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ORIGINAL PAPER

Desecuritisation of water and the technocratic turn in peacebuilding

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Abstract This article addresses the research gap of water desecuritisation and advances an interdisciplinary approach within the issue area of peacebuilding. It draws upon three strands of research: security, peacebuilding and transboundary water management. The article examines three core questions: (1) how is desecuritisation conceptualised and understood in theory as well as within the context of water development; (2) in what ways are water conflict addressed within the liberal peacebuilding paradigm; and (3) what are the roles and implications of technocracy in resolving conflict and building peace? The article conducts a conceptual scoping, which critically probes what desecuritisation and peacebuilding do politically in the water sector. It draws empirical illustrations from the Israeli–Palestinian water conflict where water is securitised while major peacebuilding efforts have been made to desecuritise the conflict. It concludes that technical blueprints may run the risk of depoliticising conflict dynamics, which contradicts the normative assumption about desecuritisation as a return to normal politics. Moreover, the technocratic turn in peacebuilding practices have empowered certain actors, who act as the "new" peacemakers while others are marginalised.

Keywords Desecuritisation · Peacebuilding · Technocracy · Water · Politics · Conflict · Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Abbreviations

CSO	Civil society organisation
DOP	Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements
FOEME	Friends of the Earth Middle East
GDP	Gross domestic product
MEPP	Middle East Peace Process
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PA	Palestinian Authority

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PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
PWA	Palestinian Water Authority

1 Introduction

The framing of water has shifted dramatically in the last decades. In the early 1990s, calls were made by prominent policy makers about the potential risks of looming water wars in regions suffering not only from recurring conflicts, but also from water scarcity. In parallel, a growing number of scholars made claims and theorised about the causal linkage between resource scarcity and its relation to the escalation of violence and conflict (see, for example, Amery 2002; Chellaney 2013). Within a few years, that assumption was challenged by other scholars who argued that the theoretical assumption had weak empirical support (Wolf et al. 2003; de Stefano et al. 2010; Alam 2002). They argued that water scarcity often induces actors to cooperate over shared water and could even act as a catalyst for nurturing peace in intractable conflicts. The latest discursive turn is now conceptually focused on the notion of water security, which has emerged as a growing paradigm in recent years (Cook and Baker 2011: 94).

Securitisation theory, which here primarily engages with the research from the Copenhagen school (Buzan and Waever 2003), unravels processes of framing and constructing an issue as a security threat, such as water scarcity. It highlights how some actors including policy makers, experts and scholars actively participate in the securitisation by their "speech acts". Desecuritisation is understood as a positive process that moves an issue away from the exceptional and back to the normal spheres of politics, which are characterised by compromise, transparency and deliberation. From a peacebuilding perspective, it is therefore central to understand these processes of desecuritisation. Yet, despite its importance, desecuritisation has received much less attention in academia both regarding theory as well as empirical analysis.

This article aims to fill that knowledge gap by conceptually unpacking the underlying assumptions of desecuritisation in relation to water conflicts. It analyses what the nexus water desecuritisation do politically through the prism of peacebuilding and technocracy. It raises three core research questions: (1) how is desecuritisation conceptualised and understood in theory as well as within the context of water development; (2) in what ways are water conflicts addressed within the liberal peacebuilding paradigm; and (3) what are the roles and implications of technocracy in resolving conflict and building peace?

It analyses how technological blueprints of desecuritisation, water development and peacebuilding are triggering depoliticised outcomes. Such outcomes contradict in theory what desecuritisation is expected to result in, namely a return to normal politics. Second, it probes the convergence between water development and liberal peacebuilding in their technical and managerial way of framing water conflict and their emphasis on global blueprints as efficient solutions. In these dominant discourses, politics is frequently seen as problematic since it may interfere and contradict the overarching technical rationality and universal assumptions (Aradau 2004; Trottier and Brooks 2013; Stetter et al. 2011). The impact of technocracy in water development has been discussed and debated at length in academia, but there are fewer studies that critically scrutinise technocracy in the issue area of peacebuilding (Mac Ginty 2012; Goetschel and Hagmann 2009).

