

“We are dealing here with a hydroelectric dam, we are not building a nuclear plant”

A case study of securitization processes in water cooperation contexts



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Abstract

In 2011, Ethiopia began the construction of the “Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam” (GERD) in the Blue Nile and in 2020 the first filling took place which escalated tensions in the shared waters and provoked concerns from Egypt and Sudan. The aim of the thesis is to broaden the understanding of water sharing issues by conducting a case study of the GERD developments between 2011 and the beginning of 2022 with a focus on securitization processes. Specific focus is on what characterizes securitization processes in water cooperation contexts and what consequences it has for cooperation. To research this, securitization theories as well as concepts of water security, human security and hydro hegemony will be applied. The method used is a content analysis of, primarily, letters addressed to the UN from the three countries. What emerged from the material was a securitization process portraying the dam as an existential threat and detrimental to water security and human security while Ethiopia is denying the idea of the GERD as a threat and portrays it as a necessity for the country’s development and survival. The study also concludes that securitization in many cases obstructs cooperation.

Keywords: Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), Securitization theory, Water security, Human Security, Hydro hegemony, Water cooperation, Blue Nile, Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt.

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1 Introduction

Water is becoming a more acute issue by the day. Due to increasing water demands, water scarcity and overall regional instability, tensions are rising between people sharing the water (Swain 2001: 769-770). Water is a relatively well-studied topic, especially transboundary water management (TWM), the management of water between two or more states (UN Water). Overall, the water topic is gaining more interest due to the emerging global water crisis (Earle et al 2010: 3, 5).

With this thesis, I aim to explore water issues further by conducting a case study of the Nile river and securitization processes in water cooperation contexts. Furthermore, in order to understand the securitization process, concepts like water security, human security and hydro hegemony will be highlighted. The research question used to study water cooperation more in detail is thus:

What characterizes a securitization process in water cooperation contexts and what consequences does this securitization have for cooperation?

In order to explore this, focus will be on the GERD (Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam)-project, a hydroelectric dam, in the Blue Nile as well as on the relationship between the three riparian countries most involved in the conflict over the GERD. Ethiopia, who established the dam, and Egypt and Sudan who are located downstream. The Blue Nile flows from Ethiopia, carries 86% of the Nile's water volume and is a part of what we usually only refer to as the Nile. The GERD being built here has sparked tension and dispute between the three countries (Hussein & Grandi 2017: 801). The hydroelectric dam has been the subject for negotiations since 2011. Although, these negotiation and cooperation processes have repeatedly been unsuccessful (Hailu 2022: 95).

The time period covered is from the start of the dispute, 2011, when the plans of the dam were put forward, until the beginning of 2022. However, the focal point will be on the latest developments. Meaning the first filling of the dam in 2020, the second filling in 2021 and 2022 with Ethiopia starting to generate electricity from it. For Ethiopia, the dam is expected to benefit millions of Ethiopians (Zane 2021, BBC 2022). However, Sudan has noticed dwindled water supply and Egypt has defined the GERD as an existential issue (Zane, 2021). Moreover, Egypt has historically held the role of hydro hegemon in the Nile, however the GERD-project gives Ethiopia a chance of increasing its status and capacity in the river (Yimer 2021: 75-76). Thereby transforming the power structure in the river.

1.1 Purpose of thesis

On the one hand, the thesis will present specific knowledge about the GERD-project and securitization processes as well as cooperation in the Blue Nile, which is a very current topic. The area is also relevant to study due to the Nile being a “hotspot” for potential conflict (SIWI). On the other hand, the findings will say something about water cooperation processes and security issues more broadly. Lastly, the thesis is of relevance because it contributes to expanding the understanding of securitization by connecting it to concepts like hydro-hegemony, water security and human security.

2 Literature review

2.1 Water cooperation or water conflict

Several studies regarding water focuses on the question of water conflict, cooperation and the risk of “water wars”. Shared water resources can cause tensions and conflict (Swain, 2001). For example, the construction of a dam upstreams can cause tension and potentially conflict by altering the water flow. Tensions could also arise due to unequal use of the water as well as issues with the water quality and water availability (Haftendorn 2000: 52-53). However, although tensions might increase, it rarely results in violence (Swain 2001). Also, even if there might be instances of violent conflict caused by water, there is not enough evidence to consider it a systematic issue (Katz, 2011: 17). So, rather than conflict over shared water resources, cooperation is more likely (Wolf 2004). However, in reality cooperation is not always as smooth and “pretty” as often portrayed and conflict and cooperation tend to co-exist (Winslett 2015, 285, Hussein & Grandi 2017: 799).

2.2 Water cooperation and security concerns

Natural resources and other environmental issues have since the 1990s increasingly been incorporated in political agendas, thus the securitization of these issues has become more common (Hussein & Grandi 2017: 797). Securitization being a speech act, meaning that something turns into a security issue when it is referred to as such, consequently extraordinary acts are allowed in order to handle the security threat (Taureck 2006: 54, Buzan et al 1998). Securitization in connection to water stretches from water security and environmental security to human security with an emphasis on individuals well-being (Allouche et al 2011: 153). With narratives, metaphors and framing, a sense of urgency can be induced

which might legitimize acting in certain ways in order to prevent a threat. Thus, by “securitizing” water, policy-makers can bring attention to issues concerning water management (Katz 2011: 21, 24, 26).

Securitization in water cooperation has been highlighted by several researchers. For instance Winslett (2015) and the securitization between Turkey and Syria over the Euphrates river. The shared waters were securitized partly because of Turkey's GAP project (the Southeastern Anatolia Project) which Syria feared would affect agriculture and the water flow in the river (Winslett, 2015: 283, 292, 294). Further studies include Hussein and Grandi's (2017) comparative study of the Blue Nile and the Yarmouk rivers with a focus on power asymmetries and securitization (Hussein & Grandi 2017). Yimer's (2021) study is also important due to its focus on the Blue Nile and the GERD, like this thesis. His study covers how tensions between Egypt and Ethiopia have increased due to diplomatic campaigns in Egypt which depicted the dam as an existential threat (Yimer 2021: 67). However, the main focus of this article is on Trump's securitization speech act of the issue. My thesis goes into more depth on the affected “conflict” parties. Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia. My intention is also on analyzing securitization over time, meaning that I will have a longer time frame than most previous studies. Additionally, I will use other primary materials than previous studies, mainly UN documents, which will allow for a new perspective on the dispute. I also hope to broaden the understanding of securitization in water cooperation by connecting to concepts like hydro hegemony, power asymmetry and water security which has not been done in this case before.

