

Book review

Arsano, Y. (2007). *Ethiopia and the Nile: Dilemmas of national and regional hydropolitics*. ETH Zurich

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Book Review History: Received: 8 November, 2024; Accepted: 10 December, 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20372/ejss.v10i2.1939>

Yacob Arsano, the author of this book, is a renowned scholar in hydropolitics at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. His profound expertise and significant contributions to the hydropolitics of the Nile have been influential in both academic and policy discourses, particularly over the past five decades. In 2007, he wrote a book entitled *Ethiopia and the Nile: Dilemmas of national and Regional Hydropolitics*. The central argument of this book thoroughly examines how the shared water resource of the Nile influences the socio-political, economic, and security dynamics of the Eastern Nile Basin countries: Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt. With a careful blend of historical context and modern analysis, Yacob reveals the deeply entrenched and often conflicting hydropolitical realities that govern the Nile's resources.

The book is organized into three sections and eleven chapters, each providing a different perspective on the tensions and complex interdependence surrounding the Nile River. In the first section, the author delves into the "Myth and Reality" of the Nile, which has long been essential to the identity, prosperity, and stability of the region. He examines the river's symbolic and practical significance, highlighting its role as both a cradle of civilization and a source of national pride and geopolitical conflict. The author illustrates how the Nile is intricately woven into the historical fabric of each nation, with a particular emphasis on Ethiopia's unique connection to the Abbay River. By tracing the river's historical importance, Yacob establishes a foundation for understanding why the Nile remains a focal point of regional identity and tension.

The second section of the book focuses on a detailed examination of Ethiopia's internal water management challenges, placing them within the context of the country's broader development goals and hydropolitical aspirations. The author outlines Ethiopia's institutional, legal, and infrastructural framework, highlighting both its strengths and weaknesses in water governance. His insights reveal

that Ethiopia's fragmented approach has resulted in difficulties in establishing a cohesive and resilient water policy, which is essential for the country to take a leading role in reshaping the hydropolitics of the Nile Basin.

The third section delves into the regional interactions among Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt. In this part, Yacob analyzes the relationship between shared geography and historical conflicts, particularly focusing on Egypt's reliance on the Nile River. The Nile supplies Egypt with 86% of its water needs, underscoring the country's long-standing quest to control Nile resources – a pursuit that dates back to the 19th century during the rule of Mohammed Ali Pasha.

Yacob also explores the influence of external actors throughout the Pre-Cold War, Cold War, and Post-Cold War periods. He highlights how international frameworks such as the Nile Basin Initiative, Hydromet, and the Technical Cooperation Committee for the Promotion of the Development and Environmental Protection of the Nile Basin (TECCONILE) often prioritize the interests of downstream nations, marginalizing Ethiopia and other upstream states. The final chapter presents a compelling vision for transforming the current hydropolitical landscape. Yacob advocates for an integrated model for the Nile Basin that emphasizes mutual benefit and adherence to regulatory norms, offering a practical yet optimistic approach for future cooperation. Overall, Yacob's exploration of the hydropolitical landscape is not only thorough but also accessible, providing a valuable resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners for years to come. One of the book's strengths lies in Yacob's ability to distill complex ideas into a coherent narrative that emphasizes the Nile's pivotal role in shaping national identity, regional security, and economic strategy.

His vision of "equitable utilization" of the Nile waters, coupled with the goal of achieving win-win outcomes, provides a significant and constructive framework for addressing the hydropolitical challenges in the Eastern Nile Basin. By promoting equitable resource management that minimizes harm to the river's ecosystem, he aligns his approach with modern principles of sustainable development and cooperative governance. His focus on win-win scenarios underscores the potential for productive dialogue among the countries of the Nile Basin. This suggests that collaborative problem-solving is possible through shared responsibilities and innovative water management strategies.

Despite the positive aspects mentioned earlier, the reviewer identified some drawbacks in the book. The author tends to exaggerate his optimism regarding the principle of "equitable utilization of water resources," which makes it challenging to support this argument. Stronger downstream countries, particularly Egypt, may leverage their influence to persuade or coerce upstream riparian states into conceding their claims for equitable use. Additionally, while the author proposes a "win-win approach," historical precedents do not back this idea, as it could undermine Egypt's hydro-hegemonic power over the Nile River. Furthermore, the author did not clearly align the research questions with the objectives, which makes it difficult to persuade readers effectively.

In a nutshell, *hydropolitics in the Eastern Nile Basin* by Yacob is a notable contribution to the study of water politics, offering a rich and significant perspective on one of the world's most contested resources. His thoughtful analysis and compelling proposals for cooperative frameworks present a forward-looking vision that is both inspiring and essential for the future of Nile Basin hydropolitics. Yacob's work not only captures the urgency and complexity of Nile politics but also has the potential to significantly shape future research and policy decisions in the field of hydropolitics.