

Cooperation over Water Resources as a Tool for Desecuritisation: the Israeli – Palestinian Environmental NGOs as Desecuritising Actor¹

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Abstract:

This article discusses the role of the Israeli and Palestinian environmental NGOs as desecuritising actors who have attempted to initiate a desecuritisation process. In this regard, the article first reviews the Copenhagen School's securitisation theory with a particular focus on the concept of desecuritisation and desecuritising actor. Based on the notion of desecuritisation, an analytical framework for analysis will be suggested here to integrate Israeli-Palestinian environmental NGOs' water management efforts as contributions in desecuritisation of relations between Israelis and Palestinians with wider conflict resolution efforts.

JEL: F51

Keywords:

Water resources, desecuritisation, environment, Israel, Palestine

Securitisation theory has been developed by a number of scholars affiliated to the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute as a theoretical framework to answer the question of what really makes something a security problem. The analytical framework

¹ This article is part of the author's doctoral thesis entitled 'Analyzing Desecuritisation: The Cases of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Education and Water Management'

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suggested by Copenhagen School includes concepts of both securitisation and desecuritisation, yet desecuritisation has been left undertheorised. Much of the criticism directed at the Copenhagen School's securitisation theory stems from the under-theorisation of the desecuritisation concept. This critique constitutes the starting point of this article in that it attempts to develop the notion of desecuritisation in the Israeli-Palestinian context. More specifically, the concept of the desecuritisng actor will be put under scrutiny since the choice of desecuritisng actor as members of the civil society, challenges the Copenhagen School's view of securitisation and desecuritisation as political processes initiated by the political elite.

This article views Israeli and Palestinian environmental NGOs' cooperation over shared water resources as an important part of structural peace-building by re-defining and re-evaluating the relations between Israeli and Palestinian public. In this respect, it is argued that by working together for a common cause -increasing quality and quantity of shared water resources- Israeli and Palestinian environmental NGOs and water experts play a part in desecuritisng the relations between two societies. Thus, this article discusses Israeli-Palestinian water management efforts as desecuritisng moves. It is imperative to keep in mind that a fully-fledged desecuritisation was not realised in the Israeli-Palestinian context, but there exists societal level efforts to initiate desecuritisng moves between Israelis and Palestinians, water management being one of them.

The first section reviews the Copenhagen School's concept of desecuritisation as well as arguments and critique with regard to desecuritisation concept. Furthermore, based on the notion of desecuritisation, an analytical framework for analysing the desecuritisation moves of Israeli and Palestinian civil societies will be presented in this section. The second section discusses the place of water as part of the peace-making and peace-building processes in the Israeli-Palestinian context. The final section is an analysis of water management as a means of desecuritisation.

Securitisation Theory and the Concept of Desecuritisation

Securitization theory was developed by the Copenhagen School during the 1990s in order to construct a "neo-conventional security analysis (which) sticks to the traditional core of the concept of security (existential threats, survival), but is undogmatic as to both sectors (not only military) and referent objects (not only states)" (Wæver 1996:110). According to the Copenhagen scholars, what is needed is an understanding of the cultural process of securitization; by which actors construct issues as threats to security. Within this context, securitization refers to a process that certain entities or issues are transformed into a threat through a particular discourse. It is defined by the Copenhagen School as a kind of threat construction through "speech acts". Securitization necessitates the use and perpetual repetition of the rhetoric of

existential threat mostly by the ruling elites. Throughout the securitization process, the political/military elites, by convincing the audience (public) that the existential threat is a real threat, legitimize the use of exceptional measures to combat or prevent this threat.

The Copenhagen School argues that securitization is founded upon a speech act by an actor claiming to speak in defence of a collectivity and demanding the right to act on its behalf. As a speech act is one of the basic components of securitization, by definition it is an inter-subjective communication process that requires, as a rule, at least two sides: a securitizing actor and an audience. Securitization necessitates the use and perpetual repetition of the rhetoric of existential threat by the securitizing actor, who is usually the government and/or its military and bureaucratic elite.