2.3 The Nile

The Nile is often an area of interest when analyzing transboundary water management since conflict over the Nile waters could impact other already ongoing conflicts in the area as well as increase social, economic and political instability in the region (Kameri-Mbote 2007: 3). Previous research has also emphasized that upstream nations' use of the shared water resources, for example through the construction of dams or other large hydrological projects, often

disadvantageously affect downstream nations who feel like their needs are not prioritized (Haftendorn 2000: 56). This ultimately creates a complex relation between the riparians and negatively affects cooperation and negotiation.

The idea is that the thesis will serve as an addition to already existing research by focusing on the relationship between the riparians in the Nile and the GERD situation in the Blue Nile particularly. GERD has been analyzed by, for instance, Abdelhady et al (2015) with an emphasis on nationalism, hydrosolidarity and the problematic of shared waters, pointing out how GERD serves as a symbol for Ethiopian nationalism (Abdelhady et al 2015). However, by using a securitization framework and connecting it to concepts like water security, human security and hydro hegemony, the thesis will increase the understanding of water cooperation in the Nile more broadly.

3 Theory

3.1 Securitization theory

In order to answer the research question the theoretical framework will build upon securitization theory. Using securitization as a point of departure is especially useful when we want to focus on the practices, the power relations and the contexts that facilitate the creation of a threat image (Balzacq, 2011b :1). Approaching security issues from a securitization perspective emerged in 1998 with Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde's book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, in which securitization was depicted as an intense form of politicization (Buzan et al 1998: 23). Securitization, then, can be understood as the practices and diffusion-, reception-, and production processes from which a threat emerges. How these threats are perceived subsequently decides how they are handled (Balzacq, 2011a : xiii).

So, securitization is a form of discursive politics used in order to put something on the political agenda and exercise control. With securitization theory we can look at statements, speeches and other acts in which the words used create a certain reality. It enables us to explore processes through which politicized topics transform into security issues (Rana & Riaz 2022: 2). The main understanding of securitization is that it is a speech act, something turns into a security issue when it is referred to as such, consequently extraordinary acts are allowed in order to handle the security threat (Taureck 2006: 54, Buzan et al 1998). This idea that security issues inherently are designed can be referred to as the Copenhagen school (Balzacq, 2011b : 1). However, solely viewing security and threats from this perspective creates a narrowness in the analysis. Partly because of the exclusive focus on the "moment of intervention" or the act. A broader perspective on securitization is advantageous because it emphasizes how securitization can occur over time through many processes (McDonald, 2008: 563-564, 568-569). Moreover, securitizing practices always happen within certain contexts (Rana & Riaz 2022: 3) and we need to consider what makes securitization possible, like

power relations (Stetter et al 2011: 443). Therefore it is important to acknowledge in what political and social contexts the securitization arises (McDonald, 2008: 571).

There are five major elements to a securitization. A securitizing actor(s). A referent subject, the thing that is seen as a threat. A referent object which is whoever or whatever that is perceived as existentially threatened. A policy or the extraordinary practices that are taken to handle the threat and an audience (Rana & Riaz 2022: 3). The audience needs to have some sort of connection to the issue and they can be enabling and/or empowering, meaning if they approve of the securitization, measures can be taken to handle the threat. Examples of empowering audiences are institutions such as congresses, parliament or the Security Council (Balzacq, 2011b : 8-9). Moreover, a securitization might be considered successful when an existential threat has been identified, if emergency actions have been taken and if relations between the parties have been affected (Taureck 2006: 55). It can also be seen from the perspective that by presenting something as a threat, a securitizing move is made. Securitization, however, occurs only when it is accepted as a threat by the audience (Buzan et al 1998: 25-26).

3.1.1 Securitization and its consequences

Asymmetric power relations, negative background events and other factors triggering securitization creates enmity in the long run, thus hindering cooperation and negotiations (Nathan & Fischhendler 2016: 19, 22). Overall, securitization over water issues tends to impede dialogue and cooperation as well as prevent possible development (Xie & Warner 2021: 2-3). Additionally, the chance of cooperation might be forestalled due to misunderstandings, mistrust and lack of communication between riparians (Petersen-Perlman et al 2017: 106, 112). That being said, narratives, framing and securitization impacts the opportunity for riparians to agree on transboundary water management. Thus, cooperation regarding transboundary waters is more likely to take place when securitization does not occur (Winslett 2015: 285-286, 289).

When observing material from a securitization perspective there are three focuses. Firstly, who securitizes? Secondly, what issues are securitized? Thirdly, what/who is presented as a threat? Moreover, it also focuses on why securitization occurs in specific contexts and under what conditions it emerges (Buzan et al., 1998, 32). Additionally, securitization theory acknowledges potential consequences of securitization, and thus also how this affects cooperation.

3.2 Important concepts

In order to illustrate the different dimensions of a securitization process the theoretical framework of securitization will be combined with concepts that are relevant when we want to illuminate how something is portrayed as a threat and how a sense of urgency is created. These concepts also help us understand why securitization occurs, what contextual factors matter and overall give a more in-depth understanding of securitization processes and water cooperation in general.

3.2.1 Water security & Human security

Water security is a broad concept containing several different aspects. Like protection against hazards caused by water, fair access to water functions, secured water quantity as well as protection from droughts and floods (Cook & Bakker 2012: 96). Water security also covers national security issues wherein water insecurity poses a threat to national interests (Xie & Warner 2021: 3, 6-7). When summarizing the water security concept four major themes emerge. Firstly, water availability and connected concepts like water stress. Secondly, human vulnerability to hazards in which water security means protection from droughts, floods and other similar phenomena. Thirdly, water security concerns itself with human needs. For example health, welfare and safety more broadly but also for instance food security more specifically. Lastly, water security equals sustainability. Sustainability here would refer to the protection of ecosystems, the

sharing of water resources, management of risks etcetera (Cook & Bakker 2012: 96-97).

Regarding human security this term emerged when the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) put forth the Human development report of 1994. Human security is a blurry and broad term (Martin & Owen, 2014: 1) but generally it can be defined as three things. Firstly, freedom from fear, such as absence of indirect and direct violence. Secondly, freedom from want. This includes a focus on the quality of life, general welfare and livelihoods such as food security. Thirdly, freedom from indignity which means that fundamental rights are protected (Tadjbakhsh, 2014: 44). It places the focus on people rather than state- and national security which was previously the prevalent view (Gasper, 2014: 29) Moreover, the United Nations defines human insecurity as “widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people.” (UN General Assembly 2012: 1). This means that there are a broad variety of threats, such as environmental, political, economic and food threats (Owen, 2014: 60).

