

The Tale of Two Dams:
*Cooperation through Remembering Aswan High Dam and Imagining
Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam*

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Integration and Inclusion: New ideas for collaboration in Nile River Basin management Policies & Practices

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Outline

- Background
- Collective memory
- Dam as a site of memory
- Remembering AHD
- Imagining GERD
- NBD role?



Berlin Wall (1961-89)

**What do we remember about the Past?
Why ? Why not?**

West vs East
Romanticism vs Pain
Mere Wall vs Blockade
Developed vs less greener



What would a West and East Berliner remember?

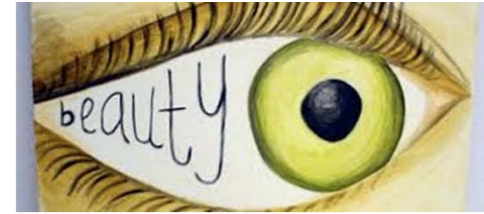
What kind of **graffiti** they wrote?

What was the Berlin Wall for the East Berliners? West Berliners?'

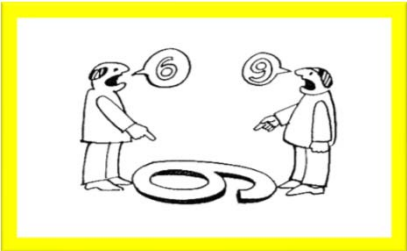
If the same people, in the same city, with different ideology had different interpretations, what would Ethiopia and Egypt have on their respective dams ?

“what is not remembered is as important as what is remembered.” Jeffery Olick

dam collects not only Nile waters, but also collective memories.



Dam in the Eyes of the Beholder



What's in a Dam/Name?

Grand Renaissance Dam (Ethiopia) and Aswan High Dam (Egypt)



Glorified Vs Tainted

Valorized as a new Pyramid Vs Renaissance of Axumit civilization

What is a 'sign of alienation' for Ethiopia, is a 'cornerstone for Egypt's Nile veto power'

Collective Memory Theory

- **Emile Durkheim** [1915] 1961), who wrote extensively in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* about commemorative rituals, and
- **Maurice Halbwachs**, student of Durkheim, was the one who coined the term **collective memory** in his *magnum opus* *The Social Frameworks of Memory*, 1925.
 - memory is a matter of **how minds work together in society**...It is in **society that people normally acquire their memories**. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories” (Halbwachs [1925] 1992:38).
- Collective Memory Studies is relatively **a new disciplines**.
 - It was mainly related with **Holocaust and focus on trauma** in the past;
 - **But nowadays** collective memories is encompassing a **diverse field of studies such as history, sociology, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, political science,...**
- Other Scholars :
 - Pierre Nora (1989) *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de memoire (Sites of Memory)*
 - Ivan Vladislavić, (1996) *Propaganda by Monuments*,
 - Benedict Anderson (1991) *Imagined Communities*; ,
 - Edward Said *Orinentalism*
 - Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*

Collective memory

- collective memory is formed and reformed **in the present for present purposes.**
- **Memory is not about the past; it is more of the present and the future.**
- memory is a matter of **how minds work together** in society. It is in the society that people normally acquire their collective memories.
- Memory is **produced through structures, actions, places, rituals.**
- We **remember & forget strategically**
- Types of memories: **Official, collective, individual**, etc..
- “behind every version of the past there must be a set of interest in the present.”
- “**appeals to the past** are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present”

Slide 6

WS [2]1 Wondwosen Seide, 11/26/2017

The Memory Studies Reader

even if if they were writing in other contexts

- **Theories of Memory: A Reader by Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead (2007),**
 - This reader is "a comprehensive survey of theories of memory from the classical period to the present day" [Plato](#), [Aristotle](#), Cicero, Mary J. Carruthers, [John Locke](#), David [Hume](#), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, [Karl Marx](#), Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, [Sigmund Freud](#), Walter Benjamin , Frances A. Yates: from The Art of Memory, Enlightenment and Romantic Memory, ed. by Michael Rossington
- **The Collective Memory Reader (2011) edited by Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy**
 - In the 'Precursors and Classics' section, where they used Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, Friedrich [Nietzsche](#), Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Walter Benjamin, Theodor [Adorno](#) and Claude [Lévi-Strauss](#) were discussed as precursors to collective memory studies,

