

**Water Sharing or Dominance Declaring:  
Analyzing the Potentials for Transboundary Water Agreements between Israel and  
Palestine**

Riyaz Basi, Dilbag Jhuty, Shahene Patel, and Karolina Szymczyk

**Abstract**

This paper outlines the difficulties of negotiating and implementing transboundary water agreements between Israel and Palestine; this challenge is exacerbated by the classification of Israel as a state and Palestine as a pseudo-state. The paper outlines why current approaches of state-security domination and the growing discourse surrounding water between Israel and Palestine transboundary water management as unsuccessful. This contributes to a continuing effort to link security and military tactics to securitizing water within the region. This protectionism is validated by the connection that Israelis perceive between their identity and water – leaving Palestinians with little power. A discussion of conflict discourse, in terms of how water is managed, provides the paper with a contextualization of how the Israeli-Palestinian relationship is made more complex. Ultimately, this paper prescribes cooperation on local levels to shift power dynamics onto a more equal level.

**Introduction**

The relationship between Israel and Palestine is especially complicated due to a history of conflict stemming from not only differences in culture, identity, and religion, but also from land and water disputes. What makes Israel especially unique is that its idea of the nation-state was founded upon the belief that it “made the desert bloom”.<sup>1</sup> This was ingrained within Israeli identity and was primarily a point of national pride amongst Israelis. Thus, Israel was first and foremost, concerned with its resources, specifically its consistent access to water either from the Jordan River or other watercourses. Moreover, since the international community does not recognize Palestine as a sovereign state, it is consistently exploited by Israel particularly because it does not have a defined border. Israel sought to ensure, throughout history, that it remained a hegemon in the Middle East and so Palestine was often

---

<sup>1</sup> Dinar, Ariel. “Preventive Diplomacy, International Relations, Conflict Resolution and International Water Law: Implications for Success and Failure of the Israeli-Palestinian Water Conflict.” *International Journal of Global Environmental Issues*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2003, 190.

left with little recourse to maintain its access to water.<sup>2</sup> This tension over resources and unresolved conflict, continues to the present and thus, conflict over water is inevitable, especially since Israel perpetuates a power imbalance over Palestine.

In order to fully understand the impetus behind transboundary agreements, it is useful to discuss water security. This concept does not refer to water scarcity, but rather incorporates a wide range of political, social and economic policies. The United Nations Water Program has advanced a comprehensive definition, which incorporates water scarcity, climate change, governance and transboundary cooperation.<sup>3</sup> Water security is not exclusively determined by the natural hydrological system and the availability of water resources in a given area. It is also dependent on the hydrological environment.<sup>4</sup> Sociopolitical and socioeconomic factors contribute in regulating the state of water security through mechanisms of water governance. Thus, we interpret water security to be the quantity and quality of water necessary to sustain not only life and livelihoods, but also the “protection of the water source itself and the protection against water related hazards”.<sup>5</sup> Water security, then, also means the necessary infrastructure to secure that water.<sup>6</sup> This paper’s focus is, however, on the potential for transboundary agreements between Israel and Palestine. Transboundary waters are “the aquifers, and lake and river basins shared by two or more countries”.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, transboundary water agreements are treaties or formal agreements between states to share the aquifers, lake or river basins.<sup>8</sup> Understanding water security is the first step in recognizing the

---

<sup>2</sup> Zeitoun, Mark. *Power and Water in the Middle East: the Hidden Politics of the Palestinian-Israeli Water Conflict*. I.B. Tauris, 2012, 68.

<sup>3</sup> Brooks, D., Trottier, J. and Doliner, L. (2013). Changing the nature of transboundary water agreements: the Israeli–Palestinian case. *Water International*, 38(6), 680.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 673.

<sup>5</sup> Van Hofwegen, Paul. “WATER SECURITY: EVERYBODY’S CONCERN, EVERYBODY’S RESPONSIBILITY.” UNESCO Institute for Water Education, June 2007.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> “Transboundary Waters.” UN Water, United Nations, [www.unwater.org/water-facts/transboundary-waters/](http://www.unwater.org/water-facts/transboundary-waters/).

<sup>8</sup> “Water: A Shared Responsibility: The United Nations World Water Development Report 2, Chapter 11.” UN Water, United Nations, [unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001454/145405e.pdf#page=387](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001454/145405e.pdf#page=387)

significance of transboundary agreements, especially between a state such as Israel and territory such as Palestine.

This paper will argue that the current approach to transboundary water agreements between Israel and Palestine is insufficient as it perpetuates power imbalances and hydro-hegemony. In order to ensure both parties are water secure and if there is to be any hope for transboundary management and agreements, there must be a shift away from conflict discourse and state-centered water security and more towards local efforts of water management. This paper aims at analyzing Israel's emphasis on state security and dominance, which is necessarily reflected in how water is managed between Israel and Palestine. This will be explored by examining state and water security theory and how this provides a basis to explain ineffective transboundary agreements. We will later investigate conflict discourse and its role in past and present attempts at water management and transboundary agreements. We will ultimately demonstrate that water cooperation on the local level has been relatively successful between Israel and Palestine, considering a few case studies. We will conclude by providing recommendations for water managers and more broadly, states like Israel and a territory like Palestine, to achieve effective and equitable transboundary agreements. This paper is focusing on watercourses in Israel and Palestine, including groundwater aquifers and the Jordan River basin.

