

## **Transforming environmental conflict through discourse, illustrated by the Israeli-Palestinian water conflict.**

**Christiane J. Fröhlich**

*In Israel and Palestine, a natural water scarcity is exacerbated by the overall political conflict. On the one hand, the regional climate is arid to semi-arid, resulting in frequent droughts. Inefficient water utilisation, growing population numbers as well as continuing economic development and urbanisation further increase water needs and amplify existing scarcity. On the other hand, two of the river Jordan's headwaters, Banyas and Hasbani, rise outside of Israel's internationally recognised borders. The Palestinians have no access whatsoever to the river Jordan, limited access to the ground water resources and are widely dependent on Israeli allocations. Since 1967, the bulk of the natural water resources are under Israeli control.*

*As a result of these specific conditions, water scarcity is perceived as a cause for (violent) conflict in both the Israeli and the Palestinian society. This manifests in conflictive discourse structures, like the discursive securitization of water scarcity for varying referential objects. Water is perceived and categorized differently by the two conflicting parties: While Palestinians regard the natural water resources as sufficient in principle and the existing scarcity as entirely politically induced, the Israelis perceive the natural water resources as absolutely scarce while receiving major de-securitization impulses from the possibility of desalination. On both sides, the dominant discourse structures underscore the conflictive issues regarding the distribution of water between Israelis and Palestinians, thus making communication, let alone negotiation, downright impossible. It is exclusively in the respective (minor) counter-discourses that possible starting points for dialogue and conflict resolution are visible.*

*With communication – verbal and non-verbal, direct and indirect – at the bottom of every conflict, the reality of Israeli-Palestinian water discourse needs to be taken into account with regard to conflict resolution approaches in the region. Conflict resolution practices, however, do not reflect this realisation as yet.*

### **The facts**

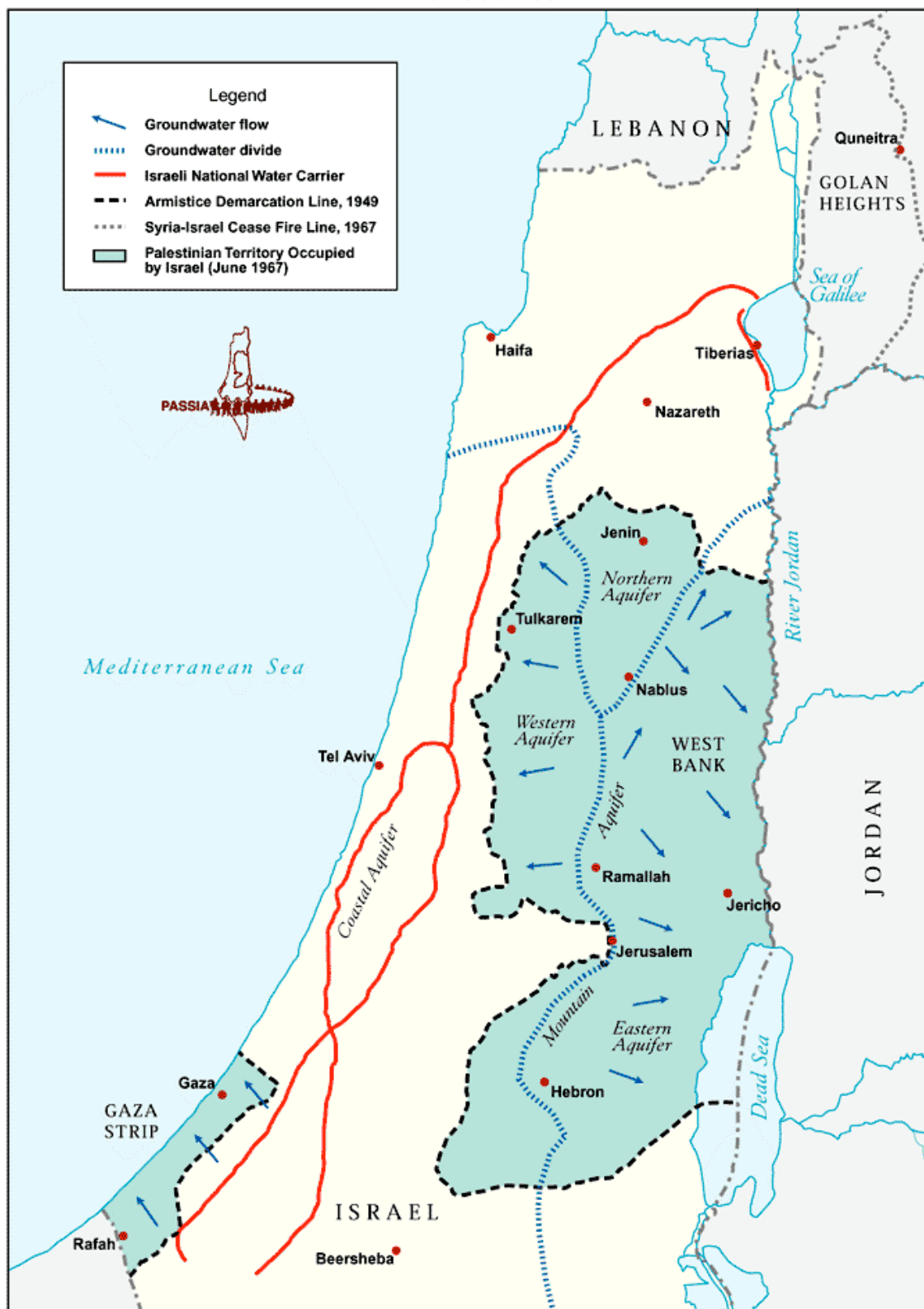
A sufficient supply of clean water is an urgent global issue; worldwide, an estimated one and a half billion people do not have dependable access to clean drinking water. Inefficient water utilisation, population growth and expanding economic development and urbanisation increase water demands and exacerbate scarcity.