Foucault-*Memory and power*

- Memory, just like power, is **contestable**.
- ‘memory is actually a very important factor in **struggle**, if one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamism.”
- Memory has **a serviceable role for power**.
- Memory employs ‘**politics of exclusion**’ to serve its purpose. It belittles one, while it glorifies others.
- Memory plays a hegemonic position by (re) constructing a compelling **meta-narrative and an Ex Cathedra discourse**.

The Politics of Memory: Remembering and Forgetting

Nile Memory : Up and Down stream memory?



Who was absent and present in the previous and ongoing Nile Cooperations Attempts?

what is not represented is as important as what is represented (Sue, 2010: 574)

The Politics of Memory: Past as a Present

Direction?



“what the past has been, and how the present should acknowledge it; **who should be remembered and who should be forgotten**; which acts or events are foundational, which marginal; what gets respected, what neglected” (Rigney , 2008)

•We-they Perspective

Usable Past (Olick, 2010) a retrospective reconstruction to serve the needs of the present.

Hydro-Memory in the Nile

- Dam collects both water and memory.
 - Dams, like monuments, 'can give material form to authorized versions of the past',
 - **National identity** can be constructed around a dam.
- Dams are the '*lieux de memoire*' (**s ites of Memory**), by adopting Nora (1989).
- Dam animates the **waterscape into national space**.
- **The struggle over the Nile is, therefore, a struggle over hydro- memory over the Nile:**
 - Between constructed past (AHD) vs imagined future (GERD).**
- *Egypt romanticizes* the past and aspires to *sustain the status-qou*, while *Ethiopia regrets the past* and *imagines a glorified future* in a Nilescape.
- A purposeful *mutual-destructive selective memory* and *tainted imagination* will make matters worse in the Nile basin.

History repeats itself!

In the Nile River Basin, Dam also repeats itself



(AHD & GERD) 'Revolutions' within the Revolutions !?

- The **Egyptian Revolutions** had preceded the construction of the two dams.
 - four months after the July **1952 Egyptian Revolution**, that the then Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser initiated the AHD project in October 1952.
 - four months after the January **2011 Egyptian Revolution**, GERD was launched by the then Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in April 2011.
- the two Dams are the result of revolutions- they are '**revolutions' within the revolutions.**

Dam Construction is like a War

- The construction of the dam both in Egypt and Ethiopia has been sanctioned as a '**war**' against against '**nature**' and '**poverty**,'
- A War that led to the **Suez Canal Crisis** in 1956
- A **Nile Cold War**
 - US studied dam sites in Ethiopia while the then USSR building Aswan in 1960s
- A **Proxy** war
- A **predicted** Nile War

- In Egypt, Alia Mossallam “***We are the ones who made this dam ‘High’!***:
 - The engineers and the workers of the AHD are remembered and glorified as:
 - ***Kalam al-sad*** (soldiers and builders of the nation and the future).
 - ***Gash al-ta mir*** (the construction army and the army of President Nasser)
- In Ethiopia
 - **Developmental Hero**
 - ***Abayen yea defer Jegena*** (defender of the Nile-PM Melse)

Death on the Dam

- Dam as a war has very loaded meanings.
- Those who lost their life by accidents during the construction of the AHD is remembered, justified and sanctified as:
 - An inevitable tradeoff
 - Martyrs or victims of the war
 - Was and is still not even reported
- The most infamous saying in the memories of those who died during construction the Dam is –*Al-marhum kan ghaltan (the deceased was at fault)*.
 - *“The phrase implied that the death was the mistake of the deceased himself, as if the High Dam authority were reliving itself of any responsibility.”*
- **Similarly, accidents and deaths are not reported in GERD**

