

Decolonising water diplomacy and conflict transformation: from security-peace to equity-identity

Mohsen Nagheebay ^{a,*} and Jaime Amezaga^b

^a Water Security and Sustainable Development Hub, Newcastle University Centre for Water, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

^b Newcastle University Centre for Water, School of Engineering, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

*Corresponding author. E-mail: mohsen.nagheebay@newcastle.ac.uk

 MN, 0000-0003-0877-1080

ABSTRACT

Water diplomacy and conflict transformation are dominated by an interest-based paradigm, where attention is given solely to achieving security and peace. We intend to critically challenge this paradigm – which is mainly dominated by the views of the Global North – by emphasising two other important but often overlooked elements: equity and identity. We argue that diplomacy within the contemporary paradigm is easily manipulated by the broader security and peace interests of foreign powers in a manifestation of global and regional geopolitical rivalry. We conclude that pro-security-peace water diplomacy is an ineffectual remedy, and posit instead that equity and particularly identity should be placed at the heart of water diplomacy and conflict transformation. While introducing a new alternative definition, we call for a paradigm shift, from security-peace to equity-identity orientation, to give space for the voice of the Global South in the analysis of hydropolitical relations. This approach affords additional insights into and explanations for hydropolitical patterns, and helps us to define new strategies for decolonising water diplomacy in practice.

Key words: Decolonisation, Diplomacy, Global South, Transboundary waters

HIGHLIGHTS

- For decades, water diplomacy across many transboundary river basins has been articulated as the dominion of the Global North.
- Such articulation is largely seen in the context of broader security and peace framework, affected by a long history of colonisation.
- Both security and peace in themselves connote vulnerability and a feeling of unsafeness.
- The contemporary interest-based water diplomacy fails to capture the realities on the ground by neglecting the river basins' equity and identity politics surrounding water conflicts.
- A paradigm shift is required for pro-equity-identity water diplomacy to decolonise the dominant mindset and strengthen the voices of the Global South.

INTRODUCTION

The link between water and security and peace has been a strategic concern for the defence and foreign policies of many countries (e.g., [Osikena & Tickner, 2010](#)). This line of thought – that is, looking at water through the lens of security and peace – latterly reached the upper levels of the global political hierarchy, when on 22 November

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC BY 4.0), which permits copying, adaptation and redistribution, provided the original work is properly cited (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

2016 the UN Security Council, for the first time in its history, hosted a debate on water, security, and peace (the records of which are documented as UNSC (2016)). In the meeting, the Global High-Level Panel on Water and Peace set the scene by emphasising the need for urgent attention to the nexus between water, security, and peace. This way of thinking, which is evident in the subsequent discussions among 69 UN member states, including all 15 member states of the Security Council, suggests that water utilisation is rapidly overshadowed by broader (geopolitical) security and peace issues (e.g., Russia vs. Ukraine, Syria vs. Israel, and the cases in Darfur, Yemen, and Afghanistan). The recent discussions in and around the 2023 UN Water Conference in New York also demonstrate that we need a *fundamental rethinking* of the global approach to water conflicts across the world to – what we think in this paper – move away from the traditional security and peace agenda (see more critical opinions concerning the UN Water Conference in Biswas & Tortajada (2023) and Mehta & Nicol (2023)).

Over the past several decades, the language of water diplomacy and water conflict transformation in the context of transboundary/international river basins has been largely dominated by a narrow focus on security and peace. This agenda is mainly dominated by the Westphalian views of the Global North and ‘still in the empire’s shadow’ (see, e.g., Hardy, 2016), in many cases reflecting the history of past colonisation. At the top of the agenda, water policies are mainly laid out on the *interest-based* approaches of rationalism, where material interests, power, and self-interest in an anarchic structure (Nagheeb & Rieu-Clarke, 2020) are the central drivers in world politics (see, e.g., Zeitoun & Warner, 2006; Mirumachi, 2015). It is said that matters concerning water in the 21st century are major risks to global security and peace. The literature concerning water security, on its own, has roots in national security concerns, retreating to ‘securitisation’ and protection of ‘our’ water (see, e.g., Lankford *et al.*, 2013). It emerged after the Cold War in the 1990s and is closely affiliated with military security, food security, environmental security, and recently climate security. In the context of transboundary waters, we have also a series of groundbreaking contributions from different perspectives: (neo-)malthusian literature on water conflict (war) (e.g., Naff & Matson, 1984), (neo-)liberal literature on water cooperation (peace) (e.g., Wolf, 1999), (critical-)constructivist literature on water conflict-cooperation coexistence (Mirumachi & Allan, 2007), and the literature on hydro-hegemony based upon (realist-)critical theory (Zeitoun & Warner, 2006). All of these have an interest-based approach in common and are largely associated with maintaining international peace and security. Accordingly, although we may not find a monolithic paradigm in the existing literature on water diplomacy and conflict transformation, ‘security and peace’ is clearly manifested in all different strands and has already become a buzzword in the titles of many projects and practices across the world. For many decades, the economic, environmental, and human rights features of water have frequently been overshadowed by the security and peace agenda, which in some respects mirrors the ‘water war’ agenda (see, e.g., Warner & Vij, 2022). We think that equity and creation of collective identity over transboundary river basins need to be placed at the top of the water diplomacy agenda instead of security and peace. Following recent advances in the examination of water conflict transformation (e.g., Wolf, 2012; Zeitoun *et al.*, 2020), we argue for giving attention to the voices of the Global South and those expressions that can further strengthen the transformative approaches beyond the Global North. We think of this as a criticism to the hegemonic way of thinking that is colonially produced or influenced by the Global North (implicitly) pervaded by ‘Western’¹ supremacy. Sondarjee & Andrews (2023) elaborate decolonisation in three interrelated areas: ‘(1) abolishing racial hierarchies within the hetero-patriarchal and capitalist world order, (2) dismantling the geopolitics of knowledge production, and (3) rehumanizing our relationships with Others’. In a similar line of thought, we intend to contribute to this

¹ In the Global North–South schism, the West is often correlated with the Global North; however, we may specifically use the term West in this paper for pointing to the geopolitical division developed over the period of colonisation and then later imperialism and capitalism mainly led by Western countries.

broader relevant literature and the movement campaigned for ‘decolonising research’ (see more in [Leal et al., 2022](#); [Hira, 2023](#); [Sondarjee & Andrews, 2023](#)) to call for decolonising water diplomacy and conflict transformation.