In order to complement the communication act between securitizing actor and the audience, the Copenhagen School suggests three 'facilitating conditions' that influence the success of the securitization process: the demand which is internal to the speech act of following the grammar of security; the relationship between the society (audience) that accept the claims the securitizing actor; and the specifications of the alleged threats facilitating or hindering the securitization. It is more likely that one can conjure a security threat, if there are certain objects to refer which are generally held to be threatening – ie. tanks, hostile sentiments, or polluted waters. In themselves, they never make for necessary securitization, but they are definitely facilitating conditions (Buzan et al. 1998:33, Buzan and Wæver 2003:15). These three conditions facilitates a securitizing act which has a chance to be successful, which means only then a securitizing actor has been able to convince the audience of the need to mobilize to take extraordinary measures. Buzan and Wæver introduce these conditions as important factors in understanding securitizing speech acts with a particular focus on power and the inter-subjective establishment of threat (1998: 25, 31-32). Wæver's restrictions on who is likely to succeed in securitization are based on the realist notion of the distribution of capabilities and powers. The more capabilities a securitizing actor has, the more likely this actor will succeed in attempted securitization. In other words, individuals or groups deprived of powers and capabilities in the society can seldom act as securitizing actors. They may speak about security to and of themselves, but they can never have the power and capability to securitize the particular issue they perceive as an existential threat.

Considering the dangers of framing certain issues in the language of security, the Copenhagen School has underlined the preference for desecuritisation and defines desecuritisation as "a process in which a political community downgrades or ceases to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and reduces or stops calling for exceptional measures to deal with the threat" (Buzan and Wæver 2003:489).

Desecuritisation is best understood as the fading away of a particular issue from the security agenda and implies that issues, for which the potential use of exceptional measures had previously been legitimised, gradually start to take steps backward so that violence will no longer be considered as a legitimate option (Wæver 1995:57). The ultimate goal of desecuritisation is the achievement of a situation in which the issue in question is no longer seen as threatening, and thus is no longer defined in security terms.

As argued by Wæver, securitised issues can be managed or transformed. However, there exists a distinction between the management of securitised issues (normalisation) and desecuritisation. The management of securitised issues may bring with it the notion of normalising the situation - an insecurity situation. Security and insecurity do not constitute an opposition. A security situation means that a threat is articulated and sufficient counter-measures are available, in contrast, insecurity has a security threat but no, or insufficient, response (Wæver 1998:81). In the case of desecuritisation there is neither security nor insecurity. If the situation is taken out of the realm of security conceptualisation, the situation can be inelegantly described as one of 'a-security' or 'non- insecurity' (Wæver 1998:81). The challenge lies in the transformation of the securitised issues, the shifting of an issue from something that is security to something that is 'asecurity' (Roe 2004:285). For Wæver, the best way is to prevent issues from being framed in terms of security in the first place, which is not an option in the Israeli-Palestinian case. Thus, Wæver's solution is not satisfactory at all in cases like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for which desecuritisation requires a drastic transformation of the securitised issue to make it part of the normal political process.

By contrast to securitising actor(s) which is clearly defined within the context of the securitisation theory, the Copenhagen School does not explicitly define who could be a desecuritising actor. In this regard, Andrea Oelsner who has applied the concept of desecuritisation on the case of regional peace in Latin America suggests that in the desecuritisation process, the crucial actors may be policy-makers and other political, economic, and intellectual elites, who will try to convey to the public (the audience, in the language of securitisation theory) their re-interpreted perceptions (Oelsner 2005:15). The same actors that had previously advocated securitisation may now encourage the process of desecuritisation by renegotiating appropriate responses with relevant audiences as well as other actors. This time, the aim will be to remove certain issues from the security agenda. On the other hand, Claudia Aradau argues that the agents should not be the self-same agents of securitisation. For Aradau, desecuritising actors should be from within the previously silenced 'other' (Aradau 2003:20). As is the case in the Israeli Palestinian context, in most of the cases the securitising actors are unwilling of desecuritisation and consider normalisation or conflict management as an option. At its best political elites initiate and/or agree to participate official peace-making processes but that does not end up with

desecuritisation necessarily. Therefore, actors other than the securitising actors should initiate the process.

An Analytical Framework: Desecuritisation as an Integral Part of Conflict Resolution

Desecuritisation by downgrading or ceasing to treat 'the other' as an existential threat is an indispensable part of conflict resolution between former adversaries. Conflict resolution addresses the deep-rooted sources of conflict. The aim of conflict resolution is to transform actually and potentially violent conflict into a non-violent process of social and political change (Ramsbotham et al. 2007:30). In this vein, if successful, by reversing the process of threat construction and downgrading the feeling of animosity towards the other conflict resolution process inherently links with desecuritisation.

