A Critical Discourse Analysis of Polarization in Egyptian and Ethiopian News Reporting on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the ways in which polarization is constructed in the news reporting on the issue of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) through a critical discourse analysis of Egyptian and Ethiopian online reports. The study focuses on tracing the lexical choices and the discursive strategies employed in the ideological representations of the events and the social actors related to the issue of the GERD. The data of the study consist of 30 online news articles covering three main events: the diversion of the course of the Blue Nile in 2013, the Declaration of Principles (DOP) signed in 2015, and the first filling of the dam reservoir in 2020. The analysis is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, and more particularly, van Dijk's (1998a) Ideological Square Model. The findings of the study reveal the impact of ideological and political stance on the discourse of news reporting in each of the two conflicting countries. The polarized representation of the issue of the GERD is realized through the positive in-group and negative out-group dichotomy.

Keywords: CDA, news reports, polarization, GERD, Egypt, Ethiopia, The Ideological Square Model

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1. Introduction

When group members explain, motivate or legitimate their group-based actions, they typically do so in terms of ideological discourse (van Dijk, 2006: 121). Media discourse in general, and news in particular, constitutes a significant source of ideological representations of social actions. The present study attempts to examine the ideological discourse of the news coverage of the issue of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) from a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective. It seeks to provide a contrastive analysis of online news reports retrieved from Egyptian and Ethiopian online newspapers.

A strong conflict between Egypt and Ethiopia started in 2011 with the launching of the GERD construction on the Blue Nile. The announcement of this project caused serious alarm in Egypt based on fears of a potential reduction of its historic share of the Nile's water. Due to the significance of this issue, its news media coverage has been massive within the Egyptian and Ethiopian newspapers presenting two different stories that attempt to legitimize each country's position. This news coverage has been loaded with polarized self-positive and other-negative representations.

Newspapers, which claim to be ideology-free, have to choose their discursive representations in line with their institutional values which are ideological themselves. Those values are not neutral but have a history and a politics, and have a role in sustaining a particular ideology in news reporting (Cameron, 1996). According to Fowler (1991: 10), ''anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position: language is not a clear window, but a refracting, structuring medium''. Thus, issues in dispute can be depicted in different news sources from completely diverse perspectives. More specifically, certain representations of issues in dispute with language that carries certain ideologies can exaggerate and increase the dispute.

The significance of the present study is that it compares and contrasts the polarized discourse of news outlets in two conflicting countries covering a sensitive issue. Further, analyzing the discourse on this issue, to our knowledge, has hitherto received little attention. Although a number of previous studies have examined the media coverage of the issue of the GERD in both Egyptian and Ethiopian news reports (e.g., El Tawil, 2018; Gebremichael, 2015; Hailemichael, 2019; Yohannes, 2020), most of these were media-oriented. Eltawil (2018) studied the media framing of the issue of the GERD by analyzing the discourse on this issue within the framework of framing and agenda-setting theories. The purpose of the study was to analyze how different groups define the crisis and the extent of using rumours and stereotypes in the news discourse. The data of the study comprised social media posts and Egyptian online newspapers' publications within the period extending from September 2017 to March 2018. The study's results revealed that the Egyptian media reporting of the issue of the GERD emphasized the conflict with Ethiopia, while the theme of 'denial' emerged in the coverage with reference to the idea that Egypt is a powerful country that has a plan to deal with the crisis.

Yohannes (2020) conducted a critical discourse analysis study of the international media coverage of the US-backed negotiations on the GERD among the three nations Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt. The study adopted Fairclough's (1995) approach to CDA and Halliday's (1994) systemic functional linguistics framework. The study examined the processes of transitivity, overlexicalization, and suppression. The data in the study were drawn from news stories published on two international news websites, namely Aljazeera and BBC News between January and March 2020. The findings of the study revealed that the representation of the GERD was somehow similar in the two sources of data. Aljazeera constructed the GERD as something that Egypt should fear, while the BBC represented the dam as controversial with a potential for conflict and even war.

The present study seeks to fill a gap in the literature since, to the best of our knowledge, no study has used CDA to explore the polarized discourse in the Egyptian and Ethiopian news reporting on the same events under scrutiny in this study and within the same investigated period (2013-2020).

Since the purpose of the current study is to investigate polarization in the media discourse on the major events related to the GERD, which triggered and escalated the dispute between the two conflicting countries, the study has the following objectives: (1) to explore the similarities and differences between Egyptian and Ethiopian newspapers in representing the issue of the GERD and the social actors and events related to it, and (2) to examine the ways in which polarization is constructed across the reports sampled in the study. With these objectives in mind, the present study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the levels of polarization and the discursive strategies underpinning the representation of the in-groups and out-groups in each country's online news reports?
2. What lexical choices and linguistic patterns are used to signal polarization in representing the social actors and events?

2. Theoretical Background

Discourse is the language used in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view (Fairclough, 1995). In other words, discourse "is the relationship of text to the event, the wider physical and social world, and to the persons involved in the event" (Fairclough, 2003: 27). Media discourse in general, and news in particular, play a very important role in drawing specific representations of events and the social actors associated with them. The type of discourse targeted for analysis in this study is news discourse. Van Dijk (1988: 4) describes the notion of news as part of a class of meanings that involve the media and mass communication, that is, a "type of text or discourse as it is expressed, used, or made public in news media or public information carriers such as TV,

radio, and the newspaper". The structure of news articles includes headlines, leads, and main events (van Leeuwen, 2008). The main event is the news itself, and it constitutes the story in which readers are interested. News stories represent the newspapers' versions of what is happening in their world (i.e., the social practices and events).