3.2.2 Hydro hegemony

Power issues are connected to securitization in the sense that securitization not only obstructs cooperation and compromise, it also tends to make hydropolitical relationships more exploitative which fuels power asymmetric conditions (Winslett 2015: 284, 287-288). The concept of hydro hegemony is necessary when trying to understand why securitization occurs in certain contexts and what the consequences for cooperation are.

Hydro hegemony can be defined as hegemony displayed in shared river/water basins. This mainly occurs when the more “powerful” part gains control over shared waters. Hegemony and power over shared water resources are, to a certain degree, influenced by countries’ geopolitical position seeing how upstream countries advantageously can affect water flow and consequently water availability. Yet another expression of hydro hegemony is the ability to challenge

and change resource distribution as well as implementing larger infrastructure projects, like dams, which puts hydropolitical relations at risk (Zeitoun & Warner 2006: 445). However, hydro hegemony does not mean that the “weaker”, or non-hegemonic, parties cannot affect processes in shared water resources and instances of “counter-hegemonic processes” are common in order to affect who controls the shared resources (Cascão & Zeitoun 2010: 28, 31).

4 Research design, method & material

4.1 Research design

This thesis aims to conduct a case study of the Blue Nile and the GERD-project from Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan's perspective. A case study will expand the understanding of this particular case of water cooperation, securitization and shared water resources. Making it internally valid. Moreover, the thesis aspires to add knowledge to a wider academic debate of water cooperation, thus making it externally valid (Heath & Halperin 2020: 234). A case study does have its problems, such as a lack of representativeness and a risk of overgeneralizing results (George & Bennett, 2004: 30, 32). However, there are also many advantages. For instance, a case study provides an in-depth understanding of the selected topic and engages with details extensively. The study will also have a longitudinal character, changes and trends will be explored over time (Heath & Halperin 2020: 165-168, 237-238).

As for the data collection method, a qualitative content analysis will be conducted, whole texts will be studied and focus is on how securitization in these appear. A qualitative content analysis is fitting because it can be utilized to analyze a broad variety of material (Heath & Halperin 2020: 365, 374). Content analysis is also a suitable option when the research question is of exploratory and/or descriptive nature (Drisko & Maschi 2016: 8) such as in this paper. A qualitative content analysis focuses on values, motives and purposes in the material studied. It is also useful when we want to focus on emerging themes as well as the hidden meanings rather than just the manifest content like in quantitative content analysis (Heath & Halperin 2020: 376, 379, 384). A content analysis does however have its limitations. For example, one might argue that the analysis turns into a question of interpretation and makes it subjective (Boréus & Bergström, 2012: 81, 85). However, since I want to highlight key themes in my material, analyze a process and describe the contents of the material, a content analysis is suitable (Drisko & Maschi 2016: 4, 6).

4.2 Case selection

The focus on the Blue Nile and the GERD-project is reasonable for observing shared water resources and the case of water cooperation and securitization. Partly due to how current the issue is in this area and how tensions are steadily increasing. The countries observed are limited to Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan. Ethiopia due to its role as constructor of the dam and Egypt and Sudan due to their position as downstream riparians. Furthermore, several former negotiation processes have been limited to these countries and all the countries have been vocal about the issue in different outlets like the UN, the AU and individual press releases, letters and speeches. This means there exists material to be studied. The case thus serves as a fair test for already existing theory, here securitization theory, and the analysis would therefore be of a theory-confirming character (Heath & Halperin 2020: 236).

4.3 Material and limitations

In order to answer the research question various sources will be used. This way of collecting data is often referred to as triangulation and allows for a multifaceted analysis (Höglund & Öberg, 2011: 7). The recording units used to conduct the qualitative content analysis will be whole texts, whole speeches etcetera. A large part of the analysis will be based on official letters representatives from Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt have addressed to the Secretary-General and Security Council of the United Nations regarding the GERD issue. Criticism towards using official documents like these is that the analysis risks being one-sided and too narrow. Moreover, these sources are biased. However, it is this biased view that gives rise to securitization, thus it does not create a problem. Furthermore, news articles and academic articles will be used as a complement to the primary sources. Partly due to difficulty in finding original sources and language barriers in primary material but also because it offers new perspectives on the conflict. Using news articles as data should be done with certain caution. Foreign news sources risk being distorted since they are too removed from the actual event. Thus, it is more beneficial to utilize international news agencies and national news sources that

provide more in-depth and accurate information. However, when using national news one has to keep the problem of bias in mind (Öberg & Sollenberg, 2011: 49-51). This study will first and foremost turn to specific news sources from Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt respectively as well as international sources.

The time period concerned is between 2011 and the beginning of 2022. However, in order to narrow the material focus will primarily be on data from the most recent years, this is because the material from the early stages of the dispute is quite limited. Moreover, the situation has gained more attention only recently. Although the project has been on the agenda since 2011, tensions have recently escalated. Especially since 2020 when Ethiopia commenced the first filling of the dam. That being said, this thesis will not be able to account for every detail of the situation and some aspects will be highlighted more than others. Furthermore, the material analyzed will only be from “top-down”/elite sources, such as representatives of the country in the UN, politicians, or ministers. Statements from grassroot organizations, NGOs etcetera will thus not be analyzed.

4.4 Operationalization

Operationalization essentially means defining how our concepts and theoretical framework will be visible in the data we analyze (Heath & Halperin, 2020: 149). Here this would mean how the securitization process is visible in the material. An analysis based on securitization theory is typically based on questions concerning who securitizes, what issues are securitized, who/what is presented as a threat and why securitization occurs in specific contexts (Buzan et al., 1998, 32). The material will also allow for an insight into what potential consequences a securitization process has for cooperation. The operationalization will be based on four broader questions asked to the material.

1. Who securitizes?

Which actors express the situation as a threat? Here it is also valuable to notice in what forums the actors express their opinion on the GERD-project.

2. What issues are securitized?

This category will be operationalized by identifying what issues are being addressed as a threat and how these threats are framed. For instance, what is used to imply a threat to water security? Like references to water availability, vulnerability to hazards, human needs or sustainability (Cook & Bakker 2012: 96-97). Or how is human security framed as threatened? For instance, like challenges to the survival and livelihood of people (UN General Assembly 2012: 1). All in all, to see what issues are being securitized, focus is on how the parties more generally describe the GERD-project and what is described as being existentially threatened and therefore the referent object.

3. Who/what is presented as a threat?

In order to operationalize this we have to look for what/who the countries believe constitute a threat. Doing this identifies the referent subject.