This article seeks to make a conceptual contribution by advancing an interdisciplinary approach, which utilises theories from three distinct research strands: security, peacebuilding and transboundary water management. Surprisingly, few studies explicitly analyse the nexus between water, desecuritisation and peace (Brooks and Trottier 2014; Coskun 2008, 2009). Furthermore, most of them interpret and understand desecuritisation as asecurity or non-security (Aradau 2004), and in the case of conflict resolution, it is seen as part of reconciliation. They also emphasise how non-governmental organisations (NGOs) constructively engage as desecuritising actors. This article differs from these studies as it puts much stronger focus on hydropolitics and technocracy in the analysis of desecuritisation and on the antagonistic rather than harmonious dynamics of peacebuilding (Mouffe 2005). As such, it addresses the water-desecuritised gap highlighted by Fischhendler (2015).

Despite a critical assessment of technocracy in relation to desecuritisation of water and peacebuilding, the article does not disregard the huge importance and impact that technical innovations and engineering solutions have for water development and systems. For instance, the technique and use of desalination have in many ways changed perceptions of what constitutes water scarcity and presents new opportunities of sharing water. Yet, the article problematises and critically probes the effects of technocracy in water development and peacebuilding in relation to politics, power and participation.

The conceptual discussion builds on empirical illustrations from the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP). The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is an interesting case since water is securitised while there have been major efforts to desecuritise water and to address water scarcity as part of the Middle East Peace Process. International intervention in the form of international donor assistance, expertise and third parties has been extensively involved partly because water has been framed and perceived as a particularly ripe area for peacebuilding, which may foster trust and build confidence in what otherwise seems to be a deeply intractable conflict. This is also a critical case of an asymmetrical conflict where the disparity of power obviously affects the parties differently (Zeitoun et al. 2013).

This article first discusses the ongoing debates on water conflict and cooperation in relation to securitisation theory. It then unpacks the nexus water desecuritisation through the prism of the technocratic turn in peacebuilding. It concludes that the technical framing of conflict tends to result in depoliticised outcomes and ignores the underlying causes of conflict because they may contradict universal blueprints of water development and peacebuilding. As a consequence, depolitication may strengthen the status quo of conflict and inhibit alternative ideas and practices. Moreover, the technocratic turn in peacebuilding practices has introduced "new" peacemakers in the form of water experts and development brokers. These peace professionals have specialised knowledge and thus speak with authority, but their powers are rarely assessed.

2 The politics of desecuritising water

The framing of water is to a large extent influenced by dominant worldviews and discourse structures, which guide actors in their interpretation and construction of meaning and reality (Barnes and Alatout 2012; Frölich 2012). The theory of securitisation provides insights into the ways issues are securitised as threats (Buzan et al. 1998, 2003). It has expanded the notion of security beyond the traditional and more restricted military definition to include issue areas, such as economics, culture and environment. The central focus of analysis is how an issue comes to be framed and constructed as an existential

threat. Such so-called security moves concern the survival of a referent object, for example, the nation state, global economy, international order or environment. Securitisation refers to inter-subjective processes based on speech acts, which are performed by policy makers and other influential elites who act as securitising actors. The theory sheds light on how influential agents within a political community come to share, construct and reinforce a particular issue as a threat. Still, the threat construction needs to correspond and be confirmed by mobilised and wider audiences, which thereby legitimise the specific framing of an issue (Buzan et al. 1998).

Having "successfully" securitised, an issue enables, prioritises and sanctions exceptional and urgent measures in order to manage the security threat. This leads to decreased transparency and more elite-oriented decision-making with a higher degree of secrecy and time pressure. Hence, processes of securitisation tend to fall outside the normal realm of politics, which is characterised by slower procedures of deliberation and compromise (Aradau 2004: 393; Buzan et al. 1998, 2003; Coskun 2009: 99; Browning and McDonald 2011: 246).

Securitisation theory has triggered academic debates in a range of issue areas such as climate change, aids and migration. Desecuritisation theory has a normative position and "bias" since it refers to normal politics (Waever 1995, 2011: 469). Desecuritisation is understood 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 measurers to deal with the threat to" (Buzan and Waever 2003: 489). It is also argued that political elites should avoid framing and discussing issues in terms of security. However, desecuritisation is not defined more precisely (Fischhendler 2015). Desecuritisation is mostly viewed as the absence of the negative aspects associated with securitisation rather than the positive goals to be achieved (Floyd 2007; Roe 2012).[1] This lack of a more positive forward-looking approach may be worrisome from a peacebuilding perspective. Furthermore, there are few scholars who attempt to distil the contents of desecuritisation particularly in relation to peacebuilding. Desecuritisation is basically about transforming an issue towards asecurity and non-security, which can be done by widening the number of desecuritising actors beyond the elite-based groups, such as NGOs, experts, and international actors (Coskun 2008, 2009).