This study adopts a CDA approach, which can be traced back to the approach of Critical Linguistics that departed from the previous traditions of textual analysis and focused on exposing the ideological implications of lexical and syntactic choices (Fowler et al., 1979; Hodge and Kress, 1979). CDA ''emerged in the 1980s as a programmatic development in European discourse studies spearheaded by Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun van Dijk, and others'' (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000: 447). Since then, it has become one of the most influential branches of discourse analysis.

CDA focuses on "studying language in its relation to power and ideology" (Fairclough, 1995: 1), and more particularly on the discursive practices which represent the relationship between ideology and power. Additionally, CDA studies discourse as a form of social practice, which "implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it" (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258).

CDA provides a detailed theoretical account of ideology in different types of discourse (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998a, 2011). According to van Dijk (2011: 419), ideologies are defined as "general systems of basic ideas shared by the members of a social group, ideas that will influence their interpretation of social events and situations''. Additionally, representing opposing groups in the media, particularly in the discourse on conflict, tends to centre around the classification of in-groups and out-groups. Therefore, a major component of the relationship between ideology and representation in news discourse is the concept of the ideological

polarization of 'us' vs. 'them', in particular, positive in-group and negative out-group representation (van Dijk, 1995). Therefore, the present study will examine how the newspapers in the two countries employ the strategies of polarized representation.

The present study adopts van Dijk's (1998a) Ideological Square Model to account for the polarized representation of in-groups and out-groups. The main assumption of this model is the ideology of groups or other collectivities. According to van Dijk's approach, the process of polarization emerges from the ideology which controls the discourse of the group. That is, any collectivity, such as journalists or politicians, belongs to a certain group that shares certain ideological assumptions, which the group try to impose on others by manipulating media discourse. Van Dijk states that the ideological square is based on four dimensions:

1. Emphasizing the positive representation of us and our allies.
2. Emphasizing the negative representation of others.
3. De-emphasizing our negative properties.
4. De-emphasizing the good properties of the others.

Van Dijk (1998b, 2011) identified a set of discursive strategies that are particularly relevant in expressing ideological perspectives. He states that these strategies are applied in discourse via the ideological square in which the representation must either serve our interests or contribute to the negative presentation of our opponents. The analysis in the present study will check for the application of the following strategies to account for the polarized representations identified. *Ideological Polarization* is considered the primary strategy for polarizing in-groups and out-groups (van Dijk, 1998b). Polarization is realized by establishing the dichotomy of 'us' vs. 'them. by emphasizing 'our' good actions vs. 'their' bad actions in the representation. The *Attribution of Agency* strategy refers to agency or active responsibility for negative actions (van Dijk, 2011). It is realized by blaming the 'other' for negative actions, where the out-groups are "described as responsible agents, who are

consciously, intentionally and cynically aware of what they do and of the consequences of their actions" (van Dijk, 1998b: 58). The *Using History* strategy is presented to account for enhancing the representation of ideological opinions about 'us' vs. 'them'. This is realized by the notion of selectively invoking and concealing history about the event being represented to legitimize the in-group's position. (van Dijk, 1998b: 60).

Other strategies relate to the manner of expressing an opinion. The "expression of opinions may be enhanced in several stylistic and rhetorical ways" (van Dijk, 1998b: 59). This means that certain choices of words and phrases to express opinions, such as using metaphors, may entail particular polarized representation by referring to the in-group's positive actions and the out-group's negative ones. The *Explicitness and Implicitness* strategy refers to the idea that ideological opinions "are not always expressed in a very explicit way. That is, "very often they are implied, presupposed, hidden or taken for granted" (van Dijk, 1998b: 63). Thus, the opinion that is good for 'us' and bad for 'them' is made explicit, and vice versa. Also, propositions may be used that have negative implications about the out-group (van Dijk, 2011). The *Description* strategy refers to the nature of the description of the polarized opinions. According to van Dijk (1998b: 32), "our good actions and their bad ones will in general tend to be described at a lower, more specific level, with many (detailed) propositions". In other words, "the type of description (general, or explicit etc.) must be in Our favour, in Our interest, or in any other way contribute positively and persuasively to Our self-presentation" (van Dijk, 1998b: 44).

3. Methodology

The data sampled in the study comprise 30 online hard news articles written in the English language and published between 2013 and 2020. The articles were collected using the online news database 'Factiva', and they were divided into 15 articles retrieved from each

set of news outlets. The online news articles were selected purposively in terms of their coverage of three major events related to the issue of the GERD. These events are the diversion of the course of the Blue Nile in 2011, the Declaration of Principles (DOP) signed in 2015, and the first filling of the dam reservoir in 2020. Researcher's bias was mitigated by randomly selecting each set of articles from the pool of articles available on the database covering the events.

Three Egyptian newspapers were chosen for collecting the data, namely Ahramonline, Egypt Independent and Daily News Egypt. Four sources of news were chosen for collecting the Ethiopian news articles: The Reporter Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Herald, New Business Ethiopia, and the Ethiopian News Agency. Both Egyptian and Ethiopian newspapers were chosen for three main reasons. First, they provide news reports written in English and cover the issue under investigation. Second, they represent both state-owned and private newspapers. Finally, they are available on the online searchable database Factiva used to retrieve the articles. The following table presents a description of the articles utilized for the analysis.

Table 1 List of Newspapers Used for Data Collection

Egyptian Newspapers	No. of Articles	Ethiopian Newspapers	No. of Articles
Ahramonline	4	The Ethiopian Herald	5
Egypt Independent	7	Ethiopian News Agency	7
Daily News Egypt	4	The Reporter	1
		New Business Ethiopia	2
Total	15	**Total**	15

4. Analysis and Discussion

To answer the study's research questions, a detailed examination of the news reports at hand has been conducted. The examination reveals that the news reporting centres around two levels of polarization that are part of the four dimensions comprising van Dijk's (1998a) 'ideological square': emphasizing the in-group's

positive actions and emphasizing the out-group's negative actions. These levels of ideological polarization are realized via several discursive strategies, lexical choices and linguistic patterns.