4. Why does securitization occur in this context?

To find out why securitization occurs in specific contexts there are a couple of things we want to obtain from the text. For instance, if the regional environment affects securitization (Balzacq, 2011c : 37), if power issues matters and if so what role it plays, if hydro hegemony matters and if so what role it plays. This is an important point of analysis since it broadens the traditional understanding of securitization. As mentioned in the theory section, factors like power relations, political and social contexts matter (Stetter et al., 2011: 443, McDonald, 2008: 571).

The coding will be so-called, “open-coding” which means that themes will emerge from the material as it is being read (Heath & Halperin, 2020: 380).

5 Background

5.1 The Nile and the history between the riparians

The Nile is situated in northeastern Africa and flows northward. There are 11 countries, riparians, sharing the waters and there are three major streams which make up the river, one being the Blue Nile which constitutes the main focus of this thesis (Britannica). In order to properly analyze the GERD project, the historical aspects have to be accounted for. During the time of the British colonization, treaties, agreements, and other official documents tended to include control over the Nile waters as an important focal point. For instance, in 1929 Britain entered into an agreement with Egypt regarding Egypt's and Sudan's absolute right to 100% of the Nile's water (Kameri-Mbote, 2007: 1). Seeing how the rest of the riparians were excluded, the agreement turned out asymmetric (Acquafredda, 2021: 22). Moreover, the bilateral agreement between Egypt and Sudan of 1959 also excluded the remaining riparians (Acquafredda, 2021: 25). Particularly upsetting at the time was how the agreement allowed for the construction of the High Aswan Dam which Ethiopia argued gave Sudan and Egypt unfair control and expansion of water use. Thus, Ethiopia never recognized the 1959 agreement (Moges et al., 2021b : 4).

These colonial time agreements have shaped the situation in the Nile profoundly by inducing a sense of political competition and hegemonic control between the riparians. Moreover, as several riparians declared independence, more and more joined Ethiopia's stance of not recognizing the 1959 agreement, declaring it an unfair action established by colonial settlements. Egypt has long had an upper hand in the management of the Nile waters due to its military and economic strength. The situation in the Nile has therefore been characterized by tensions for a long time (Acquafredda, 2021: 25-28). Despite this, cooperation processes between the riparians have occurred. The most notable form of cooperation is the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) established in 1999. As cooperation increased, more

and more riparians started to question and oppose the validity of earlier agreements and treaties (Kameri-Mbote, 2007: 3).

5.2 The GERD dispute

Plans regarding the construction of the GERD have existed since the 1960s, and thus also conflicts due to water sharing problems. However, it was not until 2011 that the plans officially became reality and the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam commenced (Hailu, 2022: 93). This resulted in worry from downstream countries fearing they would lose control and availability to the Nile waters (Moges et al., 2021a : v). GERD especially resulted in strained relationships between Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia and the negotiation process between these countries was introduced in tandem with Ethiopia beginning the dam construction. Cooperation has, however, been unsuccessful and the time from 2011 till 2022, has been marked with disagreements (Hailu, 2022: 93, 95). In 2012 the three countries gathered an international panel of experts (IPoE) in hopes of taking a first step toward cooperation. However, in 2014 when the Tripartite National Council (TNC) was created in order to carry out the recommendations from the IPoE, problems arose since the countries could not agree on the formation of the council. 2015 Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan signed the declaration of Principles (DoP) which focused on peaceful resolution of the conflict and reasonable utilization of the Nile waters (Hailu, 2022: 96). Despite being considered a big step forward in the negotiation process (Moges et al., 2021a : vi), the DoP was characterized by uncertainty. For example, regarding whether the principles have a binding effect and if it would overrule previous colonial treaties regarding the Nile waters (Tekuya, 2021: 39). In 2019 negotiations between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan commenced with the US as observer but when Ethiopia decided to withdraw the negotiations reached a stalemate (Tekuya, 2021: 36 , Hailu, 2022: 96). Further attempts at cooperation include the issue being brought to the African Union in 2020. However, this negotiation process culminated in a deadlock in 2021 and Ethiopia went ahead with the second filling of the dam. At the same time Egypt took the issue to the United Nations Security Council (Hailu, 2022: 96).

5.3 Early talks and the “start” of securitization

Securitization has occurred and been a part of the conflict since the beginning, especially between Egypt and Ethiopia. This securitization has taken various forms, including geo-economic and geopolitical actions. It has also been possible to discern certain themes in Egypt’s securitization process. For example Egypt’s historical rights to the Nile waters as well as arguments concerning water security. Furthermore, in arguments from both countries the use of loaded words and expressions have been used to make a point and gain the upperhand in negotiation processes (Yimer, 2021: 66, 76-77).

5.3.1 The IPoE report and responses to it

The international panel was formed with the intention of providing a forum for transparent information sharing regarding the GERD and hopefully bringing about trust (IPoE, 2013: 6). Among other things the IPoE report stated that the GERD generally will not result in any negative impacts. Rather, the dam will bring about benefits such as increased regulation capacity as well as improved resilience to droughts and floods. However, despite the advantages of the dam there existed a concern of some topics not having been addressed appropriately. Like the environmental and socio-economic impacts for downstream countries (IPoE, 2013: 28, 36, 42). Egypt’s, Sudan’s and Ethiopia’s different reactions to this report quickly fueled the securitization process. Sudan’s immediate statements all focused on the benefits of the GERD, like how it will help with regulating flows. Egypt, however, was more critical and mainly focused on the negative hydrological impacts while also questioning the technical validity of the IPoE study. By having a more “neutral” role, Sudan emerged as the mediator between Ethiopia and Egypt (Cascão & Nicol, 2016: 564).

5.3.2 Further securitization

Early on during the conflict Egypt made it clear that the GERD constitutes a threat to the country, its water security and water supply. The Egyptian president during that time, Mohammed Morsi (2012-2013) assured the parties that Egypt would not shy back and that “all options are open” when dealing with Ethiopia and the GERD. However, he also stated that this did not equal “calling for war” (BBC, 2013a). Around the time of 2012-2013 President Morsi also made it clear that they did not inherently oppose projects in the Nile as long as they did not affect Egypt’s “legal and historical rights” (BBC, 2013b). Continuing forward Egypt often highlighted the importance of fair and equally advantageous use of the Nile waters (Egypt Independent, 2014). Sudan at this time was still holding on to the role of “mediator”. When the Declaration of Principles (DoP) was agreed upon in 2015, the Sudanese foreign minister, Ali Karti, described the progress as “a new path in the relations of our three countries”. The Ethiopian foreign minister gave a similar statement, describing it as “a new chapter” (Dabanga Sudan, 2015a). From Ethiopia's side they have been careful with highlighting the GERD as something advantageous to everyone. Although the dam often was described as a huge source of development, Egypt continued to express concern (Dabanga Sudan, 2015b). Mainly regarding water security but also how the dam would reduce Egypt's allocated quota of water (Dabanga Sudan, 2015c). Or more specifically, how it would affect Egypt’s historical share of the Nile waters based on the agreement of 1959 (Egypt Independent, 2016).