In the 1990s, two parallel trends of framing waters can be observed among policy makers and scholars: one focused on water scarcity and future wars (Amery 2002; Scheumann and Schiffler 1998; Trottier 2003; Homer-Dixon 1999; Dinar 2002; Lowi 1995). A region frequently mentioned in this context is the Middle East as it suffers from volatile politics, unfavourable demographic trends, droughts and limited quantities of freshwater (Kliot 1994). Climate change has added to the severity of the problem by increasing uncertainty while predicting rising temperature and decreased precipitation, which will intensify evaporation of surface water while slowing down the renewal of groundwater. This is assumed to have dire consequences on economic growth, social stability and food security (Brown and Crawford 2009: 9).

These concerns are felt by Israelis and Palestinians as the surface and sub-surface resources are limited and overexploited. The Gaza Strip suffers from poor water quality, insufficient infrastructure and economic underdevelopment. The interdependent nature of water resources between Israelis and the Palestinians is particularly strong as they share

[1] In that way, it is similar to the negative definition of peace, which primarily focuses on the absence of violence, whereas positive peace is forward looking and strives towards goals, such as distributional justice, emancipation, social equality.

two groundwater basins: the Coastal Aquifer on the Gaza Strip and the Mountain Aquifer (which includes the Western Mountain Basin, the Eastern Mountain Basin and the Northeastern Mountain Basin). Also, the Mountain Aquifer system provides nearly all the water consumed by the West Bank Palestinians[2] and constitutes forty per cent of Israel's naturally renewable freshwater (Borthwick 2010: 172). Yet, the interdependence is grossly asymmetrical where Israel controls most of the water and acts as the main supplier to the Palestinians. The securitisation of water is further exacerbated as water and agriculture play a major role in identity politics and state/nation building for all parties. For instance, large parts of the total Israeli water withdrawal go the agricultural sectors despite the fact that agriculture only contributes a few per cent to GDP. Water is also heavily subsidised even though it has little to do with food security and food self-reliance, particularly in Israel, which imports up to ninety per cent of its stocks of cereals (Trottier 2007:7).

Yet, what is interesting to note is the discrepancy of security framing of water scarcity between Israelis and Palestinians (Katz and Fishhendler 2011; Frölich 2012). For the Palestinians, water is in principle sufficient, but is perceived as insufficient due to conflict and power politics. Hence, water scarcity may partly be explained through the prism of Israeli military occupation. Since the 1967 war, Palestinians have been subject to severe water use restrictions, such as unequal water distribution and the limited number of wells that can be drilled. Israel does not recognise the Palestinians' basic water rights or historical water management practices and prefers to distribute water through its national water company *Mekorot* (Selby 2003). Further, leakages from poorly maintained infrastructure generate water loss at around twenty-five per cent in the West Bank and forty per cent in the Gaza Strip (Schlütter 2005: 625). Military intervention has further deteriorated the water situation. For example, Amnesty International (2009) claims that water and wastewater infrastructure worth about USD 6 million was destroyed on the Gaza Strip during the Israeli military offensive in December 2008.

For the Israelis, water scarcity is framed as absolute although the country receives the majority of the existing shared water resources and uses desalination techniques extensively (Feitelson et al. 2012; Fischhendler et al. 2011). After the 1967 war and the subsequent occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Israel declared that all the water resources in the occupied territories were to be state-controlled and under the jurisdiction of the Israeli military. Likewise, the Golan Heights contains large parts of the drainage basin to the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee. Water resources have been at the core of Israeli state-building and the Zionist ideology of settling the land (Alatout 2006). Consequently, water policies have mostly been centralised and state-controlled although in recent years the Israeli water sector has gone through rapid privatisation (Feitelson et al. 2012).

