أي قرار في هذا الإطار على حساب علاقات البلدين وبين المصالح المصرية مباشرة، كما يحدث الآن بشأن مشروع سد النهضة الإثيوبي.”
and over Sudan. A ruler that reportedly has interfered in Sudanese affairs ever since the latter was granted independence in 1956, and is increasingly distancing itself also from the other Nile Basin states:

If Egypt has had any success in Africa, this has been its success in the provocation of its neighbours, especially Sudan. And whatever the case may be, there are many signs that reflect a Sudanese wish to break the shackles of dependency to Egypt. Perhaps this is evident from [its current] position on GERD53 (al-Sayyed 2013b).

These representations of Egyptian dominance constitute a clearly worded critique, and are a clear subversion of the alleged solidarity of Egyptian ideology. Moreover, this is a critique that strikes at the heart of the Egyptian ideology’s refusal to acknowledge Sudanese agency, and a representation which rings true given the Egyptian discourse discussed above. At the same time, there are clear limitations to this subversion. Sudanese ideology consistently affirms the importance of development along what it insists are mutual interests and consistently claims that GERD is in the interest of all and harms no one – as discussed in the following section. A clear parallel to the Egyptian ideology’s emphasis on solidarity and mutual interests.

Throughout the Sudanese discourse, there are repeated claims that Sudan will not do anything to harm Egypt54, for example, Sayyed asserts that there is an eternal relationship between Egypt and Sudan even while criticizing Egypt. A relationship apparently founded in strategic concerns in addition to the familial solidarity between the two countries discussed below: “we understand that the security of Egypt is the security of Sudan, and vice versa”55 (al-Sayyed 2013b). Another article carries the apt

53 "إذا كان هناك نجاح لمصر في إفريقيا فهو نجاحها في استفزاز جيرانها خاصة السودان، وهما يكمن من أمر، فإن هناك كثيراً من المؤشرات التي تعكس رغبة السودان في كسر قيود التبعية لمصر، ولعل ذلك يبدو من المواقف الآن من قضية سد النهضة الإثيوبي.


55 "نفهم أن أمن مصر هو من أمن السودان والعكس صحيح."
headline “The Minister of State at the Foreign Ministry: We will not Take a Position Which Harms Egypt”\(^{56}\) (Akher Lahza 2014a).

However, even these assurances are usually part of a careful subversion or contestation of Egyptian dominance, as exemplified by the following quote from the Interior Minister of Sudan, speaking about GERD: “Ethiopia has a vision, Egypt has a different vision, and we in Sudan have a vision”\(^{57}\) (Akher Lahza 2014c). The Sudanese position is carefully staked out as not being the same as either Egypt or Ethiopia, although the title of the article is “The Minister of the Interior: We reject harm to Egypt from the Renaissance Dam”\(^{58}\). The same careful stance is evident in another quote from an article in the state newspaper Akher Lahza, which generally appears to adopt a more careful stance than al-Intibaha and al-Midan:

> Debate resulted from the Ethiopian decision to alter the flow of the Blue Nile in order to complete GERD, a step which was considered by Egypt and Sudan to threaten their water allocations. (…) But the question is: what are the actual long-term consequences of the dam for Sudan?\(^{59}\) (Gadid 2013).

Along the same lines as above, this initially identifies Egypt and Sudan as a unit – in the same fashion typical of the Egyptian discourse – claiming that GERD may endanger both. Yet it concludes that the most important question concerns the long-term effects of GERD on Sudan. At the same time, Sudan and Egypt are represented as the unit ‘dawlatain al-masab’ in a wide array of articles also in the Sudanese discourse\(^{60}\).

This conditional criticism of the Egyptian Nile order indicates the complexity of the Sudanese ideology, which is founded in a precarious balance between, on the one side a subversion of the ideology of Egyptian dominance, an assertion of increased Sudanese power in the basin, and a resulting political movement away from Egypt; and on the

\(^{56}\) وزير الدولة بالخارجية: لن نتخذ موقفاً يضر مصر

\(^{57}\) أثيوبيا لدينا رؤية، ومصر لدينا رؤية أخرى، ونحن في السودان لدينا رؤية

\(^{58}\) وزير الداخلية: نرفض تضرر مصر من سد النهضة

\(^{59}\) جدل كلفت أثيوبيا تحويل مجرى نهر النيل الأزرق لاستكمال سد النهضة، في خطوة أخرى لمصر والسودان (…) لكن السؤال ما هو التأثير الحقيقي بعدم القدرة على البناء الذي يتيح للسودان

other, on the maintenance of a close relationship with Egypt and – by virtue of the emphasis on GERD as beneficial to all – of the assertion of common interests as the goal of basin interaction. The Sudanese ideological complex may thus be summarized as a ‘middle position’, whereby Sudan is framed as a middle party, situated between Egypt and Ethiopia politically and ideologically, as well as geographically and hydrologically.

Throughout, Sudanese ideology as we have seen draws on a somewhat different reading of modern Nile history than Egyptian ideology – one characterized not by Egyptian authority and benevolence, but by Egyptian selfishness and exploitation. The reading of the modern history of the Blue Nile Basin as a history of Egyptian dominance is an integral part of the Sudanese ideology’s subversion of this dominance.

Sudan’s exceedingly close relationship with Egypt has obviously not – from this point of view – brought the benefits to warrant such a relationship, and as a sovereign country, the argument is that Sudan must be free to look elsewhere for allies, without having its motives questioned. The concrete expression of this new Sudanese influence is its support for GERD – discussed in the following section.

Thus the bonds of power through which the Sudanese ideological complex is expressed depict not a basin characterized by Sudanese dominance, but one characterized by increased Sudanese influence over the Nile and its own interactions with it – with the historical context of a power deficit so severe that it apparently threatens the very sovereignty of the country.

In an assertion of Sudanese agency, one article emphasizes the importance of Sudanese water independence and claims that “for the first time, Sudan has become more pragmatic in its interaction with regional alignment regarding water, and in its national position concerning the challenges of GERD”61 (Hayder 2013, al-Intibaha 2013c). A purported pragmatism further evident in the Sudanese ambition to expand cooperation with Ethiopia, discussed in the following section.

61"ولأول مرة يصبح السودان أكثر برجماتيك في التفاعل بالنسق الإقليمي لملف المياه وموقفه الوطني من تداعيات سد النهضة."
The result of this in terms of Sudanese agency is that Sudanese support for GERD is represented as an ideology alternative to that of Egypt. This is indicated by fact that building it explicitly challenges the Nile Water Agreements, and the principle of absolute Egyptian supremacy in the basin. This entails an alternative discourse according to which the basin countries other than Egypt have increased rights and more of a say in the basin, the river not being understood only or primarily as an aqueduct to the North.

GERD as a Legitimate Sudanese Interest and a Catalyst for Change and Cooperation in the Basin

The Sudanese support for GERD is represented as a concrete expression of the new-found Sudanese pragmatism discussed above, and an assertion of increased Sudanese influence and power in the Blue Nile Basin. Framed by much of the Sudanese discourse as an apparent watershed in the modern history of the basin, marking a beginning – or at least potential for – change to the Egyptian Nile order.