We believe that not nearly enough attention is being paid to the importance of understanding limits laid upon the security and peace paradigm, and that it is dangerous to consider water issues in terms of this agenda alone. Words, language, semantics, and discourses matter and are significant driving forces in the shaping of the social and physical realities through which states (and individuals and societies) make sense of themselves, put their interests before those of others, legitimise their decisions, and reach agreements ([Fairclough, 2001](#); [Foucault, 2002](#)).² While the supremacy of the security-peace agenda, with a focus on largely *economic* interests in water diplomacy remains largely intact, the social and political struggles of the past and present have rather been for non-economic ends, equity, ethics, and ‘the desire to be “recognized” (by those whom one “recognizes” in return) in one’s reality and eminent human dignity’ (quoted by Alexandre Kojève in [Riley \(1981\)](#)). Issues may manifest in ‘water nationalism’ and resonate well through nation-building processes (see [Menga, 2015, 2017](#); [Allouche, 2020](#)). Indeed, the recent, sometimes unexpected happenings across the world, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the restoration of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the UK’s exit from the EU, the Scottish and Northern Irish independence movements, and the rise of Daesh (ISIS) in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere, could all be seen as manifestations of the politics of identity and struggles for justice and equity (see, e.g., the problem of ‘thymos’ in [Fukuyama \(2018\)](#)). With this in mind, a critical question asked by this paper is, would it be helpful if the focus of such above-mentioned high-level UN discussions was on the equity (that mainly rests at the heart of the politics of transboundary waters – see [Mirumachi, 2015](#)) and collective identity aspects of water rather than on security and peace? We think that it would, and we intend to consider why the water security-peace correspondence *alone* could be an inefficacious remedy in the context of water diplomacy and conflict transformation.

Our epistemological position stands on a view that reality is socially constructed in which ‘systems of shared ideas, beliefs and values also have structural characteristics and exert a powerful influence on social and political action’ ([Reus-Smit 2013](#)). Such reality reflects the shadow of the past within a historical context and can therefore be changed by the people who contribute to create it, and also influences them in return. We will, therefore, take a critical constructivist perspective of (transboundary) water politics where conflict and cooperation co-exist surrounding hydropolitical relations and are subject to power dynamics. The critical hydropolitics literature is, however, divided between those focusing on ‘the geostrategic and political economy nature’ ([Selby, 2003](#); [Zeitoun & Warner, 2006](#)), and those examining the role of norms, discourses, and ideas (see, for instance, [Akhter, 2015](#); [Daoudy, 2016](#); [Hanna & Allouche, 2018](#)), in shaping hydropolitical relations. This article will delve into the ulterior motives behind the behaviour of riparian states and their foreign policies over their shared waters, by taking account of the perception of the equity principle and identity influence. Here, we refer to the equitable and reasonable utilisation principle in International Water Law when we mention equity. The study also assumes state identity to be a dependent variable which is made through historical and social processes, not given. It should be noted at the outset that the focus on identity in social sciences has received growing attention in the last decade, though not enough in hydropolitics literature. A very basic definition of identity could be what [Djité \(2006\)](#) states: ‘identity is the everyday word for people’s sense of who they are’. Just as [Wendt \(1999\)](#) defines identity as a subjective quality ‘rooted in an actor’s self-understanding’,

² For example, to what extent would a set of political practices be different if deeming someone a ‘terrorist’ rather than a ‘freedom fighter’ ([Wigen, 2015](#))?

state identity is also one kind of identity as a social and relational conception referring ‘to the image of individuality and distinctiveness held and projected by the state within particular international contexts’ (Ashizawa, 2008).

Moving towards a new era of a multipolar world, we expect – though it merits further investigation – that the security-peace agenda in water diplomacy will remain the dominant course going forward, at least for the period of transition. We should think carefully whether we want to continue on this path, knowing that it has already failed to capture the painful reality of transboundary water conflicts (Zeitoun *et al.*, 2020), and that we still need to develop explanatory models with major input from social science to provide better understanding of the success and failure of water policies (Bernauer, 2002). This paper does not attempt an overhaul of water diplomacy approaches but offers a different way of promoting water diplomacy and conflict transformation. Following the same line of thought as progressive work on critical hydrogeopolitics, namely the concept of ‘water conflict transformation’ by Zeitoun *et al.* (2020), this paper suggests that to transform water conflict and to build and sustain security and peace where water is concerned, we cannot avoid redressing water-related equity and identity issues. The arguments in this paper may look rather unorthodox and challenging particularly in the views of the Global North, but we think we need such critical debate to produce deeper theoretical insights to decolonise water diplomacy. Drawing upon the ideas of critical hydrogeopolitics, we intend to provide a fresh perspective on water diplomacy and conflict transformation by exploring the notion of ‘equity-identity orientation’.

CRITIQUING WATER DIPLOMACY UNDER THE SECURITY-PEACE AGENDA

In the real world, the emphasis on the nexus between water, security, and peace has been increasing globally; and this triad appears in many strategies, projects, and programmes, most of them funded and guided by rich (mainly Western) countries’ departments of foreign affairs or military and intelligence-related services (e.g., the US, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Norway – see Nagheby & Rieu-Clarke, 2020). Asserted by all these movements is the goal to *transform* water issues from a source of conflict and war into a catalyst for cooperation and peace. Similarly, in the academic world, there have been important contributions to capturing the essence and legacy of water conflict transformation (e.g., Wolf, 2012; Zeitoun *et al.*, 2020) within the context of water diplomacy (e.g., Islam & Susskind, 2012; Klimes *et al.*, 2019; Keskinen *et al.*, 2021; Sehring *et al.*, 2022, 2023). Though its definition may vary among policymakers and academics, water diplomacy is largely understood as ‘the conduct of relationship between riparian states of shared water resources to enhance cooperation between them in relation to the joint management of those resources but with regard to goals *beyond the water sector, namely regional stability and peace*’ (Schmeier & Shubber, 2018, emphasis added). Transformative approaches, as we also use in this paper, are often thought akin to water diplomacy. However, central to all this literature, even in much of it associated with critical hydrogeopolitics (see Cascão & Zeitoun, 2013), is a desire to transform water conflicts to achieve security and peace largely *through* an interest-based approach. Despite these important contributions, the literature on water diplomacy and conflict transformation remains chiefly concerned with states’ security and peace – on which the focus is sovereignty – rather than societal security – on which the focus is identity, and we add, equity (McSweeney, 1999). There are three key reasons for the limitations of the security-peace duality, which provide particular insights and implications for decolonising water diplomacy and conflict transformation. Decolonisation of water diplomacy needs to critically reflect on the following three interrelated concerns about the Global North supremacy in colonial-based knowledge, biased observation and presentation of the Global South which is yet affected by colonial ‘mental slavery’ (Hira, 2023), and (geo)political processes and practices.