### **State Water Security**

While we recognize that transboundary water agreements between Israel and Palestine is increasingly challenging, this is not necessarily the case with Israel and other states. A prime example of this is the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty that was signed in 1994.<sup>9</sup> Israel agreed to give Jordan 50,000,000 cubic metres of water each year and that Jordan owns

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 8

seventy five percent of the water from the Yarmouk River, a tributary of the Jordan River.<sup>10</sup> Israel also agreed to assist Jordan with water desalination technologies. Clearly, a transboundary agreement between Israel and Jordan proved to be successful, ultimately demonstrating relatively equal management of the Jordan River. Israel and Palestine have made previous attempts at transboundary agreements, most notably through the Oslo Agreement. The Israeli government had agreed that the Palestinians, would assume, power and authority within the domain of water and sewage systems in the West Bank.<sup>11</sup> The Palestinians in the West Bank receive between seventy and eighty MCM of water, which is much lower, than the water required. Thus, the Oslo Agreement between Israel and Palestine has not contributed much in the way of equal management over the Jordan River, let alone ensuring the Palestinians are water secure.

This can predominately be explained through analyzing the way Israel approaches its water policies. Israel approaches water management from a state-centered security perspective, in which any challenge to consistent access to water would be a challenge to the state. As was briefly mentioned, Israel approaches its water management style as a nation-building exercise, otherwise referred to as its ‘hydraulic mission’.<sup>12</sup> The Israeli nation-state is primarily concerned with not only ideas of nationalism and identity, but also Zionism, which refers to the belief that Israel must protect its right to its homeland. In terms of the ‘hydraulic mission’, this essentially indicates how its political Zionism is a significant factor in how Israel tackled the problem of its supposed water insecurity. When its Arab neighbours tried to engage in a similar approach, between 1948 and 1967<sup>13</sup>, it essentially, “... gave rise to intense feelings of insecurity in Israel... based on threat perception... that became part of the Israeli

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 15

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>12</sup> Zeitoun, Mark. *Power and Water in the Middle East: the Hidden Politics of the Palestinian-Israeli Water Conflict*. I.B. Tauris, 2012, 67.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

security doctrine”.<sup>14</sup> Israel’s lack of consistent access to water was and is primarily interpreted as a *threat to the state*. Now, about forty percent of the groundwater in which Israel is reliant, originates from waters in the West Bank and upper Jordan River.<sup>15</sup> Since water security is a question of life for Israel, it needs to ensure that it maintains the consistent access to water for the benefit of the state. The Israeli concept of the nation-state funnelled into its state security principles, and more specifically, into its military and technological capabilities.

This helps water security experts to understand the motivation behind Israeli water security policy and the militarization of its water resources. Israel is considered to be a hegemon in the Middle East, largely due to the fact that it maintains technological and military superiority as it had increased its projectable deterrent power over its neighbours.<sup>16</sup> It is not uncommon for Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) to maintain a presence within Palestine’s territory, especially over its water resources like the West Bank Water Department.<sup>17</sup> Israel found a way to consistently ensure its water security by using its strengths (military capabilities) to protect its idea of the nation-state. Security scholars describe this approach to water security as a kind of “strategic culture” or “power projection” in which military strategy mimics cultural life, especially when force is extended beyond its borders.<sup>18</sup> Essentially, it describes how political ideologies of public discourse define occasions as worthy of military involvement. Israel, throughout history and today, suffers from an insecurity complex, which created room for a water security doctrine to flourish. Israel’s

---

<sup>14</sup> Turton, Anthony Richard. *The Political Aspects of Institutional Developments in the Water Sector: South Africa and Its International River Basins*. 2005, 43.

<sup>15</sup> Gleick, Peter H. “Water and Conflict: Fresh Water Resources and International Security.” *International Security*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1993, 85-6.

<sup>16</sup> Feitelson, Eran. “The Ebb and Flow of Arab-Israeli Water Conflicts: Are Past Confrontations Likely to Resurface?” *Water Policy*, vol. 2, no. 4-5, 2000, 350.

<sup>17</sup> Zeitoun, Mark. *Power and Water in the Middle East: the Hidden Politics of the Palestinian-Israeli Water Conflict*. I.B. Tauris, 2012, 69.

<sup>18</sup> Klein, Bradley S. “Hegemony and Strategic Culture: American Power Projection and Alliance Defence Politics.” *Review of International Studies*, vol. 14, no. 02, 1988, 136.

ability to maintain its “strategic culture” and “power projection” ultimately left Palestine as water insecure. While Israel did not need to engage in extreme hostilities via militarization towards the Palestinian territory, it still fundamentally cheated Palestine and dismantled any prospects of governance over shared water resources.

Other security experts argue that Israel engages in a security or military paradigm with respect to its water policy in order to exert regional dominance and maintain a monopoly over water, especially with Palestine. A prime example of this can be found when IDF destroyed water systems and infrastructure in Jenin. The IDF will often make deliberate efforts to obliterate emergency repair equipment to disrupt water services to Palestinians.<sup>19</sup> This does little to ensure Israel’s water security, but much more in the way of exerting its hegemony and dominance over Palestine. What Israel’s nation-state exercise, militarization, domination, and fundamentally, its need to maintain a monopoly on water systems demonstrate is how conflict over resources is increasingly likely to continue. State security doctrines and militarization of water will not lead to cooperation, let alone transboundary agreements. Instead, what this exacerbates is deep resentment between Palestinians and Israelis.