3 Desecuritisation and the technocratic turn in peacebuilding

Desecuritisation of water is of central concern as part of a comprehensive peacebuilding agenda, which emphasises positive peace. Since securitisation tends to result in win–lose outcomes, it is important to reframe water conflicts towards more integrative solutions. I now probe into the normative underpinning of water desecuritisation and how it resonates within the paradigm of liberal peacebuilding. The nexus water desecuritisation will be analysed through an assessment of the roles performed by various desecuritising actors,

[2] The Jordan River is no longer available as a water resource to the Palestinians (Schlütter 2005, p. 625).

such as water experts, international third parties and donors. As part of these efforts to desecuritise, water cooperation and development are assumed to move water back to the normal sphere of politics, to facilitate transparent integrative discussions and reframe water so that it is no longer perceived as an existential security threat. By situating the processes of desecuritisation within the wider peacebuilding context, peacebuilding may be a "facilitating condition" for the efforts to reframe water conflicts towards mutually satisfying outcomes. Water cooperation, which relies heavily on technical and generic solutions, fits well with the ways liberal peacebuilding has been refined in recent years towards emphasising standardisation and technocracy. Particularly in asymmetrical water conflicts, such as the Israeli–Palestinian one, technocracy tends to downplay hydropolitics and power, which has negative consequences for broader participation and inclusion in water development (Abitol 2009). However, such outcomes are detrimental to the normative ambition underlying desecuritisation, which stipulates a return to normal politics.

3.1 Technocracy, functional competency and peacebuilding

Since 1990, there are a growing number of destructive intrastate conflicts or "new" wars (Kaldor 2012; Duffield 2001). These conflicts often take place within fragile, collapsing dysfunctional states. The international community has responded by attempting to manage and transform these fragile states into strong liberal democratic states. The liberal peacebuilding paradigm has evolved and expanded as a global panacea to these complex conflict dynamics. The underlying assumption is that liberally constituted societies are more peaceful than non-liberal states. Furthermore, the liberal peace thesis assumes that consolidated democracies do not go to war with each other due to institutional constraints upon political leaders to wage war, which thus enhances the prospect of international peace and security. In addition, economic interdependence and regional cooperation will make these states more peaceful, interdependent and economically prosperous (Newman et al. 2009; Campbell et al. 2011).

From a peacebuilding perspective concerned with the precarious transition from war to peace, desecuritisation of water helps to deepen and enhance trust for integrative cooperation over shared water resources. Hence, potential desecuritising actors may range from water engineers, experts and international donors to local NGOs who may assist and facilitate cooperation. Beyond scientific and technical skills, they may also offer material incentives to influence the willingness of parties to cooperate. These strategies correspond to some of the goals in the liberal peacebuilding paradigm, which aims to strengthen broader processes of democracy and civil society that are distinct from the state. For instance, civil society organisations (CSOs) are vital partners in various peacebuilding projects and alternatives to faltering state structures and institutions. Consequently, CSOs are often able to benefit from generous funding and are valued as important agents for contributing towards normalisation and stabilisation of societal relations in conflict-ridden societies. At the same time, the standards and logic of various civil society projects most often emanate from the global North. So, for instance, in the case of water development, desecuritisation tends to take place against some specific cultural frames, such as environmental universalism and scientific knowledge, which may contradict local needs and conditions (Stetter et al. 2011: 448). Furthermore, reliance on CSOs has simultaneously increased against the background of a transformative neoliberal environment where western states to an ever-larger extent have begun to privatise and outsource many of the tasks of development assistance and peacebuilding to private actors and NGOs (Duffield 2001; Warner and Wegerich 2010).

The Middle East Peace Process, for example, has from the outset been influenced by the notion of a liberal peace in its strong emphasis on economic cooperation and institution building. The Declaration of Principles (DOP), which was signed by the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1993, was packed and marketed with economic prosperity in sight (Peres 1993). This led to a great influx of international actors and donors.[3] Around that time then, UN Secretary Boutrous Boutrous Ghali launched his *Agenda for Peace,* which stressed the responsibility of the international community to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts (Boutrous-Ghali 1995). It was an ambitious agenda, and peace support operations increased not only in numbers, but also in their multifunctional tasks and mandate.

