

# THE RIVER THE DAM

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The river is of course Abay (Blue Nile) and the dam is Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The target, mainly in relation to GERD, of this article is the Ethiopian Diaspora residing in all of the Continents. Let me define the Diaspora structurally from the outset. It is composed of: a) the progressive and democratic individuals, (the elites), b) the established civic organizations, such as the “Ethiopian People’s Congress for United Struggle (Shengo), c) the opposition political parties, d) the social media, and e) the general population residing in the Continents. It is a formidable force. I have been observing specifically the community I am part of moving with deliberation, step by step, feeling and reflecting, along side, almost parallel, with the Ethiopian society inside Ethiopia. I was part of it too. There were many factors that contributed to this type of organized activities. I can safely generalize this progressive community involvement to all the Ethiopian communities residing in different parts of the world outside of Ethiopia. There is nothing that the Diaspora is lacking. It is a complete and an all round body with diverse building factors for social and economic development inside Ethiopia, of course when and if done with fitting and timely strategy. So, the potential is there. Intact. It is time to unleash this potential for an all out positive and measurable impact through material and diplomatic participation mainly in support of the actively working opposition political organizations inside Ethiopia. With the absence of Meles Zenawi there is, right now, the opportunity to give it a try. So, let us not miss this opportunity.

The opposition forces inside Ethiopia are there. Physically and emotionally, talking and walking among the Ethiopian society. They are there inside Ethiopia, leaving and breathing, the ups and the downs, the economic and the social miseries of the society. The opposition forces are there to feel and touch the width and the depth of the poverty the society is buried under. Let us not be fooled by what is going on in Addis Ababa. The poverty in Ethiopia literally can be felt and touched. It is here the input of the Diaspora is urgently needed to join hands with the opposition political parties inside Ethiopia. It is here the unleashing of the potential of the Diaspora is needed urgently. Once one genuinely accepts the need for the timely and cooperative contribution for the economic development hence taking the necessary steps to eradicate

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poverty then one can easily see building GERD to be part of this positive effort. Poverty in Ethiopia is man made. The natural resources, including the rivers, Ethiopia endowed with were not correctly employed due to lack of proper management. Unfortunately, politically organized bodies have contributed to this man made poverty to linger on and take-out old, young and babies forever. This shouldn't happen with the natural resources, with intelligent society, and with the skilled manpower that Ethiopia is endowed with.

Even though, the topic of this article is "The River The Dam," I am linking it to "change of strategy" and "holding political power." I am linking it because, once the opposition political and the organized civic organizations in the Diaspora accepted the immediate implementation of these two interconnected courses of actions then the acceptance of the construction of GERD would logically follow. Because one cannot be for "holding political power" in earnest and at the same time be against the construction of GERD. Because the Dam has become the project of the Ethiopian society. It is politically wrong to go against the interest of the society. Further more, an important point to note is that the effort has made the society in a very subtle manner to think and act in unison. Accurately undiscovered and untapped latent attributes of Ethiopian culture.

## **WHY CHANGE POLITICAL STRATEGY?**

The changing of political strategy is the precursor for holding political power. It is not the precursor for building the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. It is very important to realize that the traditionally applied strategy and methods of political struggle that existed since the Ethiopian revolution are not working. It has become archaic and obsolete. I think we have to accept this fact. As the current regime became smarter and smarter the opposition political parties and the civic organizations including the ones in the Diaspora became monotonous and boring. They remained where they were totally devoid of creativity. Very defensive too. It appears the immediate desire to hold political power and improving the living conditions of the society slowly died. This behavior have manifested itself repeatedly when an action was not followed by another finishing action. A good example is the election of May 15, 2015. In fact, it is doubtful whether the burning desire to hold political power and improve the living conditions of the society ever existed from the very beginning. I challenge any one of the political leaders particularly of the Diaspora if they ever had any sleepless night thinking, now, about how to hold

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political power, yes how to hold political power, and alleviate the economic misery of Ethiopian society. It should not be simply for the sake of holding political power. If so it misses the objective. It is to empower the society. It is to unleash the potential of the society in general and of individuals' creativity and determination in particular. That is why it is needed immediately. To revive this dead and dying, that is, this mystified political power thing, creatively changed strategy with a specific target to hold political power is critically important.