In the interest of continued Sudanese development – which as we have seen is conditionally identified as legitimate by the Egyptian ideology – the argument is that given the substantial benefits of GERD, it simply makes no sense for Sudan not to support its construction. These benefits most notably include the generation of electricity (Yahya 2013, Abdalqader 2013), the protection of Sudanese dams from silt (Mirghany 2013, al-Midan 2013c) and flood protection (Kalar 2013).

As we have seen in the previous section, Sudanese ideology rejects the Egyptian claim that Sudanese support for GERD is founded in domestic political considerations. One article responding to the Egyptian accusations is tellingly entitled “The Renaissance Dam: the Strategic Interests Are Stronger than the Political Interests” (Abdalqader 2013). This claim is also explicitly made by President Bashir, who emphasizes the very real benefits from GERD, asserting that it makes very little sense for Sudan not at least consider both the dam and the potential for closer cooperation with Ethiopia (al-Intibaha 2013b).
At the same time, this support is generally represented not so much as a break with Egypt as it is an opportunity for a new shared vision or agenda for the basin – based in a general conviction that GERD is beneficial to all and harmful to none. The benefits of such a shared vision would reportedly be far-reaching, as illustrated by the following quote:

Ethiopia is in (...) a hectic development boom, and Sudanese investments are flowing into Addis Ababa. The region is in need of Egyptian experience [combined with] Sudanese agricultural lands and Ethiopian water and skilled labour, [with which] the region may become more attractive, and there is nothing which stops it from being competitive with Japan and Malaysia63 (Yahya 2013).

This demonstrates the same balance discussed in the previous section, between a careful subversion of the Egyptian order and the maintenance of the relationship with Egypt and of solidarity as a governing principle of ideology in the basin. In this respect it is, as we have seen above widely emphasized in the Sudanese discourse that Sudan will not agree to anything that may harm Egypt but rather is merely trying to promote its own national interest.

While there are some warnings in the Sudanese newspapers regarding dangers related to construction and even Ethiopian plans for dominance in the basin (Mansour 2013, Abeed 2013, al-Midan 2014), these are few and far between, and often voiced by spokespeople of the Egyptian government. As discussed above, there is an emphasis on caution and ensuring no harm is caused. However, the argument made on the back of this concerns the importance of increased regional cooperation rather than halting construction of the dam or reducing its size.

An integral part of Sudanese ideology, then, is the representation of GERD as a legitimate contravention of basin treaties, and the potential dangers and risks related to GERD which are foregrounded in the Egyptian discourse are generally downplayed,
and its alleged benefit for all basin countries is emphasized. The claim is made that GERD benefits not only Sudan, and that the risks tied to construction are relatively low, but also that there are potential benefits for Egypt – such as increasing the life-span of the High Aswan Dam (al-Intibaha 2013e, Yahya 2013, Akher Lahza 2014b). Here, Sudanese discourse naturally stands in stark opposition to that of Egypt.

In a further contrast to the Egyptian discourse, Ethiopia is identified as a valuable partner for closer cooperation. Based on the Sudanese discourse, increased cooperation between Sudan and Ethiopia clearly appears to also be an Ethiopian aim (al-Intibaha 2013c, al-Midan 2013c, al-Midan 2013a). Moreover, Ethiopia is represented as eager to promote cooperation also with Egypt (al-Midan 2013c, al-Midan 2013a, Akher Lahza 2014b). This feeds into the image of Ethiopia and GERD not as a divisive issue in the basin, but as an opportunity for closer cooperation between all basin countries.

The culmination is that GERD aside from being beneficial to Sudan is represented as a catalyst for change and increased cooperation in the basin. As we shall see in the following section, it appears to be considered a legitimate break with Egyptian dominance in the basin, and with the veto rights enshrined in the Nile Water Agreement of 1929.

**A Limited Subversion of the Egyptian Logonomic System**

The limited subversion of the Egyptian ideological complex is supported by limited contestation of the logonomic rules that support the Egyptian ideology. More specifically, this entails a contestation of the validity of the Nile Water Agreements as the basis of basin regulation, and relatedly of the Egyptian veto right on construction across the river enshrined in them.

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Based on the discussion in the previous sections, the most fundamental rules of the Sudanese logonomic system statements regarding legitimate interaction in the Blue Nile Basin must follow are: 1) the Nile Water Agreements are not a valid basis for basin law due to their colonial origins and over-privileging of Egypt; 2) all Nile countries have equal rights to benefit from the river provided no harm is caused to any other Nile country; and 3) the goal of basin interaction mutual development through the pursuit of shared interests, understood as the pursuit of the equal rights established in 2).

The contestation of the Egyptian veto right on construction across the river enshrined in the Nile Water Agreement of 1929 is obviously implicit in the Sudanese support for the construction of GERD discussed above. The opposition to this is agreement is framed in terms of it being a an agreement between colonial powers, and not by the basin states themselves: “it is not possible for a state to [stay committed] to what was dictated by a colonizer” 66 (Gadid 2013). An assertion that it must be possible to change regulations in the Nile Basin in light of new political developments.

Moreover, the Nile Water Agreement of 1959 is widely contested, both because it is based on the Nile Water Agreement of 1929, and because it excludes all Nile states except Egypt and Sudan 67. In sum, the implication of this post-colonial perspective on basin regulation is that such regulations should be jointly authored by all basin countries: “(...) Now we must build a shared strategic vision (...) and we must trust that all the agreements made in the previous century are not holy” 68 (Hayder 2013, al-Intibaha 2013c).

At the same time, this contestation of the logonomic system is decidedly limited. As much is indicated by the fact that the latter two logonomic rules listed above are shared by the Egyptian logonomic system. Furthermore, the Sudanese logonomic system does not detail specifically how its definition of ‘equal rights to benefit from the Nile’ differs from the Egyptian definition. This is further discussed in the following section.

66 “لا يمكن أن تلزم دولة بما أمره عليها الاستعمار.”


68 “والآن لا بد من تبني رؤية إستراتيجية مشتركة (...) ولكن الفيتو أن كافة اتفاقيات مياه النيل الماضية بالقرن الماضي ليست مقدسة.”
As above, these logonomic rules are taught and policed by institutions tied to knowledge production and the spread of information – in this context most significantly through the news media and the institutions that regulate media and discourse. As mentioned in chapter one, both Al-Intibaha and Akher Lahza have explicit bonds to the Sudanese government, and so may be seen as disseminators of state discourse.

In the articles covered by this study, Akher Lahza appears to closely follow the same line that Sudanese government representatives are keen to express in Egyptian newspapers. Maintaining a careful balance between contesting Egyptian dominance, while anxious not to step on Egyptian toes.

The articles analyzed from Al-Intibaha are similarly supportive of GERD and critical of Egypt – although the tone of the criticism varies from strong denunciation to more careful questioning of the Egyptian status quo. It is however generally more outspoken in its criticism than Akher Lahza.