First, the conventional pro-security-peace approaches are based principally on the rationalist perspective that states’ behaviour is shaped by their largely economic and political *interests*. An imprecise understanding of water-related interests, being limited to material interests, would omit an important puzzle piece in conflicts and

cooperation over transboundary waters – that of identity (see [Allouche \(2020\)](#) for more discussion on the role of identity). Two major past and current trends in academia related to what used to construe transboundary water politics – i.e., ‘water war’ (see more in [Warner, 2012](#)) and ‘water peace’ ([Wolf, 1999](#)), which appeared in the 1980s and early 2000s, respectively – are largely carried on this train of thought and are mainly *interest*-based in nature. The quest for security and peace in itself risks vulnerability, by creating a condition in which ‘others’ may perceive ‘our’ defence as a threat. An overemphasis on security and peace not only underappreciates other relevant structural economic and political factors, but may also impair the policymakers’ understanding of important underlying societal factors such as the equity and identity aspects of water conflict and cooperation. To respond to this flaw and grounded on the concept of ‘water conflict–cooperation coexistence’ ([Mirumachi & Allan, 2007](#)), [Zeitoun et al. \(2020\)](#) – from a critical hydropolitics perspective – introduced a new pathway to transforming water conflict by focusing on ‘the *harm* that manifests unevenly across time and space to different individuals and communities, as well as to the environment’ (emphasis added). Critical hydropolitics endeavours to grapple with equity issues and to consider the interplay between context, identity, and policy (for instance, [Zeitoun & Warner, 2006](#); [Cascão & Nicol, 2016](#); [Nagheeb & Warner, 2018](#); [Zeitoun et al., 2020](#); [Hussein et al., 2022](#)). Despite significant progress in providing a critical understanding of water diplomacy, the pathway to transformation for [Zeitoun et al. \(2020\)](#) remains laid upon ‘interest-based interaction’. Their approach brings with it a number of methods to resolve conflict and achieve a level of satisfaction for the concerned parties based largely on their interests, without (or with less) care of what this satisfaction means in relation to their identity. Although the notion of ‘harm’ is well-considered by [Zeitoun et al. \(2020\)](#), to what extent this harm is caused by interest- or identity-based interactions is left untouched. That means the identity-based interaction, even if not ignored or underestimated, is treated in the same way as interest-based interaction. For example, in the case of the Helmand River, shared between Iran and Afghanistan, water has far greater societal value than is derived from economic benefits alone. Water in this case is seen primarily in the context of identity politics for Afghans, as a way to cure the harm done to their identities – which they view as having been ‘damaged’ or ‘lost’ in a history of wars, invasions, repressions, and destabilisations – and to restore them (see, e.g., [Nagheeb & Warner, 2022](#)). From a broader perspective, this is also well obvious in Afghans’ resistance to forced Western technocratic models and manifested in the rise of Taliban ‘to re-create the sources of Afghan identity’ (likewise, see other cases from Colombia and D.R. Congo in [Ugarriza \(2009\)](#)). This can be discerned also in many other cases, for example, in the Nile particularly for Ethiopians (see, e.g., [Menga, 2017](#)). This focused attention on interest-based behaviour within the context of security and peace may reasonably lead one to argue that such critical analyses, in practice, are quite similar to water war/peace modes of thought. In this way, we think transformation literature should adopt a decolonised approach to bravely pay more attention to the deeper layers of water conflict, i.e., identity politics to engage with those related dormant but substantial resentments and harms simply left out of water diplomacy.

Second, in addition to their preoccupation with material interests, there is another problem with conventional approaches to water diplomacy as part of the security-peace agenda. Many discussions concerning water conflict and cooperation and the potential for transformation fail to convey sufficient knowledge or understanding of the situation being considered and are expressed in biased language. Conventional representations of conflict and/or cooperation rarely define exactly what these terms mean from a psychological, cultural, and ideological perspective and how they might be interpreted and practiced by different states (and societies) in relation to their identity. This is reminiscent of the idea of ‘constructive ambiguity’, or the intentional use of ambiguous language by one side when seeking to reach some sort of agreement or compromise with another. This is the legacy of many Western foreign policies conceived by their diplomats, including the former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and the Israeli statesman Abba Eban, ‘who often wrapped controversial issues in the Middle East in language that could mean one thing to one side and something else to the other’ ([Fischhendler, 2008](#)). Pro-security-peace water

diplomacy abounds with such ‘constructive ambiguity’, which often acts more as ‘grit than grease to the cogs of the peace process’ (Mitchell, 2009).

Inherently social concepts have different, sometimes even opposite values, meanings, definitions, and understandings between one country to another, and more generally between the Global North and Global South, partly reflecting their identity and ideology. Boelens *et al.* (2016) assert that ‘territorial struggles go beyond battles over natural resources as they involve struggles over meaning, norms, knowledge, identity, authority and discourses’. Many Western models of governance in the era of global capitalism tend to be built from an idea ‘about two worlds called them and us, where the “us” is the West ... and the “them” is everywhere else’. In this way of thinking, the West attempts ‘to depict large parts of the world as dangerous places for us and ours’, describing them as the seat of backwardness, barbarian and uncivilisation, chaos and overpopulation (e.g., Josep Borrell metaphorically referred to Europe as a ‘garden’ and to the rest of the world as a ‘jungle’; Bishara, 2022). This is precisely what Bankoff (2001) suggests when saying that the West renders the world unsafe in order to not only perpetuate its cultural hegemony but also to ‘provide further justification for Western interference and intervention in others’ affairs for our and their sakes’. Similarly, Beil (2000) goes on to say that such North’s depiction was (and still is) in line with the world security order for capital accumulation and ‘it was part of an over-arching vision of world order which allowed US to justify intervention anywhere, against countries, for example, which nationalised raw materials’.

If pursuing this line of argument, it can for example be contended in a simplistic way that the lack of robust institutions to manage water results in the heightened risk of conflict between riparian states, mainly in the Global South where water is scarce (e.g., Gleick, 1994; the research methodology and output of some projects like those in Washington-based World Resource Institute and the Hague Water, Peace and Security also easily give this impression); and solutions are often proposed according to Western technical and economic approaches, without acknowledging the profundity of local socio-political realities on the ground. This is where hypocrisy may be visible in world politics, if circumstances are manipulated to benefit the powerful (often Western countries). For example, ‘water crisis’ and ‘water scarcity’ are often given as causes of violence and conflict in the Global South, principally in regions (e.g., the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)) which have strategic value to the Global North. Water crises and scarcity are popular predictors of violence and conflict in the South, which then can offer a justification for the intervention of many North-funded projects (see, e.g., Beil, 2000). The same ‘water crisis’/‘water scarcity’ concerns in the North are contrastingly viewed as being capable of resolution through more robust cooperation. However, an ‘under-developed’ place in the South – with a collectivist society – may show greater social solidarity, higher resilience, and a stronger indigenous identity than a ‘developed’ place in the North that has an individualistic society, particularly at times of disaster or crisis (Patterson *et al.*, 2010). Such differences were observable during the recent global COVID-19 pandemic, when societies with apparently more robust organisational capacity struggled to cope (Friedman, 2020). With this in mind, conflict and cooperation might have different meanings at the Nile or the Helmand, which flow through traditionally collectivist societies, than at the Rhine or suchlike industrial, individualistic societies. For instance, cooperation may be understood by riparians of the Danube and Rhine river basins as a means to strengthen their broader, shared security and economic interests against a common enemy under a sense of European identity, despite past and present identity conflicts (see further elaborate discussion in Kittikhoun & Schmeier (2020)). However, the same cooperation may be interpreted by other states in other parts of the world, like the Middle East, as a risk to national independence and a threat to identity in certain geopolitical conditions. For instance, Palestinians may see any cooperation (including water) with Israelis – even if it results in material benefits – under current oppressive conditions more as a threat to their resistance to occupation and as ‘permanent Israeli domination in disguise’ (quoting Meron Benvenisti in Selby (2003)). Understanding how these terms like cooperation could be defined to reflect particular cultural and political

values or give a sense of collective identity is important when attempting to offer effective measures for water diplomacy in certain regions.