As the current political, social, and economic situations in Ethiopia are requiring creatively changed strategy it also requires the organized political and civic bodies to be a "realist" not an "idealist." Grasping the realities in the field and changing strategy go together. A realist is a practical person one who monitors the realities carefully and decides to tackle them. I argue that the "realities" that are openly hovering over Ethiopia would force one to change ones political strategy because nowadays changing political strategy as situations demand is to be a realist. These realities have existed for a long, long time. They need to be tackled according to the nature of the realities and immediately too. How? By changing political strategy and holding political power. What are the "realities" hovering over Ethiopia? Here are some of the concrete realities on the ground in Ethiopia, not in order of importance:

**Financial institutions favor the regime.**

**Forced random relocations of communities**

**The suffering of political prisoners**

**The cracks within the regime since the death of Meles**

**Shortages of electricity, water and communication structures**

**The inadequacy of health provision**

**The education system is robbing future nation builders**

**Poverty is extensive and unbearable**

**The constitution needs to be reconstructed**

**Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is being built**

These are some of concrete realities. One more time, to be a realist is to critically assess ones political strategies and tactics one has been employing so far, to have an impact on the above realities. If assessed boldly and truthfully one would realize ones deficiencies hence no success have been achieved so far. Nothing. So, what should be done? The blunt and true response to this question is to completely change ones strategy and hold political power. For how long can one shun even talking bout holding political power? Changing political strategy should be inseparably linked to holding political power. They always should go together. I am repeatedly hammering

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these two phrases so bear with me.

Two steps to initiate change of strategy with the objective of holding political power. **The first one is** to stop or minimize dwelling only on the negatives. I argue that it is crippling the political struggle of the Diaspora. Particularly after the political environment, to a certain extent, due to the weakening of the political structure within the regime is changed and changing after the death of Meles Zenawi not to take advantage of this political situation is unforgivable. It is extreme and deadly weakness by itself. One of the routine job of the opposition political parties is to be nosy and look for any crack of any size within the contending party. And then, when found one, search for any possible means to take advantage of the exposed crack. One has to be always on alert mode, on his tiptoe, not sleeping, to take advantage of these kinds of political situations.

So, instead of emphasizing the negatives, be on the side of the peasants and individual entrepreneurs, by pointing out and emphasizing what they are practically doing in the field now. There are segments in the society in the field of agriculture and in the field of privately owned small scale industries slowly, step by step, but surely participating in these segments of activities. They should be recognized and commended for what they are trying. Accepting these facts do not hinder one from harshly criticizing the regime. The criticisms, preferably constructive ones, directed toward the activities of the peasants and entrepreneurs, such as what the activities are lacking and what should be done to improve them, or simply correcting the wrongs, should be in target with these positive social activities on the ground. So, stop nitpicking. Be a realist.

**The second one is** negotiation and compromise. By the way I have discussed this issue a number of times in my previous articles. In fact, I have suggested in one of my articles to use International organizations, both governmental and non-governmental to initiate this process. When? Now! At least try it. Given the existing contradictions between the regime on one hand and the opposition political parties and civic organizations on the other, to change strategy and then hold the political power, negotiation and compromise is a must. For, for one to hold political power one has to be inside Ethiopia, inside the society. This is a must too. Therefore, one has to be prepared to deal with this hard to swallow phenomenon, that is, "negotiation and compromise," if one had the burning desire to hold political power at any cost which, unfortunately, is lacking in the Diaspora opposition forces. The

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end justifies the means. Specially when used for a good cause it would be non-regrettable.