Examining why Israel approaches water management from a state-dominant perspective helps us to understand why the principles within the Oslo Accord were largely disregarded. The principles stated in the Agreement were not abided and Israel has used water as tool to oppress and control Palestinians.<sup>20</sup> The hegemonic power utilized by Israel and their emphasis on state security and dominance has lead to ineffective water management policies, and more specifically, transboundary agreements. Israeli state-dominated and

---

<sup>19</sup> Zeitoun, Mark. *Power and Water in the Middle East: the Hidden Politics of the Palestinian-Israeli Water Conflict*. I.B. Tauris, 2012, 92.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 416.

overmilitarized policies helps to explain why Israel perceives itself as a water scarce or insecure state. This is because Israel has embedded its political Zionism into this concept of the nation-state. Thus, water is directly related to Israeli identity and power. Israel's political Zionism reflected and funnelled directly into Israeli state policies, including its water security doctrines like the Oslo Agreement. The purpose of transboundary agreements is to encourage the sharing of resources, which necessarily does away with concepts of sovereignty, domination, or monopoly over water. Any prospects of future transboundary agreements over water resources, such as the Jordan River between Israel and Palestine will need to shift away from state-centered water policies.

## **Growing Conflict Discourse**

### *Conflict Discourse and Identity*

Before discussing the role of discourse in impeding transboundary agreements between Israel and Palestine, it useful to discuss the role of identity in water security rhetoric. As was touched upon in the previous section, the idea of the nation-state, political Zionism, and identity play significant roles in how water is discussed. Since Israel and Palestine “share” the Jordan River basin, it holds substantial religious as well as cultural significance for both parties. This is primarily due to the fact that in the Bible, Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, and thus, it holds great spiritual and religious significance.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, with the Palestinian Muslims, the Jordan River resembles a critical element of Islamic history.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, it is also important to recognize the role of political Zionism and its relationship to water. The Israeli state could not have existed without sufficient access to water and water resources, particularly with advancements in agriculture.<sup>23</sup> Israeli identity and the belief in the

---

<sup>21</sup> “River out of Eden: Water, Ecology, and the Jordan River in Islam.” Ecopeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East (FOEME), 2014, 17.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Frohlich, Christiane J. “Security and Discourse: the Israeli-Palestinian Water Conflict.” Conflict, Security & Development, vol. 12, no. 2, 2012, 129-30.

protection of the Israeli state are inherently rooted in not only its access to the Jordan River, but also in its consistent access to water for food. Thus, water plays a fundamental role in shaping the identities of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Since identity and culture are important factors in how Israelis and Palestinians perceive water, it also necessarily manifests itself into how water is discussed, and thus, managed. The language that is utilized by policy makers, leaders, or water managers is vital in order to understand why transboundary agreements have never worked between Israel and Palestine. As was mentioned in the previous section, we outlined how the lack of consistent access to water is interpreted as a state security threat. This is reflected directly into the rhetoric surrounding water when former Prime Minister of Israel stated, “Water is a question of life for Israel... Israel would act to ensure that the waters continue to flow”.<sup>24</sup> Not only is this a prime example of how water is indoctrinated within state security policies, but also how it is directly linked with the concept of the nation-state, specifically in the identity of Israelis. This is a prime example of conflict discourse, fundamentally developing rifts in cooperation over water resources between the two parties.

Additionally, Palestinians have also engaged in conflict discourse. Palestinians and especially, the Palestinian Water Authority, describe their water insecurity in such a way that completely shifts blame to Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>25</sup> We can find examples of this in how Palestinians perceive Israelis as a, “faceless, anonymous and hostile mass which maintains the occupation and the conflict with the Palestinians to satisfy its supposed greed and lust for war”.<sup>26</sup> This does little for cooperation efforts on water. Instead,

---

<sup>24</sup> Gleick, Peter H. “Water and Conflict: Fresh Water Resources and International Security.” *International Security*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1993, 85.

<sup>25</sup> Zeitoun, Mark. *Power and Water in the Middle East: the Hidden Politics of the Palestinian-Israeli Water Conflict*. I.B. Tauris, 2012, 42.

<sup>26</sup> Frohlich, Christiane J. “Security and Discourse: the Israeli-Palestinian Water Conflict.” *Conflict, Security & Development*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2012, 144.

it perpetuates the narrative that water will always be a source of conflict in this region. Water security experts also contribute to conflict discourse, which are primarily myths and do little in the way of achieving transboundary cooperation<sup>27</sup>. As was demonstrated with the water discourse by Israeli and Palestinian leaders, water experts, too, engage in a ‘doomsday’ perspective or use ‘water war’ language when describing the relationship between Israel and Palestine.<sup>28</sup> This is what Eric van Rythoven describes as “threat inflation”, in which language is used in such a way as to exaggerate the perceived threat to either gain support for a particular point of view, or to maintain power.<sup>29</sup> When Israelis and Palestinians engage in conflict discourse, which is vehemently supported by water managers and experts, the final result is Palestinians and Israelis ultimately developing images of the respective “other”. This is incredibly problematic for the potential of transboundary agreements because both parties will consistently blame the other for their lack of water security.