Third, contrary to the typical transformative approaches, this paper argues that what occurs in *Realpolitik* is the sudden evaporation of dreams of water diplomacy and conflict transformation into a reality of contending interests, particularly in strategic regions (e.g., the Middle East), between the wealthy funders of respective projects or the regional actors concerned. This might be because diplomacy, in Ernest Mason Satow's famous and often-quoted definition, is nothing more than 'the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between governments [and we add, non-governments]', which varnishes the exercise of power and protection of the state's interests (Satow, 1957; see also Thompson, 1981). While scholars of water diplomacy concentrate on the security-peace agenda for promoting water cooperation, less attention is paid to the instrumentality of this agenda, and how it could prove self-defeating in a larger global capitalist and rival geopolitical context by actually jeopardising regional stability and peace. We argue that by giving priority to the security-peace agenda, water diplomacy, and conflict transformation ultimately melt away into the wider, non-water-concerned geopolitical context. We have witnessed this failure in many transboundary river basins, including the Nile, Jordan, Euphrates-Tigris, Mekong, and Helmand, where a global geopolitical overlay was easily cast across a regional (hydro)security complex highly affected by the security-peace agenda of mainly outside-basin powers (see, e.g., Nagheby & Warner, 2018). These approaches, as part of broader water policies, are greatly affected by the structural power of global capitalism, which supports the direct investment of neoliberal states in extractivism in developing states (Beil, 2000; Avilés, 2019). This is a significant but underexplored point, since we know that most transboundary river basins across the world are located in developing, non-industrial regions (Mirumachi, 2015). Could water diplomacy in these conditions be designed to accelerate the economic growth of more industrially advanced states on the principle of global capitalism? Harvey (2003) argues that this 'New Imperialism' requires 'the use of imperialistic power to incorporate territories previously shielded from capitalist investments' (Avilés, 2019). While conventional approaches to water diplomacy in academia or in practice turn a blind eye to or at least are overcautious in discussing the wielding of power (Vij *et al.*, 2020), we argue that an overemphasis on the security-peace agenda inevitably ends in abnormal politics, risking the creation of both an equitable utilisation regime and of a collective identity for transboundary river basins among riparian states. Against this backdrop, and as we will discuss further here, while the critical hydropolitics literature has opened up scope for a critical analysis, it is not yet radical enough to challenge the broader hegemonic Global North's narratives and policies. A decolonised water diplomacy and conflict transformation is required to break through the barriers of the legacy of imperialist colonisation to reform the terms dictated down on the security-peace agenda.

Further, the hypocrisy of the Global North in the depiction of the Global South i.e., 'us' vs. 'others' – as elaborated earlier – appears more problematic here when it becomes part of a broader security-peace agenda. The danger of Western analyses is that they are often performed on their former colonies or the regions that are strategically important to them (Beil, 2000). These analyses are heavily orientated towards (or highly influenced by) broader security and (geo)political interests, with priority given to the goal of keeping the West safe. Accordingly, equity, and the interests and identities of the target regions, are therefore likely to be sacrificed to fulfil those priorities and justify foreign interventions. Could water diplomacy projects, then, serve to promote such foreign policy interventions? For instance, the 2017 U.S. Global Water Strategy focuses on water as the core of the U.S. foreign policy agenda, to the end of protecting 'U.S. national interests'. In approaches similar to that of the US, countries like the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, and Sweden have included water as a fundamental foreign policy concern (see Nagheby & Rieu-Clarke, 2020). Even if there are some efforts to promote water- and environment-related security and peace, we have witnessed them finally overshadowed by broader security interests; see for example former U.S. President Donald Trump's reckless suggestion for solving the quarrel

between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan about the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD): ‘blow up that dam’ (Reuters, 2020). In the longer term, this kind of strategic foreign policy, which gives prominence to protecting Western interests and transcends water diplomacy, not only destabilises the target region, perpetuates anarchy, and damages the pro-democracy movement for constructive cooperation over transboundary waters, but also threatens the West’s security itself, by, for example, creating migration crises or provoking radicalism. Therefore, water diplomacy in this tainted security-peace game potentially damages the socio-economic, multi-level, interdependent norms, and the creation of a collective identity for the riparian states; and, indeed, equity throughout the basin. In light of the above, we think scholars and practitioners need to adopt a postcolonial critique and take drastic steps, in their discourses, analysis, and practices, to challenge the Global North supremacy in water diplomacy. We suggest equity-identity orientation could provide fresh insights in this way.

WATER DIPLOMACY IN EQUITY-IDENTITY FOCUSED ATTENTION

‘True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice’ – Martin Luther King

Despite the importance of material self-interest in explaining various events of the present, humans are also motivated by what Fukuyama (2018) calls the *‘politics of resentment’* following from a group’s disparaged or disregarded dignity and identity (see also Hicks, 2021). Such resentment may be largely – but not explicitly – rooted in an inequitable and unjust social structure (or access to water) or past geopolitical history and identity-based conflicts (e.g., Rothman & Olson, 2001). Responding to this resentment may bear far more emotional weight than the efforts of those who pursue economic advantage. Therefore, when looking at water conflict, it is not all about sharing ‘money’ coming out of water cooperation among parties, it is *rather* about dignity and how that cooperation addresses their identity. Marton & Szálkai (2017) show how identity politics and resentment (as ‘a sense of having been on the losing side of history’) are the determinative factors in hydropolitical conflict in the case of Hungary as a downstream state. Clear but understudied examples of the pivotal role of identity and a sense of resentment in shaping transboundary water politics are Ethiopia (Gebresenbet & Wondemagegnehu, 2021) and Afghanistan (Nagheby & Warner, 2022) where there is a strong feeling of considering themselves as victims in various historical contexts. Notwithstanding this, a substantial part of the puzzle of how to transform water conflicts, i.e., identity, is missed by contemporary water diplomacy at the cost of equity. These politics, being centred around identity, require a wider critical perspective on water diplomacy than is offered by the security and peace aspects.

A state’s identity as a source of its behaviour is discernible in its foreign policy actions (Nau, 2002). Identity, in this way of thinking, influences the behaviour of a state by stimulating and shaping its interests. Wendt (1999) points out that identity ‘generates motivational and behavioural dispositions’ in international actors. One may correctly raise the question that if ‘identity shapes interests’, then interest-based approaches can indeed capture identity variables. However, the problem is that, as constructivists argue (Wendt, 1999), states’ interests – that merely show the tip of the iceberg – can certainly offer important contributions, but they may give a false image of their complex behaviour. That means a state’s interests may not accurately represent socially constructed state’s identity associated with other domestic socio-political features (see more in Alexandrov, 2003). Moreover, grounded on Buzan’s Copenhagen School theory, identity is a centrepiece of security at the societal level (Balzacq, 2011); this means that identity carries greater weight than sovereignty: losing sovereignty connotes being stateless, but losing identity is a form of death. From a critical constructivist’s view, identity is seen as ‘continuously reinterpreted through evolving representations of threats which, in turn, determine security dynamics’ (Daoudy, 2016). As a result, identity is a critical driver to define domestic and foreign policies and to determine

the rise and decline of state power (Daoudy, 2016). Accordingly, there is an inextricable bond between security and identity. To achieve security inevitably requires (re)producing collective identity, and so security (and peace) policies that ignore the role of identity are destined to fail. However, as already discussed, the existing studies on water diplomacy overlook identity in their analyses as well as foreign policy-making processes as possible explainers of the real-world situation.