One of the most prominent water scarce areas is the Middle East and North Africa, which is at the same time arguably one of the politically least integrated areas worldwide. The MENA-region hosts five percent of the global population, but only one percent of the world's water resources. Without efficient water management, the World Bank projects a decrease of water availability per head and year by at least 50 percent until 2050.<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Lebanon, all states abutting the Jordan basin are water deficient according to Malin

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/mna\\_wdi.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/mna_wdi.pdf), S. 1.

## Water Sources



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**Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA)**

Falkenmark's Water Stress Indicator<sup>2</sup>; the situation is particularly severe in Jordan and the

<sup>2</sup> Water availability of more than 1,700m<sup>3</sup>/capita/year is defined as the threshold above which water shortage

Palestinian Territories.

The main water sources for Israelis and Palestinians are Lake Tiberias, the river Jordan, its sources and tributaries and the local groundwater resources (aquifers). Two of the Jordan's headwaters (Banyas and Hasbani) originate outside of the Green Line; the Palestinians have not had access to the river since 1967; the dispute between Israel and Syria about the Golan heights is still unresolved and includes water allocation issues, and the Palestinians depend largely on water resources that are controlled by Israel. The growth rate of the Arab population in Israel is 2.6%, while the growth rate of the Jewish population in Israel is 1.7%. The Palestinian population grows by 2.2%.

The region's climate is arid to semi-arid, i.e. droughts are frequent and put a strain on natural water resources. In 2008, the water levels of Lake Tiberias sank to their lowest point since metering began; its perpetually sinking water levels led to the aquifers beneath the West Bank taking over the role of most important water reservoirs for Israel and the Palestinians. The largest sub-surface water resources are the coastal and the mountain aquifer with 240 and 679 Million cubic meters (MCM) per year respectively. The renewable natural water resources in the region are estimated at 2.784 MCM per year.