From the failure of the DoP during 2015 to the first filling of the dam in 2020, tensions were gradually rising. In 2017, Egypt and Sudan accused Ethiopia of a lack of information regarding construction modifications of the dam (Egypt Independent, 2017a). In the middle of rising tensions and disagreements, the Arab League also expressed concern over how the operation of the dam is “ambiguous and concerning” (Egypt Independent, 2017b). In 2020, Ethiopia filled the dam despite a lack of agreement between the three countries while also putting the blame on Egypt for insisting on control over the river flow. Ethiopia’s foreign minister at this time stated that “they [Egypt] are not ready to offer us anything. They want to control everything” (Al Jazeera, 2020a).

To summarize, different arguments from the three countries have marked the securitization process. While Egypt has focused on portraying the GERD as a threat to water security, water availability and as a threat to their historical rights, Sudan has been more toned down in their responses and promoted a negotiation process from the beginning. All while Ethiopia continually emphasized the mutual benefits of the dam. However, the GERD which was once seen as an advantageous project for the region is today rather associated with Ethiopian pride (Acquafredda, 2021: 30).

6 Presentation of findings

In this section the findings and empirical results regarding the securitization process in the Blue Nile from 2020 till the beginning of 2022 will be presented.

6.1 Who securitizes, where and to whom?

This thesis is mainly focusing on how the securitization process unfolds in the UN and an international context. It is in this forum opinions regarding the GERD are expressed and the dam is portrayed as a threat. Thus, the audience for the securitization is the international community and it is from this audience that the parties wish to gain support for their stance. Or more specifically, the Security Council here acts as the empowering audience because they have the ability to allow measures to be taken in order to tackle the supposed threat. Furthermore, concerning who securitizes, the securitizing actor, it would in this case be “high-ranking” public figures. In the forum of the United Nations the letters are always presented by the permanent representative of the country in question. However, these letters might be initially produced by ministers of foreign affairs, ministers of irrigation and water, or similar, in the countries.

6.2 Egypt

6.2.1 Who/what is presented as a threat?

Who and/or what constitutes a threat is also called the referent subject. For Egypt the referent subject would equal Ethiopia’s unilateral actions and the GERD. Not only is Ethiopia the problem due to its lack of political will in solving the dispute (Letter 15 April, Egypt, 2021: 3). Egypt also deems it worrisome that the Ethiopian government is trying to make it appear as if the issue is undermining Ethiopian sovereignty (Al Jazeera, 2022). Instead of prioritizing cooperation,

Egypt is accusing Ethiopia of slowing down the negotiation process, making it ineffective in an exploitative manner (Letter 11 June, Egypt, 2021: 3-4). Moreover, the GERD project is seen as posing a threat to Egypt's hydrological position in the Nile (Letter 1 May, Egypt, 2020: 7). As a consequence of Ethiopia's unilateral actions, Egypt has expressed a willingness to use military means to protect the country's interests (Al Jazeera, 2020b).

6.2.2 What issue(s) are securitized?

Regarding what is securitized and thus what is seen as existentially threatened, or the referent object, Ethiopia's acting in relation to the dam has been described as unilateral and in violation of international norms and laws (Al Jazeera, 2021a). Moreover, several statements regarding the GERD tend to focus on Egypt's need for the Nile in order to meet their water needs and thus survive. The GERD project is therefore often referred to as an existential threat (BBC, 2021) and illustrated as something that puts people's lives at "great risk". For instance due to the fact that the dam will affect irrigation and drinking water conditions (Al Jazeera, 2021b). The dam is also portrayed as negative due to the damages it brings to the social, political and economic fields (Gomaa, 2022).

The securitization and the Egyptian letters to the UN target different events during the different years. In 2020, it concerns the first filling of the GERD, in 2021 it covers the second filling and in 2022 focus is on the commenced operation of the GERD.

The first filling of the GERD in 2020 increased tension in the Blue Nile, thereby resulting in a more apparent securitization from the parties. At this time, Egypt described the GERD-project as "the greatest consequence for Egypt" (Letter 1 May, Egypt, 2020: 2) and a regrettable development (Letter 1 May, Egypt, 2020: 3) in the Blue Nile that is worrisome due to insufficient investigation regarding negative environmental and hydrological impacts (Letter 19 June, Egypt, 2020: 3). The dam is also seen as threatening because it affects food security, water security and ultimately the safety of the Egyptian citizens (Letter 1 May, Egypt,

2020: 2). Common themes in the securitization from 2020 include peace and security as well as water vulnerability.

Firstly, the theme of peace and security is illustrated in how the GERD is portrayed as an “imminent threat” to regional security and peace that is increasingly becoming more urgent to the international community (Letter 1 May, Egypt, 2020: 2 , Letter 19 June, Egypt, 2020: 2). Secondly, water vulnerability is emerging as a theme which can be seen in how Egypt’s reliance on the Nile is emphasized. The dependency ratio on the river is 98% and with Egypt already experiencing acute water scarcity the dam poses an immediate threat (Letter 1 May, Egypt, 2020: 7). The GERD would impact Egypt negatively by causing water shortages which would damage arable land and result in increased food costs (Letter 1 May, Egypt, 2020: 7), thereby affecting the lives of the people in Egypt.

2021 marks a continuation of the securitization process and the second filling is presented as “disastrous” with risk of causing “significant harm” to both Egypt and Sudan (Letter 15 April, Egypt, 2021: 4). Frequent themes emerging in connection to the second filling are infrastructure, vulnerability to hazards and socio-economic consequences.

Framing the securitization by pointing to infrastructure is done by stressing how the GERD will worsen the High Aswan Dam’s resilience (Letter 11 June, Egypt, 2021: 27). Furthermore, Egypt continuously points out how the GERD disastrously decreases the resilience to droughts and other extreme weather conditions (Letter 11 June, Egypt, 2021: 28), thus showing how the GERD creates a vulnerability to hazards. When the filling and operation of the GERD correspond with a period of drought it also put Egypt at risk of water shortage, jeopardizing the survival of all of Egypt’s citizens (Letter 15 April, Egypt, 2021: 4). Lastly, socio-economic conditions being affected by the GERD is often mentioned. These socio-economic consequences are referred to as “impossible to fathom” and “disastrous”. People would be losing their jobs and incomes while large amounts of cultivated land would disappear (Letter 11 June, Egypt, 2021: 32).