It is interesting to note that how the projection of the Dam as a war transcends beyond life and death. The GERD and AHD are larger than life and death

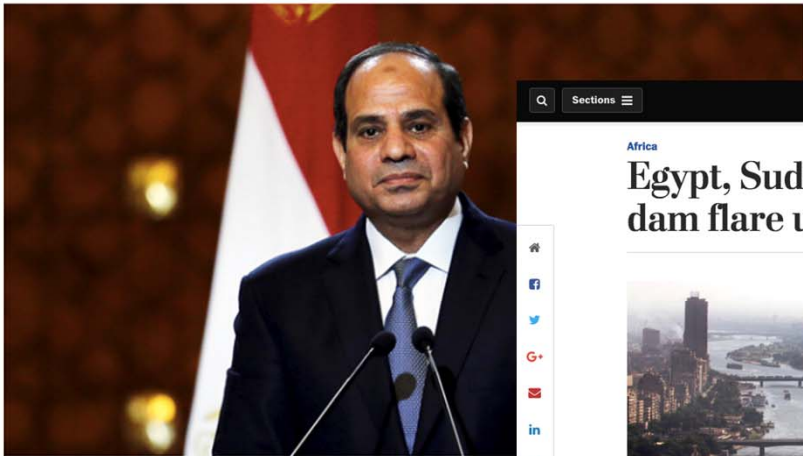
And Just Last Week **“The Life and Death”** rhetoric surfaced again!

EGYPTIAN STREETS POLITICS AND SOCIETY ▾ OPINION ARTS & CULTURE TECHNOLOGY TRAVEL

NEWS

Egypt's Water Share of the River Nile Is a "Matter of Life or Death": Al-Sisi on Ethiopian Dam

EGYPTIAN STREETS NOVEMBER 19, 2017

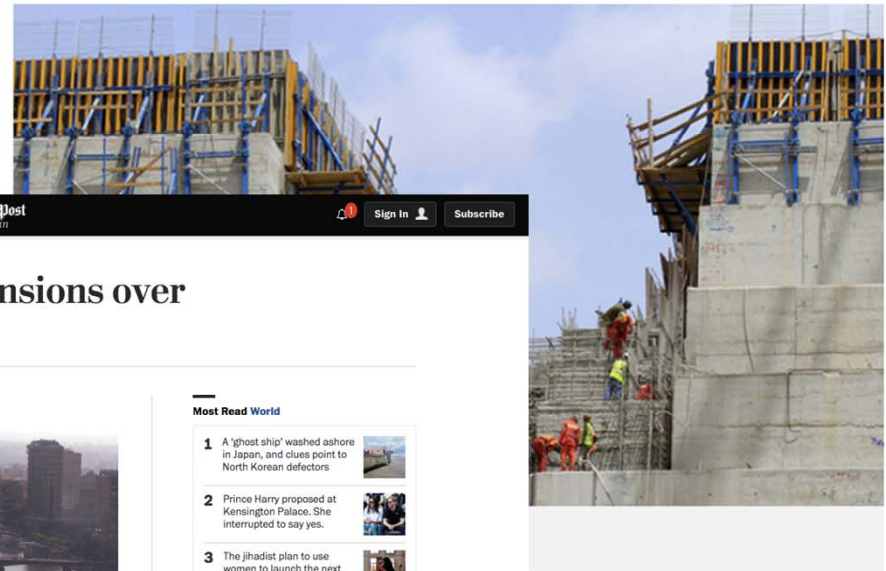


Egypt's president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi stressed in a speech that no one can touch Egypt's water share of the River Nile.