These geographical, hydro(geo)logical and demographic realities lie at the bottom of the Israeli-Palestinian water conflict. They are, on the one hand, factual circumstances; on the other, however, they are a power base for the ruling elites, who use knowledge about water availability, demand and allocation which is considered "right" at a particular moment in time for their purposes. Not surprisingly, there is little agreement on these facts in the whole of the Middle East (and in the research community).

Countless studies have been written about the different aspects of water scarcity in the Middle East and worldwide. Numerous proposals have been made as to the political solution of the water conflict between Israelis and Palestinians (as well as Israel and the other neighbouring states). But water still is an issue of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians: The final solution of the "water question" has been postponed to the permanent status talks. There is no sustainable solution of the water conflict in sight, regardless the benefits it may bring for all parties involved.

Up to now, research has focused first and foremost on water as an environmental issue and an economic good. Questions of ontology and epistemology have been widely ignored. The historicity and discursive construction of how water is perceived – illustrated, for instance, by the question of who allocates what value to water at a certain point in time – is routinely being ignored. Also, the social construction of "wealth" and "scarcity" is being disregarded in favour of more naturalist interpretations.

In order to find new approaches to the Israeli-Palestinian water conflict, however, it is necessary to pinpoint and delineate the ways in which seemingly objective data are socially constructed. Discursive and institutional continuities need to be analysed in order to finally use the potential for conflict transformation that is inherent in changing discursive structures.

### **The Israeli and the Palestinian water discourses. Perceptions of a resource.**

The Israeli-Palestinian water conflict is characterised through and unsolved because of fundamentally different perceptions of scarcity, which manifest in the respective water discourses. Both parties to the conflict construct water to be a conflictive issue that is highly emotional: „Nothing is more basic, more vital, than water, and few issues stir as much

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occurs only irregularly or locally. Below this level, water scarcity arises in different levels of severity. Below 1,700m<sup>3</sup>/capita/year **water stress** appears regularly, below 1,000m<sup>3</sup>/capita/year **chronic water scarcity** is a limitation to economic development and human health and well-being, and below 500m<sup>3</sup>/capita/year water availability is a main constraint to life (**absolute scarcity**). For a critique of Falkenmark's index and other indices, see [http://waterwiki.net/index.php/Water\\_Conflict\\_and\\_Cooperation/Indicators](http://waterwiki.net/index.php/Water_Conflict_and_Cooperation/Indicators).

emotion.<sup>3</sup> Water scarcity is being securitised by both parties to the conflict, but the motivations behind the respective securitising moves as well as their referential objects differ immensely. This is where conflict resolution needs to start.

The following is the essence of five years of research on this topic. In my PhD thesis, I firstly outlined the genesis of the Israeli and Palestinian water discourses from 1882 (the start of systematic Jewish settlement in biblical Palestine) until 2005. In this way, the results of the ensuing discourse analysis could be set in relation to the historical development of the water discourses in both societies. Secondly, a synchronic critical discourse analysis of seventeen half-open, semi-structured interviews with Israeli and Palestinian water experts showed how both societies perceive and value water on a political, strategic and societal level and in what way water is being (de-)securitised for and by whom. This analysis revealed disparities and conflictive issues, but also parallels, similarities and starting points for dialogue in both the Israeli and the Palestinian water discourses. Thirdly, I formulated tentative trends for the future development of the Israeli-Palestinian water conflict, which could potentially be starting points for new peace initiatives.<sup>4</sup>

### *Discourse structure*

The two fundamentally different interpretations of water and water scarcity can be explained and understood when considering the specific development and structure of the respective national discourses on water. Both discourses contain elements of a hegemonic and a counter-discourse. The specific discursive structures precluded which was “sayable” or “unsayable” in both discourses, dependent on the level to which an utterance referred and on the speaker’s position in the discourse. When international issues are touched upon, like justice, international law or the allocation of the natural water resources amongst all neighbours in the Jordan basin, it is impossible (unsayable) in both hegemonic discourses to criticise the respective in-group’s water management. On this level, water is perceived as a zero-sum game: Giving up control over water is perceived as real water loss; at the same time, a lack of control equals as an existential threat. While cooperative water management is mentioned as a wish or overall goal in both discourses, in the hegemonic discourse structures it is considered feasible only and exclusively when political aspects of water management – like re-allocation – remained out of bounds (i.e. unsayable).