By gradually framing conflicts in technical terms, such as complex emergencies, the core problems were related to state structures, institutions and development. Since then, the international community has worked towards a standardised methodology for conflict analysis where scientific and rational approaches have dominated as they are viewed as more neutral and efficient (Mac Ginty 2012: 293–7). Furthermore, the need for "technical assistance" within peacebuilding has generated a rapidly expanding peace industry,[4] which today includes a wide range of state actors, international institutions and NGOs. These international actors and experts frequently perceive themselves as neutral and impartial without any stakes in conflicts. A new cadre of international peace experts and professionals with specialised knowledge that favour bureaucracy, law and administration has therefore gained ground (Mac Ginty 2012: 296), leading to specialist and technocratic terminology of peacebuilding. Roger Mac Ginty (2012: 287) labels this phenomenon the "technocratic turn" of peacebuilding. This is also reflected in the growing number of toolboxes, handbooks and best practices of peacebuilding, based on the lessons learned that have been prescribed and promoted globally. Yet, relatively few studies have assessed the implications of this technocratic turn in peacebuilding in relation to the maintenance of peace and context sensitivity (Goetschel and Hagmann 2009; Mac Ginty 2012).

3.2 The water desecuritisation nexus

In the late 1990s, there was a discursive turn in the policy framing of water, which countered the water-war thesis and strengthened the water-for-peace discourse. It was now argued that water scarcity was triggering cooperation rather than war. Thus, cooperation held the prospect for peace (Katz 2011) and was proved by extensive historical analysis (Wolf et al. 2003). Since then, studies suggest technological and diplomatic advances, which would make cooperation a much more likely outcome of water scarcity (Alam 2002; Dolaytar and Gray 2000). Hence, the water sector became increasingly viewed as a strategic area where cooperation was more likely to flourish between former adversaries than other issue areas. It also provided a suitable rationale for water development to become part of the liberal peacebuilding agenda in its overarching effort to strengthen institution building and state capacity. Shared functional interests in scarce water resources and technological innovations were expected to trigger and catalyse cooperation, which would create confidence and trust between warring parties. In addition, there was a tendency to overdramatize the potential dangers and risks of failing to take preventive actions in relation to water scarcity in order to mobilise and encourage investments in water

[3] The Palestinian territories receive the highest sustained rate in the world of per capita disbursements to an aid recipient (Brynen 2008:234).

[4] This has also triggered a fierce competitive market for funding schemes among peace NGOs.

development and infrastructure, such as pipelines, desalination plants, wastewater treatment and drip irrigation systems to mention a few (Katz 2011: 19–28).

These ideas were influenced by assumptions emanating from functionalist theory (Haas 2008). The theory prescribes and expects cooperation in areas of low politics to spillover to high politics and ultimately result in integration. As Mac Ginty (2012: 302) underlines, "[a] strong logic of technocracy is to expand its area of functional competency and to make linkages with other areas of technocracy. Technocrats find it convenient to deal with technocrats." Such a policy assumption was, for instance, reflected in the initial phases of the Middle East Peace Process where water was a prioritised area within the multilateral negotiations,[5] aiming to foster long-term regional cooperation and sustainable peace (Aggestam and Sundell 2014; Peters 1996). As the water peace discourse dominated among practitioners and diplomats, the water sector became a favoured area for donor assistance. Hydro-cooperative projects between Israelis and Palestinians were initiated and received generous funding. Many technical projects such as irrigation systems, pipelines and wastewater plants were launched and funded in Palestine in an effort to develop additional and new water supplies (Selby 2003). Yet, in contrast to other regions where water resides in the area of low politics, water in the Middle East is securitised and thereby defies some of the preconditions for functional water cooperation. This may therefore result in unintended peacebuilding consequences.