### *Conflict Discourse in Transboundary Agreements and Policies*

Relatedly, conflict discourse in transboundary water management between Israel and Palestine is vital in understanding the epistemological conflict discourses embedded within water management policies.<sup>30</sup> Water resources in the lower Jordan Basin have traditionally been categorized by autonomous development, struggle and conflict.<sup>31</sup> Israel and Palestine have been characterized by water conflict however there has been increasing levels of cooperation at the local level since the 1994 Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty, as will be discussed later.<sup>32</sup> This new age of collaboration, however, is not absolved from power relations, as

---

<sup>27</sup> Zeitoun, Mark and Mirumachi, Naho. "Transboundary Water Interaction I: Reconsidering Conflict and Cooperation", *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 2008, 298.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 125.

<sup>29</sup> Rythoven, Eric van. "The Perils of Realist Advocacy and the Promise of Securitization Theory: Revisiting the Tragedy of the Iraq War Debate." *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2016, 490.

<sup>30</sup> Fischhendler, I. and Katz, D. (2013). The impact of uncertainties on cooperation over transboundary water: The case of Israeli–Palestinian negotiations. *Geoforum*, 50(3), 204.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 202.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 209.

Israel continues to utilize economic and military dominance on states that are located near the lower Jordan River Basin.<sup>33</sup> Water usage within the Lower Jordan River Basin is disproportionately developed and Palestinians have no direct access to the Jordan River. The largest and most extensive users of the Jordan River Basin is Israel, which withdraws approximately 580-640 million cubic meters of water per year.<sup>34</sup> This fundamentally perpetuates power imbalances, leaving Palestine increasingly water insecure.

The dominant Israeli water discourse is the ‘Needs, Not Rights’ narrative. This discourse originates from the notion of state scarcity that accepts that Palestinians have a need for water, but they do not have the right to water.<sup>35</sup> The Israeli state thus recognizes that just as all humans, Palestinians need water, but are unwilling to encourage or actively meet their human rights. Therefore, Palestinian water needs are not being met and water ownership rights are being disregarded. The framing of Palestinian water rights creates a discourse of water scarcity and does not address the infrastructural and water management systems that promote inequality. This dominant epistemology originates from the Principle of Absolute Sovereignty, which states that any nation can utilize the waters of an international river flowing on their territory regardless of the consequences to other countries.<sup>36</sup> According to this theory, the upstream states are free to divert all the water from a shared watercourse without considering the needs of downstream states. As a result, the full application of this right to each riparian to utilize the shared resource to their satisfaction has led to water resources being over-utilized by Israel to the detriment of Palestine and other surrounding nations.<sup>37</sup> The disproportionate domination of Israel over shared water resources is necessarily reflected in international legal discourse. Moreover, these kinds of international

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 214.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 143

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 144

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 147

laws allows states like Israel to perpetuate conflictual discourse at the peril of Palestine. This aids in creating narratives in which Palestinians do not require water rights. In order to achieve any potential for cooperation, let alone transboundary agreements, a shift away from conflict discourse can prove not only useful, but also vital for the livelihoods of Palestinians and Israelis.

### **Transboundary Cooperation at Grassroots Level**

We have discussed how current approaches to transboundary management between Israel and Palestine have been ultimately unsuccessful due to Israel's state-dominated water policies and both parties engaging in conflict discourse that reflects into water management. With that said, however, local transboundary cooperation seems far more promising. Grassroots cooperation has been occurring between Israelis and Palestinians since the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords where water cooperation mechanisms were formally established. Yet, the management mechanisms, such as the Joint Water Committee, are essentially "domination dressed up as cooperation" since it supports Israel's securitization of water by denying or extending the licensing procedure for Palestinian water projects.<sup>38</sup> Even though international agreements are "seen as the pinnacle of cooperation", they are not always as effective if "important components of the agreement are not implemented, or favour one actor at the expense of a collective win" and thus, in reality there is little to no cooperation.<sup>39</sup> Cooperation is complex; there are different ways it takes shape and it can operate within all the different levels and scales simultaneously. There needs to be a shift away from the conventional "notion of cooperation as treaties to a more dynamic view of transboundary water cooperation as an on-going and non-linear process in which state and non-state actors

---

<sup>38</sup> Zeitoun, Mark and Mirumachi, Naho. "Transboundary Water Interaction I: Reconsidering Conflict and Cooperation", *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 2008, 306.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 303.

establish, challenge, modify and legitimize multi-layered governance structures".<sup>40</sup> We believe that localized water cooperation has the potential to contribute to shifting the power asymmetry, hydro-hegemony, and conflict discourse existing within the Israel and Palestine transboundary agreements.