## **HOLDING POLITICAL POWER**

Holding political power is the key to tackle the above itemized “realities” on the ground. The slogan “holding political power,” must replace often spitted out slogan, “changing the democratic system.” A very boring slogan. If one has the burning desire to hold political power and turn around the lives of the society for the better, changing the democratic system is an automatically follow up action. It is a given. It should not be raised as a primary slogan. In fact, in my opinion it has become a cover up for ones deadly weaknesses. Do you know what follows next? “To change the system we have to be united.” There you have it! It is a regressive process. It is stepping away from the main slogan. Unity should not be an ultimate end step or process. It should be used sporadically for specific, timely, objective such as demonstrations, or public meetings, and, above all for elections. Kinijit was a coalition, a unity, formed to beat Meles Zenawi in the election of particularly of May 15, 2015. He was knocked down because of the coalition, but unfortunately there was no follow up action to keep him there on the floor permanently. The coalition formed by four political parties that was called Kinijit could be a blue print that can be replicated to successfully win this coming national election. If the opposition political organizations were told they have lost when they know they have won then it is their responsibility to show their gut by vehemently challenging the regime by any means necessary. One can say with full confidence the society will be behind them.

Therefore, instead, right now, why not focus **first on:** holding political power and then release the political prisoners; holding political power and then reconstruct the constitution; holding political power and stop the random relocation of communities, such as what is being done on Kemant; holding political power and eradicate poverty. What about holding political power and fully control the Dam which is being built, and also to fully utilize the rivers of Ethiopia for irrigation? Why not think, decide, and take these gutsy moves, that is, first to hold political power and tackle the issues itemized above. I hope you have followed the logic of my argument. So, stop whining and walk the talking. There is too much talk going around. In my opinion, the correct interpretation of walking the talk should be holding political power. If not exit the field of the political struggle. Because, in the first place you are crowding the space. Secondly, you are becoming stumbling block. Churning out press releases, hipping up negatives upon negatives, demonstrations after

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demonstrations and public meetings after public meetings, in trying to tackle the above itemized realities did not work and it will not work. We have been doing all these things for the last 23 years. The individual who was controlling the political, the social and the economic system of the country, on the top of that the one who was fully controlling and running the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary branches of the country is no more here. So, why not take advantage of the existing weak political structure that exists within the regime? If one does not wish to enter Ethiopia and be counted by being part of the needed political struggle then let Ethiopia, the opposition political parties, the EPRDF, the social media, and above all the society at large interact, ferment, fight it out, and take its own natural course. I will say it again, if the civic and the political organizations are not willing to get involved physically and mentally by somehow entering Ethiopia then leave Ethiopia alone. There has to be some how a cut off time to say enough is enough.

I argue that holding political power must be the heart of the current political struggle. The press releases, the demonstrations, the public meetings should be to educate the society by emphasizing the importance and the immediate need to hold political power. At this time, emphasizing on these activities is part of changing strategy. Without the burning desire in ones gut to hold political power and tackle the real situations that exist in Ethiopia simply talking about them is wasting time. Or, it is simply trying to perpetuate ones political life here among the Diaspora. I am quite sure these political and civic organizations will talk about the same issues for the coming fifteen to twenty years, or even more. It seemed they are molded and built for it. It appears, through time they have become addicted to it. A culture that is affecting the Ethiopian communities all over the Continents, that is, the Diaspora. So, it is time to completely eradicate this culture.

## **THE RIVER THE DAM**

Here I am going to focus mainly on those who are challenging the construction of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. It is extremely wise for those who are challenging Ethiopia's right to harness its natural resources, specifically Abay river(Blue Nile), in whatever way deemed applicable for its economic development, to reflect upon the history of Ethiopia. Ethiopia never hesitated to protect and defend its right and interests from external aggressors. For example, for the current presidential candidate of Egypt and his likes, to threaten Ethiopia with war demanding to suspend building the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, or else, should be reminded of the battles

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of 1875 and 1876 between Egypt and Ethiopia. The army of Khadiv Ismael was annihilated by Ethiopians at the battle of Gundat and Gura under the leadership of King Yohannes IV.

