
**የዓባይ ውኃ ጉዳይ- በተፈሪ ሙኩንን፡ እታፍዘር አታሚዎች፤2012
ዓ.ም፤ የ7ፀ ብዛት 360 :: Abay (Nile) Waters Issue by Teferi
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The author is a historian and has written a PhD dissertation on the political history of the eastern Nile River. He also has a couple of publications on the politics and history of the Nile waters. The current book focuses on the political history and international relations among the three countries, namely Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan on the Nile waters. It is a fairly well-written and informative piece in the Amharic language covering nearly five decades between the early 1950s and 2002. The author provides a detailed study of how the *Abay* (Nile) water affected the historical and political circumstances of the relationships between the countries of the eastern Nile basin in the 19th century. The book has five chapters, each based on a chronological order, historical events, and themes, arranged into details of topics and sub-topics.

The first chapter deals with the geological and hydrological characteristics of the Nile watershed areas and the evolving environmental conditions, population density, and economic activities of the people of the region over the past few decades, before the 1950s. In the chapter, it is argued that these variables pushed the government of Ethiopia towards the utilization of the Nile water. Ethiopia's Nile water development initiative has caused regular confrontations, mistrust, and tension among the above-mentioned countries. The chapter is also concerned with how such relationships shaped the historical reality of the countries and eventually about the advent of the colonial powers in the region, particularly the British colonial power. The coming of colonial powers, according to the author, destabilized the established historical relations between the countries of the watershed regions of the Nile. The author argues that

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the countries of the Nile waters used an integrative approach to the river until the early 1950s, in which all countries had the opportunity to benefit from the waters, which later shifted to the unilateral decisions and actions of countries particularly Egypt and The Sudan.

The second chapter of the book deals with the manners in which the countries of the Nile waters area came out from the integrative approach of using the Nile waters and took an independent decision about how to make use of the river, leading the countries to mistrust, accuse, and oppose each other whenever there is a Nile River problem posed by one of the countries, especially Ethiopia. The author explains that the 1959 agreement signed between Egypt and Sudan on the share of the Nile water is among the unilateral acts which demonstrate how the two countries behaved independently on the use of the Nile River, especially by ignoring the potential opportunity they could have to cooperate on the Nile waters. This was because, in the 1960s, Egypt built the High Aswan Dam. The chapter also examines how the three nations entered the post-World War II cold war era and discover their ways of using the Nile against each other.

The author deals with Ethiopia's initiatives to implement projects on the Nile River in the third chapter, and the implications that follow, especially from the 1950s to 1974. The author clarified that there were many studies carried out in the early 1950s on how to make use of the Ethiopian side of the Nile waters. This was accompanied by the preparation of projects planned to use the water. After the construction of the Aswan Dam, the situation was particularly tense between the nations. Studies and design of the projects were carried out by the US government and its engineering firms, as the author pointed out. The author also describes in this chapter how Egypt has always been working to destabilize Ethiopia by providing tasks to the Ethiopian government, primarily to distract the Ethiopian government's attention from planning development-related issues on the Nile waters. As its key strategy, when the Ethiopian government tried to think of operating on the Nile, Egypt sought to establish religious and ethnic tensions among the Ethiopians. Eventually, for the advancement of the country, the Ethiopian imperial government was unable to build any dam, or attempt to divert the Nile River.

The fourth chapter deals with the situations of the waters of the Nile between 1974 and 1991, and their connections with civil wars, drought, and the ideological change of Ethiopia in the cold war era. Ethiopia became a socialist country during this time, which brought Russia to the Ethiopian side, while Sudan and Egypt supported capitalists such as the United States. The approach of using the waters of the Nile from the Ethiopian side has changed this condition. Sudan had begun to assist and arm the Ethiopian rebel group, the *Tigrayan* People's Liberation Front (TPLF), according to the author, and used to create instability to weaken the government of Ethiopia. Likewise, Egypt formally armed the Eritrean rebel group (although initiated in the 1950s and 1960s and became powerful, in the 1970s), and Somalia (in 1977) to wage war against Ethiopia. As the author states, it was just a proxy war between Egypt and Ethiopia aimed at destabilizing Ethiopia to prevent the utilization of the Nile River. This was followed by the great Ethiopian famine of 1984-85, which forced the Ethiopian government, rather than the Nile waters, to turn its face to solving this problem. The *Dergue* regime (1974-1991) did not, however, try much to operate on the Nile River; rather the period ended with the war against the rebels, and subsequently with famine and internal political problems.