In 2022 there has so far only been one letter from Egypt. This letter emphasized how Ethiopia has failed in conducting adequate studies concerning the socioeconomic, environmental and hydrological consequences of the GERD as well as how no consultation with the other riparians has occurred which is worrisome (Letter 21 February, Egypt, 2022: 2).

Overall takeaways from the Egyptian securitization is the utilization of impactful words in order to get their message across. This includes describing the dam as the “greatest consequence”, an “imminent threat”, and a “regrettable development” bringing “significant harm” and “catastrophic consequences” to downstream riparians. The GERD is seen as an existential threat and an unilateral action that poses a threat to water security (Egypt speech, 2021). Additionally, with the securitization Egypt is trying to win the sympathy of the international community by stressing how the GERD is threatening peace and security internationally while also destabilizing East Africa and the Horn of Africa more generally (Letter 15 April, Egypt, 2021: 4). Moreover, with statements such as;

“I am telling our brothers in Ethiopia, let’s not reach the point where you touch a drop of Egypt’s water, because all options are open,” - Abdel Fattah el-Sisi,
President of Egypt (Al Jazeera, 2021c)

It becomes clear that the consequences of the dispute could be far worse than “just” non-cooperation and a lack of agreement between the parties.

6.3 Sudan

6.3.1 Who/what is presented as a threat?

The referent subject presented in Sudan’s securitization process is, like in Egypt’s case, Ethiopia and the GERD. Although Sudan has pointed out various benefits with the GERD, like reduced risk of flooding, they have still voiced their worry (Al Jazeera, 2020d). Sudan has therefore throughout the whole dispute found itself caught between Egyptian and Ethiopian interests (Al Jazeera, 2020e). However, according to Sudan, Ethiopia’s unwillingness to resolve the dispute,

their rhetoric regarding the situation and their intent to continue with the fillings despite a lack of agreement is harmful (Letter 22 June, Sudan, 2021: 10). Additionally, the unilateral fillings create a lack of trust and obstructs cooperation (Letter 22 June, Sudan, 2021: 10).

6.3.2 What issue(s) are securitized?

The GERD is portrayed as a threat due to its impacts on infrastructure and agriculture. Sudan emphasized how the GERD will endanger the dams operating in Sudan (Al Jazeera, 2020:e) as well as how millions of Sudanese people will be affected by failure in the agricultural system caused by the dam. The securitization also focuses on the dangers facing water supply and availability (Al Jazeera, 2020c) and the GERD as the cause of severe water shortages (Al Jazeera, 2022). In fact, Sudan is saying that they are already noticing an apparent decline in water flow due to the GERD (BBC, 2020). Additionally, Sudan has expressed how the GERD project and Ethiopia's actions are considered a threat to national security (Al Jazeera, 2021d).

Just like in Egypt's case. The securitization directed to the UN, has covered different events in the GERD process from year to year. In 2020 it focused on the first filling and in 2021 the second filling. Sudan has not yet presented a letter to the UN in 2022.

In conjunction with the first filling in 2020, three major themes emerged as part of the securitization process. Agriculture and property, Sudanese infrastructure and environmental impacts. First off, Sudan points to how it is almost entirely dependent on the river for agricultural purposes. This means that mismanagement of the GERD will result in damages to both agriculture and property which consequently affect the lives of Sudanese citizens and the Sudanese economy (Letter 2 June, Sudan, 2020: 2, 8). Secondly, the GERD is constituting a danger to Sudan's water infrastructure by putting Sudan's own dams at risk (Letter 24 June, Sudan, 2020: 3). Finally, the environmental aspects of the dam construction and operation are usually highlighted. Or rather, the fact that the environmental consequences have not been studied properly by Ethiopia. However, Sudan has

seen indications that the dam will change the water quality which, for example, might bring about health issues (Letter 2 June, Sudan, 2020: 8).

During 2021, the securitization process once again focuses on the GERD as a threat due to environmental aspects. Additional focuses included water availability and water quality, the risk to the people of Sudan and the issue as an international matter. Regarding the environment Sudan emphasizes how the ecosystem's in the river as well as the aquatic life will be negatively affected by the GERD (Letter 22 June, Sudan, 2021: 11). Moreover, the GERD is not only posing a threat to the environment but it is also disturbing water availability and water quality. Thereby putting Sudan's water security in harm's way (Letter 22 June, Sudan, 2021: 11). More specifically, the second filling is expected to result in a sudden decrease in water levels and thus affect the water supply to millions of people (Letter 12 April, Sudan, 2021: 2). The securitization process further emphasizes the harm befalling upon the Sudanese citizens as a result of the GERD (Letter 22 June, Sudan, 2021: 5-6). The second filling risks bringing "serious implications" to citizens (Letter 7 July, Sudan, 2021: 2). Yet another theme that emerged was how the issue is of an international character. While Ethiopia is blaming Sudan and Egypt for "internationalizing" the dispute and making cooperation harder, Sudan is arguing that since the river is shared and international then so is the dispute (Letter 22 June, Sudan, 2021: 8). If the issue is not dealt with, Ethiopia is responsible for creating an undesirable precedent in Africa (Letter 22 June, Sudan, 2021: 3).

Takeaways from the Sudanese securitization process is a focus on the GERD as a threat due to negative environmental and socioeconomic consequences but also due to how it affects the operation of Sudan's own dams and the safety of Sudanese citizens (Letter 2 June, Sudan, 2020: 3, Letter 22 June, Sudan, 2021: 5-6). In conclusion, Sudan's stance on the GERD is thus that it is threatening the water security as well as causing direct harm to the citizens of Sudan (Sudan speech, 2021).

6.4 Ethiopia

6.4.1 There is no threat

Ethiopia stresses how they do not take actions resulting in significant harm to other riparians (Letter 14 May, Ethiopia, 2020: 3) and how the GERD is not posing a threat to regional or national security (Letter 16 April, Ethiopia, 2021: 9). This is illustrated in a quote from a speech by Ethiopia's Minister of Water, Irrigation, and Energy regarding the GERD after the Security Council conducted the 8816th meeting on Peace and Security in Africa.

“ Let me reiterate that we are dealing here with a hydroelectric dam, we are not building a nuclear plant” (Ethiopia speech, 2021).