The political leaders of Egypt should be fully aware of the fact that the fighting spirit, the determination, and the aggressiveness of the Ethiopian people are still alive, stronger, and better. This fighting spirit is a generational phenomenon. When and if campaigned and told to come in defense of Ethiopia's interest the Ethiopian society will come forward in full force to be sacrificed. It is in its blood. Therefore, the external powers should be aware of this instilled behavior of Ethiopian people. It is amazing. What makes the Egyptian leaders to think that the Ethiopian people will fold their hands and seat idle, instead of vehemently challenging, while the Egyptian leaders threaten to go to war to protect the interests of Egyptian people?

Commonsense. It is the immense responsibility of the regime to pay attention and to take seriously to whatever type of propaganda and threat being spread by the regime of Egypt. It must be prepared to challenge any possible incident in relation to the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

This is 21<sup>st</sup> century. The era where self-determination of States, members of the United Nations Organizations at that, is sacred. Ethiopia, one of the founding members of this UNO was being sabotaged, a very sophisticated sabotage at that, by a branch within the UNO regarding the Abay (Blue Nile) river. She was told to get permission from Egypt and Sudan to use its river. Ethiopia, a sovereign Nation, no more can be ignored and no more to be considered a small, black (the color that Ethiopia is proud of), and a dispensable Nation as it was done in 1929 and 1959 when the so called Blue Nile agreement was signed. The so called Blue Nile agreement of 1929 and 1959 was deliberately done in line with just characterized behavior. Ethiopia was completely ignored. As if it did not exist. Didn't the members of the UN know about it? Yes they do. It smells fishy. Racism could be one of the factors here. Shouldn't Ethiopia has the right to renegotiate now the agreement signed in her absence, where Ethiopia was the only source of the element to be discussed and signed then?

So, it is a fact that Ethiopia did not participate and signed the 1929 and 1959 so called Blue Nile agreement. She was ignored and uninvited. Taking 1959 as an example, since 1959, in the last 55 years, things have changed diametrically. For the Egyptian government whose mode of thinking and rationalization amazingly did not change a bit since 1959, it is better for it, the

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Egyptian government that is, to suck it up, come to its senses and deal with the issue with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century mode of thinking and rationalization. The 1929, amazingly even the 1959, stone age type mentality have long gone.

The people of Ethiopia have changed in many important factors since 1959. Its political outlook and its political consciousness have transformed extensively. The repeated, full and enthusiastic participation in consecutively held elections is a testament to the level of its political consciousness. Even though it did not benefit from the elections. Ultimately, the Ethiopian society have reached a level to see what is hurting it and what is benefiting it. It cannot be fooled anymore. Consider the building of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in line with this critical observance of the Ethiopian society. The Ethiopian society is lining up to build it and see its fruit as soon as possible. Contrary to the negative opinion of some of the Ethiopian Diaspora intellectuals and the opposition forces. Contrary to the international organizations who sided with Egypt. The Western governments including the government of the United States of America must stop siding

with the Egyptian political leaders. In fact it is better for the United States of America to side with Ethiopia.

Regarding some of the Ethiopian intellectuals in the Diaspora who came out openly against the construction of the Dam, should have thought twice before taking such treasonous positions. They have taken a very regrettable position. Here is why it is treasonous. There is a confrontation between Ethiopia and Egypt. Between two Nations. The International organizations, both governmental and non-governmental know about it. How would an Ethiopian, the immediate witness at that, validate his/her position with the full knowledge of cause and the nature of the confrontation? The confrontation could lead to war. Are these treasonous individuals going to raise their guns against Ethiopia in collaboration with the Egyptian government? The logical implication is as clear as that. It is very baffling. Further more, with the full knowledge of what Egypt is doing its level best to destabilize Ethiopia using religion, for example, to come up with any negative criticism against the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) is to conspire with Egyptian political leaders. Hence it is a full fledge treason against the interests and aspirations of Ethiopian people. Which ever way one sliced it this is what it is. Treason against a State is a crime punishable by law. The contradictions between them and the regime shouldn't have come between them and the construction of GERD. It shouldn't have come between them