With the above arguments, we think that water diplomacy needs to derive not merely from an interest-based policy to achieve security and peace but it should be *rather* steered by the equity-identity gear (see Figure 1). Water diplomacy can be a policy to lead interest-based interactions towards the creation of a collective identity between riparian states in respect of shared water resources, from which the priority is improving equitable utilisation. With such a policy, the goal of security and peace may be achieved. Accordingly, water conflict transformation, in our perspective, could occur through an alternative way by emphasising and prioritising the notions of equity and identity rather than interest. Contrary to what is known as water conflict management and resolution, *conflict transformation*, here, signals the positions and perceptions of the parties, dealing more with the root causes of the conflict in order to engage with the parties and transform their interests, identities, and discourses *collectively*. Water conflict transformation is a back-and-forth process in which the key targets should be equity and identity, not security and peace. This approach seeks to understand the behaviour and position of riparian states in relation to transboundary water conflicts by investigating effects of their identity. The goal of this approach is the creation of a collective identity over a transboundary river basin. The collective identity, in a way similar to nation-building, means that all riparian states in the basin find commonness in their histories and different interests and create a shared understanding for a common future. Therefore, water conflict transformation here is directed to the future (re)construction of a collective identity from several single and often rival identities over transboundary waters, while looking for the root causes of conflicts in the past. However, we

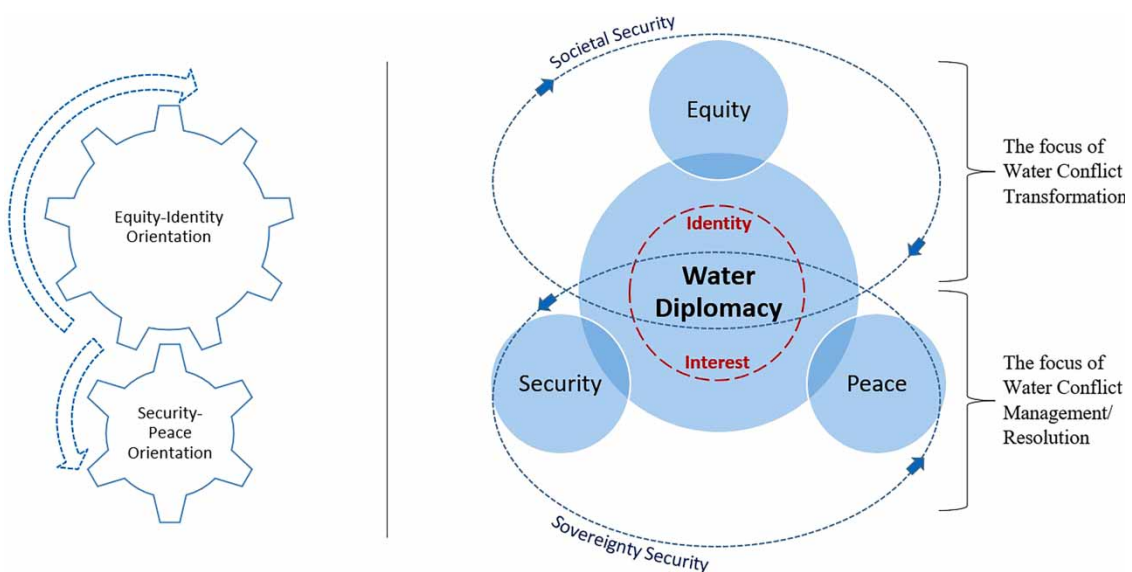


Fig. 1 | Water diplomacy in equity-identity and security-peace orientations (Left: showing decolonised water diplomacy by giving more weight to the equity-identity rear gear; Right: showing the elements of water conflict management, resolution, and transformation).

agree with [Lukes \(1974\)](#) that the concept of ‘false consciousness’ means this collective formation of identity over transboundary waters could be subject to power asymmetry and created according to the interests of the dominant group. Notwithstanding this, the process of ‘true’ consciousness could be drawn out from a ‘safer’ and more constructive atmosphere if it is continuously questioned more by equity principles than security-peace interests. This could be achieved by insisting upon the recognition of identity and agency, which are structurally or culturally inherited from the past. Within this process, it may be possible to metamorphise a negative effect of identity-based conflict (such as manifesting potentially aggressive forms of unilateralism, nationalism, etc., in a river basin) into a positive form of behaviour that leads to more equitable hydro-political relations towards identity-based cooperation (see, e.g., [Rothman, 2012](#)).

Water conflict transformation is in fact much more closely associated with the principles of fairness and justice than with the concepts of management and resolution ([Lederach, 1995](#); [Miall, 2004](#); [Zeitoun et al., 2014](#)), and it seeks a balance between equity and riparian states’ interests and identities. In other words, ‘conflict transformation is not about making a situation of injustice more bearable, but about transforming the very systems, structures and relationships which give rise to violence and injustice’ ([Parlevliet, 2009](#)). Notwithstanding this, while the different aspects and symptoms of water conflicts worldwide may be similar, they could be rooted in different layers of their socio-political context. Water conflict is just one feature of a larger picture and might show some effects of related concerns. The sense of injustice felt in water conflicts may sometimes be directed at an injustice carried out as part of a broader geopolitical action. In such cases, the transformation of a water conflict will not occur unless such injustices are resolved. The water disputes between Israel-Palestine, India-Pakistan (e.g., where the Indus flows through Kashmir), Malaysia-Singapore, Russia-Ukraine, Turkey-Syria-Iraq, Egypt (and Sudan)-Ethiopia, and Iran-Afghanistan are examples of such geopolitical-identity conflicts. This does not mean to reduce all their conflicts merely to identity conflicts; however, water conflicts are a reflection of or triggered by a bigger conflict around the politics of identity associated with their geopolitical disputes and, in particular, underlying injustice. Thus, considering equity in water utilisation in conjunction with the interests and identities of the concerned parties moves beyond disputes solely over water. In water conflict transformation approaches, there is a need to analyse the chief driver of equity by considering the identities of riparian states as they relate to water issues and how they could contribute to a collective form. Here, identity influences water diplomacy and related policies through the determination of interests. Reciprocally, water diplomacy may be also shaped directly by a state’s identity politics ([Daoudy, 2016](#)). Drawing upon [Wendt’s](#) explanation of identity, we suggest that the creation of a collective identity between riparian states for a transboundary river basin is the essential prerequisite of water diplomacy and its starting point. Collective identity here does not mean forsaking diversity; it is the creation of a shared understanding of different ideas, values, norms, and traditions which upholds equity principles. In these terms, equity-identity orientation in water diplomacy gives greater weight to the creation and transformation of a collective identity over transboundary water resources, rather than the material interests (which are mainly for self-interest) of the security-peace orientation. The former can tackle the underlying local realities of societal security throughout the basin and lead the rejuvenation and creation of common interests according to equity principles, whereas attempts at material gain risk intensifying the competition over self-peace, self-security, and more self-interested wishes at the cost of equity. Water diplomacy with the support of a shared identity respects the human dignity of all groups involved, while materialism may achieve a kind of peace by excluding a group or disregarding their human dignity. The former constitutes the moral basis of collective action with respect to different interests; the latter encourages unilateralism and nationalism when planning the utilisation of transboundary waters. Against this backdrop, [Table 1](#) summarises the main conceptualisations of water diplomacy orientation in terms of security-peace and equity-identity.