3.3 The problem with politics

Water development in general concerns many activities and actors. As a way to increase efficiency and coordination while reducing complexity, there is an inclination to de-emphasise the political nature of water problems. Such framing of water can, for instance, be found among western leading institutions, such as the World Bank, despite growing concerns about local ownership and participatory components (Abitol 2009). The technical framing of conflict favours technical solutions, whereas politics is seen as negatively influencing rationality and scientific reasoning. Most solutions and models suggested are centred on the creation of new water, identifying alternative sources, and improving efficient use while hydropolitical issues, such as equitable benefit-sharing and redistribution of existing water resources, are avoided. "Politics, it seems, is a Bad Thing, and it is often seen as a problem (Warner and Wegerich 2010:11). If politics is a problem, it can be "solved" by depoliticising issues by giving them back to the experts". Wider social participation is seen as a challenge to water development since in theory the technocratic system does not favour popular input. As a result, local perspectives are frequently perceived as obstacles to be overcome and technocracy offers a way of bypassing that problem by depoliticising the conflict (Abitol 2009; Aggestam and Sundell 2015; Mac Ginty 2012: 292). However, as Waever (2011: 472) rightly points out, desecuritisation that transforms into technocratic management may depoliticise at least as much as securitisation does. If desecuritisation of water is likely to lead to the depoliticisation of conflict, it can have unforeseen consequences regarding ownership, power dynamics and contextual sensitivity. Water development is inherently a political process with contested meanings of water, which includes diverse actors with unequal powers to confront, negotiate and cooperate (Mollinga 2008). Both scholars and practitioners need to recognise that water scarcity is an area of political contestation (Warner and Wegerich 2010:9). To have an attentive political

[5] The framework of the Middle East Peace Process was structured along two tracks of bilateral and multilateral negotiations.

gaze and to critically engage with depoliticised discursive constructions of water can therefore illuminate these patterns of depoliticisation in relation to water scarcity (Warner and Wegerich 2010: 4).

Desecuritisation processes which result in depoliticisation can be particularly troublesome in asymmetric conflicts. In the Israeli–Palestinian case, various Israeli governments have consistently favoured a depoliticised and technocratic approach to water cooperation as part of the peace process. Such an approach avoids questions related to hydropolitics, historical contexts, water rights and redistribution (see also Alatout 2006; Zeitoun 2011). Israel has sought to achieve agreements that are restricted to joint management of existing resources, conservation and joint development of new water supplies (Weinthal and Marei 2002). Claims and demands made by the Palestinians, for example, regarding access to the Mountain Aquifer have been rejected. Israel argues that it has historical rights to the water since it previously appeared as springs within pre-1967 borders. It also argues that Israel was the first to invest in and use the source and the contested aquifers provide water to the urban areas of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem (Soffer 1999: 190–191).

The Palestinians have consistently claimed their water rights as well as for a greater share of and access to water resources. Palestinians demand the rights to most of the water in the West Bank, both groundwater and rights to the Jordan River, which are embedded within a historical context and international law. The Helsinki Rules (1996) and the 1997 Convention on the Law of the non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses underscore equitable share of water and that neither party should cause "significant harm" to other users. The Palestinians have for a long time sought Israeli recognition of these water rights, but to no avail (Schlütter 2005; see also Alatout 2006).

During the peace process, the Israeli framing of water development has come to dominate and guide water negotiations, which consequently is reflected in the outcome of the agreements that the parties have signed. The DOP mentions water as a potential area of cooperation and highlights the need to establish a Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) in order to promote economic growth (Declaration of Principles 1993). However, the agreement does not specify agreed-upon interpretations, and water rights and resource allocation are only vaguely and imprecisely referred to. The Oslo II Accord (the second interim agreement signed in 1995) stresses that cooperation is needed on water resources and thus provides greater details about water management. Both parties are committed to develop additional water from the West Bank underground aquifers in order to meet the immediate needs of the Palestinians. Again, the emphasis is on creating new additional water, but does not include any provision about redistribution.

3.4 New peacemakers and desecuritising agents

The efforts to reframe water conflict in a more technical–managerial way provide much leverage to water experts and peace professionals. Yet, their significant dispositional power is often disguised and seldom talked about as their expertise is viewed as objective, scientific and unbiased. This "hydocracy" often claims to represent the correct solution of a given problem in the water sector (Warner and Wegerich 2010:6). International actors frequently conduct a dual role in peacebuilding by both assisting and funding water development projects. Yet, these third parties tend to focus more narrowly on water issues and privilege technical solutions, description and prescription that are non-context specific. Lacking substantial knowledge of local political circumstances, these new peacemakers are

acting as "experts" and are inclined to present their ideas as impartial and "voices of liberal reasons" (Selby 2003: 44; see also Stetter et al. 2011).