The opposition paper Al-Midan is similarly supportive of GERD and highly critical of Egyptian dominance, although it appears to strive towards a somewhat more balanced coverage, occasionally featuring articles supportive of Egypt and more critical of the Sudanese government.

In sum, there appears to be a strong consensus across all three newspapers on the potential benefits of GERD, and on the contestation of Egyptian dominance in the basin. The fact that this point of view is evident also from an opposition paper known for its critical approach to the Sudanese government suggests that the position is not merely pushed through by the official institutions, but is supported also outside these.

**The Contradiction of a Middle Stance and the Failure to Acknowledge Conflicting Interests**

As established in the previous sections, the Sudanese ideology’s view of the basin is one of a brave new world in which all basin countries rely on cooperation to solve conflicts
and pursue shared interests\(^69\). In so depicting the basin, the ideology adopts a stance whereby Sudan is framed as middle party – politically as well as geographically and hydrologically. Asserting greater Sudanese power in the basin, while at the same time making an effort both to maintain a close relationship with Egypt, and to maintain the pursuit of shared interests as the goal of basin interaction. This stance has been discussed above, and is exemplified by the following quote:

> The solution [to the issue of Ethiopian control over GERD, and implicitly to the disagreement concerning the construction of GERD] may be [that it is necessary] for Sudan to intervene as an intermediary between the upstream states, Egypt and Ethiopia in order to reach a new treaty for the organization of water allocation\(^70\) (Gadid 2013).

This Sudanese ideological middle stance is potentially problematic for two reasons. Firstly, if, as is suggested above, the goal of the Sudanese subversion of Egyptian ideology is to enable a greater political space for pragmatism and increased Sudanese influence over its use of Nile as well as its interactions with the other Nile states – then the characterization of this subversion as a middle stance is a contradiction. A middle stance – or neutrality, as it is called by the Sudanese Foreign Minister in the Egyptian newspaper al-Masry al-Youm (Farhat 2014b, Farhat 2014a) – would appear diametrically opposed to the freedom of choice that is the stated aim of a new Sudanese policy.

In more concrete terms, if Sudan was to tie itself to a self-proclaimed middle position, then in the face of for example continued Sudanese support for Ethiopia – which is something Sudanese media discourse argues for – it would likely be an easy thing for Egypt to claim that Sudan does not in fact inhabit a middle position. In this case, Sudanese protestations that it is adopting a pragmatic policy in the basin would likely do little to ease Egyptian worries.

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\(^70\) "ٓوَالحلِّ لِهذِهِ القَضِيَّةِ يكِمُّنْ فِي ضَرْوَةِ تَدخِلِ السُّوْدَانِ لِيَكُونَ وَسُعٌُا مَا بِبِينِ دُوْلَةِ المِنِيبِ ومَصرِ وَالِيُوبِيَا لِلْوُلْسُوْلِ إِلَى اِفْتِقَادِاتِ جَدِيَّةِ" نَظَّمُنَّ حُصُصَ المَيْءَاءِ.
To put it bluntly, it may seem that the Sudanese middle position is a rhetorical device which although it appears to have been constructed in order to sugar the pill of Sudanese agency to Egypt ultimately is likely to do Sudan a disfavour because it is incapable of supporting the increased policy space the Sudanese discourse argues for.

Secondly and relatedly, there is a strong message from both parties that any legitimate action or policy in the basin must be founded in solidarity and the realization of common interests – albeit that Egyptian and Sudanese ideas of what constitute common interests in this case appear at odds.

As an apparent agreement between the two, the idea that the goal of basin interaction should be the pursuit of shared interests is both significant and potentially problematic. Firstly, it is of course significant to the extent that it indicates a compatibility between Egyptian and Sudanese points of view – a potentially promising prospect for future cooperation in the basin.

The problematic feature of this apparent agreement is that neither party makes any suggestion regarding what the course of action should be – other than vague prescriptions of negotiation and cooperative measures – in cases of conflicting interests where substantive cooperation is not immediately possible. The current situation is an example of this, as the three countries in the Blue Nile Basin now apparently are unable even to agree on the conditions according to which studies of the dam should be completed (Hussein 2015b, Hussein 2015a) – let alone the identification of more or less elusive common interests.

In more theoretical terms, while the Sudanese discourse subverts and contests Egyptian dominance in the basin, it appears to stop short of suggesting an alternative logonomic system to substitute the current one. The Sudanese claim to agency which is made on the back of a purported middle position appears – like Egyptian ideology – to be founded in a conceptualization of the basin where conflicting interests hardly exist. In both Egyptian and Sudanese ideologies, it seems the task for which basin regulation is needed is simply to facilitate cooperation and work towards more or less self-evident common interests that as a rule benefit all and harm no one.
How to identify these common interests or deal with situations where interests do conflict, without resorting to what amounts to a prescriptive and oversimplified judgement of their legitimacy and merit, is scarcely discussed. In the Sudanese discourse as in the Egyptian discourse, the impression is given that identifying shared interests is a relatively simple matter, and that any failure to pursue these must be motivated by selfishness or power hunger. This is especially harmful given that such an evaluation of legitimacy is an exercise in futility if – as the current case appears to be – all parties simply claim that their interests are legitimate shared interests, and their opponents’ are motivated by selfishness and power hunger.

The Egyptian discourse glosses over its lacking acknowledgement of conflicting interests by differentiating between legitimate and non-legitimate interests, and brazenly founding the former in the Nile Water Agreements and the knowledge and historical narratives which support these. This is in the interest of Egypt, which as the hegemon of the basin has been able to successfully label its own interests as shared interests.

Sudan, despite its criticism of these agreements and Egyptian exploitation, similarly distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate interests – merely proposing a different definition of what constitutes legitimate. The Sudanese discourse apparently seeks to base this definition in a post-colonial perspective, which although it appears relevant does not account for conflicting interests. This may do Sudan a disfavour if, as Zeitoun et.al. suggest, Sudan has fewer resources draw on for the propagation of its view than Egypt does as a result of Egyptian hegemony in the basin.

If it is accepted that ideologies can be expressed as ideological complexes and logonomic systems; and that the latter regulate and support the former, then it follows that any subversion of an ideological complex which does not sufficiently subvert also the supporting logonomic system is likely to have limited efficacy, because the ideology at the heart of such a contestation will continue to be subject to the same rules as the ideology it seeks to criticize – rules which are an integral part of the original ideology and work to support and legitimate this.

In sum, the Sudanese discourse appears to be suggesting that it is time to exchange the Nile Water Agreements – yet in doing so proposes that the prospective new order be based on the same vague principles of solidarity which have caused the old one to fail.
Namely a lacking acknowledgement of the fact that different Nile countries have different and conflicting interests.
Chapter three has demonstrated the viability of the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress as a theoretical-methodological framework for the study of ideology and discourse in the Blue Nile Basin. In the current chapter, the findings presented above are placed in the theoretical context of hydro-hegemony.