On the national level, the limits of that which was sayable tend to be more generous. Without the threat of a hostile out-group it becomes possible to criticise one’s in-group’s water (management) practices, and even to demand massive changes in this sector. This is where starting points for dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians inside both hegemonic discourses are discernable: As long as the highly political issue of re-allocation is left out, water experts from both sides agree on the rough outlines of an ideal regional water management.

It is only in the respective counter-discourses, however, that hegemonic limits to that which was sayable are broadened considerably. Here, both the perception of water as a zero-sum game as well as the depiction of the respective “other” as dangerous and threatening are substituted by more cooperative discourse structures. In the Israeli discourse, this is achieved by transcending that which had hitherto been primarily national interests onto the global level; in Palestinian discourse, acknowledging the respective direct responsibility for the current status quo in water allocations reveals far more cooperative discourse structures. While both hegemonic discourses are entirely focused on the (national) in-group’s security and the out-

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<sup>3</sup> Jad Isaac: Opening Remarks, In: Jad Isaac / Hillel Shuval (eds.): *Water and Peace in the Middle East*, Proceedings of the First Israeli-Palestinian International Academic Conference on Water, Zürich, Switzerland, 10-13 December 1992, Amsterdam / London / New York et.al.: Elsevier 1994, p. xiii-xiv, here p. xiv.

<sup>4</sup> See Christiane Fröhlich: *Der israelisch-palästinensische Wasserkonflikt. Diskursanalytische Betrachtungen*. Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag, 2010.

group's mistakes and failings, the respective counter-discourses open up new room for critique of the in-group and a certain openness towards the "other's" narrative and outlook.

It is, at this point, not important which of these viewpoints is "true". It is not central here to confirm and appraise what is "right" or "wrong", but what is **considered** "right" or "wrong" in the national discourses, making it thus sayable or unsayable. As mentioned above, even such seemingly objective data as the available water quantities are being actively constructed and interpreted; therefore, it is necessary to identify discourse structures which reflect such active construction in order to transform them.

### *Hegemonic discourse structures: Israel*

In the Israeli hegemonic discourse, which is – like the whole water discourse – dominated by experts (who may or may not cameo as politicians), the natural water resources in the Jordan basin are considered too scarce to keep the current standard of living of the region's population, let alone improve it. Natural water scarcity is perceived to be absolute. Together with the historical relation between land, water and the creation of a Jewish state, deeply rooted in Zionist ideology, this results in a perception of natural water scarcity as existential threat, manifested in countless securitising moves.

The roots of water's ideological meaning for Israel lie in political Zionism, which is shaping the political decisions of the State of Israel until this very day. Water had a central role in Zionism, since the movement's goal – the creation of a Jewish state – could not have been achieved without sufficient water resources. In addition, agriculture, at the beginning of the 20th century, evolved into the highest goal of the Zionist movement and into the most important symbol of the *yishuv*, the new Jewish community prior to the creation of the state. As an answer to growing anti-Semitism, Europe's increasing modernization and secularisation as well as strengthening movements of nationalism, the "promised land" in the first half of the 20th century developed from a symbol of spiritual redemption in the unknown future to the practical focus of national rebirth, to a ray of hope for the developing Jewish nationalism. The intellectual, spiritually-indirect relation of Jews to the "promised land" was constructed into a direct reference in Zionism.