Extensive empirical analyses of water management in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict show that development brokers play an integral role as part of the hegemonic discourse on peace and water development (Trottier 1999, 2006). Development brokers shape and constrain agendas according to a presumed universal project rationality, which emanates from the global North and is finite in time. They are indispensible actors between local organisations and international actors having the knowledge and expertise to speak the "right" technical languages and buzzwords, which fit the project logic of donors. They network with donor organisations while their local social positions enable them to mediate between the local population and the donors themselves (Trottier 2006). At the same time, there is fierce competition for international funds among many local agencies where some are empowered and others disempowered. This pattern feeds into a more general trend of how development and peacebuilding have enveloped in recent decades towards increasing privatisation and outsourcing of donor assistance.

The Palestinian case provides ample examples of the problematic interplay between the international and local in the water sector. The Palestinian Authority (PA) and the PWA in particular have to be attentive to the requirements posed by the international donor community and Israel while still advancing the needs of the local Palestinian communities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. As an outcome of the DOP and the peace process, the PA has to mediate between Israel (who only negotiate water with the PA), international donors and water experts on the one side and local communities on the other (Kramer 2008:14). There have also been strong pressures exerted by international actors and donors to have only one centralised coordinating Palestinian institution for communicating development plans with, which at times contradicts the needs of the local communities (Selby 2003: 158). As a result, the PWA has found itself in a dual position of having to negotiate and take into considerations local interests by Palestinian municipalities and village councils as well as staying attuned and responsive to the requirements of international donors since the PWA has the overarching responsibility to oversee internationally funded water projects (Trottier 2007: 118–120). This has triggered additional tensions in the water sector between a variety of actors, such as local NGOs, international donors, Israel and the PA. Furthermore, there is rivalry for funding between various actors and this dependency on international funding has resulted in new power constellation. Some actors have been empowered and gained influence while others, who rely on traditional and communal forms of management, have been circumvented over time (Selby 2003: 124; Trottier 2007: 118–24).

4 Conclusion

This article has primarily been concerned with the political effects of combining desecuritisation and peacebuilding in an effort to reframe and remove water conflict from the security sphere into the realm of normal politics. By way of conclusion, three remarks are made. First, desecuritisation is assumed to reverse the non-liberal logic of securitisation and move an issue towards a liberal democratic and transparent process making. However, in the few studies where desecuritisation has been more consistently applied in empirical cases, the concept is mostly understood as asecurity and non-security, in other words as the absence of securitisation. However, to evaluate the normative validity of desecuritisation a

more refined and forward-looking operationalisation is necessary (Aradau 2004; Browning and McDonald 2011: 246–250; McDonald 2011: 284).

Second, water development and liberal peacebuilding converge in their emphasis on functional technocracy. Technocracy has been perceived as an impartial and less controversial way of desecuritising water conflict, due to its strong emphasis on professionalism, standardisation and rational problem-solving. Yet, such technical framing of conflict resolution in the water sector tends to downplay hydropolitics in general and power dynamics in particular. Paradoxically, this contradicts the normative assumption about desecuritisation, which strives towards the normalisation of politics. To ignore politics and asymmetrical relations may consequently strengthen the status quo rather than resolving the conflict. Moreover, it may inhibit wider inclusion of social actors and alternative ideas and practices as they may divert from the universal blueprints of water development and peacebuilding. The Middle East Peace Process shows that the so-called normalisation that was expected as an outcome of the multitude of hydropeace projects has instead resulted in a strong rejection among Palestinians of cooperation with Israelis and replacement of a widespread trend of "anti-normalisation" (Aggestam and Strömbom 2013). Hence, desecuritisation and peacebuilding may have unintended negative consequences and even at times exacerbate conflict.

Third, the technocratic turn in peacebuilding practices has empowered certain actors while marginalised others. The so-called new peacemakers have been introduced in their capacities of being water experts and development brokers. They have come to gain significant ground in management, but their powers are rarely assessed because they are assumed to be impartial and unbiased on the basis of their technical and/or scientific knowledge and competence. Such a technical framing of conflict and peace also fits within a wider pattern of a post-political world of governance that encourages technocratisation and makes paternalism from the global North more likely (Warner and Wegerich 2010: 10; Barnett 2012; Mouffe 2013). We therefore need to conduct more studies that critically assess what desecuritisation and peacebuilding do politically in the water sector.

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