The development towards a more consolidated peace involves a process of redefinition and reinterpretation of the perceptions of 'the other'. Eventually, incremental changes facilitate, at least among the elites, a degree of working trust that focuses on the common interests that exist amid continuing differences in perceptions and attitudes. Within this context, Marc Howard Ross argues that the problem in attempting to resolve a conflict is not merely to seek "a formula on which the parties can agree but also to first find a way to alter the hostile perceptions and mutual fears that lock the parties into a zero-sum view of any proposals" (Ross 1993:160). That is to say, the lack of open conflict and violence does not mean that the relations between former adversaries were desecuritised. To this end, two factors can help to desecuritize the relations: rhetoric, as the manifestation of political will, and the construction of co-operative institutions and organisations (Oelsner 2005:14). When the conflicting sides show signs of readiness to cooperate and/or coexist, shared discourses, common projects and even common institutions can be expected to evolve. As a consequence of this, the relationships between the parties become desecuritised (Oelsner 2005:14). Common institutions, high levels of interdependence and compatible domestic regimes, among others, point to the existence of efforts to desecuritize (Adler and Barnett 1998:114).

In order to move the security issue back into normal politics, from security to asecurity, desecuritisation process needs to be fed by both structural and cultural peace-building efforts. In this vein, the analytical framework suggested here views desecuritisation as a natural product of structural and cultural peace-building efforts as well as official peace-making efforts. Here, it is argued that besides official level desecuriting moves, at societal level positive changes in relations between former adversaries (Oelsner 2005) and their perceptions towards each other (Kacowicz and Bar-Siman-Tov 2000) can be considered as desecuriting moves. Hence, it is

suggested that there exists a necessity of the existence of a variety of desecuritising actors both from societal and official level.

Thorough peace-making and peace-building efforts a natural process of desecuritisation is initiated with reconciliation being an ideal outcome. Peace-making, which aims at ending direct violence between the adversaries, refers to the attempts "through traditional diplomatic activities [to reach] a settlement between conflicting parties" (Fisher 1997:10). Peace-making is used in the sense of moving towards a conflict settlement where conflicting parties are induced to reach an agreement (Ramsbotham et al. 2007:30). Peace-building, meanwhile, refers to the attempts to make peace from the bottom up. Ronald J. Fisher defines peace-building as "efforts for improving the relationship between adversaries toward greater trust and cooperation, more accurate perceptions and attitudes, a more positive climate, and a stronger political will to deal constructively with their differences" (Fisher 1997:11). Peace-building underpins peace-making by addressing structural issues and the long-term relationship between conflicting parties (Ramsbotham et al. 2007:30).

Johann Galtung suggests that peace-making aims to change the attitudes of the main protagonists and brings negative peace, whereas peace-building tries to overcome the contradictions which lie at the root of the conflict and brings positive peace (Galtung 1996:112). Galtung defines negative peace as the cessation of direct violence and positive peace as the overcoming of structural and cultural violence as well. In conflict situations desecuritisation is not necessarily identified with the lack of conflict and violence. Securitisised relations between conflicting parties cannot be easily desecuritisised within the context of negative peace. Hence, desecuritisation of relations between former adversaries requires peace building efforts to bring about a positive peace.

Based on Galtung's model of conflict, violence and peace, peace-building is classified as structural and cultural peace-building. Structural peace-building addresses the issues such as security concerns, civil and human rights, economic stability and growth, the sharing of resources and the distribution of power. If successful, structural peace-building leads to normalisation, thus contributes in desecuritisation of relations. On the other hand, cultural peace-building addresses issues like education, peace and conflict awareness, cultural exchanges and people-to-people encounters. If successful, cultural peace-building can lead to reconciliation (Ramsbotham et al. 2007:14). In this sense, structural peace-building paves the way for the re-definition and re-evaluation of relations between former adversaries and contributes in the re-definition and re-evaluation of the perceptions regarding the other side of the conflict.

The analytical framework suggested here argued that for a successful desecuritisation both official level political will to end conflict through peace-making and societal or civil society level determination for peace-building is necessary. Here,

it is argued that a fully-fledged desecuritisation requires more than one set of desecuritising actors both among the political elite and from civil society. Ideally both sides' desecuritising efforts should complement each other.