The link between the goal of a state territory on biblically promised land and its settlement by Jews, thus the creation of a specifically Jewish state, was agriculture. On the one hand, agriculture made it possible to "take into possession" the land in the literal sense. On the other hand, Jewish immigrants could, by working with the land and owning it, shed their European, Western, urban image and substitute it through a new identity: that of the *chalutz*, the pioneer, who helps to build a Jewish state and thus contributes to the redemption of the "chosen people". However, both for the immediate survival of the numerous immigrants and for agriculture, a secure supply of fresh water was indispensable. Thus, both settlement and agriculture aided the fact that water as a resource melted together with the „Zionist[...] ethos of land, pioneer heroics, and national salvation“.<sup>5</sup>

This is where today's institutionalised securitisation of water in Israeli discourse is rooted: Water became an aspect of national security, of the security of the Jewish entity which formed the ultimate Zionist goal. The holocaust and the repeated threats by Arab neighbours to "drive Israel into the sea" led to the development of a "security ethos" or "security discourse", which from very early on put the *yishuv's* security in the centre of all political initiative. The discursive securitisation of diverse threats became one of the most powerful discursive structures in the Israeli societal discourse; security became a cultural master symbol. In general, a mentality developed which cultivates the perpetual state of siege.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Alwyn R. Rouyer: Zionism and Water: Influences on Israel's Future Water Policy during the Pre-State Period. In: Arab Studies Quarterly, Herbst 1996, Bd. 18, Nr. 4, [http://www.orianim.ac.il/courses/meast/water/Zionism%20and%20water\\_files/fulltext.html](http://www.orianim.ac.il/courses/meast/water/Zionism%20and%20water_files/fulltext.html), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Bar-Tal: Societal Beliefs in Times of Intractable Conflict: The Israeli Case. In: International Journal of

The water discourse has been taken over by this general securitisation trend. Growing immigration, developing water scarcity, the myth of the *chalutz* and discursive incidents such as the British White Paper of 1939 contributed to this securitisation trend. Zionism rooted the idea of “settling the land” and “making the desert bloom” as one of the Jewish state’s central concerns in Jewish collective memory. A sufficient water supply thus became a value in and of itself, a symbolic practice and a vital condition for Jewish-Israeli identity.

It was not until 1967, when water scarcity remained even though Israel had acquired control over most of the natural resources, that more pragmatic voices became more prominent in the Israeli water discourse. After the six-day-war, a certain de-securitisation (with regard to the in-group) of the resource began, which was enhanced by technical progress, especially the development of affordable desalination technologies in the 1990s. Ever since the Oslo accords, the water issue even tends to be seen as practically solved: In Israeli hegemonic discourse, the peace agreements between Israel and Jordan and the Palestinian Authority are generally perceived as a successful solution to the water conflict. Water, according to this argument, has lost large parts of its emotional and ideological charge and has thus been de-securitised considerably.

But discourse analysis shows that the “old” conflictive discourse structures are still present, and can easily be reactivated. Giving up Israeli control over natural water resources as requested by Palestinians still is decidedly unsayable: Numerous securitising moves illustrate that hegemonic discourse structures aim primarily at securing and conserving the status quo of water allocation, thus preventing any changes. The only way out of this perceived, existentially threatening scarcity is, in the Israeli hegemonic discourse, to produce more water through desalination. Changing the Israeli economic structure or the overall standard of living, however, is as unsayable as re-allocating any amount of water which has been under Israeli control since 1967.

In a nutshell, the discursive securitisation of a re-allocation of the natural water resources is, despite several desecuritising moves since 1967, still being routinely activated whenever need be. On the basis of this securitising move, emergency measures including violence continue to be legitimised. The emphasis put on desalination as a means to solve the conflict cannot belie that the hegemonic discourse structures which depict water as an attribute of disputed territory and as part of the Jewish-Israeli identity remain widely unchanged. The fact that the talks about the political dimension of regional water management failed during the Oslo process and had to be postponed to the end status negotiations can be read as a manifestation of these discursive structures. Thus, true de-securitisation remains a hope rather than a reality, since the hegemonic discourse structures dominate the Israeli water discourse and predetermine political decision making.