The situation of the Nile waters between 1991 and 2002 was presented in the fifth chapter. As the author argued, there were irregularities in dealing with the Nile water issues in these years. Following government change in Ethiopia, the time was filled with both peace and conflict, and there were attempts at cooperation between the Nile waters region countries. Unlike in the past, there have been attempts at peaceful discussions among the three nations, although there have also been tensions between Ethiopia, on the one hand, and Egypt and Sudan, on the other.

In terms of data, the author used a variety of sources to collect firsthand information, such as archival materials, published and unpublished documents, and interviews with informants. The book typically stressed the politics of the history of the Nile waters, meaning that the author focuses on the politicization of the historical

relations, primarily of the three countries that use the Nile waters (Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan). The author thus used a narrative descriptive style to write the book in which he presented the facts and events that have occurred in the past five decades in detail.

The book told us of the political history of the use of the Nile waters, primarily by the three major actors: Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan. On one side, Ethiopia, and on the other side, Egypt and Sudan have been in dispute and rivalry over the use of Nile waters. The colonial powers (mainly Britain and Italy) then, finally, exacerbated the problem. By excluding Ethiopia, various protocols and agreements on how to share and use the Nile waters have been signed by colonial powers, not for the benefit of the indigenous population, but to their people in Europe. The well-known ones are the 1891 Protocol signed by Great Britain and Italy to demarcate their respective spheres of control in East Africa, especially from *Ras Kasar* to the Blue Nile; the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1929, which was a bilateral agreement between Egypt and Britain. The agreement recognized so-called Egypt's "historical and natural rights" and gave veto power to Britain over any project on the Nile waters. The 1959 treaty allocated Egypt the bulk of the Nile waters, 55.5 billion cubic meters (66 percent) of the rivers, while Sudan allocated 18.5 billion cubic meters (22 percent), and the remaining 10 billion cubic meters (12 percent) of the waters was left for evaporation. The treaty did not acknowledge upstream countries' interests, including Ethiopia, whose territory accounts for 85% of the Nile River (Hailu 2001). Currently based on the protocols and agreements concluded between the colonial powers, Egypt and Sudan have always claimed to use the waters of the Nile.

The only treaty involving Ethiopia was the Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1902, an arrangement between Ethiopia and Great Britain on behalf of Sudan (under British rule). We also learn from the book (pp.43-44) that the agreement of 1902 had nothing to do with Egypt, but rather with Ethiopia and the colonial government of Britain. It ended when the British government left Egypt in 1956. The disputes over the Nile waters included more players and countries after 1945 when the world entered the cold war between the communist and capitalist nations, which destabilized not only the three countries but also the Horn and Northeastern African region. Throughout history, when

Ethiopian governments seek to start or enforce some Nile-related initiatives, Egyptian governments have often been intervened in Ethiopian matters to destabilize the government to distract the Ethiopian government's attention from Nile water development issues. Besides, Egypt established the Arab League, of which Sudan and Somalia were members, specifically to intimidate and disrupt Ethiopia. Ethiopia, however, did not act on this as much as Egypt did to get diplomatic support from many countries. One can understand that the Arab League is Egypt's brainchild and has always declared its concern about the share of Nile waters whenever Ethiopia raises any concern about development on the Nile.

One can also understand from the book that Sudan has always been on the side of Egypt and often playing between Ethiopia and Egypt in that Sudan always maintains abstention whenever there is a political dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia because Sudan has always benefited from what the Nile waters has earned from Egypt. The 1959 Sudan-Egypt Nile Waters Sharing Agreement, which excluded Ethiopia, is an example of a unilateral decision in which Sudan shared 18.5 billion cubic meters of water and Egypt shared 55.5 billion cubic meters of water, while Ethiopia had none.