The two most notable organizations advancing cooperation at a grassroots level are EcoPeace Middle East and the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies. Their contributions to advancing regional cooperation over shared water resources, and peace within the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is deeply rooted in the values of environmental cooperation. Environmental cooperation, also known as environmental peacebuilding, is theoretically seen as a means to creating a pathway for advancing peace within a conflict by advocating for environmental protection. It is believed that by sharing an ecosystem, and the inevitable shared environmental problems, calls for cooperation and collective action because of the complex interdependencies between the parties involved.<sup>41</sup> In the case of Israel and Palestine, the shared water resources that have been securitized or militarized and politicized for decades are seen by this theory as an entry point to foster dialogue, cooperation, and potentially contribute to future peaceful transboundary agreements.

Some benefits of environmental cooperation are transforming distrust and hostility from working together to solve common problems which then creates shared knowledge; it can lead to the generation and internalization of shared norms; and the creation of an eco-regional identity based on environmental interests.<sup>42</sup> Fostering environmental cooperation at a grassroots level is an easier entry point because it utilizes civil society actors, social interest groups, and academic institutions to spark individual and relational changes such as

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Kramer, Anikka. "Regional Water Cooperation and Peacebuilding in the Middle East," *Initiative For Peacebuilding*, December 2008, <https://nl.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/Kramer-2008-Regional.pdf>, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

perceptions and attitudes.<sup>43</sup> These types of changes do not happen automatically however; they take time to build throughout society and the diverse actors before they can start to influence the structural dynamics in the political arena. Both EcoPeace Middle East and Arava Institute are organizations that are dedicated to cultivating an atmosphere that generates models of cooperation at a smaller scale with the hope that eventually it will affect change at a larger structural level. This helps to shift away state-security dominated water policies and conflictual water discourse as local actors are creating and perpetuating a cooperative narrative over shared water resources.

Furthermore, EcoPeace Middle East, formerly known as Friends of the Middle East, was founded in 1994 with the objective to promote "cooperative efforts to protect our shared environmental heritage" by advancing "sustainable regional development and the creation of necessary conditions for lasting peace".<sup>44</sup> EcoPeace was one of the first organizations in the region to fully incorporate environmental peacemaking theory into their practices and programs.<sup>45</sup> They argue that since nature has no boundaries, environmental cooperation "has the opportunity to go beyond political borders" to advance peace efforts and transform a conflict constructively because it emphasizes the interdependent relationship of the actors involved.<sup>46</sup> EcoPeace uses both a bottom-up and top-down approach, however, only one of their bottom-up projects will be examined because of its unique structure and objective to change perceptions towards not only environmental resources, but towards perceptions of the

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> "About Us", EcoPeace Middle East, accessed April 10, 2018, <http://ecopeaceme.org/ecopeace/about-us/>

<sup>45</sup> "Environmental Peacebuilding," EcoPeace Middle East, accessed April 10, 2018, <http://ecopeaceme.org/ecopeace/environmental-peacebuilding/>.

<sup>46</sup> Harari, Nicole and Roseman, Jesse. "Environmental Peacebuilding Theory and Practice: A Case Study of the Good Water Neighbours Project and In Depth Analysis of the Wadi Fukin/Tzur Hadassah Communities," EcoPeace Middle East, January 2008, [https://web.archive.org/web/20090518193358/http://www.foeme.org/index\\_images/dinamicas/publications/publ93\\_1.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20090518193358/http://www.foeme.org/index_images/dinamicas/publications/publ93_1.pdf), 6.

'other'. Bottom-up or local approaches to transboundary agreements helps to ensure little to no power imbalances between Israel and Palestine.

The Good Water Neighbor project is one of their most well known efforts of utilizing environmental cooperation to demonstrate that "dependence on the same water resources can create one community out of adverse users and stakeholders".<sup>47</sup> It operated from 2001 to 2008, originally with 11 Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian communities participating and then in 2008, it expanded to 17 communities. Each of the participating communities had a neighbouring community across the political and territorial boundaries, and they physically shared and depended on the same water resources. EcoPeace hired only local staff, not expert environmentalists or peacemakers, to facilitate the various activities held between the three targeted stakeholders - youth, adults, and mayors. A central assumption behind targeting these stakeholders was that it educates and empowers local constituencies that reaches across the borders, which could eventually create political will through the mayors and other local leader once they recognize the benefits from cooperation.<sup>48</sup> Examples of some of the joint projects were field visits to communities, constructing water-wise buildings to reuse grey and rainwater, and a Peace Park. After evaluating the impact of the project, EcoPeace found that the youth saw the highest changes in terms of more positive perceptions of the 'other' and recognition on the need to cooperate on shared water resources and issues.<sup>49</sup> Clearly, grassroots efforts such as this one prove to generate positive narratives, thus shifting away from state and conflict dominated discourse and policies.

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>48</sup> Kramer, Annika. "Regional Water Cooperation and Peacebuilding in the Middle East," *Initiative For Peacebuilding*, 23.

<sup>49</sup> Harari, Nicole and Roseman, Jesse. "Environmental Peacebuilding Theory and Practice" *EcoPeace Middle East*, 23.