#### *Israeli counter-discourse*

The hegemonic spheres of the sayable are expanded only in the Israeli counter-discourse. While the general meaning of water for Israel’s survival is not questioned, the myth (and goal) of the blooming desert is rejected altogether. Hitherto exclusively national security interests are being transcended onto the whole region; water allocation is set in relation to international justice and the debate on water as a human right. Thus, the goal is not to preserve the status quo of water allocation, but to use and to allocate water independent of past securitisations, to start anew under entirely different premises. The central issues and goals are sustainability, justice and environmental protection. According to this argument, water allocation should be independent from a user’s nationality; questions of water utilisation should be independent from national political interests. The ideological value of

Israeli agriculture thus is substituted by a pragmatic estimate of its economic value, which would ultimately lead to its extinction.

Thus, the counter-discourse massively broadens and changes the hegemonic spheres of the sayable. However, it still falls short of a true de-securitisation of water scarcity. While the focus of the securitising moves has indeed changed, they merely move on to another referent object but otherwise remain largely undiminished. Instead of perceiving natural water scarcity as an absolute threat to the Israeli (and Middle Eastern) society and suggesting desalination as urgent and imperative, the counter-discourse depicts past water utilisation as generally threatening for the whole regional population. In addition, de-securitisation remains subjunctive when a society which lives in complete harmony with the natural conditions is imagined. In sum, the counter-discourse, while considerably expanding the hegemonic spheres of the sayable, cannot entirely free itself from the inscribed, internalised routines of the security ethos mentioned above. This proves the prevailing great mistrust and results from the extremely durable, existentially threatening and seemingly unsolvable conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

#### *Hegemonic discourse structures: Palestine*

In the Palestinian hegemonic discourse, the same natural water resources that are perceived to be absolutely scarce in Israeli discourse are believed to be sufficient at least for a major improvement of the Palestinian standard of living. In the Palestinian perception, the experienced water scarcity is entirely politically induced; this manifests in countless securitisations of the Israeli control over water. Where “objective” water scarcity is the focus in Israeli discourse, in the Palestinian it is Israeli dominance which causes most securitising moves.

While water had been considered essential for the security and survival of the *yishuv* and the state of Israel all along in the Israeli discourse, the analogous development in the Palestinian discourse was considerably delayed. For a long time, there was no common Palestinian voice which could have supported the vision of a specific Palestinian society independent from Osman and/or pan-Arab voices. In addition, the Palestinian discourse developed in response to and dependent on the Israeli discourse; the Palestinian hegemonic discourse structures reflect this until today.

Due to its specific historical development, the Palestinian water discourse perceives water as important primarily as an attribute of a territory that is considered rightfully Palestinian, but has been under Israeli control for decades. The Palestinian water discourse has been formed by Israeli control, not natural conditions: The water scarcity that Palestinians experience is almost exclusively perceived as a consequence of Israeli dominance in the water sector and in the region in general. It can be assumed that this discourse pattern has been imprinted on Palestinian societal discourse ever since the proclamation of the state of Israel (if not earlier) and thus is not by any means an exclusive characteristic of the water discourse. Accordingly, Palestinian societal discourse were dominated by the striving for an independent, sovereign state territory and the end of Israeli occupation. The perception of water, or of control over the resource, thus were no more than an appendix to these discourse structures. In fact, the demand for sufficient water allocations in Palestinian hegemonic discourse is discursively inseparable from the rejection of Israeli control over large parts of the natural water resources and from the demand for a re-allocation of these very resources. Water here functions as one medium amongst many others which are being utilised to communicate Palestinian overall rejection of Israeli dominance.

These hegemonic discourse structures reflect a dominant mentality of siege which exists analogous to the Israeli such mentality. One manifestation thereof is the myth of the *fellah*, who works and sustains his land even in the worst of circumstances (and needs water to do

that). Thus, the Palestinian hegemonic discourse on water is characterised mainly by resistance against Israel; only in the last couple of years, specifically Palestinian versions of water management have been developed which at least partly transcend this resistance and the general rejection of Israel.