Water Management as Part of Israeli-Palestinian Peace-building

In general one of the key areas which can be instrumental in encouraging cooperation between conflicting parties and peace-building is water management. In terms of peace-building, issues regarding water resources potentially offer a window of opportunity for cooperation and coexistence between former adversaries. Since cooperation among conflicting parties involved in water disputes increases access to water and lowers the risk of armed conflict over scarce resources, water can be utilised as a catalyst for conflict resolution and peace-building.

Of all the issues in the Israeli-Palestinian context, access to fresh water has been one of the most visible since water is considered an issue of vital importance to both sides. Therefore, water was seen as an issue in negotiations that has the potential for resolution. It has also provided opportunities for peoples from both sides of the conflict to work together.

Even before the signing of the Interim Agreement in 1995 and the establishment of the Joint Water Committee (JWC) following the Interim Agreement, Israeli and Palestinian environmental experts were well aware of water-related problems. Within this context, the IPCRI initiated a meeting called Our Shared Environment in December 1994. This conference was particularly important since it was the first time that Israeli and Palestinian civil society and water experts from governmental level had met in an informal context to discuss their mutual concerns. During the conference, both Israeli and Palestinian delegates pointed out the need for cooperation on water management and linked environmentalism to the structural peace-building process (Proceedings 1994). Referring to the importance of sustainable water systems, Yoram Avnimelech from Haifa University Faculty of Agricultural Engineering pointed out the necessity for Israelis and Palestinians to work together by saying that "...this problem of water quality knows no borders. Israelis and Palestinians share the same watersheds and aquifers and have to deal with this together" (Avnimelech 1994:29). As an example of Palestinian views, Karen Assaf from the PNA Ministry of Planning underlined the importance of overcoming the lack of trust between the two sides when dealing with water-related problems by saying that "there is a problem of conflicting entities and the attitude over the years that either we use it (water) or lose it. In essence, as Palestinians and Israelis, we have to get over this lack of trust and begin to coordinate and work positively" (Asaf 1994:57).

Even though civil society is supposed to supplement governmental work in the water management area, particularly after the collapse of peace process, civil society

has taken the initiative in project development and implementation in the water sector (Twite 2007). Water departments of Israeli and Palestinian universities and NGOs, for example the IPCRI, FoEME, and the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, have cooperated in the Israeli-Palestinian water sector.

During the early 1990s, Israeli-Palestinian cooperation in the environmental field in general and water management in particular was viewed as a means to support the peace-making efforts. Hence, parallel to the bilateral and multilateral peace-making efforts during the Oslo peace process, numerous joint Israeli-Palestinian NGOs were created to deal with environmental issues, including water-related problems. These NGOs became complementary to the peace-making efforts during the peace process by supporting policy development in the water management area, offering technical expertise, developing capacity-building and implementing transboundary water projects.

Most of the joint Israeli-Palestinian environmental NGOs are funded from the Israeli side or from international partners such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the EU and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), although all of them claim to be equally Israeli and Palestinian in their orientation and focus. All of them conduct their work primarily in English and all have faced crises associated with the Intifada.

In spite of the violence that erupted in 2000, most of the joint Israeli and Palestinian environmental NGOs survive and continue to contribute to Israeli-Palestinian transboundary water management. These projects have faced several challenges and obstacles after the collapse of the peace process in 2000, such as restrictions on movement, social legitimacy and funding. In October 2004 a second Israeli-Palestinian International Conference on Water for Life was held. Editors of the conference proceedings, Hasan Dweik from Al-Quds University and Hillel Shuval from the Hebrew University, opened the conference with the following call:

[...] resolving the water issues through a much needed and much wanted long-term peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians is far from encouraging ... through this Conference the delegates have participated in the process of promoting peace through dialog among scientist in what is called "second track diplomacy (Dweik and Shuval 2006:7-8).

As stated by Michael Zwirn (2001), the success of joint environmental NGOs depends on the creation of lasting institutional and personal ties between Israeli and Palestinian partners, such as those created in the above-mentioned conferences. These networks have maintained and withstood the security and political crises that erupt every so often between Israelis and Palestinians. Among all the conflicting issues,

fresh water has linked Israelis and Palestinians both at the governmental and societal levels. In the next section these cooperation and coexistence activities will be analysed by reference to the notion of desecuritisation.