4.1 Egyptian News Reports

The polarized discourse on the GERD in the Egyptian newspapers incorporates a positive representation of the intentions and actions of the in-group (i.e., Egypt) and a negative depiction of the attitude and actions of the out-group (i.e., Ethiopia).

4.1.1 Positive Representation of the In-group

The construction of the in-group is realized through three main images depicted in the Egyptian articles: Egypt is a powerful country with good intentions, praising Egypt's diplomatic actions and praising the role of President El-Sisi.

Egypt is a Powerful Country with Good Intentions

The image of Egypt as a strong country able to deal with the GERD crisis and protect its interests is explicitly depicted in the news media since the announcement of the project in 2011. The media also incessantly highlight Egypt's good intentions throughout the course of actions related to the issue of the GERD. The following extracts from the Egyptian news articles reflect the context of this positive representation of Egypt:

1. In a Tuesday statement, Egypt's Ministry of Irrigation said that Egypt would "not accept" any project that has a negative impact on Nile water flow. (Ahramonline, 28th May 2013).

Extract (1) is extracted from an article covering the event of diverting the course of the Blue Nile in 2013, which signalled the beginning of the dispute with Ethiopia. Egypt is activated as a powerful agent associated with the negative verb *not accept*. The use of the indefinite determiner '*any*' to refer to the dam carries an ideological implication by positively depicting Egypt as able to stop anything that might negatively impact the Nile flow. Also, it implicitly reflects Egypt's good intentions as not opposing

Ethiopia's dam project in particular, but the focus is on the idea of protecting Egypt's interests. Additionally, the positive representation of Egypt as a powerful state that does not seek to harm anyone is explicitly presented in the next example:

> 2. Morsi said that, while Egypt had a "keen interest" in maintaining friendly relations with African states – especially Sudan and Ethiopia – it was also keen not to risk losing a "single drop of Nile water." (Ahramonline, 6th June 2013).

In Extract (2), the ideological positive representation of Egypt is realized through the use of the discursive strategy of 'explicitness'. Thus, the lexical choices in this example serve to provide a favourable image of Egypt. The use of the adjective *keen* in the phrase "keen interest in maintaining friendly relations with African states" positively represents Egypt's good intentions in the dispute. Additionally, depicting Egypt's powerful position is reflected in the phrase "not losing a single drop of Nile water".

With the signing of the DOP agreement in 2015, Egyptian media representation of the issue shifted, for a short time though, from a discourse of crisis, threat and dispute to focus on dispute resolution, cooperation and mutual benefits. Therefore, the representation of Egypt as powerful does not occur in the reports covering the event of the DOP. However, not long after, the tension escalated again between the two countries with Egypt blaming Ethiopia for hindering the negotiations and acting unilaterally. Then, with the announcement of the first filling of the dam in 2020, the dispute culminated. There have been many references, thus, in the news reports to Egypt's firm stance on rejecting Ethiopia's unilateral actions concerning the filling of the dam, in particular. This is evident in the following extracts:

> 3. Egypt's position on the issue is not weak and will never be weak (Egypt Independent, 27th July 2020).

4. Egypt retains its historical rights to the waters of the Nile, abides by international resolutions and laws in this regard, rejects any unilateral measures (Egypt Independent, 24th July 2020).

Egypt Independent focuses on representing Egypt's objections to the unilateral filling of the dam. The strategy of 'description' is utilized in Extract (3), where the overall position of Egypt is described as being "not weak" and the description is emphasized by using the adverb of frequency '*never*' in "never be weak" to indicate that Egypt will continue to maintain its powerful position in the future.

Van Dijk's (1998b: 60) ideological strategy of 'using history' is employed in Extract (4), where "ideological opinions selectively invoke and hide history". In this example, the reference to Egypt's historical share of the Nile water is invoked to enhance the positive representation of the legitimate position of Egypt. Also, 'agency' is observed in this example by representing Egypt as an active agent in the clause "Egypt retains its historical right", which again serves to positively show Egypt as strong.

Praising Egypt's Diplomatic Activities

The Egyptian news media depict the in-group as having positive characteristics by associating Egypt with positive actions, particularly diplomatic action. Egypt is ideologically presented as the side that seeks to resolve the issue through dialogue and diplomacy. Also, the media representation differentiates Egypt from Ethiopia, which is recognized as obstructing Egypt's diplomatic activities and unwilling to cooperate. From the beginning of the dispute in 2013 with the diversion of the course of the Blue Nile, the media outlined Egypt's firm standpoint on the GERD and framed its reaction as centring upon finding a peaceful solution. The following extract represents this framing:

5. President Morsi stresses Egypt's insistence on maintaining the traditional share of Nile water while also

stressing the country's interest in maintaining friendly relations with African states (Ahramonline, 6th June 2013).

The lexical choices in Extract (5) reflect the positive image of Egypt by using the words *friendly* and *relations*. The following examples show the discursive strategies employed in the Egyptian reports covering the DOP agreement to achieve positive in-group representation.

6. "Through continuous dialogue, we reached the starting point," Sisi said (Egypt Independent, 23rd March 2015).

In Extract (6), the 'national self-glorification' strategy is employed. Using the modifier *continuous* to refer to the process of diplomatic dialogue emphasizes the positive characteristics of the in-group as it indicates that Egypt has exerted a lot of effort to reach an agreement. Also, the use of the inclusive pronoun 'we' as an active agent ideologically constructs the speaker's identity as part of the in-group. The following extract shows the positive representation of Egypt's position during the tension that escalated after Ethiopia unilaterally started the first phase of filling the dam reservoir in July 2020.