There are, as mentioned in chapter one, two concrete aims for connecting the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress and hydro-hegemony: firstly, addressing the lacking hydro-hegemonic methodology for the study of discourse and ideology; and secondly, addressing the generalized nature of the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress, which provides no theoretical-methodological framework for the study of how ideology relates to the world of the Blue Nile Basin outside discourse.

Put differently, the strength of hydro-hegemony lies in its comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to power and state interaction in river basins, and in its conceptualization of ideology and discourse as fundamental to transboundary river interaction. Its weakness lies in its lacking methodological capacity for the systematic study of these latter concepts. The strength of the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress on the other hand lies in its ability to study ideology as a functional socio-political concept. Its weakness lies in the generalized nature of its theory, and in its limitation to the study of discourse.

As mentioned in the introduction, it is suggested – although additional research is needed into the nature and role of ideology and discourse in transboundary river basins – that a key flaw resulting from the inadequate methodological approach to ideology in hydro-hegemony is an overly compartmentalized understanding of the role and nature of ideology and discourse, whereby their impact is considered to be limited to more or less effective so-called subtle mechanisms.

Moreover, the concepts of ideology outlined respectively by Zeitoun et.al., and by Hodge & Kress appear theoretically and methodologically compatible. This is due to
their mutual focus on power-asymmetry and, as we shall see, respectively on coercion-consent and power-solidarity as twin determinants of control.

The current chapter consists of two sections: firstly, the theoretical framework of hydro-hegemony is briefly presented and its compatibility with the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress discussed; following this, a critique of its conception of ideology is given with a foundation in the theoretical-methodological framework of the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress and the findings of this study.

**Hydro-Hegemonic Theory and the Social Semiotics of Hodge & Kress**

As mentioned in chapter one, the hydro-hegemonic approach to transboundary river basin interaction places power along a scale from overt to subtle, with ideology at the latter extreme of this scale. Towards the same extreme is located hegemony – opposed to what Zeitoun et.al. refer to as dominance, which is based in non-subtle forms of power:

If brute force is being used by a powerful riparian, the arrangement is probably not by definition hegemonic (since the situation is in flux, and an order is being established). If more subtle forms of power – such as the framing of solutions, setting of agendas, or sanctioning of discourses – are being used, the transboundary water arrangement is likely hegemonic (in the sense that attempts are being made to generate the consent of the non-hegemonic actors (Zeitoun, et al. 2014:1-2).

The meaning of subtle in this context relates to consent, which is opposed to coercion or brute force. Coercion is, in other words, characterized by the absence of consent, and is overt or non-subtle. Along these lines, Zeitoun et.al. theorize what they call different mechanisms for the contestation of, or production of compliance with a given hegemonic or dominant order.

These mechanisms are organized along the axis mentioned above, and roughly speaking involve three different levels: coercive mechanisms are characterized by the use of overt force and lacking consent; bargaining mechanisms are characterized by at least the appearance of bargaining between the involved parties and are characterized by a mix
between overt and subtle power; and ideational or ideological mechanisms are characterized by more or less tacit consent and the absence of overt force.

Below the definition of these mechanisms are quoted from Zeitoun et.al. (2014:2-4):

Firstly, mechanisms for the production of compliance:

**Coercive compliance-producing mechanisms**: […] compliance with the order can be assured through pressure created by the use of force or the threat of the use of force, e.g. the unilateral construction of infrastructure. Active stalling during negotiations is classed under this category, because of the very different alternatives available to the stronger and weaker sides in the absence of a negotiated agreement […]. Material capacities to create and gain access to alternatives (e.g. through more infrastructure of financial resources) can also create pressure on the weaker side to consent, without any direct or discernible exertion of power.

**Utilitarian compliance-producing mechanisms**: are used to encourage compliance with the status quo. These are the ‘carrots’ to the ‘stick’ of coercive mechanisms. Utilitarian mechanisms can include inducements or rewards that bring either political pay-offs, such as recognition and similar rewards and alliances for legitimacy-challenged regimes, or financial pay-offs such as a share of the capital generated by a transboundary water project.

**Normative compliance-producing mechanisms**: rely on instilling the belief that compliance with the order is right, or a duty, even an obligation. The normative basis for this type of compliance is the legitimacy of the order, such that compliance is assured “regardless of whether fear of punishment for refusal to comply is present, and regardless of calculations that may be made about the balance of costs and benefits entailed in compliance” (Lustic 2002: 23). Transboundary water treaties, ‘best practice’ of transboundary water management, and the operational procedures of international financial institutions may be considered examples of normative compliance-producing mechanisms active in transboundary water interaction.

**Ideological compliance-producing mechanisms** rely on unquestioned acceptance of the order, independent of the sense of obligation, or rewards or pressure on offer. When these mechanisms are effective, not complying with the order is *unconsciously* ruled out. The knee-jerk reactions invoked when political issues (such as the sharing of transboundary waters) are portrayed as national security issues are an example of ideological mechanisms, as are deeply-held facts derived from the construction of knowledge and sanctioned discourse […].
Conversely, Zeitoun et.al. define the **mechanisms for resistance and counter-hegemony** in the following way:

**Coercive resistance mechanisms:** these mechanisms to resist the established order rely on compelling one actor involuntarily, by the use of force or the threat of the use of force. Examples of such coercion may include violence against and sabotage of the hegemonic order, the unilateral construction of hydraulic infrastructure (in transboundary waters) – or merely a threat to execute any of these.

**Leverage mechanisms of resistance and of counter-hegemony:** These mechanisms to resist or transform the established order rely on increasing and actor’s influence and authority at the local, regional or even global level. The approach does not necessarily challenge the legitimacy of the order, but works to win ‘the game’ within the rules that have been established under the hegemonic setting. Leveraging mechanisms at use in transboundary water setting include forming strategic alliances […], launching diplomatic efforts, the use of the principles of International Water Law to contest existing legal setting, or the mobilization of alternative sources of funding.

**Liberating mechanisms of resistance and of counter-hegemony** These mechanisms seek to transform the order through direct or indirect undermining of the foundations that underpin in. Distinct from coercive resistance mechanisms in that they have potential to transform a hegemonic order, liberating mechanisms generally challenge the legitimacy of the order by offering *alternatives*, i.e. replacing dominant and sanctioned visions, agendas, discourses, realities, knowledge.

The above demonstrates the emphasis on discourse, ideology and the construction of knowledge as determinants of transboundary basin interaction. Accordingly, it is argued that a comprehensive and methodologically sound approach to discourse and ideology is necessary to fruitful hydro-hegemonic analysis.

As mentioned, the compatibility between hydro-hegemonic and the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress lies in their shared focus on power asymmetry and the duality of coercion-consent and power-solidarity. Naturally, an important question in this respect concerns the theoretical relation between what Hodge & Kress call power and solidarity; and what Zeitoun et.al. refer to as coercion and consent, and respectively solidarity and consent as a key to dominance and hegemony.