Water Management as a Means of Desecuritisation in the Israeli-Palestinian Context

Aforementioned, securitised issues can be managed or transformed through desecuritisation. Wæver views desecuritisation as the best option when it comes to particular issues such as environmental threats (Wæver 1995:57). In the Israeli-Palestinian case, a joint recognition of the futility of zero-sum thinking regarding water resources led to the transformation from conflict formation to conflict resolution during the 1990s and transboundary water management between Israel and the Palestinian Authority became part of both peace-making and peace-building processes. With the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000, the peace process collapsed but civil-society-level cooperation and official-level-coordination over water-related issues continued. In the absence of political will for conflict resolution, on their own, Israeli and Palestinian environmental NGOs' structural peace-building efforts have not succeeded in desecuritisating the relations between Israelis and Palestinians. However, their efforts have led improvement in their relations concerning the water sector.

The ultimate goal of desecuritisation is the achievement of a situation in which the issue in question is no longer seen as threatening, and thus is no longer defined in security terms. Several different factors can encourage desecuritisating moves. In the Israeli-Palestinian water management case, a number of internal and external factors affected the development of an environment conducive to cooperation. First, following the drought of 1990-91, a major shift in Israeli water policy occurred and water re-emerged in the public agenda. After the drought, Israeli water experts underlined the importance of, and to the threats to, water quality. This shift towards the importance of water quality has constituted the basis for the many calls by professionals for joint management of the shared aquifers (Feitelson 1996 and Rouyer 2000). The second was reconciliatory atmosphere of the peace process which changed Israeli views regarding the Palestinians' water rights. Within this context, the notion that all people have a right to a basic minimal water allocation for domestic use gained popularity among the Israeli public and consequently a human rights perspective has been added to the Israeli-Palestinian water relations (Shuval 1992 and Rouyer 2000). As Feitelson found out, despite the disparate perceptions of the water issues within Israel, a dominant view emerged during the 1990s in favour of cooperation with the Palestinians (Feitelson 2002:315). The widespread acceptance of this discourse was seen in the statements made by Israeli officials even during the Netanyahu administration and it was admitted that Palestinian domestic water use has a priority

over Israeli agricultural water use.² When the conflicting sides showed signs of readiness to cooperate this reflected in governmental level policies by the establishment of a management structure between Israel and Palestinian Authority, including the Joint Water Committee, Joint Supervision and Enforcement Teams (JSETs) and the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) with the Interim Agreement in 1995.

Since changing negative perceptions and initiating a desecuritisation process is not easy, in most cases, realisation of common interests eventually facilitates a degree of working trust. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, interdependencies regarding the water resources have served as a catalyst to finding a formula on which the parties can agree, which could alter their hostile perceptions and mutual fears and hence contribute to the desecuritisation of their mutual relationship. Gradually, competing claims and accusations regarding the access and control of water have been replaced by securitisation of conflict as a threat to shared water resources by Israeli and Palestinian water experts and environmental NGOs. From this perspective, the issue is seen as more than a zero-sum game but rather a situation where both Israelis and Palestinians stand to lose if they do not carefully manage the aquifers they share. As a reflection of this shift in the Israeli-Palestinian water context in favour of cooperation over shared water resources, several Israeli-Palestinian environmental NGOs were established to institutionalise cooperation between the two sides. Since then, water experts and civil society from both sides have been working together. Currently, there are several bi-national and/or regional environmental NGOs dealing with transboundary water management and several Palestinian agencies collaborating with Israelis on water projects.

As an example of the work of these bodies, FoEME launched the Good Water Neighbours Project in 2001, despite the outbreak of the second Intifada. This project aimed "to foster information-sharing, dialogue and cooperation among communities regarding water and environmental issues... An essential component of the project is to advance the peace dividend – the peace building potential created through the trust developed by community partnerships and cooperative ventures" (FoEME Project Report 2005:6). Good Water Neighbours invested in peace-building at the community level to create the necessary foundations for a long-lasting peace. It is argued that "while at a national level a conflict can prevent progress in problem-solving, at the community level there can remain a willingness to cooperate. This is often the case concerning water supply and pollution problems" (FoEME Project Report 2005:38). Within this context, five Israeli, five Palestinian and one Jordanian community have participated in Phase I of the project (2001-2005). Six additional communities have been included in Phase II (2005 – present). As was stated in its project report, FoEME encouraged the participation of Palestinians as well as Israelis and Jordanians to

² For the quotations from various interviews and newspaper reviews see Rouyer 2000: 195, 207 and 242.

promote cooperation between conflicting sides but avoided the use of words like 'antagonists', 'foes' etc.:

In a conflict area, it is important to have staff members that are representative of the different peoples involved in conflict.