These hegemonic discourse structures result in massive securitisations of water in Palestinian water discourse, even though for different reasons than in the Israeli discourse. Due to its territorial connotations and the identity issues connected to it, as well as considering the Palestinian dependence on Israeli allocations which is perceived as absolute and which exists since 1967, Israel's control over large parts of the regional water resources is considered and perceived to be an existential threat to Palestinian society. The insufficient access to the natural water resources of the West Bank and the Gaza strip (prior to 2005) is, according to this argument, a threat to the viability of a Palestinian state.

These hegemonic discourse structures influence practically all discursive patterns in Palestinian water discourse. This is illustrated by a perception which is communicated throughout the hegemonic discourse, namely that the general consideration of Palestinian claims to groundwater resources beneath the West Bank and parts of the river Jordan were imperative for the overall goal of establishing a Palestinian state. The reduction of the water issue to technical issues as practised by Israel (for instance in the Israeli-Palestinian joint water committee) thus equals surrendering the central national goal. This also explains why desalination is rejected outright in Palestinian discourse: There, access to water is discursively constructed into a vehicle to achieve a cohesive, viable Palestinian state. While there certainly are more pragmatic voices inside Palestinian hegemonic discourse, who criticise Palestinian water management and thus expand the spheres of the sayable considerably (even if only on the national level), the dominant discourse structure on the international level is a securitisation of Israeli control over large parts of the natural water resources by depicting Palestinian control over these resources as a vital and indispensable element of a sovereign Palestinian state. Thus, there has not been any de-securitisation in Palestinian hegemonic discourse as yet, since Palestinians remain politically, economically and socially dependent on Israel, their Arab neighbours and the international community.

Generally speaking, the Palestinian hegemonic discourse considers Israel to be solely responsible for the situation of the Palestinians. Accordingly, Israel is presented as pivotal to all Palestinian suggestions to solve the conflict in Palestinian discourse: Israel's public opinion needs to change, Israel needs to compensate the Palestinians etc. At the same time, already existing efforts by Israel to relax the water situation for Palestinians are being ignored or ridiculed; they remain unsayable. The Palestinians, in contrast to this, are perceived as entirely dependent on outside forces and only to a certain extent – if at all – responsible. This is interesting particularly with regard to the fact that Israeli discourse does not question Palestinian capacity to act, but on the contrary actively requests their taking on responsibility for the regional water resources.

#### *Palestinian counter-discourse*

Palestinian hegemonic discourse depicts Palestinians as predominantly passive, dependent and broadly helpless spectators of the regional water management. In this way, they are relieved of all responsibility to act: Any responsibility is being projected onto the out-group. This discursive pattern, which necessarily hinders conflict resolution initiatives, is only altered in Palestinian counter-discourse. There, Palestinians – illustrated for instance by subject-object-constructions – achieve the ability and duty to act. This kind of discursive empowerment results in two things: Firstly, the hegemonic discourse structures need to withstand the inherent massive critique. By questioning the dominant communication pattern, the counter-discourse challenges the predominant self-image of Palestinian society as the victim of Israeli assaults. If this counter-discourse gained momentum, the Palestinian society



would have to reconcile the cognitive dissonance between the myth of the unjustly treated, mainly peace-loving and cooperative Palestinian and the image of the lying, greedy and war-mongering Israeli with reality. Palestinians would have to face their responsibility towards their own and the Israeli population and admit to past mistakes. On this basis, a de-securitisation of water (and the other conflictive issues) would be possible.

Secondly, underscoring the Palestinian society's ability and duty to act results in discursive structures that no longer glorify the in-group, but render the latter both vulnerable and changeable in the direction of cooperation. At the same time (and possibly proportional to this) the demonisation of the out-group decreases, so that hitherto dominant conflictive discourse structures are substituted by more cooperative ones. Thus, in the counter-discourse it is possible to interpret cooperation with Israel, Israeli efforts in the water sector as well as Israeli knowledge about water management as entirely positive and even useful for Palestinian society.