Here, Zeitoun et.al. explicitly draw on Gramsci:
It is through consent that power over ideas (even at the inter-state level) blends with Gramsci’s notion of hegemony. Gramsci’s (2003 [1935]) insight into the relations between authorities and those they have authority [sic] allowed him to interpret the give-and-take that goes on in exchanges between them […]. As control is more readily maintained through a mix of force and consent (rather than through force alone), the consent of the weaker subject to a hegemonic arrangement is integral to its maintenance. (…) (Zeitoun, et al. 2014)

This quote appears to echo the theoretical perspective of Hodge & Kress. With reference to Gramsci, Zeitoun et.al. assert that the most effective form of power is power over ideas, whereby the dominated may act according to the wishes of the dominant willingly or in some cases without even being aware of it.

This presupposes, however, that the dominated consent – consciously or not – to the ruling ideas. As we have seen above, the hegemony of Egypt in the Blue Nile basin is founded on the Nile Water Agreements and the ideas and discourses that support these. If Sudan and Ethiopia do not consent to these agreements as the foundation of the basin order – as now seems at least partly appears to be happening – this implies a contestation of Egyptian ideological power.

Put differently, Egyptian ideological domination in the Nile Basin rests on the identification of other basin countries as members of the Egyptian order. To paraphrase Hodge & Kress, the Egyptian ideology must express bonds of solidarity with those it seeks to dominate. In the concrete context of the relationship between Egypt and Sudan, Egyptian ideological power rests on the ideological point of view that there is social, political and geographical cohesion between the two countries that warrants integration or alliance.

By consenting to the Egyptian Nile order, Sudan and Ethiopia have marked solidarity with Egypt. Although additional research is called for, this suggests that consent and solidarity are compatible concepts. The same seems the case when considering the theoretical relation between power in the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress, and coercion in hydro-hegemonic. As mentioned in chapter one, Hodge & Kress define power in the context of ideology as “hierarchy, control and order”. To Zeitoun et.al., coercion as we a have seen involves the overt use of force or threat of the use of force.
A Critique of the Concept of Ideology in Hydro-Hegemonic Theory

The above is not to suggest that the concept of ideology in hydro-hegemony is a complete match with the concept of ideology in the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress. An important difference between the two is the way Zeitoun et.al. theorize ideology as relating only to subtle or non-coercive mechanisms of power.

To the extent it is a hegemon in the basin, Egypt has according to Zeitoun et.al. been able to rely chiefly on ideological or normative mechanisms for assuring compliance with its order in the Nile Basin. It has not, goes the argument, generally needed to resort to coercive mechanisms71.

Gramsci, whose theories hydro-hegemony is founded in, explains the difference between coercion and consent with the following analogies: "State and Church; politics and morality […], law and freedom; order and self-discipline […]" (Gramsci 1999:387). Hodge & Kress, however, make it explicit that they consider ideology to be “coercively imposed by dominant groups on behalf of their distinctive interests [my emphasis]” (1988:3). In other words, Hodge & Kress contend that the imposition of an ideological complex on a group is coercive in that it seeks to force that group to adopt or accept a specific world-view.

From this perspective, both State and Church imply logonomic systems, which explicitly regulate social production of meaning in order that it serve the dominant ideological complex (Hodge and Kress 1988:4). In other words, Church is not in principle different from state, or in the case of GERD, Egypt discussing military action against Ethiopia and Egypt sanctioning discourse or authoring expert knowledge are all coercive actions in that they impose or seek to impose certain ideological complexes and logonomic systems on the other riparians – or more precisely: they all seek to structure the world in certain ways which serve Egyptian goals in the basin.

A concrete example of how ideology from the perspective of Hodge & Kress is coercive is the representation of Sudan in Egyptian ideology. Egyptian ideology is quite blunt

71 Although for example the Egyptian stalling of the Nile Basin Initiative negotiations might according to the above definitions be classified as a coercive mechanism.
and direct in legitimizing Egyptian control in the basin and in more or less completely disregarding Sudanese perspectives. Characterizing this interaction as non-coercive because it is a question of ideology and discourse rather than for example military might or the stalling of negotiations appears inadequate.

Furthermore, it is argued that if ideology – as Zeitoun et.al. posit – has the power to elicit compliance with the rules a given order, then it follows that ideology has a normative function. This is implicitly understood by the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress, whereby ideology as we have seen is composed of an ideological complex and a logonomic system. The latter explicitly pertaining to “normative mechanisms”, despite functioning as part of ideology.

What this study suggests as a tentative way to broaden and deepen the hydro-hegemonic understanding of ideology is to adopt a less compartmentalized view of the role of ideology in transboundary river basins. More concretely this would entail not tying ideology only to what Zeitoun call “ideological mechanisms”, but rather working towards an understanding of ideas and ideals as important also to other forms of power and interaction.

While more research is needed, it is suggested that effective ideology (as in the ideological mechanisms theorized by in hydro-hegemonic) should be distinguished from ideology as fundamental to the socio-political dimension of transboundary river basin interaction. That Egyptian ideology may be faltering as an effective source of Egyptian hegemony in the Blue Nile Basin does not, it is argued, mean that more contentious ways of asserting Egyptian power are any less ideological – in the sense that they are based in ideas of what the basin is, and have concrete goals pertaining to what the basin should be.

In an extreme example from the above discussion, when participants of the televised Egyptian meeting for the discussion of GERD suggested military action towards Ethiopia\textsuperscript{72}, they presumably did so due to specific reasons pertaining to an ideological image of the Nile, and of who should control it.

\textsuperscript{72} See footnote 16, page 36.
Accordingly, this study suggests as a productive avenue for further research the possibility for and utility of a hydro-hegemonic study of ideology based in the theoretical-methodological framework of the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress. In the first instance, it is suggested that such research be oriented towards the theoretical relationship between power-solidarity and coercion-consent, and towards the interaction between ideology and the world outside political discourse.
5 Conclusion

This thesis has shown how ideology in Egyptian media discourse legitimizes Egyptian dominance in the Blue Nile Basin; and how ideology in Sudanese media discourse in a limited way subverts this dominance. Through doing so it has at the same time demonstrated the potential of the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress as a methodological approach to the study of ideology in the Blue Nile basin.

The current chapter will summarize the study’s findings, and attempt to provide some conclusions. We begin with a summary of the findings related to the Egyptian and Sudanese ideologies, followed by a suggestion of the implications of the prescriptive concept of solidarity which appears to remain the governing principle of both Egyptian and Sudanese ideologies in the Blue Nile Basin. Concluding with a reflection on the methodological utility of the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress for the study of ideology in the Blue Nile Basin, and a suggestion of avenues for further theoretical and empirical research.

Egypt – ‘A First Among Equals’

The Ideological Complex

In Egyptian ideology, the Blue Nile Basin is represented as characterized by equality and the rule of law – all states reportedly have equal rights to benefit from the Nile waters and to pursue development, provided they do not harm the development of others. What constitutes ‘harm’, and by extension what constitutes a legitimate pursuit of development is defined by Egypt – the self-proclaimed leader of the basin due to alleged historical and geographical fact. This ideological complex represents Egypt as ‘a first among equals’.