Government responds to Egypt "Dam is a matter of life or death"



Renaissance Dam is a "matter of life or death" for Ethiopia too, government



The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness Sign In Subscribe

Africa

Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia tensions over dam flare up again

Most Read World

- 1 A 'ghost ship' washed ashore in Japan, and clues point to North Korean defectors
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- 3 The jihadist plan to use women to launch the next incarnation of ISIS
- 4 Argentina: Water got in sub's snorkel, caused short circuit
- 5 **Analysis** Russia is encouraged by a...

How do you Imagine Yourself and Others?

“my mother gave birth to twins: myself and fear.”- Thomas Hobbes



Mirror Enemy Image



*It is hard for an ardent patriot to realize that **his country is a mental**, rather than a physical, phenomenon !” (Boulding 1959:130)*

Egypt's imagination of Ethiopia

Egypt views Ethiopia as **'a natural reservoir'** of the Nile waters, **not 'a user'**.



For Egypt a GERD is



Mahmoud Abu-Zeid former Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation of Egypt (from 1997-2009) said that **“you could look this dam as a tap Ethiopians can open and close at its whim. This gives them a very dangerous power. This will impact on Egypt’s water security.”**

in his interview for FRANCE 24 English

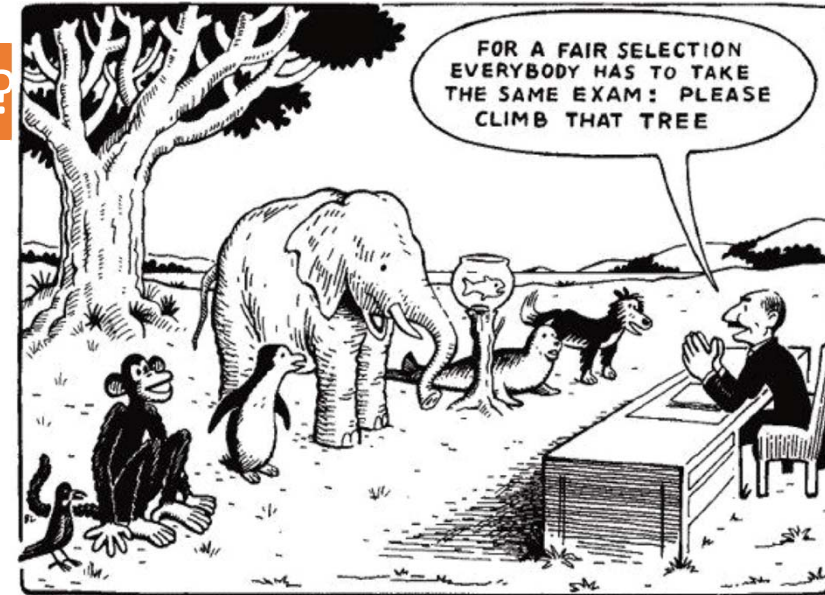
For Ethiopia a GERD is



One Nile-One Famil, may need One Collective Memory!?

NBD can look for the **SYNTHESIS** of the wo dams

- **Not a Duty to Cooperate** , but a **Duty to Dam!**
 - **Thesis (AHD)** vs **Anti-Thesis (GERD)**
 - NBD can help in finding the **Synthesis!?**
- Extricating the **Nile Question** from the iron grip of **National Security** and **Life and Death** framing/narrative
- **Questioning ‘The Nile Question’?**
 - There is no right answer to the wrong question
 - What are the **Basin’s People The Nile Questions?**
- Maximizing the **“policy makers toolkits”** (WDR, 2015)
- Trying to create **a center of convergence** of memory-Avoiding Amnesia!
 - **Moving from The Riparian/The Nile History of the Nile to The People Memory /History of the Nile!-----Humanizing the Nile**



Sometimes the thing that is holding you back...

*It is not the presence of the dams,
but the absence of collective
memories that are affecting us...*



...is all in your head.

ANTHEM LIGHTS