The effects of this discursive empowerment became particularly obvious with regard to the topic of asymmetry. In Palestinian hegemonic discourse the asymmetry between Palestinians and Israelis is perceived as absolute and virtually immutable. In the counter-discourse, however, it was not only sayable that Palestinians had already had numerous opportunities to break this asymmetry but did not take advantage of them; the counter-discourse also implied that it is still possible to change the existing asymmetry to the benefit of the Palestinians if the international community, Arab neighbours and Israel can be convinced of the Palestinian's sincere goodwill and capacities. Together with the related call to or request for action, aimed at all Palestinians, this not only expands the hegemonic spheres of the sayable, but can also be read as a starting point for dialogue and cooperation between the conflicting parties.

### **Conflict transformation through discourse transformation**

In sum, the hegemonic structures of both the Israeli and the Palestinian water discourses are dominated by powerful conflictive patterns which extend from the societal discourses into the water discourses and frame the latter. These conflictive structures with their securitisations and exclusions hinder the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian water conflict. This becomes particularly clear with regard to the perception of the respective out-group: In Israeli hegemonic discourse, the water quantity available to Palestinians is perceived as sufficient, thus letting the Palestinian demand seem unjustified. This reproduces an Orientalist image of the dreamy, irrational and emotional Arab who hurts himself with his lack of pragmatism. At the same time, the Palestinian hegemonic discourse features the Israelis as faceless, anonymous and hostile mass which maintains the occupation and the conflict with the Palestinians to satisfy its greed and lust for war, without any interest whatsoever in solving the conflict. It was only in the respective counter-discourses that "the other" was accepted with their needs and anxieties; this, however, is a vital condition for conflict transformation. Here (and only here), starting points for a communicative *rapprochement* of both camps became visible.

There is overall agreement in Israel and Palestine, on a theoretical level, that the prevalent mentality of *us versus them* does not make sense with regard to resources like water, since water ignores national borders and thus needs to be managed cooperatively. In fact, the idea of sustainability and environmental protection is widely accepted by both sides, as is the idea of cooperative water management as an overall goal for the region. But this general accordance is superimposed by the conflictive discourse structures outlined above. If these discursive structures' power were diminished and substituted by more cooperative varieties, the way to cooperative water management could be considerably shortened; there could even be spillover-effects of this trust building into other areas of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Thus, it is imperative to develop tools of “discursive conflict resolution” in order to come closer to a sustainable solution to the water conflict. So how can powerful discourse structures be changed? Discourse alterations become possible on the basis of any perceived change of the conflict situation, both on the regional and on the global level. Changes of the geopolitical, military or even economic conditions can have a positive effect on hegemonic discourse structures:

„Any representation which blurs the inclusion/exclusion boundary breaks down certainties constructed in the name of war and forms a counter-discourse which deconstructs and delegitimizes war and thereby fragments myths of unity, duty and conformity.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus, conflict transformation could be achieved by weakening the antagonistic positions in the water sector and supporting the de-securitisation of the resource (as demonstrated in the counter-discourses). In order to achieve this, the respective counter-voices could be given a forum in order to, by continually and constantly putting pressure on the hegemonic discourse structures and by expanding the spheres of the sayable, produce cognitive dissonances which question and reframe the old, discursively institutionalised perception of the Israeli-Palestinian water conflict. In this way, the perception of both the out- and the in-group could be gradually changed, allowing trust to develop anew.

From what we know today, external actors will play a vital role in this process by influencing the conflict as mediators or third parties. The impact that Israeli and Palestinian discursive structures have on these external actors, or rather: the latter’s ability to break out of these institutionalised patterns of communication could decide about whether they are successful agents and considered trustworthy and acceptable. Therefore, analysing the discourses of international actors in the Middle Eastern conflict and their interplay with the local hegemonic and counter-discourses promises to be fruitful for future works of peace and conflict studies. In any case, with communication at the bottom of every conflict, ignoring conflictive discourse structures equals accepting them uncritically and thereby perpetuating the conflict.

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<sup>7</sup> Jabri (1996), S. 7.