7. Egypt, however, showed flexibility during the negotiations, introducing alternative proposals (Daily News Egypt, 18 July 2020).

The discursive strategy 'level of description' is utilized in Extract (7) by praising Egypt's diplomatic action. The word choices support the positive characteristics of the in-group by using the words *flexibility* and *alternative*.

Praising the Role of President El-Sisi

Self-positive representation is also manifested in the description of the social significance of the actions of the Egyptian President El-Sisi. Several discursive strategies of representation are applied in the news reports to positively activate El-Sisi's role in protecting the interests of the Egyptians in Egypt's diplomatic action. The following examples are indicative of these

representations of El-Sisi in the articles covering the event of signing the DOP agreement.

8. Sisi is firm regarding this issue, as it concerns the Egyptian people and their future (Egypt Independent, 24th March 2015).

In the above extract, El-Sisi's role in resolving the issue is foregrounded by presenting him as an active agent. The lexical choice of using the modifier *firm* represents El-Sisi as being keen on protecting the interests of the Egyptians and renders a picture of him as the guardian of the people. The following extracts show the positive representation of El-Sisi's role during the tension over the filling of the dam in 2020:

9. Al-Sisi ruled out resorting to military action to settle the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) crisis, emphasizing that negotiations are the only way to solve the issue (Egypt Independent, 28th July 2020).

10. "Egyptians are worried, and I say that your concerns are legitimate and that I am with you," Sisi said (Egypt Independent, 28th July 2020).

The diplomatic efforts of President El-Sisi and his positive attitude towards the other side in the conflict are emphasized in Extract (9) by pointing out his assertion excluding the option of taking military action against Ethiopia. Also, the positive representation of El-Sisi is realized in the news reports by quoting parts of his speech in Extract (10). This example reflects an ideological implication as President El-Sisi portrays a positive image of himself as being one of the Egyptian people when he says "I am with you". The use of the pronoun 'I' serves to establish a dichotomy of El-Sisi as part of the in-group (the Egyptian people) in contrast to the out-group (Ethiopia) that seeks to harm Egypt.

4.1.2 Negative Representation of the Out-group

The 'us' vs. 'them' dichotomy aims to criticize the out-group to defend the interests of the in-group and justify their political and

ideological standpoints. The presence of negative depictions of the 'other' serves as an indicator of increasing tensions and polarization. The discursive ideological strategies employed in the Egyptian news reports incorporate the depiction of three negative images of Ethiopia: violating international laws, being unwilling to cooperate, and acting in a manipulative way that lacks credibility.

Ethiopia Violates International Law

In the Egyptian media, Ethiopia's position is represented as being a violation of the international laws and previous Nile water treaties. Initially, Ethiopia's decision to build a dam on the Nile is represented as a violation of the water agreements of 1929 and 1959 which grant Egypt a historic right to the Nile water. This negative representation is further asserted in the coverage of the issue of filling the dam in 2020 where Ethiopia's unilateral actions are considered a breach of the GERD negotiation's Declaration of Principles signed in 2015. The following extracts are indicative of these representations:

> 11. Ethiopia's announcement about completing the first stage of filling the Renaissance Dam violates the agreement signed with the two downstream countries (Egypt and Sudan) (Egypt Independent, 24th July 2020).

The 'attribution of agency' discursive strategy is evident in Extract (11) where negative actions are attributed to the out-group, and positive ones to the in-group (van Dijk, 1998b: 43). Ethiopia is ideologically represented in the clause "violates the agreement signed with the two downstream countries" as the responsible agent to be blamed for the negative actions. According to van Dijk (1998b: 43), "agency, responsibility and blame may also be attributed as a function of ideological orientation".

> 12. Bekele announced, on Wednesday, that his country has unilaterally started the first phase of filling (Daily News Egypt, 15th July 2020).

In Extract (12), 'attribution of agency' and 'evidentiality' are utilized by attributing the negative action of unilaterally starting the filling of the dam to Ethiopia and using the statement made by the Ethiopian Minister of Irrigation as proof. This action is considered a violation of the DOP agreement signed in 2015 between Egypt and Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is Unwilling to Cooperate

Unlike the Egyptian newspapers' positive representation of Egypt's diplomatic activities in pursuit of resolving the issue, Ethiopia is portrayed in the Egyptian news as the side that is hindering the path of negotiations and not cooperating. The following extracts show extracts of this negative representation:

13. Ethiopia rejected all alternative proposals, instead maintained its rigorous stance on the dam's filling (Daily News Egypt, 18th July 2020).

14. Egypt has participated in multiple rounds of negotiations over the GERD with Ethiopia for about nine years, all without reaching a final agreement. Egypt blames Ethiopia for the failure of the negotiations (Daily News Egypt, 25th July 2020).

'Agency' is observed in Extract (13) by foregrounding Ethiopia's role in disrupting the ongoing negotiations. Ethiopia is depicted as an active agent in the clauses "rejected all alternative proposals" and "maintained its rigorous stance". The negative image of Ethiopia is expressed by utilizing the discursive strategy of 'level of description', where the negative representation is enhanced by the lexical choices, such as using *rigorous* in reference to Ethiopia's stance. In Extract (14), the negative image of Ethiopia is presented in contrast to the positive representation of Egypt as the side that "has participated in multiple rounds of negotiations with Ethiopia for about nine years". This contrasting representation emphasizes the dichotomy of 'us and them'.