Through a carefully planned and implemented program, individuals can be encouraged to lead their communities, take actions that will improve livelihoods and deal with the urgent needs of their community through working with the 'other' side. Water issues are an excellent bridge to promote cooperation between neighbouring communities (FoEME Project Report 2005:37-38).

Through Good Water Neighbours project FoEME also managed to bring Israeli and Palestinian local authorities together to cooperate over shared water resources. Within the context of the FoEME's Good Water Neighbours project the Mayors of the Palestinian town of Baka el Sharkia and the Israeli city of Baka el Gharbia-Jat signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 19 July 2007. The mayors agreed to strengthen cooperation between their municipalities in order to preserve the natural heritage in the region in respect to environment and water concerns. With this memorandum the Mayors declared their commitment to the protection of the Mountain Aquifer, their agreement to connect their sewage networks to the new treatment plant in Baka el Gharbia-Jat and the importance of cleaning up Wadi Abu Nar, a stream that flows through both municipalities. The Mayors recognised the necessity of allocating resources and funding for joint projects between the two towns, to increase exchange visits between officials of the two towns. The social and geographical connections that tie both municipalities necessitate increased cooperation for the benefit of the region. The agreement between the mayors is significant since most of the towns in the West Bank lack waste water treatment plant. Due to the geographic proximity of these two communities and their use of the Mountain Aquifer's waters, both Israel and the Palestinian Authority have a clear interest in promoting solutions like this for waste water as well as solid waste in the West Bank.

Besides FoEME, IPCRI's Water and Environment Programme almost exclusively focuses on the role of water in peace-building. As stated in IPCRI's web site the Environment and Water Programme of IPCRI is working to promote effective cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians in the field of environment with a special emphasis on water issues. Compared to FoEME, IPCRI operates at the institutional rather than the implementation level, with participants from environmental NGOs, business leaders and ministries from both sides. Besides its participation in regional water management projects such as the Glowa Jordan River Project and the OPTIMA

(Optimisation of Sustainable Water Management) Project, IPCRI is serving to create lasting institutional and personal ties between Israeli and Palestinian water experts and activists through organising regular conferences and workshops. Given the restrictions on movement to/from areas under the Palestinian Authority's control, these conferences and workshops seem to be unique platforms for face-to-face meetings between Israelis and Palestinians dealing with water management. As was declared in the Joint Statement of the Participants of IPCRI's Conference on Water for Life, held in October 2004, both Israeli and Palestinian participants continue to work together to deal with the acute water problems of the region.

[...] the Palestinian and Israeli participants, along with their international partners remain committed to solving the many challenges associated with water quantity and quality in our region ... Human activities caused most of our water problems and [we] can solve them. But this will require coordination and cooperation (Twite 2006:19).

Gershon Baskin, Israeli co-director of the IPCRI, pointed out that a number of Israeli-Palestinian joint projects were initiated following the conference. In this sense, the conference was extremely successful in terms of the continuation of work in the transboundary water management area. Baskin stated that, even if the conflict goes on, civil society continues cooperating, as was the case during the Hamas government's administration. He gave the example of Israeli army personals' dialogue with Palestinian municipalities regarding water-related emergencies despite the temporary freeze in official Israeli dialogue with the Palestinian Authority, including the work of Joint Water Committee (Baskin 2007).

On the Palestinian side, a number of Palestinian NGOs have been collaborating with their Israeli counterparts in water management either being the Palestinian partner of joint Israeli-Palestinian projects or providing consultancy for Israeli environmental NGOs. As al-Khateeb has put it, Palestinian civil society works with Israeli civil society based on equality and mutual respect: "Both Israeli and Palestinians have common interests, particularly when it comes to water issues. It is a win-win case otherwise it would be lose-lose" (al-Khateeb 2007). However, he goes on to point out that, despite the good work done by NGOs from both sides in the water sector, "civil society cannot substitute [for] governments. NGOs can work for awareness, for education but [are] not able to develop infrastructure, which is the most needed thing for Palestinians" (al-Khateeb 2007). As Twite has pointed out, besides financial and logistical problems that obstruct joint water management efforts, there is still the problem of distrust between Israeli and Palestinian political elites. According to Twite, in the water sector one can know all the facts about water but the problem is one of

attitude and mind: getting people to change their opinions, and think more creatively. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, since governments of Palestinians and Israelis do not have the same mentality, neither side has considered the needs of the other (Twite 2007). Both al-Khateeb and Twite underlined that the uncompromising positions of Israeli and Palestinian governments do not serve the good of both peoples.³ For a more efficient water management, Israeli and Palestinian governments have to think differently and develop an understanding of their mutual water needs.