Key to this ideological complex is solidarity: Egyptian discourse goes to great lengths to emphasize the cohesion between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan – geographically, hydrologically, politically and socially – and the main claim used to denounce both Ethiopia and Sudan is that they are not acting in solidarity either with Egypt or with the common good of the basin.
In the Egyptian discourse, Ethiopia is consistently referred to as brother ‘akh’ – brother in the same way one might refer to one’s neighbour as brother – and Sudan is consistently referred to as ‘shaqiq’ – or brother from the same mother and father. This illustrates both the strong principles of solidarity outlined above, and the fact that the relationship between Egypt and Sudan is represented as closer than that of Egypt and Ethiopia.

According to this representation, the basin is by its nature divided into two distinct areas: the humid highlands of the South, and the arid lowlands of the North. In Arabic, these distinct and opposing units are generally referred to respectively as “duwwal al-manba’” and “dawlatain al-masab”. “Manba’” refers to the “spring or origin” of the river, whereas “Masab” refers to the “outlet or drain” of the river. In this context they may be translated as “downstream states” and “upstream states”.

To the downstream states (‘dawlatain al-masab’) belong the brothers (‘ashaqqa’) Egypt and Northern Sudan, largely represented as an integrated unit, shaped by common geography and history. These states are framed as the natural leaders of the basin due to their stable climate, the related potential for agriculture and the long history of their civilizations.

First among them is Egypt, the executor of the natural order in the basin and the defender of equal rights and the pursuit of mutual development through shared interests. Because Egyptian leadership is represented as natural and based in scientific fact, and as guaranteeing equal rights to benefit from the Nile, and the pursuit of mutual development, its legitimacy is unimpeachable. Any contestation of it could only be motivated by politics, in Egyptian ideology represented as opposed to scientific fact

Solidarity is represented as fundamental to Egyptian ideology and as crucial to Egyptian existence. This ideology should be seen as a response to the history and hydrology of the basin. Egypt occupies an extremely vulnerable position in the Nile Basin – relying almost entirely on water originating outside its border. Moreover, the policies of the British colonizers suggest upstream Nile control as a means of control over Egypt is not an abstract concept, but a recent experience.
The Logonomic System

Implicit in this ideological complex are two contradictions: firstly, Egyptian dominance in a basin ostensibly characterized by equality; and secondly Egypt’s vehement opposition to unilateral action on the Nile, despite the foundation of the Egyptian Nile order in unilateral action – namely the Nile Water Agreements.

The Nile Water Agreements are represented as expressions of self-evident rules founded on self-evident facts. These rules form the basis of logonomic system of Egyptian ideology, which allows it to function despite its inherent contradictions. The most fundamental logonomic rules which statements regarding legitimate interaction in the Blue Nile Basin must follow have been summarized as the following: 1) the Nile Water Agreements are the basis of basin law; 2) this law guarantees Egypt’s historical right to its share of the Nile waters; 3) it also guarantees the Egyptian right to veto construction on the Nile River in order to protect its water allocation; 4) all other Nile countries have equal rights to benefit from the river provided 1)-3) are not interfered with; and 5) the goal of basin interaction is mutual development through the pursuit of shared interests, understood as the pursuit of the equal rights established in 4).

The fact the Nile Water Agreements are framed as legal documents, it is argued, may obscure the circumstances of their authorship because an important principle of law is that it apply equally to all. Thus, it is suggested that despite having been constructed unilaterally by Egypt, Great Britain and Sudan primarily to serve Egypt, the claimed legal status of Nile Water Agreements is used to represent solidarity through equality.

These are explicitly taught and enforced by a range of institutions tied to knowledge production and the spread of information. Media discourse is in Egypt regulated by the state. It is a common occurrence both for the security forces to confiscate publications, stop printing and arrest journalists; and for the judicial institutions to sanction legal action. There is also a significant degree of self-censorship by journalists and editors.

Finally, the Egyptian ideology’s emphasis on scientific fact means that questions regarding the Blue Nile Basin are framed in terms of right and wrong. Egyptian discourse makes a claim to a superior scientific understanding of the basin – refusing to recognize knowledge authored by Sudan and Ethiopia due to their allegedly inferior
research methods and capabilities. This claim is used to dismiss Ethiopian and Sudanese perspectives as insincere, selfish and political.

**Ethiopian and Sudanese Transgression**

According to Egyptian ideology, Ethiopia’s political aim with the construction of GERD relates to its ambitions for unilateral control over the Nile, the destabilization of the basin and the marginalization of Egypt. Part of the representation of Egyptian ideology as based in scientific fact, GERD is asserted as near-universally harmful except to the exploitative aims of Ethiopia. Moreover, it is claimed to be poorly researched, designed and implemented – putting the entire basin at risk in the case of an earthquake or other unforeseen events.

In constructing it, Ethiopia is represented as coercively having overstepped its legitimate rights in the basin. It has allegedly been unmasked a pretender to basin dominance, and its reign would most likely be based on blunt force in order to pressure its policy through. To this end it is reported to be taking advantage of Sudan, interfering in its domestic policy in order to ensure Sudanese support for GERD.

Sudan is on the other hand framed as weak and unstable - a little brother to Egypt. As we already have seen, Sudan and Ethiopia are not represented as equal in Egyptian ideology. The Sudanese support for GERD appears to hit closer to home than the Ethiopian construction of GERD, as Sudan is chastised more strongly than the former for its abandonment or even betrayal of Egypt.

It is claimed that Sudan is racked by poor governance and is being taken advantage of by Ethiopia, either not realizing the damage GERD could cause it and Egypt, or ignoring this for the sake of the ruling elite improving their relations with Ethiopia. At the most extreme, this is used as an argument for Egyptian intervention in Sudan.

The Sudanese motivation for the support of GERD reportedly relates to the unpopularity of the current government, Ethiopian pressure and the instability of the Sudanese state. Issues the Sudanese government allegedly seeks to address through increasing its cooperation with Ethiopia – which reportedly plays a key role in domestic Sudanese politics most importantly through it hosting the negotiations between Sudan
and the Sudanese opposition, and between Sudan and South Sudan. The Sudanese leadership, represented by President Bashir, is chastised for working towards their own political gain – ignoring both scientific fact, and the larger strategic issues related to the ongoing shift of power in the basin.

As a consequence, the representation of Sudan in the Egyptian discourse leaves it in a position where it cannot have agency. Citing its weakness, and the incompetence and political problems of its government (i.e. Bashir), Sudan can apparently only hold one of two positions: either it must be with Ethiopia, in which case it is acting against its own interests and therefore must be incompetently governed, exploited and/or misunderstanding the situation; or it is with Egypt. There is no room for a middle position, which is what Sudanese spokespeople in the Egyptian media argue for. In short, there does not in the current Egyptian ideology in the Blue Nile Basin appear to be room for a Sudan which contests the Egyptian perspective.