Ethiopia is a Manipulator

Ethiopia is not only depicted as being uncooperative in the course of negotiations but also represented as a manipulator. From the very beginning of the dispute, the Egyptian media's reporting on the event of diverting the course of the Blue Nile focused on the implications of the fact of how it occurred a few days after Morsi had visited Ethiopia. This is reflected in the following extract:

15. Last week, in the immediate wake of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi's visit to Ethiopia, Addis Ababa began diverting a part of the Blue Nile in preparation for the dam's construction (Ahramonline, 4th June 2013).

Extract (15) indicates that the media implicitly accuses Ethiopia of manipulating Morsi and Egypt, which in turn implies that the Ethiopian government is politically deviant. Ethiopia is depicted as showing faked good intentions. The next extract from a report covering the DOP agreement shows another extract referring to Ethiopia's manipulative actions:

16. Ethiopian public opinion is still mobilized against Egypt, despite the positive atmosphere that prevailed between the Egyptian and Ethiopian delegations during the signing of the principles (Egypt Independent, 25th March 2015).

The news report highlights how Ethiopia is acting in a manipulative way by continuing to mobilize its public opinion against Egypt a few days after signing the DOP. The reference in the same report to "the positive atmosphere" during the signing of the DOP denotes that Ethiopia is responsible for mobilizing public opinion. The following extracts show the negative representation of Ethiopia in the coverage of the event of filling the dam:

17. Dina Mufti said that his country is instead seeking a guiding agreement that can be modified as needed (Egypt Independent, 25th July 2020).

18. He added that Ethiopia has always given "fake promises" during the negotiations (Daily News Egypt, 25th July 2020).

Extract (17) refers to Ethiopia's most manipulative action as interpreted in the Egyptian news, which is its refusal to sign a legally binding agreement on the dam. The use of the strategy 'level of description' in Extract (18) reflects Ethiopia's manipulative actions through the lexical choice of using the modifier *fake* along with the frequency adverb *always*. The following extract reflects a negative image of Ethiopia as lacking credibility by disseminating false claims:

19. Egypt has debunked the Ethiopian claims regarding the historic agreements, pointing out that these agreements were signed between Egypt, or the British empire representing Egypt, while Ethiopia was an independent state (Daily News Egypt, 11 July 2020).

In Extract (19), Ethiopia's position in the dispute is described as being based on a false claim that Egypt's historical share of the Nile is based on a colonial-era agreement. The negative representation is supported by using the verb debunk which is negatively laden. Furthermore, the following extract reflects an explicit inclusion of Ethiopia into the out-group that is associated with negative actions:

20. Allam told Daily News Egypt that the Ethiopian maneuver's taking advantage of Egypt's involvement in the Libyan crisis reflects hidden coordination between Addis Ababa and Turkey against Egypt (Daily News Egypt, 18 July 2020).

Extract (20) provides a significantly polarized description of Ethiopia by directly associating it with Turkey, which was publicly opposing Egypt's regime, to establish a clear dichotomy with an evil out-group comprising Turkey and Ethiopia.

4.2 Ethiopian News Reports
4.2.1 Self-Positive Representation

The Ethiopian newspapers typically identify Ethiopia as the rightful side in the dispute. The positive representation of the in-group is based on three images: identifying Ethiopia as having a more favourable position, praising Ethiopia's intentions and praising Ethiopia's diplomatic efforts to solve the issue. The following table shows the discursive strategies employed in the news reports to portray these images.

Ethiopia Has a Stronger Position

The Ethiopian news media construct Ethiopia as the in-group that is in a dominant or more favourable position than its opponent or the out-group (i.e., Egypt). Ethiopia's image as a sovereign powerful nation is repeatedly confirmed in the data under investigation. This polarized representation occurs in the news discourse by utilizing several discursive strategies. The media convey a positive message to the world and the people of Ethiopia that no one can stop Ethiopia from completing the dam. The following extract shows this image:

21. The nation would not stop construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) for a second owing to the noises in Egypt. (Ethiopian News Agency, 11th June 2013).

The above extract from a report on the event of diverting the course of the Blue Nile in 2013 reflects the self-positive representation of Ethiopia. The reference to Ethiopia as a social actor using the word 'nation', which indicates a collective identity, supports the image of Ethiopia as being powerful. The lexical choices in the phrase 'noises in Egypt' have the ideological implication that Ethiopia is powerful by referring to Egypt's objections as mere 'noises' that can be disregarded. Additionally, the coverage of the event of the DOP in the Ethiopian news focuses more on praising the diplomatic efforts of Ethiopia with only a few

instances of references to the image of Ethiopia as a powerful nation. See the following extract:

22. "Ethiopia's position on the completion of the dam and the volume of water that the reservoir holds is firm" and it is based on international laws, the Premier said. (Ethiopian News Agency, 28th March 2015).

Extract (22), to support the positive-self description, utilized a strategy van Leeuwen (2008: 105) identifies as "authority legitimation" "by reference to the authority of tradition, custom, law, and/or persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested". The clause "based on international laws" invokes the impersonal authority of the law, so that the answer to the unspoken 'why' question is because the laws say so (van Leeuwen, 2008: 108). Hence, Ethiopia's position is described as being *firm* because it conforms to the rules of international laws. Further, the following extracts from the reports covering the event of filling the dam reservoir in July 2020 are indicative of van Dijk's positive self-representation strategies:

23. We Ethiopians can defend any force if we stand together for our national interest (The Ethiopian Herald, 19th June 2020).

24. Ethiopia will not give away its right by any miracle to use the water of the Abbay River (Blue Nile) (New Business Ethiopia, 30th June 2020).