Given the cooperation and co-existence work, those environmental NGOs and water management experts have already become an indispensable part of structural peace-building between Israelis and Palestinians. However, with the lack of a genuine political will to initiate a peace-making process, one cannot talk about a fully-fledged desecuritisation process. The Israeli-Palestinian situation in general and the Israeli-Palestinian water sector in particular remains one of conflict management. Particularly in the water sector, both sides have succeeded in managing securitised issues and kept water out of the ongoing conflict. In this regard, Israeli and Palestinian civil society efforts illustrate the potential for desecuritisation between Israelis and Palestinians in the long run.

Water Management as a Means of Desecuritisation and the Prospects and Problems in Israeli-Palestinian Reconciliation

As far as the assessment of the extent and quality of the cooperation over transboundary water resources is concerned, varying degrees of cooperation are identified by Sadoff and Grey (Sadoff and Grey (2005) as cited in Zeitoun 2008). They suggest an incremental model from unilateral action to coordination, collaboration and to joint action. Similarly, the UNDP 2006 Human Development Report identifies the range of cooperation from coordination such as sharing information, collaboration such as developing adaptable national plans and joint action which includes joint ownership of infrastructure assets (UNDP 2006:224). The reaching of an international agreement or establishment of an international regime is generally seen as cooperation. But when the components of the agreement are not implemented properly, or favour one side at the expense of a collective win, the agreement result in poor cooperation as experienced in the implementation of the Interim Agreement. In this regard, it is important to move beyond the assessment of conflict resolution in water sector as treaties to a more dynamic view of transboundary water cooperation as a non-linear process in which state and non-state actors establish, challenge, modify and legitimize multi-layered governance structures (Kirstin 2007 as cited in Zeitoun 2008). A similar view was expressed in the 2006 UNDP Human Development Report:

³ The interviews were conducted during the Hamas government in 2007, hence all diplomatic and official level contacts between Israel and Palestinian Authority were frozen.

Cooperation [over transboundary waters] need not always be deep – in the sense of agreeing to share all resources and engaging in all types of cooperative ventures – for states to derive benefits from rivers and lakes. Indeed, given the different strategic, political and economic contexts in international basins, it makes sense to promote and support cooperation of any sort, no matter how slight (UNDP 2006:228).

Given the deeper and broader view of conflict resolution in transboundary waters, the work of FOEME and other Israeli and Palestinian civil society efforts are acknowledged by the United Nations as a positive achievement.. Referring to the FOEME's Good Water Neighbours project the UNDP report states that:

A variety of cooperative programmes have been set up in Jordan, Palestine and Israel to promote exchange of information and ideas between different communities in the region. These programmes have also furthered the campaign to protect the Jordan River, which brings stakeholders from the entire region together to work on sustaining the flow of this important river (UNDP 2006:380).

Aforementioned, the Israeli and Palestinian civil societies' campaign for the protection of the Jordan River through unprecedented transboundary cooperation and the actual cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli civil societies played a considerable role in structural peace-building. Given the political considerations that hinder the effectiveness of the Joint Water Committee in the water sector, Israeli and Palestinian civil society actors resumed responsibility for the development and implementation of projects to improve the quality and quantity of shared water resources. Particularly, FoEME's Good Water Neighbours project has succeeded in bringing 11 Israeli and Palestinian communities, as well as water experts, together for a common solution to water-related problems. The installation of rain water harvesting systems in school and municipal buildings of the communities which participated in the Good Water Neighbours project, the cooperation between Tulkarem in the West Bank and Emek Hefer in Israel to collect the olive mill waste with a truck and take it to Israel for treatment in order to prevent the dumping of olive mill wastes into the Alexander River which flows through Emek Hefer to the Mediterranean Sea, and Israeli environmental activists' cooperation with residents of the Palestinian village of Umm al-Reihan in the northern West Bank on the green basin project to purify the sewage water in the village are a few examples to illustrate Israeli-Palestinian joint activities to improve the quality and quantity of their shared waters (Haaretz 2008).