Table 1 | Conceptualisation of water diplomacy in different orientations.

Conceptualisation of water diplomacy's orientation	
Security-Peace	Equity-Identity
Water conflict management and resolution	Water conflict transformation
Focusing on security and peace	Focusing on equity and collective identity
Interest-oriented interaction	Identity-oriented interaction
Mainly deterministic and constant approach	Non-deterministic, fluid, and malleable approach
Mainly led by outsiders (external forces)	Mainly led by insiders (internal forces)
No influence on rational and root causes	Target rational and root causes
No influence on states' interests	Shapes states' interests
Sovereignty-based	Society-based
More motivated by national-scale interests	More motivated by regional- and basin-scale interests
Moving (largely) towards self-help/-interest	Moving towards regional consciousness and collective action

A focus on equity and identity is therefore needed to promote a *paradigm shift* in the analysis of transboundary water politics. We assert that many of the existing conflicts over transboundary river basins across the world and in particular in the Global South are largely reflections of the past history of colonisation and the root causes of identity- and equity-based problems. This call for paradigm shift aims to decolonise the contemporary interest-based approach. We suggest that the primary steps, and indeed, the hardest parts, in water diplomacy in any transboundary river basins lie with the creation of collective identity via the assessment of the equity principle. In the process of creating collective identity, shared ideas around equity are also constructed for the assessment of the interactions. Then, water conflict transformation for security and peace is achievable (see Figure 2). That means it

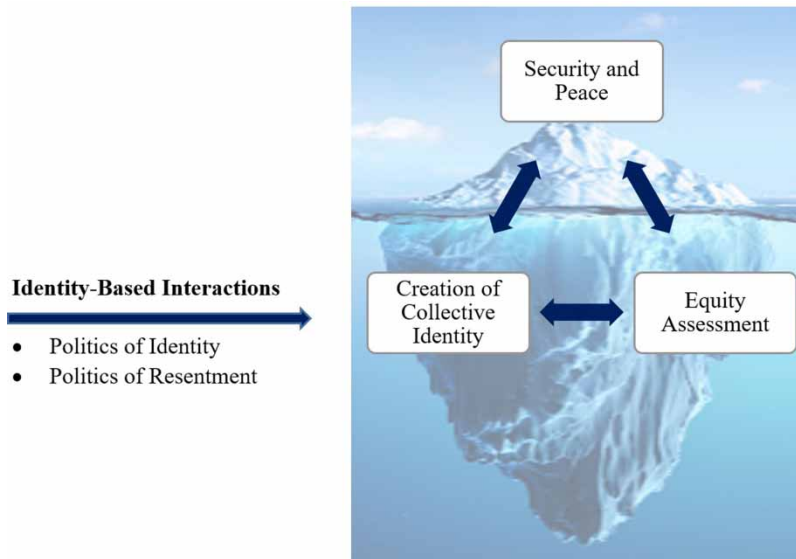


Fig. 2 | Stage process in decolonising water diplomacy.

is vital that water diplomats think first about *how* they can build a collective identity and fully appreciate the historical pains that reflect on water conflicts and try to cure them, for instance, over the Nile or Helmand, respectively, between Egypt and Ethiopia, and between Iran and Afghanistan, prior to making a basket of shared material interests and benefits over dams or hydropower or virtual food trade. Deep understanding of the interplay of these factors needs further research to establish a solid empirical basis for action. This is quite similar to what Hagg & Kagwanja (2007) recognised about the limitations of liberal peace orthodoxy emphasising the importance of re-conceptualisation of identities as building blocks of sustainable peace, justice, and reconciliation. Now, the biggest challenge for scholars and practitioners is: how can we create a collective identity over transboundary water, and is it really possible in all cases? This is where the concept of equity (and justice) is considered as evaluative criteria. Creation of collective identity without respecting the basic principle of equity (and justice) is a false remedy. For an extreme case like Palestinian-Israeli relations where there is a tendency to impose a specific identity through an occupation, then creation of collective identity is impossible without fixing the existing unjust structure (e.g., Selby, 2003). Indeed, creation of collective identity over an unjust basis is doomed to failure and water diplomacy, in this nature, will never succeed in conflict transformation.

Such a paradigm shift in the theoretical and practical focal points will lead scholars and policymakers to decolonising water diplomacy and assess a set of new priorities to confront local realities particularly in the Global South. We acknowledge that the definitions of equity and identity, like other social and political concepts, are varied and are ambiguous in theory and controversial in practice. Just as pro-security-peace water diplomacy is often gainless (at least for the riparian states), an *overemphasis* on equity-identity may also prove unrewarding. The emphasis on the politics of identity should be placed with care so as not to overstress the identity factor to the neglect of the material interests. Similar to how the creation of collective identity might be manipulated by power, equity (and justice) may also be subject to the concept of 'false consciousness'.

Therefore, we do not assert that the focus on equity is an unproblematic concept; weaker parties may be misled from recognising their rights through normalised discourse under a hegemonic constellation. This may even go further to ignore the fact that oppressive structures often have their own, often, well-meaning logic for what they understand as just. Considering a long history of colonisation and cementing the colonial mindset across the world in the interest of colonisers, hegemonic and imperialist thoughts, it might seem also difficult to get a sense of the engineerability of a collective identity over transboundary waters. This is why we think we need a fundamental rethinking for decolonisation of the mind in water diplomacy, and we suggest that the focus on equity-identity orientation, though might not be a 'perfect' solution, it expresses the greatest potential to challenge the dominant pathway. Finding a balance between identity and interest is therefore the major task in decolonised water diplomacy, and equity principles can be a useful aid in achieving this. We assert that this balance could bring a new perspective to water diplomacy and conflict transformation. Changing the focus of policy analysis to equity and identity can offer a more in-depth understanding of the underlying complexity, without becoming mired in the difficult discussions of water-related security and peace.

CONCLUSION

Water diplomacy stands at the crossroads between two orientations, security-peace and equity-identity. While we showed how the former facilitates the hegemonic policy of the Global North, we argue that the latter potentially offers alternative avenues for decolonising water diplomacy and water conflict transformation. For decades, water diplomacy across many transboundary river basins has been articulated as a colonial-based art of the Global North by ignoring the reality of the Global South. Decolonising water diplomacy should rest upon challenging the Global North supremacy in colonial-based knowledge, disrupting the biased depiction of the Global South, and reconstructing (geo)political processes and practices over collective identity-equity practice. We

argued that security and peace over transboundary waters may be achieved by standing on a functionalist interest-based approach, cooperating over technical matters and ignoring sensitive issues concerning the politics of identity and equity. The question is the extent to which such willful neglect is effective to make peace? Is security achieved if we ignore the fundamental (or a big part of the) problem instead of confronting it? We may bring a short-term security and peace, for instance, in the Jordan River Basin, without touching the broader issues concerning the oppression and damaged identity of Palestinians, but it then would be extremely vulnerable and fragile, as it was demonstrated in the past.