Furthermore, the Arava Institute was founded in 1996 as an academic and research centre for building environmental leadership throughout the Middle East, and their students are primarily comprised of Israelis, Palestinians, and Jordanians. Arava provides a "space to critique the neglect of the environmental responsibility in the region" by building knowledge, skills, credentials, and networks that help create an "opening for a response".<sup>50</sup> Just like EcoPeace, they believe in utilizing environmental cooperation as an alternative method to address challenges that are ignored at the state level. Through their work they intend to build a regional environmental network that challenges the "opposing hegemonic discourses of security" that are currently in play at the political and economic level.<sup>51</sup> The Arava Institute has five transboundary research centres; water management, renewable energy and energy conservation, sustainable agriculture, long-term ecological research, and sustainable development. These five research programs "enable cross-border exchanges of knowledge and technology by providing young Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian and international researchers the opportunity to work together on the pressing environmental issues of the region".<sup>52</sup> The Center for Transboundary Water Management is essentially a platform for Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian policy makers and experts to cooperate on all relevant aspects of transboundary water management such as conservation, desalination, and wastewater treatment.<sup>53</sup> This also encourages local actors to perceive water relations as less of a state-to-state issue, and more of a community one.

It is also important to note that the Arava Institute and its Center for Transboundary Water Management launched a two-component project from 2012 to 2015 called, Mitigating

---

<sup>50</sup> Alleson, Ilan and Schoenfeld, Stuart. "Environmental Justice and Peacebuilding in the Middle East," *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, Vol 19. No 3, 371-379, 2007, 376.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 371.

<sup>52</sup> "Arava Institute Research Centers: Transboundary Research," The Arava Institute, accessed April 10, 2018, <http://arava.org/arava-research-centers/>.

<sup>53</sup> "Centre for Transboundary Water Management," The Arava Institute, accessed April 10, 2018, <http://arava.org/arava-research-centers/center-for-transboundary-water-management/>.

Transboundary Wastewater Conflicts. The initial stages of the project delivered tangible outcomes such as "installation of small scale greywater treatment and reuse systems at seven sites in Israel and West Bank, for rural families not reached by the Israeli or Palestinian centralized wastewater treatment grids".<sup>54</sup> The second component witnessed 11 cross-cultural and multinational workshops targeted for three stakeholders; decision-makers, technicians and students. The workshops were designed with the purpose of targeting the protracted roots of the overarching Israeli-Palestine conflict that is deeply reflected within the transboundary water issues. Through facilitating constructive dialogue between and across diverse and relevant stakeholders, the Institute was aiming to determine the feasibility of long-term perception changes that can potentially lead to deeper and broader scales of environmental cooperation. For each workshop they used intake and outtake questionnaires to measure the effectiveness of their workshops by asking a series of questions to determine if perceptions had changed and there was an improved understanding of wastewater issues in Israel and West Bank. The results showed that there was an improved understanding of issues shared by both sides, that perceptions of the 'other' were more positive than before, and that there was a high level of agreement that increased cooperation for shared benefits should be occurring.<sup>55</sup> Grassroots management is the best potential that Israelis and Palestinians have for transboundary agreements and management.

What is most notable about the work that EcoPeace and Arava Institute are completing is that they are cultivating a network of experts, policy makers, researchers, technicians, and other professionals within communities that are in favour of cooperating over shared water issues. By using the basin as its scope, including relevant stakeholders and

---

<sup>54</sup> Lipchin, Clive, et al. "Mitigating Transboundary Wastewater Conflicts: Building Partnerships and Trust through Collaborative Dialogue," *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, Vol 11. No 2, 2016. 72.

<sup>55</sup> Lipchin, Clive, et al. "Mitigating Transboundary Wastewater Conflicts: Building Partnerships and Trust through Collaborative Dialogue," *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, Vol 11. No 2, 2016. 73-6 entire paragraph from this source.

water users, and learning from all the different sources of knowledge, these two organizations are demonstrating that cooperation over water is not only possible, but successful. The scale they are operating at is significantly small and thus, their ability to make tangible transformations within the existing transboundary water institutions is a gradual, longer-term process. For there to be successful water cooperation there needs to be relatively good relations between the states involved, however at the state level, this remains a remote possibility between Israel and Palestine. So, shifting away from state-dominated water policies towards a local one can also perpetuate positive water discourse. Using localized levels of cooperation can be a means to successfully transform this negative and hostile relationship into a cooperative one, and as EcoPeace and Arava Institute have demonstrated, cooperation over shared environmental resources can have profound positive influences that has great potential to scale up if utilized.

## **Recommendations**

In order to move from the “is” to the “ought”, that is, from state-dominated transboundary management, to grassroots or local transboundary cooperation, water managers must use an appropriate method that meets the needs of people in both Palestine and Israel. This involves an integrated water resource management (IWRM) framework, in which water is governed on multilevel and polycentric systems of management. Multilevel, meaning varying levels of management and polycentric, meaning power is completely decentralized<sup>56</sup>. IWRM is about communication and joint management, especially in the case of Israel and Palestine, over water resources<sup>57</sup>. Grassroots water cooperation, as the previous section highlighted, needs the coordination of all stakeholder groups within Palestinian and

---

<sup>56</sup> Moriarty, Patrick, et al. “Integrated Water Resources Management: And the Domestic Water and Sanitation Sub-Sector .” IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre , IRC, 2004, [www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/Moriarty-2004-Integrated.pdf](http://www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/Moriarty-2004-Integrated.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

Israeli communities. The shift away from state-centered hydro hegemony, particularly by Israel can result in increased participation and consultations of those either suffering from water insecurity or other stakeholders that may be directly impacted by poor transboundary management. While we have provided sufficient evidence to support the claim that grassroots and local level transboundary cooperation is successful, it must also adhere to the principles of IWRM to ensure that all voices are included. The potential for transboundary agreements partly relies on the necessary shift from state to local, considering the key principles of IWRM.