**Sudan – ‘A Middle Party’**

**A Limited Subversion of the Ideology of Egyptian Dominance**

Sudanese ideology paints a different but related picture. In the context of a basin allegedly characterized by Egyptian dominance and exploitation, the argument is made that the upstream countries (including Sudan) should have greater rights – notably the right to construct infrastructure and more freely utilize the Nile waters.

At the same time, great care is taken to assert continued solidarity with Egypt. Throughout the Sudanese discourse, there are repeated claims that Sudan will not agree to anything that harms Egypt, and that its support for the construction of GERD is contingent on the dam not posing a danger to Egypt or Egyptian water allocations. Accordingly, the Sudanese *ideological complex* is summarized as ‘a middle stance’.

With this caveat, Sudanese ideology subverts Egyptian dominance by seeking to expose Egyptian actions in the basin as hypocritical and based in self-interest, in clear contravention of the solidarity used to legitimize dominance in the Egyptian discourse. Here, in other words, Egypt is the one cast as exploitative and selfish, and its language
of solidarity and familial bonds is sought unmasked as a relatively empty tactic of dominance.

A crucial part of this subversion, the modern history of the Blue Nile Basin is represented as the history of Egyptian dominance and exploitation of the upstream countries. Egypt’s modern Sudan policy is criticized for lacking any degree of solidarity or focus on common interest, betraying a purely strategic approach where Sudan is simply a means to the end of continued Egyptian dominance in the basin.

This limited subversion of Egyptian dominance entails a limited subversion of the logonomic system supporting this. In Sudanese ideology, the most fundamental logonomic rules which statements regarding legitimate interaction in the Blue Nile Basin must follow are: 1) the Nile Water Agreements are not a valid basis for basin law due to their colonial origins and over-privileging of Egypt; 2) all Nile countries have equal rights to benefit from the river provided no harm is caused to any other Nile country; and 3) the goal of basin interaction is mutual development through the pursuit of shared interests, understood as the pursuit of the equal rights established in 2).

Implicit in this, the Sudanese logonomic system is based in a post-colonial reading of basin regulation, whereby it is asserted that such regulation should be jointly authored by all basin countries, and guarantee all equal rights to benefit from the river. At the same time, the limitations to this subversion are clear, as the last two rules are shared with the Egyptian logonomic system. Furthermore, aside from rights to construction of infrastructure, it is not sufficiently specified how ‘equal rights’ in Sudanese ideology differs from ‘equal rights’ in Egyptian ideology. These limitations are further discussed below.

**GERD as Legitimate Sudanese Interest**

GERD is in Sudanese ideology represented as a concrete expression of what this new idea of equal rights in the basin would entail: namely a contestation of the Egyptian veto on construction in the basin, and a reassessment of the Nile Water Agreements as the source of basin-regulation. In other words, the Sudanese support for GERD is framed as a subversion of the institutions at the heart of Egyptian dominance; as well as a statement of Sudanese pragmatism, agency and new-found position as a middle party –
supporting the rights of the upstream countries to construct on and benefit from the Nile, while seeking to avoid harm to Egypt.

While Sudanese support for GERD is seen by Egypt as political posturing for the benefit of Ethiopia-Sudanese relations, the ideological claim in Sudanese discourse is that given the geographic location of Sudan and the hydrology of the Blue Nile, it simply makes no sense for Sudan not to support GERD due to its considerable benefits for the country. The most important benefits are that the dam will protect Sudanese dams from silt; it will protect Sudan from floods; and it will provide Sudan with much needed electricity.

In a clear subversion of Egyptian ideology, these benefits are largely treated as an established fact in Sudanese discourse, while any risks involved in the dam’s construction are played down. In an expression of the prominent role of solidarity also in Sudanese ideology, GERD is represented as a catalyst for change and increased cooperation in the entire basin. Part of this, it is represented as beneficial also to Egypt – a manifestation of shared interests for all basin countries.

Like the threats to Egypt from upstream water control, the benefits that may be reaped from GERD are not abstract concepts. Likewise, it is widely considered that the Nile Water Agreements are biased towards Egypt. Accordingly, the Sudanese ideology should be seen as a response to the history and hydrology of the Blue Nile Basin.

The Contradiction of a Sudanese Middle Position and the Failure to Acknowledge Conflicting Interests

The main argument made in Sudanese discourse is for a change in Sudanese regional policy, that it must become more pragmatic in its interactions with other Nile countries and work for its own interests, rather than supporting Egypt by default. In short, it must move from being Egypt’s little brother to becoming an agent in its own right.

At the same time, in a somewhat paradoxical turn of events, this new Sudanese position is expressed through a discourse which casts Sudan as ‘a middle party’ or even as neutral. Sudan, it is argued, is geographically situated between Egypt and Ethiopia, and so its regional policy should acknowledge this and work for a closer relationship with
Ethiopia, while maintaining solidarity both with Egypt and as the governing principle of the basin. This study argues that there is a clear contradiction between the stated goal of increased Sudanese pragmatism and the adoption of a so-called ‘middle position’.

Relatedly, the Sudanese subversion of Egyptian dominance is limited in that it primarily targets the alleged hypocrisy of Egyptian solidarity and the institutions of Egyptian dominance – most notably the Nile Water Agreements and the Egyptian construction and regulation of knowledge. The prescriptive idea of solidarity as a normative way of identifying patterns of cooperation which as a rule benefit all and harm no one is left more or less intact, merely with the addition of post-colonial principles as a means of contesting the Egyptian definition of what constitutes ‘harm’, ‘equal rights’ and accordingly ‘legitimate development’.

It seems that while the apparent goal of the Sudanese ideology is the subversion of Egyptian dominance, the Sudanese discourse does not go far enough in its subversion of the Egyptian logonomic system. While it contests the institutions through which this functions, it fails to address the idea of solidarity and common interests underlying the logonomic system – and by extension the idea that there is no inherent conflict of interests in the Blue Nile basin. The result appears to be a situation where both parties simply claim that their interests are legitimate shared interests, and their opponents’ are motivated by selfishness, power hunger and/or a misunderstanding of the situation.

In this context, the current logonomic system serves the interests of Egypt, which as the long-time hegemon of the basin has been able to label its own interests as shared interests. If prescriptive solidarity remains at the heart of ideology in the basin, the question is whether Sudan has the resources and support to gain regional and international acceptance for its own definition of ‘mutual interests’ and ‘equal rights’.

‘Shared Interests’ as an Impediment to Effective Interaction in the Blue Nile Basin

Both Egyptian and Sudanese ideologies hinge on a prescriptive conception of solidarity as the governing principle of basin-interaction. Both are founded in the assumption that there exists an ideal solution to conflict in the basin – in this case the conflict
surrounding the construction of GERD – which benefits all basin countries and harms no one.