Another most important point explained in the book (p. 319) is, “የዓለይ ጉዳይ ከአስራ ዘመናት ሙቶ ክፍለ ዘመን ጀምሮ ዘመናዊ የኢትዮጵያን ታሪክ በመቅረጽ ረገድ ጉልህ ሚና ተጫውቷል”.

That is to say, the Nile water had a major role in shaping the modern history of Ethiopia in the 19th century. It can be argued that it re-shaped not only the past of Ethiopia but also diplomatic ties and external relations. It also plays a significant role in situations of internal political matters. It is a big instrument for either stabilizing internal political affairs or destabilizing them. It also acted as a tool and instrument for ending the authority of the governments of both the regimes of Emperor Hailsellasié I and the *Dergue*. The water of the Nile is also a way of assessing the depth of the country's diplomatic relations. The diplomatic relationship between Ethiopia and the Arab world, Ethiopia and Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan, Ethiopia and Europe, Ethiopia and the United States, and Ethiopia and Russia have all

considered the Nile problem as their main agenda. Therefore, as the author claimed, the Nile River problem in general profoundly affected the political development of Ethiopia in the 19th century (p. 319).

Despite its strengths, there are points in the book that are less persuasive and might be reconsidered by the author. On p. 33 he suggested that “ዛሬ ላይ ሁነን ስናየው በዚያን ዘመን [14ኛው-18ኛው ክፍለ ዘመን] ኢትዮጵያ ይህን መሰል ታላቅ ፕሮጀክት [ማለትም አባይን የመገደብ] ለመፈጸም የሚያስችል አቅም ነበራት ብሎ ማለት ከእውነት የራቀ ይሆናል”:: (literally translated as *it is difficult and far from real that Ethiopia at that time (14th-18th centuries) would have the capacity to develop such a large project (i.e. constructing a dam on the Nile River)*). That is, Ethiopia could not divert the Nile River in any way in the 14th-18th centuries. This claim can be seen as Euro-centric, frequently implying that Africans and other 'under-developed' countries are unable to carry out their growth-related ventures that can illustrate their own cultures or stages of development. However, in ancient and medieval times, there were many ventures in Ethiopia and elsewhere in Africa.

The creation and inventions of the Axumite period, such as the ancient stele and the rock Hewn Churches of Lalibella, can be instances that demonstrate the potential of the people at that time (mental, technical, and psychological). There are explanations why the author mentioned why Ethiopian governments have struggled to use the Nile waters only related to the above point again (p.321). Ethiopia has no financial ability, has very little or no technological expertise, and has no economic interest in building dams on the Nile River, among other things. The reasons might be valid, but the most important explanation may be that, contrary to the above, Ethiopia has poor diplomatic ties concerning the use of the Nile River throughout history.

Here, one may ask the question: Did Egypt built the High Aswan Dam on its own? The response is no. To mobilize financial and technical support from other nations, Egypt used its diplomatic ties with either the USA or Russia at the right time and in the right place. In this regard, to get financial and political support, Ethiopia should have actively pushed to get as many countries as possible.

While Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt are traditionally vying countries, the author stated that he focuses on all the Nile River Basin countries, and the emphasis of the book is mainly on the three countries as the key actors on the Nile waters. Besides, many of the sources used represent views and ideas from the Ethiopian side; if the author sought to discuss documents from the Egyptian and Sudanese sides, and their institutions, this document would have been stronger and richer. The author used many of the references in his PhD dissertation that somehow illustrate the convergence of ideas and knowledge parallels between the current book and the dissertation (Teferi 2013).

It can be summarized that the book is generally a well-written text and that Ethiopia and the eastern Nile countries have always been rivaled on the political, geographical, economic, and diplomatic situations and positions related to the Nile waters as far as the water exists, while it can also be a source of peace and cooperation compared to mistrust and conflict.

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