Implementing "full" IWRM, which consists of national legislation, legal frameworks and a stronger government capacity, is not a realistic option for transboundary management between Israel and Palestine. Rather the use of "light" IWRM, which is the adoption within different sub-sectoral activities or joint management mechanisms between diverse stakeholders in the community, might be a more realistic and fruitful option. This way, there will be a generation, and hopefully internalization, of norms that emphasize principles of IWRM throughout local levels of water management. Cross-border collaboration at smaller local levels, as evident through the work done by both EcoPeace and Arava Institute, results in stronger exchanges of information and skill, greater participation from diverse stakeholders, and successful collaboration.<sup>58</sup> Successful transboundary management needs to "combine site-specific solutions that fit the local context and coordination at the watershed level...to identify solutions, we must engage stakeholders and utilize their knowledge".<sup>59</sup> We recommend continuing the use of localized efforts through "light" IWRM, of cross-border

---

<sup>58</sup>Albrecht, Tamee, "Transboundary Watershed Management in the Israeli-Palestine territories," John Hopkins Water Institute, December 12 2014, <http://water.jhu.edu/index.php/magazine/transboundary-watershed-management-in-israel-and-the-palestinian-territories-identifying-site-speci>

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

and people-to-people cooperation on joint water management mechanisms so that the full needs of both Israelis and Palestinians are being met.

The success of future projects similar to those carried out by EcoPeace and Arava focus on the importance of relationship building within the broader contexts of security and water sharing. When Israel and Palestine perpetuate the rhetoric at all levels of society, the issues continue to manifest, the conflict especially surrounding water, threatens Israelis or Palestinians image of their nation-state, their security, and their futures. Conventionally, states focus on negotiations and the use of accords in order to navigate change for their countries. With the failure that came out of the Oslo Agreement, as we have explored, it may be time to consider bottom-up approaches for Israel and Palestine. Notable scholars, Noam Chomsky and Edward Said, have doubted whether “peace processes” were ever “alive” to begin with - were they just propagated as a breakthrough into an era of work towards peace?<sup>60</sup> These criticisms are important in the discussion around future approaches to peace processes and what this means for future undertakings. The complexity of the conflict being ingrained in every aspect of the conflict provides the largest obstacle to overcome. If the focus is simply on water and how to integrate cooperation and relationship building within smaller communities, villages and foster partnerships, it can and will drastically impact the way in which water is managed between the two states.

## **Conclusion**

We have demonstrated in this paper that the current approach to transboundary water management, and by extension, agreements between Israel and Palestine is problematic as it facilitates greater power imbalances and hydro-hegemony. We have further argued that in

---

<sup>60</sup> Selby, Jan. "Dressing up Domination as 'cooperation': The Case of Israeli-Palestinian Water Relations." *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 01, 2002, 122.

order to ensure water security for Israeli and Palestine, and more importantly, potential for transboundary agreements, there must be a shift away from conflict discourse and state-centered water security and more towards local efforts of water management. Protracted conflict such as the one between Israel and Palestine exemplifies the difficulty in approaching a transboundary agreement. With water being so closely tied to identity, the issue is no longer infringing on access to the resource it becomes a conflict surrounding the dismantling of Israel's uniqueness. This distinct factor is seen as the ability to thrive in the desert; however this has entirely infringed on the Palestinian ability to access water. When the focus is continually thrust upon water agreements, treaties and conventions, the top level approach never permeates deep enough in order to ensure that everyone on both sides' needs are satisfied. Current state-dominated approaches have continued to fall short in supplying equitable water sources to both sides and have only continued to strengthen Israel's hydro-hegemony in the region. While shifting Israeli discourse away from linking water to its survival may be difficult, there are small incremental changes that can get both parties closer to understanding the needs of each other.

With the case studies that have been presented from both EcoPeace and Arava, they show that grassroots and more locally based approaches to peacebuilding have seen successes. Recognizing the need for equitable management at the local levels is integral in ensure that changes to water management start from the most basic levels and grow upwards. When implementing conventions or commissions, there is no guarantee that these are going to be supported at all levels. When water management is approached top-down, we see the cracks in the implementation. Israel and Palestine provide a perfect example of these issues. Moving forward, it will be difficult to remove the diplomacy and negotiations from discussions of water sharing, however the stronger the local foundations are, the more it reinforces the odds for cooperation leading to stability.