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and the interests of Ethiopian people. Common sense. The political leaders of Egypt never wished for the economic development of Ethiopia. Never. Don't forget what Boutros Boutros Ghali did. Further more, one should know that it is a question of self-determination of a sovereign country; it is a question of national security; it is a question of the interests and aspirations of Ethiopian society. For Ethiopians nothing in the world should trump up these important issues. Nothing should come between Ethiopians and this God given ownership and neutralize his/her rationalization. Not even the EPRDF.

The population increase is another factor to be considered seriously in line with the building of the DAM. The population have increased to over 90 million. In 1959 when the so called Nile agreement was signed the population of Ethiopia was about 20 million. Therefore, obviously, there are a lot of mouths to feed now. Hence the urgent need of economic development. A progressive and at the same time a comprehensive economic development plan and policy are required. The poverty situation is very dire. Unless all economic developing tools available comprehensively unleashed to attack poverty, as the population is increased so does poverty. One of the available tools for alleviating poverty in Ethiopia is the harnessing of Abay (Blue Nile) river. Whether for producing hydroelectric power or for irrigation. I think it is commonsense.

Here is a extremely important point to note. When an Ethiopian speaks of Abay river (Blue Nile) it is the segment of 500 miles length inside Ethiopia with its source Lake Tana, and, with all its tributaries. It has numerous tributaries, about 28 of them. All these, the 500 mile length of Abay, its tributaries, the fauna and the flora within, and surrounding them are the property of Ethiopian people.

No one has the right to any kind of claim on the 500 miles stretch of the river. To arrogantly appear to have a claim of any sort on this particular natural resources of Ethiopia is tantamount to have a claim to its mineral resources inside its territory. In fact it is simply trying to own Ethiopia itself. The basis of International law concerning the Ethiopian rivers aught to be these facts on the ground. If the International law did not apply these facts on the ground, that is, regarding Ethiopia, then even the International law itself aught to be challenged and the matter should be renegotiated, not to be adhered to. Absolutely never give in. Hence, the logical premise for any type of negotiation and compromises, when it comes to the irrational challenge of the Egyptian political leaders, that is, if and when needed regarding directly or

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indirectly sharing Abay river (Blue Nile), must be based on this non contestable God given ownership. That is Abay river(the Blue Nile), particularly the 500 miles with its tributaries. If the International law neglects this inalienable right of Ethiopia to using its river then it has to be taken to the relevant international court. The bottom line of my argument is the international law that dealt with Abay river aught to be renegotiated.

## **FUNDING THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE DAM**

### **1. The International Organizations**

It is critically important for the International Organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, to accept this Nature given ownership right of Ethiopia. The ownership right is non-negotiable. The funding organizations such as International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, including those United Nations linked Economic Development branches should consider this inalienable right to utilized ones own sources for economic development, without looking into the skin of the color and the level of economic development. The very nature of ignoring Ethiopia during the negotiation of 1929 and 1959 was simply racism. Ethiopia was treated unfairly by openly siding with the claim of Egypt on the Abay (Blue Nile) river. Particularly on the Abay river that has to do with the 500 miles segment within Ethiopia. Ethiopia was deliberately denied funding to build the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam particularly by funding International Organizations. They have to reexamine their positions and invest in this historic project.