Besides these technical initiatives, activities exist to raise awareness among Israelis and Palestinians. IPCRI's regular conferences and workshops and FoEME's workshops bring together Israeli and Palestinian youngsters from the communities involved in the Good Neighbours Project in order to overcome language, cultural and political issues and establish a basis for working together. These are examples of civil society initiatives in the water sector that encourage community involvement in peace-building activities. The most important fact of all is that these programmes have continued to be designed and implemented, even in the face of severe challenges and ongoing conflict.

In the water sector, at the political level both sides have succeeded in managing securitised issues and kept water out of ongoing conflicts. Through the establishment of institutions to deal with water-sharing issues between Israelis and Palestinians, a conflict management mechanism has been constructed. However, the governmental level efforts to keep water out of violence and conflict have hindered the development of conflict resolution efforts. Despite the failure of the peace process and the problematic nature of the Joint Water Committee system, Palestinian and Israeli water experts have continued to work together to improve the quality and quantity of shared water resources. Based on the belief that they have common interests in the water sector, they have attempted to turn water management from a zero-sum game into a win-win case. This joint effort has contributed to a re-evaluation and re-definition of relations between the two sides. In the absence of governmental level support, Israeli and Palestinian environmental NGOs and water experts have developed systems and infrastructure to address the water-related issues that negatively affect the quality of Israeli and Palestinian livelihoods. For the realisation of these projects they have effectively managed to get financial support from international development agencies. In spite of the effectiveness of the NGOs in addressing localised, relatively small-scale problems arising from the mismanagement of water resources, they are still far from addressing the macro-level structural issues in Israeli-Palestinian water management that require a restructuring of the joint water management regime, as distinct from the ongoing Israeli domination over the existing system, and the creation of a well-regulated Palestinian water sector.

Conclusion

This article has analysed Israeli-Palestinian water management programmes and both sides' attempts to re-evaluate and re-define their relations. It has been argued that, parallel to the ongoing securitisation processes, the continuous peace-building efforts of Israeli and Palestinian environmental NGOs and water experts have appeared as one of the main areas of cooperation that has considerable potential for triggering a desecuritisation process.

In summary, the civil society efforts in the water sector have not been supported politically. As the securitising actors are incapable of desecuritisation, as illustrated in the water management case, Israeli and Palestinian civil society has been actively engaged in structural peace-building efforts, thus initiated a desecuritising move by re-evaluating and re-defining their relations with their counterparts. Through cooperation over concerns regarding the quality and quantity of shared water resources, Israeli and Palestinian civil society organisations and water experts have attempted to contribute to the process of redefining and reinterpreting their mutual relationship. As discussed here, to some extent they have succeeded in contributing to a moderation of negative perceptions by working together over the improvement of the quality and quantity of shared water resources. However, at the official level, Israeli and Palestinian water authorities have been acting in favour of conflict management, thus preferring to keep water-related issues in the context of normal politics. On the other hand,

As argued in this article, desecuritisation requires both political level and civil society level involvement and the instruments of civil society do not hold power and resources for the realisation of a fully-fledged desecuritisation. In the Copenhagen School's terms, the second facilitating condition, the social conditions regarding the position of authority for the desecuritising actor (the relation between desecuritising actor and audience), fall short. As stated by Lowi (1995), the 'high politics' of war and diplomacy do not allow extensive collaboration in the sphere of 'low politics' as illustrated by the water sector. But, by managing cooperation between a number of Israeli and Palestinian communities over shared resources and by securitising the ongoing conflict and violence as an existential threat to shared water resources, they have contributed a change in public opinion about the necessity for desecuritisation (the third facilitating condition). Through encouraging interaction at community level, water management programmes have also contributed to a change in the language used to define previously securitised relations (the first facilitating condition for desecuritisation). In other words, by working together for a common aim Israeli and Palestinian civil society proved their potential to contribute to the initiation of a desecuritisation process in the long run.

It was demonstrated that there exists a group of individuals and civil society actors both in Israel and the Palestinian Territories who have committed themselves to peace-building and reconciliation. However, their success in transforming overtly securitised relations between Israel and Palestine and in accelerating a full-fledged desecuritisation process has been constrained by ongoing political securitisations.

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