## References

- "About Us." EcoPeace Middle East. Accessed April 10, 2018.  
<http://ecopeaceme.org/ecopeace/about-us/>
- Albrecht, Tamee Albrecht. "Transboundary Watershed Management in the Israeli-Palestine territories." *John Hopkins Water Institute*. December 12 2014.  
<http://water.jhu.edu/index.php/magazine/transboundary-watershed-management-in-israel-and-the-palestinian-territories-identifying-site-speci>
- Alleson, Iian and Schoenfeld, Stuart. "Environmental Justice and Peacebuilding in the Middle East." *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*. Vol 19. No 3, 371-379, 2007.
- "Arava Institute Research Centers: Transboundary Research." The Arava Institute. Accessed April 10, 2018. <http://arava.org/arava-research-centers/>.
- Brooks, D., Trottier, J. and Doliner, L. "Changing the Nature of Transboundary Water Agreements: the Israeli–Palestinian case". *Water International*, 38(6), 2013.
- "Centre for Transboundary Water Management." The Arava Institute. Accessed April 10, 2018. <http://arava.org/arava-research-centers/center-for-transboundary-water-management/>.
- Dinar, Ariel. "Preventive Diplomacy, International Relations, Conflict Resolution and International Water Law: Implications for Success and Failure of the Israeli-Palestinian Water Conflict." *International Journal of Global Environmental Issues*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2003, pp. 188–225.
- El-Sayed, M. and Mansour, R. "Water Scarcity as a Non-traditional Threat to Security in the Middle East". *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, 73(2), 2017.
- "Environmental Peacebuilding." EcoPeace Middle East. Accessed April 10, 2018.  
<http://ecopeaceme.org/ecopeace/environmental-peacebuilding/>.
- Feitelson, Eran. "The Ebb and Flow of Arab-Israeli Water Conflicts: Are Past Confrontations Likely to Resurface?" *Water Policy*, vol. 2, no. 4-5, 2000, pp. 343–363.
- Fischhendler, I. and Katz, D. "The Impact of Uncertainties on Cooperation over Transboundary Water: The case of Israeli–Palestinian negotiations". *Geoforum*, 50(3), 2013.
- Frohlich, Christiane J. "Security and Discourse: the Israeli-Palestinian Water Conflict." *Conflict, Security & Development*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2012, pp. 123–148.
- Gleick, Peter H. "Water and Conflict: Fresh Water Resources and International Security." *International Security*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1993.
- Harari, Nicole and Roseman, Jesse. "Environmental Peacebuilding Theory and Practice: A Case Study of the Good Water Neighbours Project and In Depth Analysis of the Wadi

- Fukin/Tzur Hadassah Communities." *EcoPeace Middle East*. January 2008.  
[https://web.archive.org/web/20090518193358/http://www.foeme.org/index\\_images/dinamicas/publications/publ93\\_1.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20090518193358/http://www.foeme.org/index_images/dinamicas/publications/publ93_1.pdf).
- Isaac, J. and Hilal, J. "Palestinian landscape and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict". *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 68(4), 2011.
- Klein, Bradley S. "Hegemony and Strategic Culture: American Power Projection and Alliance Defence Politics." *Review of International Studies*, vol. 14, no. 02, 1988, pp. 133-153.
- Kramer, Annika. "Regional Water Cooperation and Peacebuilding in the Middle East." *Initiative For Peacebuilding*. December 2008,  
<https://nl.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/Kramer-2008-Regional.pdf>.
- Lipchin, Clive, et al. "Mitigating Transboundary Wastewater Conflicts: Building Partnerships and Trust through Collaborative Dialogue." *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*. Vol 11. No 2, 2016, pp. 72-77.
- Moriarty, Patrick, et al. "Integrated Water Resources Management: And the Domestic Water and Sanitation Sub-Sector ." IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, IRC, 2004,  
[www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/Moriarty-2004-Integrated.pdf](http://www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/Moriarty-2004-Integrated.pdf).
- Posthuma, R. "Conflict Management in Israel". *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 24(3), 2013, pp. 39-66.
- "River out of Eden: Water, Ecology, and the Jordan River in Islam." *Ecopeace / Friends of the Earth Middle East (FOEME)*, 2014, pp. 4–60.
- Rythoven, Eric van. "The Perils of Realist Advocacy and the Promise of Securitization." *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2016, pp. 490-555.
- Selby, Jan. "Dressing up Domination as 'cooperation': The Case of Israeli-Palestinian Water Relations." *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 01, 2002.
- Selby, J. "Cooperation, Domination and Colonisation: The Israeli-Palestinian Joint Water Committee". *Water Alternatives*, 6(1), 2013, pp. 12-24.
- Tamimi, A. "Hydro-Politics: Water and Difficult Dialogues on Resources". *Macalester International*, 23(12), 2009, pp. 145-175.
- Turner, M. *Decolonizing Palestinian Political Economy*. 2014. 2nd ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- "Transboundary Waters." UN Water, United Nations,  
[www.unwater.org/water-facts/transboundary-waters/](http://www.unwater.org/water-facts/transboundary-waters/).
- Turton, Anthony Richard. *The Political Aspects of Institutional Developments in the Water Sector: South Africa and Its International River Basins*. 2005.

Paper prepared for presentation at the Annual ICSD, New York, September 2018

“Water: A Shared Responsibility: The United Nations World Water Development Report 2, Chapter 11.” UN Water, United Nations,  
[unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001454/145405e.pdf#page=387](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001454/145405e.pdf#page=387)

Zeitoun, Mark. *Power and Water in the Middle East: the Hidden Politics of the Palestinian-Israeli Water Conflict*. I.B. Tauris, 2012.

Zeitoun, Mark and Mirumachi, Naho. "Transboundary Water Interaction I: Reconsidering Conflict and Cooperation", *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 2008, vol. 8, pp. 297-316.