As summarized by Minja, Seid, and Mammo, (Misplaced Opposition to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam), the International Panel of Experts (IPE) on Ethiopia reported as follows:

**(i) unlike the options of smaller dams which would have included potential irrigation projects, GERD is an energy production project and any fear of large and permanent reduction in the flow of freshwater to downstream countries is unfounded;**

**(ii) the filling up of the dam is planned, to be done in stages by taking into account rainfall patterns and the catchments area;**

**(iii) both the financial and social cost-benefit preliminary analysis of the project on upstream and downstream countries are favorable and the expected damages on downstream countries are not insurmountable;**

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(iv) the preliminary findings about the project's side effects on Egypt is not sufficient and hence there is an information (hydrological) void, and much of the current allegations and threats are based on unfounded Egyptian fears;

(v) work has progressed to the extent that, at the time of writing this article, the project has reached a degree of completion rate of 31% and the water diversion has been successfully carried out;

(vi) the expected loss of water due to evaporation for the new project is not worse than what Egypt is currently losing from its environmentally unfriendly projects and poor water management (A number of analysts have indicated that Egypt has not been an efficient user of the available water. Not only is water not priced properly, but the Egyptian authorities also have allowed the expansion of water devouring crops of rice and sugar cane- against the advice of experts and bilateral donors. The irrational and increasingly thirsty nature of Egyptian use of water has failed to recognize the realities of our time: escalating shortages of water exacerbated by global warming, population pressure and life-style changes.)

(vii) recent [geological and hydrological studies](#) have documented an abundant level of ground water in the Nile basin countries and hence downstream countries will not be thirsty if upstream countries build dams that generate electricity.

It is clear, therefore, that Egypt's no dam policy or stance against large energy producing dams in upstream countries is a misplaced opposition and therefore calls for a new thinking in Cairo.

Given the concrete, fact based, evidence provided by International Panel of Experts (IPE), the International funding organizations, both governmental and nongovernmental have no reason but to fund this life changing Dam being constructed by Ethiopian people.

## **2. The Ethiopian Communities Residing in the Different Continents**

Ethiopia is calling the Diaspora to fully participate in the successful completion of the Dam. She is appealing to everyone, to remove the wall of the contradictions, based on the argument provided above, and, the report of the International Panel of Experts (IPE), that exists between the Diaspora and the regime. The contradiction is obstructing to see who the ultimate beneficiary of the Dam is. It is the people of Ethiopia. Particularly in reference to this Dam, taking positive step regarding GERD implies taking steps to protect and to defend Ethiopia from outside aggressors from any direction. I strongly argue that, this Dam issue is turned into how much the spirit and determination of our for-fathers is reviving in us to stand up against any direct or indirect intrusion in the God given right of Ethiopia and its people. I think it is a measuring yard at this critical time. In addition, the failure of this Dam will not be the failure of only of the regime. It will also be the failure of the Ethiopians

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in Diaspora. The Ethiopian people inside Ethiopia is doing its share. Never think that it does not concern us Diasporans. It concerns us one-hundred-percent.

## **So, What Can the Diaspora Do?**

### **At least three things:**

- 1.** Campaign and lobby to stand against the campaign and the lobby of Egypt. Use the article by Minga, Seid and Mammo: **Misplaced Opposition to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam**. Simply attach a cover letter to this article and mail it to the White House, the Congress, and to all relevant International organizations including IMF and the World Bank.
- 2.** Organize demonstrations and public meetings to educate the Ethiopian society all over the Continents about the crux of the issue regarding the Dam. Use the article mentioned under # 1. In addition invite one or all the three Professors who organized the article to the public meetings by covering their expenses. I don't see why it cannot be done.
- 3.** Make a generous contribution of money.

Ignore the campaign of some of the intellectuals and political organizations, who are conspiring with Egypt against the interests of Ethiopia. Conspiring against the building of the Dam siding with Egyptian political leaders is the mother of all treason. No question about it. One cannot, in good faith, especially the intellectuals, be purely against the construction of the Dam but not against any move made by the Egypt's leadership that stood against the interests of Ethiopia. It is simply shallowness. The best thing for them should have been, for the Conspirators that is, to simply shut up and say nothing. The bones of our for-fathers are rolling inside their graves. They would have not allowed any foreign aggressors to walk all over Ethiopia. It is the question of independence. It is the question of self-determination. It is not simply the construction of the Dam. So, think about it critically and deeply.

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