The issues surrounding transboundary waters are already constantly subjected to identity politics and issues concerning equity above other relative politics. We have argued that water conflicts in many transboundary river basins are but one small piece in the greater game of security and peace rivalry, mainly between outsiders. Adding water diplomacy to this game is an inefficacious remedy when the equity and identity of the insiders are easily ignored. The unconscious or conscious bias of water diplomacy towards security-peace – which is dictated by the broader geopolitical interests of mainly outside-of-basin players – could likely be corrected by putting a new emphasis on equity-identity, thereby transforming water conflicts. Conventional approaches to water diplomacy are mostly carried out as part of a pro-security-peace agenda of the Global North, through which priority is given to material interests rather than to the equity and identity of the locals. Given the weaknesses of water-related security-peace approaches that attempt to transform water conflict, this article calls for further critical analysis of hydropolitical relations to generate a wider and more defined focus on equity and identity issues. Equity-identity-based solutions could contribute to decolonising research and policy concerning water diplomacy and creating space for the voices from the Global South. The article introduces a new definition of *water conflict transformation*, which demands a thorough consideration of aspects of equity and creation of collective identity as they concern international river basins. However, while we have sought to justify *why* equity-identity orientation is required for water diplomacy and conflict transformation, we call for further empirical investigation of *how* to implement and practice it in reality.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We thank the anonymous reviewers for their careful reading of our manuscript and sincerely appreciate their insightful comments and suggestions. We would also like to thank Ana Cascão for her feedback on an earlier draft of the paper. This work was supported by the Water Security and Sustainable Development Hub funded by the UK Research and Innovation's Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and we thank them for their support.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All relevant data are included in the paper or its Supplementary Information.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare there is no conflict.

REFERENCES

- Akhter, M. (2015). The hydropolitical cold war: the Indus waters treaty and state formation in Pakistan. *Political Geography* 46, 65–75.
- Alexandrov, M. (2003). The concept of state identity in international relations: a theoretical analysis. *Journal of International Development and Cooperation* 10(1), 33–46.

- Allouche, J. (2020). Nationalism, legitimacy and hegemony in transboundary water interactions. *Water Alternatives* 13(2), 286–301.
- Ashizawa, K. (2008). When identity matters: state identity, regional institution-building, and Japanese foreign policy. *International Studies Review* 10(3), 571–598.
- Avilés, W. (2019). The Wayúu tragedy: death, water and the imperatives of global capitalism. *Third World Quarterly* 40(9), 1750–1766.
- Balzacq, T. (2011). *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*. Routledge, London and New York.
- Bankoff, G. (2001). Rendering the world unsafe: ‘vulnerability’ as western discourse. *Disasters* 25(1), 19–35.
- Beil, R. (2000). *The New Imperialism: Crisis and Contradictions in North/South Relations*. Zed Books, London and New York.
- Bernauer, T. (2002). Explaining success and failure in international river management. *Aquatic Sciences* 64, 1–19.
- Bishara, M. (2022). *Josep Borrell as Europe’s Racist ‘Gardener’*. Available from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/10/17/josep-borrell-eu-racist-gardener> (accessed 4 May 2023).
- Biswas, A. K. & Tortajada, C. (2023). Global crisis in water management: can a second UN Water Conference help? *River* 2, 143–148
- Boelens, R., Hoogesteger, J., Swyngedouw, E., Vos, J. & Wester, P. (2016). Hydrosocial territories: a political ecology perspective. *Water International* 41(1), 1–14.
- Cascão, A. E. & Nicol, A. (2016). GERD: new norms of cooperation in the Nile Basin? *Water International* 41(4), 550–573.
- Cascão, A. E., Zeitoun, M., (2013). Power, hegemony and critical hydropolitics. In *Transboundary Water Management: Principles and Practice*. Earle, A., Jägerskog, A. & Öjendal, J., (eds). Routledge, London, pp. 40–55.
- Daoudy, M. (2016). The structure-identity nexus: Syria and Turkey’s collapse (2011). *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 29(3), 1074–1096.
- Djité, P. G. (2006). Shifts in linguistic identities in a global world. *Language Problems and Language Planning* 30(1), 1–20.
- Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and Power*, 2nd edn. Pearson Education, Harlow, UK.
- Fischhendler, I. (2008). Ambiguity in transboundary environmental dispute resolution: the Israeli-Jordanian water agreement. *Journal of Peace Research* 45(1), 91–109.
- Foucault, M. (2002). *Archaeology of Knowledge*. Routledge, London.
- Friedman, S. (2020). COVID-19 has blown away the myth about ‘First’ and ‘Third’ world competence. *The Conversation* 13. <https://theconversation.com/covid-19-has-blown-away-the-myth-about-first-and-third-world-competence-138464> (accessed 19 July 2023)
- Fukuyama, F. (2018). Why national identity matters. *Journal of Democracy* 29(4), 5–15.
- Gebresenbet, F. & Wondemagegnehu, D. Y. (2021). New dimensions in the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam negotiations: ontological security in Egypt and Ethiopia. *African Security* 14(1), 80–106.
- Gleick, P. H. (1994). Water, war & peace in the Middle East. *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* 36(3), 6–42.
- Hagg, G. & Kagwanja, P. (2007). Identity and peace: reconfiguring conflict resolution in Africa. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 7(2), 9–35.
- Hanna, R. & Allouche, J. (2018). Water Nationalism in Egypt: State-Building, Nation-Making and Nile HydroPolitics. In *Water, Technology and the Nation-State*. Menga F. & Swyngedouw E., (eds). Routledge, London.
- Hardy, R. (2016). *The Poisoned Well: Empire and its Legacy in the Middle East*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Harvey, D. (2003). *The New Imperialism*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Hicks, D. (2021). *Dignity: Its Essential Role in Resolving Conflict*. Yale University Press, London.
- Hira, S. (2023). *Decolonizing the Mind – A Guide to Decolonial Theory and Practice*. AMRIT, Amsterdam.
- Hussein, H., Conker, A. & Grandi, M. (2022). Small is beautiful but not trendy: understanding the allure of big hydraulic works in the Euphrates-Tigris and Nile waterscapes. *Mediterranean Politics* 27(3), 297–320.
- Islam, S. & Susskind, L. E. (2012). *Water Diplomacy: A Negotiated Approach to Managing Complex Water Networks*. Routledge, New York.
- Keskinen, M., Salminen, E. & Haapala, J. (2021). Water diplomacy paths – an approach to recognise water diplomacy actions in shared waters. *Journal of Hydrology* 602, 126737.
- Kittikhoun, A. & Schmeier, S. (2020). *River Basin Organizations in Water Diplomacy*. Routledge, London and New York.
- Klimes, M., Michel, D., Yaari, E. & Restiani, P. (2019). Water diplomacy: the intersect of science, policy and practice. *Journal of Hydrology* 575, 1362–1370.