Among countries as geographically and hydrologically diverse as the Blue Nile Basin countries, such an ideal solution appears utopic. In the case of GERD it certainly seems that Sudan and Ethiopia stand to benefit more than Egypt. Whatever the case may be, it is a fact that Egypt is rather reluctant to accept the dam’s construction, and that there are clear benefits to be reaped for Sudan.

On the basis of its findings, this study proposes that the idea of ‘shared interests’ is an impediment to effective and sustainable basin interaction. Effective dialogue between the countries of the Blue Nile seems unlikely if there is little or no acknowledgment of conflicting interests as a natural consequence of the different hydrological, geographical, political and social characteristics of the different states.

The burning question is whether there are more useful ways of dealing with disagreement than glossing over it by referring to different ideas of purported ‘shared interests’.

**Reflections on the Social Semiotics of Hodge & Kress as a Methodological Approach to Ideology in the Blue Nile Basin**

It has been asserted above that this thesis demonstrates the utility of the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress for the study of ideology in the Blue Nile Basin. This section expands on that assertion, reflecting on the strengths and potential weaknesses of this theoretical-methodological approach.

In applying the analytical framework of the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress to the study of ideology in the Blue Nile Basin, there are arguably two main and related theoretical-methodological dangers: confirmation bias, and the strong leaning of social semiotics towards a constructivist and language-centric understanding of the world.

Beginning with confirmation bias, a risk with the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress, as with any method, is that what is observed is as much a product of the theoretical-
methodological approach used as it is empirically founded. In other words, the analytical framework applied to the empirical data may condition what is observed, and how this is interpreted. In the context of this study, the clearest danger is that the application of the current analytical framework may over-privilege the role of ideology in basin dominance; as well as the role of solidarity as a determinant of such dominance.

As discussed in chapter one, the significance of ideology to basin dominance is based on the assumption that socio-political interaction in the Blue Nile Basin is governed not only by scientific fact, but also by ideas representing the world in specific ways; and by ideals specifying goals for such interaction. This perspective is corroborated both by Zeitoun et.al (2014), and by Tvedt – who in his books “The River Nile in the Age of the British” (2006) and “The Nile: The River of History” (2012) emphasizes the role of ideas and political theory to how a river is conceptualized and interacted with.

Furthermore, it is argued that the foundation of ideology in the Blue Nile Basin in both power and solidarity is empirically supported. The significance of solidarity is indicated by the explicit discourse of shared interests, and of geographical, social and political cohesion – and even integration – in both Egyptian and Sudanese newspapers. Power and solidarity as twin determinants of dominance or hegemony is also supported by Zeitoun et.al., who as we have seen indicate hegemony in the basin is reliant on both coercion and consent.

As for the understanding of ideology as expressed through an ideological complex, it is similarly argued that this closely corresponds with empirical findings. While the theoretical-methodological framework of Hodge & Kress greatly facilitates the observation and interpretation of these, it is argued that the contradictions implicit in the bonds of power and solidarity projected by Egyptian and Sudanese ideologies would be clear also in lieu of this methodological approach.

The constraints on the messages that can be produced and received referred to as the logonomic system also fits well in the Egyptian and Sudanese discourses. Both Sudanese and the Egyptian media are regulated by the respective governments – and as we have seen the respective discourses clearly criticize messages that do not follow concrete ideological rules.
Given the strong bias of social semiotics towards a highly constructivist interpretation of reality and orientation to language above all else as the determinant of this reality, the second main danger from the use of the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress is, so to speak, taking the linguistic turn too far. In other words, overemphasizing language as a determinant of reality.

This also compounds the risk of confirmation bias to the extent that researcher, instead of applying the theoretical-methodological framework to the empirical data in order to explain this data, applies the empirical data to the theoretical-methodological approach – in doing so more or less constructing a reality of his own devising.

Due to the constructivist bias of social semiotics, it is of crucial importance that ideology be understood as directly related to the physical world, and as conditioned by this world in concrete ways. A risk in using social semiotics is that this connection is obscured or neglected, and that the study of ideology in international river basins is reduced to the study of language – effectively rendering such a study irrelevant.

It is partly for this reason it has been suggested that the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress as an approach to the study of ideology in international river basins be tied to hydro-hegemony, which, despite its flaws, is valuable in its orientation towards an interdisciplinary study of interaction in international river basins – conditioned by discourse and ideology, but not a product of these.

The strength of the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress lies in successfully combining these empirical insights into a functional and coherent model of ideology in the Blue Nile Basin. With the risks in mind, it is argued that social semiotics provides a useful theoretical framework for the prudent researcher to make sense of the social or ideological dimension of the Blue Nile Basin, understood as an extension of the physical or hydrological dimension, both regarded from a diachronic perspective.

More specifically, this strength lies in the framework’s potential to capture ideology in the Blue Nile Basin as a functional socio-political construct with explicit links both to history, and to the physical world. Through the understanding of messages as linking both signifiers and signifieds; and producers and recipients, social semiotics allows for an understanding of ideology as a concrete image of the world, conditioned by socio-
political interaction between agents with asymmetric resources, and concrete points of view and goals.

**Ideology and Hydro-Hegemony**

While hydro-hegemony theorizes the ways in which ideology and discourse relate to larger power structures in transboundary river basins, it does not feature a theoretical-methodological framework for the study of these concepts in their own right. A symptom of this shortcoming, it is argued, is an overly compartmentalized understanding of the role and nature of ideology, whereby their impact is considered to be limited to more or less effective so-called subtle mechanisms.

Based on its findings, this study proposes the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress as a potentially promising theoretical-methodological foundation for deepening and broadening the hydro-hegemonic understanding of ideology. Conceptualizing it as fundamental to socio-political interaction in transboundary river basins, pertaining also to non-subtle mechanisms.

A combination of the two would likely be aided by the fact that they are conceptually related – both focusing on power asymmetry and the duality of power-solidarity and coercion-consent. Finally, such a combination would be potentially beneficial also with the aim of addressing the limitations of the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress, discussed in the previous section.

**Suggested Avenues for Further Research**

This study indicates several avenues for further research related to ideology and its role in international river basin interaction. To build on the findings of this thesis and at the same time address its limitations, more research should be carried out into the Ethiopian ideology in the Blue Nile basin, as well as into non-state ideologies within the different Blue Nile countries. This research could probably be expanded to include also the other tributaries of the Nile river.

More comprehensive insight is needed into the nature and role of ideology in Nile basin interaction – especially into how ideology relates to the world outside discourse. For
this reason, it is proposed that the social semiotics of Hodge & Kress be married to hydro-hegemony. Should it prove possible to combine these frameworks in a fruitful way, more research would be called for into the nature and role of ideology also in other river basins.

Finally, additional historical research is called for. The work of Tvedt provides a useful starting point since it reconstructs British colonial water projects, water plans and hydro strategies in great detail, however it could be expanded upon to write a comparative intellectual history of the Nile focusing more systematically on the various perspectives of the states and peoples in the basin. A considerable task, to be sure, but an important one with the goal of illuminating the river from different angles.
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