As seen in Extract (23), the formation of the 'us' group is realized by using the inclusive pronoun 'we' which signals in-group membership. Van Dijk's (2011) strategy of 'national self-glorification' is observed to praise the in-group and create a favourable picture of 'us' as in the clause "can defend any force". This favourable image is featured in contrast to the negative image of the 'other' as in the phrase "any force". Van Dijk's (1998b) discursive strategy of 'opinion expression' is used in Extract (24), which employs exaggeration in favour of the group's interests. The

image of being powerful is supported by lexical choices, such as the inclusive pronoun *we* and the word *miracle*.

Ethiopia Has Good Intentions

The Ethiopian news reports under investigation draw a solid image of Ethiopia as the side that has good intentions. Throughout the events related to the GERD, the media coverage consistently disseminates the claims that the dam project will benefit all the Nile riparian countries, including Egypt and Sudan. See the following extract from the reporting on the event of diverting the Blue Nile in 2013:

25. Ethiopia has a firm stance to work in cooperation and friendship with Egypt for the GERD would also benefit it (Ethiopian News Agency, 11th June 2013).

The strategy of 'actor description' is used in Extract (25), where the lexical choices reflect the positive image of Ethiopia. Using the words *cooperation*, *friendship*, and *benefit* sends a message of good intentions and honest political will to the world regarding the purpose of the GERD. The following extract is also indicative of this representation:

26. "In our part, we have explained to them that the dam construction will not affect the downstream countries at all," Dina said (The Reporter Ethiopia, 8th June 2013).

The use of the pronouns 'our' and 'we' in Extract (26) embodies a typical instance of the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy which intends to assert the in-group positive image. Further, the event of the DOP in 2015 caused a drop in the tension between Ethiopia and the other two riparian countries. Consequently, the news coverage during this time embraces several strategies of representing the in-group's positive image of good intentions. See the following extract:

27. Hailemariam said the document will bolster the relations between the three countries […] I want to assure the people of Egypt and the people of Sudan that this construction (of the GERD) will cause no significant

harm to the peoples of our three countries, and specifically to the people of Egypt" (Ethiopian News Agency, 24th March 2015).

The reference to the DOP in Extract (27) is realized by using 'agency', where the agreement itself is positively activated as an agent in the clause "bolster the relations between the three countries". The use of the pronoun 'I' by the Ethiopian Prime Minister, while he addresses the people of Egypt and the people of Sudan, constructs him as part of an in-group that talks on behalf of the people of Ethiopia. Also, the use of the pronoun 'our' in "our three countries" carries the ideological implication of positively representing Ethiopia as the good side that tries to include Egypt and Sudan in the in-group. This notion is also evident in Extract (28) below:

28. The signing of the agreement, which comes after ensuring that the Ethiopian dam will not pose any significant harm to downstream countries, is a success for the three countries, she said (Ethiopian News Agency, 29th March 2015).

The use of the modifier *significant* in the clause "dam will not pose any significant harm" fits into van Dijk's (1998a) ideological square by employing the evaluative structure of de-emphasizing 'our' negative actions. The lexical choices in 'no significant harm', as argued by Hailemichael (2019: 53), imply that Ethiopia admits to the fact that "there could be a tolerable harm, which is not significant". The idea of 'no significant harm' is associated with the argument for maintaining an equitable share of the Nile water. This is evident in the coverage of the event of filling the dam in 2020; the event that caused a political clash between the two countries.

29. Ethiopia as always is committed to fair and equitable utilization of the Nile waters causing no significant harm to its neighbours and the lower riparian states in the spirit

of good faith and brotherhood (The Ethiopian Herald,
June 24th 2020).

As seen in Extract (29), the strategies of 'national self-
glorification' and 'explicitness' are utilized to praise Ethiopia. The
description here is strengthened by the set of lexical choices the
reporter uses, such as the adverb of frequency *always* and the words
fair, *equitable*, *good*, *peaceful* and *brotherhood*. Further, the use of
the adverb *always* along with the other lexical items explicitly
indicates that these positive characteristics of Ethiopia are
permanent.

Praising Ethiopia's Diplomatic Efforts

Like the positive image disseminated in the Egyptian news
articles, the Ethiopian reporting on the GERD features the same kind
of depiction. The following extract from the coverage of the event of
the DOP features this representation:

30. The agreement is the outcome of Ethiopia's
successful diplomatic efforts and would build the
country's image, he noted. (Ethiopian News Agency, 31st
March 2015).

The strategies of 'self-glorification' and 'explicitness', which
entail making explicit the qualities that are good for us, are used in
Extract (30). This is evident in the clause "would build the country's
image", which directly brings up the idea of showing the world a
positive image of Ethiopia's "successful diplomatic efforts". The
following extract also shows examples of praising Ethiopia's
diplomatic efforts.

31. Dr Tedros Adhanom agrees that the agreement opens
a new door for cooperation among the countries
(Ethiopian News Agency, 29th March 2015).

In Extract (31), there is an example of van Dijk's (1998b: 59)
strategy of 'opinion expression', which states that opinions "may be
enhanced in several stylistic and rhetorical ways". The positive
opinion of the Ethiopian Foreign Minister about the outcomes of

Ethiopia's diplomatic actions is expressed by using a metaphor in the clause "opens a new door for cooperation". Furthermore, the following extract shows an example of the coverage of the event of filling the dam in 2020:

> 32. Ethiopia is trying its best to negotiate with Egypt, which doesn't contribute water to the Nile but wants to take all of it. (New Business Ethiopia, 30th June 2020).

In Example (32), 'polarization' is evident in the dichotomous representation of 'us' vs. 'them'. This is realized by positively depicting Ethiopia as "trying its best to negotiate" while negatively referring to Egypt as the side "who wants to take all of it".

4.2.2 Other-Negative Representation

The representational choices employed in the Ethiopian data at hand include various polarization strategies for the negative depiction of the out-group. These strategies centre around three negative images of Egypt as the opposing out-group: Egypt hinders Ethiopia's development, Egypt imposes political pressure, and Egypt makes false claims.