However, even if the dam does not pose a threat, there still exist problems according to Ethiopia. Firstly Ethiopia is accusing Egypt of securitizing the issue and using an almost threatening rhetoric which diminishes the trust between the countries (Letter 23 June, Ethiopia, 2021: 3). Ethiopia further underscores how the issue goes as far back as to the treaties signed over the Nile waters during colonial time which gave Egypt control over a majority of the Nile and established an Egyptian thinking of “historic rights” to the river (Letter 14 May, Ethiopia, 2020: 2). Moreover, Ethiopia emphasizes how they have consulted both Egypt and Sudan during the building of the GERD (Letter 14 May, Ethiopia, 2020: 3) unlike Egypt who several times has acted unilaterally. For example during the construction of the High Aswan Dam and the Peace canal which have changed the flow of the Nile waters and consolidated a status quo that is beneficial to Egypt (Letter 23 February, Ethiopia, 2022: 2). So, the problem is not Ethiopia and the GERD but Egypt's monopolistic tendencies as well as hegemony in the river which makes cooperation difficult (Letter 14 May, Ethiopia, 2020: 4 , Letter 22 June, Ethiopia, 2020: 4).

Secondly, how Sudan and Egypt have internationalized the dispute by depicting it as something that threatens peace and security internationally is an issue (Letter 22 June, Ethiopia, 2020: 2). The rhetoric they have used in order to do this

intensified during the second filling and Ethiopia described it like Egypt and Sudan are “beating the war drums” (Letter 16 April, Ethiopia, 2021: 2). By internationalizing the issue and bringing it in front of the Security Council, unnecessary pressure is put on Ethiopia while the trust between the countries is reduced (Letter 22 June, Ethiopia, 2020: 3).

6.4.2 The GERD is beneficial and necessary

As previously mentioned, Ethiopia argues that the GERD is not a threat but a necessary and beneficial project. Ethiopia are dependent on the dam for the country’s development and the GERD will help tackle the deep-rooted energy deficit in Ethiopia (Letter 14 May, Ethiopia, 2020: 2-3). The dam is also necessary for the country’s economic advancement (BBC, 2020). More specifically, Ethiopia often points to how it will contribute to an improved water supply and thus help mitigate droughts as well as reduce food- and water security (Letter 14 May, Ethiopia, 2020: 2, 10). Additionally, the construction and utilization of the dam falls under Ethiopia’s sovereign rights (Letter 22 June, Ethiopia, 2020: 3). Overall, the dam is seen as a project which will bring light to citizens currently living in darkness and something that will benefit both prosperity and well-being of the people but also regional integration (Ethiopia speech, 2021).

To summarize, Ethiopia believes the GERD is not a threat and that there are no international practices or laws that prohibit Ethiopia's actions nor require them to ask the downstream riparians for consent. That being said, the issue has only escalated due to Sudan and Egypt’s colonial history which has created monopolistic and hegemonic thinking regarding the Nile waters (Letter 23 June, Ethiopia, 2021: 3). Moreover, it is interesting to point out how many of the arguments Sudan and Egypt use in order to portray the dam as a threat, Ethiopia uses in order to portray the dam as a beneficial necessity. For instance, references to food and water security and the well-being of the citizens. Besides this, Ethiopia, as well as Egypt, has implied that military action might serve as an option if necessary (Al Jazeera, 2020b).

7 Analysis and discussion

7.1 What characterizes a securitization process in water cooperation contexts?

As previously mentioned, securitization is a speech act used in order to make something appear as a threat. It is a political move utilized when actors want to put something on the agenda and exercise control (Rana & Riaz 2022: 2). Former studies have shown that hydrological changes in shared waters, like dam projects, are almost always met with concern from downstream riparians (Haftendorn 2000: 56), as can be seen in the GERD case. Previous studies have also highlighted how securitization of water usually centers around two concepts, water security and human security (Allouche et al 2011: 153) which the GERD case confirms.

On the one hand, how the GERD causes water insecurity is addressed through arguments pointing to worsened water availability and increased vulnerability to hazards (Cook & Bakker 2012: 96-97). This is illustrated as decreases in water levels (Letter 12 April, Sudan, 2021: 2) and a risk of water shortages which damages arable land and causes increased food costs (Letter 1 May, Egypt, 2020: 7). The GERD as a threat to water security is also visible in statements describing the GERD as responsible for decreasing resilience to extreme weather (Letter 11 June, Egypt, 2021: 28) which would make the GERD a threat to the safety from hazards. The securitization from Egypt and Sudan also addresses how human needs and sustainability, like ecosystems, are threatened which is part of the water security concept (Cook & Bakker 2012: 96-97). This is illustrated in how the GERD is seen as worsening the water quality which puts people's health at risk (Letter 2 June, Sudan, 2020: 8) and how it is causing people to lose their jobs (Letter 11 June, Egypt, 2021: 32). The threat to sustainability is also visible in statements regarding how the GERD negatively will impact ecosystems and aquatic life (Letter 22 June, Sudan, 2021: 11).

Human security, on the other hand, is a broad concept but we can see that the securitization focuses on the well-being of citizens, quality of life, livelihoods, food security etcetera which are all elements of human security (Tadjbakhsh, 2014: 44). In the letters, this is illustrated as damaged arable land and increased food costs due to the GERD (Letter 1 May, Egypt, 2020: 7). The securitization also stresses how people would be losing their jobs and incomes, partly due to how large amounts of cultivated land would disappear (Letter 11 June, Egypt, 2021: 32). This would inevitably affect people's quality of life and livelihood as well as access to food. As Sudan puts it, the GERD will bring "serious implications" to citizens (Letter 7 July, Sudan, 2021: 2). All this coincides with the UN's definition of human insecurity as challenges to people's livelihood and survival (UN General Assembly 2012: 1). Nevertheless, human security and water security often go hand in hand. For instance, water shortages, which is a threat to water security, also puts the survival of people at risk which threatens human security.

Furthermore, it can be distinguished that securitization in water cooperation contexts can develop and change over time (McDonald, 2008: 563-564, 568-569). During the early stages of the securitization process, Sudan's responses were more toned down as they acted as a mediating force between Egypt and Ethiopia. They also emphasized the benefits of the GERD while Egypt was more critical (Cascão & Nicol, 2016: 564). In the more recent developments of the securitization process Sudan is taking a firmer position and stresses how the GERD threatens water security and causes direct harm to the citizens of Sudan (Sudan speech, 2021). They also point to how a lack of cooperation is consolidating the view of the GERD as a threat to national and regional security (Letter 2 June, Sudan, 2020: 10). Egypt, on the other hand, has from the start been more vocal about the GERD as something harmful and they have generally been more critical. However, the recent letters to the UN lack the previous focus on Egypt's historical rights to the Nile waters and rather concentrate on how the GERD negatively affects Egypt's already scarce water supplies (Al Jazeera, 2020c, Al Jazeera, 2020d).