Egypt Hinders Ethiopia's Development

The first negative representation of Egypt in the Ethiopian news reports is exemplified in the repetitive references to the claim that Egypt's hidden agenda is not protecting its interests; rather it is to prevent Ethiopia from utilizing its natural resources and achieving its development by all means. The following extract is indicative of this representation:

> 33. No African wants to hurt Egypt; however, Egypt cannot continue to hurt black Africa (Ethiopian News Agency, 14th June 2013).

The ideological dichotomy of self-positive and other-negative representation is evident in Example (33) The in-group of Africans is depicted here as not wanting to hurt Egypt, while Egypt is shown as the side that keeps hurting Africa. Van Dijk's (2011) strategy of 'victimization' is utilized to increase the strength of the negative

image of the out-group, whereas the in-group presents itself as the victim. Also, the lexical choices in the clause "continue to hurt black Africa" are ideologically loaded through the dichotomous reference to the in-group as "black Africa" versus Egypt as the out-group. The lexical choices here indicate a reference to racial discrimination which signals bias in the representation of Egypt excluding it from the group of African countries.

> 34. Previous leaders of Egypt have been opposing Ethiopia's right to use Nile waters before the launching of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. The leaders had also tried to utilize different maneuvers to obstruct the construction of the dam even after the launching (Ethiopian News Agency, 31st March 2015).

In Extract (34), the negative delineation of Egypt is realized by using van Dijk's (1998b) strategy of 'using history' which refers to how ideologically polarized representations draw on reconstructions of historical narratives to depict a positive or a negative image. The explicit reference to "previous leaders of Egypt" promotes the idea of a deep-rooted negative attitude of Egyptian politicians towards Ethiopia's desire for development. The lexical choices also enhance the negative image by using words like *opposing*, *right, manoeuvres* and *obstruct*. The following extracts show some examples from the coverage of the event of filling the dam:

> 35. Egypt, a country that has already achieved universal electrification is impeding Ethiopia from using the waters of the Nile (The Ethiopian Herald, 28th July 2020).
> 36. Especially Egypt is working tirelessly to block Ethiopia from constructing the dam, instead of supporting Ethiopia's ambition (The Ethiopian Herald, June 19th 2020).

The strategy of ''attribution of agency'' is employed in the above two examples by activating Egypt's role in "impeding

Ethiopia from using the waters of the Nile". The lexical choices, such as the words *impeding*, *tirelessly*, *block* and *ambition* give a detailed description of Egypt's negative position. The following extract is also indicative of the context of negatively representing Egypt's intention to stop Ethiopia from achieving development:

> 37. They have worked hard to make sure that we don't have the capacity to build a hydro dam. After we get the capacity, they have worked hard to make sure that we don't start the construction. (New Business Ethiopia, 30th June 2020).

The dichotomy of 'us and them' is evident in Example (37) via the repetitive use of the personal pronouns 'we' and 'they'. Van Dijk's (1998b) 'polarization' and 'agency' strategies are employed here by activating the out-group (Egypt) as the agent that attempts to harm the interests of the in-group while positively representing the in-group as the victim.

Egypt Imposes Political Pressure

The second negative representation of Egypt in the Ethiopian news reports is manifested in the repetitive references to Egypt as putting political pressure on Ethiopia to gain support from third parties or to force Ethiopia to give up its rights. Egypt is also accused of hindering diplomatic action to serve its own interests and hidden agenda. The following extracts are indicative of this representation:

> 38. For Egypt to go to war over the Nile issues there should be the maddest leaders in the country. He encourages them to come to cooperation and negotiations to benefit the two friendly people (Ethiopian News Agency, 12th June 2013).

In Extract (38), the news reporter quotes the statement of Hailemariam, the former Ethiopian Prime Minister. This statement comes in reaction to an incident when some Egyptian politicians, unaware that they were being aired live on TV, were caught and

recorded calling for military action against Ethiopia. This incident was interpreted by the Ethiopian media as merely a form of political pressure. The strategy of 'actor description' is utilized here through the lexical choices of the words *maddest* and *war* that demonstrate a negative description of Egypt. A 'polarization' strategy is also employed here associating Ethiopia with "cooperation and negotiations" while rendering the Egyptian politicians as bringing out the narrative on war which provides explicit indications for incitement to violence.

Furthermore, the impact of the GERD conflict on the media coverage intensified during the rising tension over the issue of filling the dam in 2020, exacerbating the situation and breeding mutual accusations and hate speech between the two countries. The following extracts are indicative of this:

39. Egypt's steps target to pose political and diplomatic pressures on Ethiopia (The Ethiopian Herald, June 24th 2020).

In Extract (39), van Dijk's (1998b) strategies of 'agency' and 'actor description' are employed to ideologically represent Egypt as the agent responsible for the failure of negotiations. Egypt's negative actions are intensified by the lexical choices in the clause "pose political and diplomatic pressures". The following extract, which quotes a statement by the Foreign Minister of Ethiopia, Gedu Andargachew, outlines a typical example of the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy:

40. "Let them take (the issue) to the United Nations, take it wherever they want. Let them say whatever they want. Let them say bad things about Ethiopia. And let them threaten us as they sometimes do" (New Business Ethiopia, 30th June 2020).

As obvious in Extract (40), 'polarization' is evident by labelling the Egyptians as the out-group or the enemy, whereby they are described as acting in a manipulative way as they "say bad things

about Ethiopia" and "threaten us". The repetitive reference to the Egyptians as manipulative and a threat by the Ethiopian Foreign Minister is a typical example of politicians employing language to ideologically stigmatize the out-group and negatively represent the other.