Another aspect regarding the securitization process is how it only recently has taken more international forms by addressing letters to the UN directly. Perhaps as a way of reaching a so-called empowering audience who can have an impact on the issue and allow “extraordinary” actions in order to solve the dispute. Securitization, as previously mentioned, is inherently a way of being able to act in ways otherwise not acceptable (Taureck 2006: 54, Buzan et al 1998). This “internationalization” has been criticized by Ethiopia who advocates “African solutions to African problems” (Letter 22 June, Ethiopia, 2020: 3).

7.2 Why securitization?

Since hydrological projects such as dams have a tendency to create tensions due to problems with water availability and generally just a disadvantageous situation for downstream riparians (Haftendorn 2000: 52-53), securitization emerges as an action actors can take in order to tackle the issue (Buzan et al., 1998, 29). As part of a broader understanding of securitization it has also been established that surrounding contexts influence the securitization (Rana & Riaz 2022: 3, Stetter et al 2011: 443, McDonald, 2008: 571). Securitization is indeed a way of handling a perceived threat and in this case, to achieve human and water security. However, securitization is also a tactical strategy (Zikos et al 2015: 309). That being said, securitization could be a way of influencing the current border disagreements Sudan and Ethiopia are having (Al Jazeera, 2021:d). Moreover, in Egypt's case it was early on speculated that the GERD issue served as a way of removing the spotlight from economic and political problems within Egypt (BBC, 2013a).

Furthermore, the historical context is important. The Nile waters have always been characterized by asymmetry. For instance, the colonial agreement of 1929 gave Egypt and Sudan the absolute right to 100% of the Nile waters (Kameri-Mbote, 2007: 1). The history in the Nile has therefore given rise to competition and hegemonic tendencies. This can be seen in how Egypt has argued for their historical rights to the Nile waters (BBC, 2013b). They have also stated that the GERD affects their hydrological position (Letter 1 May, Egypt, 2020: 7). Based on this, it can be concluded that hydro hegemony influences and

shapes the securitization process in the Nile. Hydro-hegemon, which refers to the most powerful nation controlling the waters, is usually decided by the location in the river (Zeitoun & Warner 2006: 445). However in this case the location has previously not mattered, seeing how Egypt is situated downstream but has generally been more powerful in the river. But, as Ethiopia has grown economically and increased its military power, they have started challenging Egypt (Hussein & Grandi, 2017: 803). Thereby also challenging Egypt's hydro-hegemonic position. Some argue that the securitization from Egypt's part and their focus on water insecurity is in fact connected to a fear of losing power in the region (Yimer, 2021: 66, 76-77). Based on this it could be argued that Egypt securitizes due to a fear of losing the role of hydro-hegemon to Ethiopia.

7.3 What consequences does securitization have for cooperation?

All three countries have made it clear that there is a lack of trust and political will in the negotiation process. Ethiopia mentions that the securitization from the other countries is decreasing the trust between the parties (Letter 23 June, Ethiopia, 2021: 3) while Sudan has argued that Ethiopia's unilateral filling has diminished trust and consequently made cooperation difficult (Letter 22 June, Sudan, 2021: 10). This corresponds with previous studies showing that the chances for cooperation are small when the relationship between the parties is marked by mistrust and inadequate communication (Petersen-Perlman et al 2017: 106, 112). The securitization processes are overall creating a lack of trust and an unfavorable climate for negotiation. Cooperation is therefore much more likely when there is no securitization (Winslett, 2015: 285-286, 288-289). However, it still has to be stressed that cooperation is not always "pretty" and that it usually coexists with conflict (Winslett 2015, 285, Hussein & Grandi 2017: 799).

8 Conclusion

The main aim of the study was to explore water issues and securitization processes in water cooperation contexts through a case study of the GERD project in the Blue Nile. The research question in order to do this was: “What characterizes a securitization process in water cooperation contexts and what consequences does this securitization have for cooperation?”. With this as a basis, the study further intended to contribute to a deeper understanding of securitization processes and water cooperation by connecting it to concepts of water security, human security and hydro hegemony.

By analyzing news articles and official documents stretching from 2011 to the beginning of 2022 certain factors in the securitization emerged. First and foremost, Egypt and Sudan express worry over Ethiopia’s unilateral actions in the river and believe the GERD constitutes an existential threat which is in line with studies showing that water issues are often seen as threatening to a country’s interests and national security (Xie & Warner 2021: 3, 6-7). Moreover, just like previous studies have pointed to how securitization of water usually centers around water security and human security (Allouche et al 2011: 153), so is the securitization regarding the GERD. For instance, Egypt and Sudan are highlighting how the dam causes decreases in water levels, negative environmental impacts and direct harm to the citizens downstream. Ethiopia, however, stresses how they are not taking actions resulting in significant harm to other riparians as well as how the construction of the dam is part of their sovereign rights.

Other features of the securitization process includes an “internationalization” of the issue over time. For Egypt and Sudan this might be a way of reaching an empowering audience, here the Security Council. Although, for Ethiopia this “internationalization” is creating a lack of trust, hindering cooperation and is seen as “beating the war drums” (Letter 16 April, Ethiopia, 2021: 2). Yet another

aspect of the securitization process is how it is connected to questions of power and hegemonic positions with Ethiopia blaming Egypt's hegemonic status for the failure of cooperation. Furthermore, the study concludes that context matters, colonial-based agreements have created competition and a longing for hegemonic control which has influenced the dispute.

The study has also emphasized potential consequences securitization processes have for cooperation. In all securitization contexts, not only regarding the GERD, mistrust and a lack of communication prevails which prevents effective cooperation. In the Blue Nile specifically, negotiation processes have been on the table since the start of the GERD 2011 but have over and over again fallen through. Thus one can argue that cooperation is more likely when there is no securitization. It is however important to keep in mind that securitization processes are far from the only reason for cooperation not succeeding. Either way, if tensions keep increasing it is likely that it will bring instability to the region more broadly and perhaps also escalate other disputes in the area. Both Ethiopia and Egypt have in fact hinted that military action might be an option if necessary.

In conclusion, the case of securitization and water cooperation in the Nile further broadens the understanding of transboundary water management. There is however a lot to further study. For instance, this study has only focused on a quite narrow part of the securitization process with high-ranked officials/elites as securitizing actors. However, this type of securitization tends to diminish the voices of other, more powerless, groups (McDonald, 2008: 573-574). It would therefore be interesting to explore other securitizing actors and water issues on a more grass-root level.

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