Egypt Makes False Claims

The third polarized representation of Egypt as the out-group in the Ethiopian news reports is exemplified in the argument that Egypt passes on false claims about Ethiopia and the GERD made by its politicians and media outlets. The following extracts show instances of the interpretations of Egypt's claims by the Ethiopian newspapers:

> 41. Egypt has long been engaging in false and blatant rhetoric meant to conceal the facts and the real causes behind the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) claiming it would harm its national interest (The Ethiopian Herald, June 26th 2020).

Extract (41) details an example of one of the references in the Ethiopian news reports to what they establish as a false claim made by Egypt about the outcomes of the GERD. Egypt has recurrently announced that its main concern about the Nile dam is related to its potential impact on Egypt's share of the water. However, the Ethiopian media explicitly state that this claim is incorrect. Egypt is activated as an agent responsible for spreading extravagant false discourse on the dam to mislead public opinion. The lexical choices in this example emphasize the negative representation of Egypt by using the negative words *false*, *blatant*, *rhetoric* and *concealing*.

Another argument established in the Ethiopian news coverage as misleading is related to Egypt's claims that it depends on the Nile for its entire supply of water.

> 42. For long, Egypt has been wrongfully claiming that the Nile is its only source of water (The Ethiopian Herald, June 26th 2020).

'Actor description' is evident in Extract (42), where Egypt as the social actor is explicitly constructed as propagating wrong claims to hide facts and legitimize its position. Many references occur in the Ethiopian media to the idea that there are sources of fresh water in Egypt, other than the Nile, such as underground water; accordingly, Egypt's reasons for being concerned about the Nile water are irrational. The word choices here support the negative representation by using the words *long* and *wrongfully*. Finally, the following extract shows another example of accusing Egypt of making false claims:

> 43. Egyptian media outlets like Al-Harm online are very much biased and engaged in twisting information in line with their obsession (The Ethiopian Herald, June 26, 2020).

Another significant accusation against Egypt is related to activating the role of the Egyptian media outlets in exaggerating the propaganda on the issue by spreading false claims, which accordingly increases the dispute. The representation is enhanced by using negatively laden lexical choices like *biased*, *twisting* and *obsession*.

5. Conclusion

The present study has investigated the polarized discourse in the news media coverage of the issue of the GERD by Egyptian and Ethiopian online newspapers. The data analysis reveals that both sets of news reports at hand employ several discursive strategies and use certain lexical items that establish two opposed dichotomies of in-groups and out-groups. Polarization is manifested in two levels: of self-positive and other-negative representations of the events and of the social actors involved. Within the Egyptian news reports, the news coverage mainly depicted the 'us' group through three positive images: 'Egypt is a Powerful Country with Good

Intentions', 'Praising Egypt's Diplomatic Effort', and 'Praising President El-Sisi's Role'. The out-group was negatively represented in the Egyptian reports through three images: 'Ethiopia is a Manipulator and Lacks Credibility', 'Ethiopia is Unwilling to Cooperate' and 'Ethiopia Violates International Laws'. On the other hand, the Ethiopian data positively portrayed the in-group focusing on the following three images: 'Ethiopia Has a Stronger Position', 'Ethiopia Has Good Intentions' and 'Praising Ethiopia's Diplomatic Efforts'. The negative representation of the out-group in the Ethiopian data involved three main images: 'Egypt Hinders Ethiopia's Development', 'Egypt Imposes Political Pressure', and 'Egypt Makes False Claims'.

The study's findings have demonstrated the applicability of van Dijk's (1998a) model of the Ideological Square to the data in hand. The two sets of news reports revealed the use of several discursive strategies to account for the polarized representation of 'us' and 'them'.

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ملخص

تتناول الدراسة الحالية تحليل نقدي للخطاب للتغطية الإخبارية لقضية بناء سد النهضة الإثيوبي من خلال دراسة مقارنة لعينة من المقالات الإخبارية المنشورة على مواقع الصحف الإلكترونية في كل من مصر وأثيوبيا والتي تتناول ثلاثة أحداث هامة متعلقة بالموضوع: تحويل مجري النيل الأزرق في عام ٢٠١٣، توقيع اتفاقية اعلان المبادئ بين مصر وإثيوبيا والسودان في ٢٠١٥، وعملية الملء الأول للسد في عام ٢٠٢٠. تتبع الدراسة منهج التحليل النقدي للخطاب كأساس لتحليل البيانات. في هذه الدراسة يهدف الباحثان لتحديد أوجه الشبه والاختلاف في استخدام أساليب التمثيل للمجموعة التابعة والمجموعة الخارجية وذلك من خلال تطبيق نموذج المربع الأيديولوجي لفان دايك. حيث يوفر هذا النموذج اطاراً عملياً للكشف عن استراتيجيات التمثيل الإيجابي والسلبي للأحداث الاجتماعية وكذلك المشاركين في تلك الاحداث. توصل الباحثان من خلال نتائج الدراسة الي تركيز المواقع الإخبارية في كل من البلدين على رسم صور إيجابية للنفس وصور سلبية للآخر. علي سبيل المثال، أظهرت نتائج الدراسة تركيز التقارير الإخبارية المصرية على توضيح موقف مصر القوي في الصراع والإشادة بجهود الرئيس السيسي في حل النزاع. كما أشارت التقارير المصرية الي موقف اثيوبيا السلبي. علي الجانب الآخر أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن التغطية الإخبارية في الصحف الاثيوبية ركزت على رسم صورة سلبية لموقف مصر باعتبارها تسعي لإعاقة التنمية الاقتصادية في إثيوبيا، مع رسم صورة إيجابية لإثيوبيا باعتبارها تسعي للوصول لحل سلمي للنزاع.