- Lankford, B., Bakker, K., Zeitoun, M. & Conway, D. (2013). *Water Security: Principles, Perspectives and Practices*. Routledge, London.
- Leal, J. S., Soares, B., Franco, A. C. S., Lima, R. G. d. S. F., Baker, K. & Griffiths, M. (2022). *Decolonising Ecological Research: A Debate Between Global North Geographers and Global South Field Ecologists*.
- Lederach, J. P. (1995). Conflict transformation in protracted internal conflicts: the case for a comprehensive framework. In: *Conflict Transformation*. K. Rupesinghe (ed). St. Martin's Press, New York.
- Lukes, S. (1974). *Power: A Radical View*. Macmillan, London.
- Marton, P. & Szálkai, K. (2017). [Against the current: deconstructing the upstream/downstream binary in hydropolitical security complexes](#). *New Perspectives* 25(3), 1–27.
- McSweeney, B. (1999). *Security, Identity and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Mehta, L. & Nicol, A. (2023). How the UN got thirsty again after 46 years. *Water Alternative Forum*. Available from: <https://www.water-alternatives.org/index.php/blog/UN2023>.
- Menga, F. (2015). [Building a nation through a dam: the case of Rogun in Tajikistan](#). *Nationalities Papers* 43(3), 479–494.
- Menga, F. (2017). [Hydropolis: reinterpreting the polis in water politics](#). *Political Geography* 60, 100–109.
- Miall, H. (2004). *Conflict Transformation: A Multi-Dimensional Task. Transforming Ethnopolitical Conflict*. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden.
- Mirumachi, N. (2015). *Transboundary Water Politics in the Developing World*. Routledge, London and New York.
- Mirumachi, N. & Allan, J. A. (2007). Revisiting transboundary water governance: power, conflict cooperation and the political economy. In: *Proceedings from CAIWA International Conference on Adaptive and Integrated Water Management: Coping with Scarcity*, Basel, Switzerland. Citeseer.
- Mitchell, D. (2009). [Cooking the fudge: constructive ambiguity and the implementation of the Northern Ireland Agreement, 1998–2007](#). *Irish Political Studies* 24(3), 321–336.
- Naff, T. & Matson, R. (1984). *Middle East Water: The Potential for Conflict*. Westview Press, Boulder, CO.
- Nagheeb, M., Rieu-Clarke, A., (2020). Water diplomacy in the Helmand River Basin: exploring the obstacles to cooperation within the shadow of anarchy. In *River Basin Organizations in Water Diplomacy*. Kittikhoun, A. & Schmeier, S., (eds). Routledge, London and New York.
- Nagheeb, M. & Warner, J. (2018). [The geopolitical overlay of the hydro-politics of the Harirud River Basin](#). *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 18(6), 839–860.
- Nagheeb, M. & Warner, J. (2022). The 150-year itch: Afghanistan-Iran hydro-politics over the Helmand/Hirmand River. *Water Alternatives* 15(3), 551–573.
- Nau, H. R. (2002). *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London.
- Osikena, J. & Tickner, D. (2010). *Tackling the World Water Crisis: Reshaping the Future of Foreign Policy*. Foreign Policy Center, UK.
- Parlevliet, M. (2009). *Rethinking Conflict Transformation from a Human Rights Perspective*.
- Patterson, O., Weil, F. & Patel, K. (2010). [The role of community in disaster response: conceptual models](#). *Population Research and Policy Review* 29(2), 127–141.
- Reus-Smit, C. (2013). Constructivism. In: *Theories of International Relations* (Burchill, S., Linklater, A., Devetak, R., Donnelly, J., Paterson, M., Reus-Smit, C. & True, J., (eds)). Macmillan International Higher Education, New York.
- Reuters (2020). [Ethiopia Says It Will Not Cave to 'Aggression' in Dam Dispute](#). Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-ethiopia-idINKBN2790D9> (accessed 19 July 2023)
- Riley, P. (1981). *Introduction to the Reading of Alexandre Kojève*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 5–48.
- Rothman, J. (2012). *From Identity-Based Conflict to Identity-Based Cooperation: The ARIA Approach in Theory and Practice*. Springer, New York.
- Rothman, J. & Olson, M. L. (2001). [From interests to identities: towards a new emphasis in interactive conflict resolution](#). *Journal of Peace Research* 38(3), 289–305.
- Satow, E. M. (1957). *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice*. Longmans, Green and Company, New York.
- Schmeier, S. & Shubber, Z. (2018). [Anchoring water diplomacy – the legal nature of international river basin organizations](#). *Journal of Hydrology* 567, 114–120.
- Sehring, J., Schmeier, S., ter Horst, R., Offutt, A. & Sharipova, B. (2022). [Diving into water diplomacy – exploring the emergence of a concept](#). *Diplomatica* 4(2), 200–221.

- Sehring, J., ter Horst, R. & Said, A. (2023). Water diplomacy: a man's world? Insights from the Nile, Rhine and Chu-Talas basins. *Journal of Hydrology X* 100152. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hydroa.2023.100152>.
- Selby, J. (2003). Dressing up domination as 'cooperation': the case of Israeli-Palestinian water relations. *Review of International Studies* 29(1), 121–138.
- Sondarjee, M. & Andrews, N. (2023). Decolonizing international relations and development studies: what's in a buzzword? *International Journal* 0(0), 1–21.
- Thompson, K. W. (1981). Power, force and diplomacy. *The Review of Politics* 43(3), 410–435.
- Ugarriza, J. E. (2009). Ideologies and conflict in the post-Cold War. *International Journal of Conflict Management* 20(1), 82–104.
- UNSC (2016) Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Water, Peace and Security. UN doc. S/PV.7818.
- Vij, S., Warner, J. & Barua, A. (2020). Power in water diplomacy. *Water International* 45(4), 249–253.
- Warner, J. (2012). Three lenses on water war, peace and hegemonic struggle on the Nile. *International Journal of Sustainable Society* 4(1–2), 173–193.
- Warner, J. & Vij, S. (2022). No, There Will Not Be a War for Water. New Security Beat. <https://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2022/01/no-war-water/> (accessed 19 July 2023)
- Wendt, A. (1999). *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Wigen, E. (2015). Two-level language games: international relations as inter-lingual relations. *European Journal of International Relations* 21(2), 427–450.
- Wolf, A. T. (1999). 'Water wars' and water reality: conflict and cooperation along international waterways. In *Environmental Change, Adaptation, and Security*, Lonergan, S.C., (ed). Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 251–265.
- Wolf, A. T. (2012). Spiritual understandings of conflict and transformation and their contribution to water dialogue. *Water Policy* 14(S1), 73–88.
- Zeitoun, M. & Warner, J. (2006). Hydro-hegemony – a framework for analysis of trans-boundary water conflicts. *Water Policy* 8(5), 435–460.
- Zeitoun, M., Warner, J., Mirumachi, N., Matthews, N., McLaughlin, K., Woodhouse, M., Cascão, A. & Allan, T. (2014). Transboundary water justice: a combined reading of literature on critical transboundary water interaction and 'justice', for analysis and diplomacy. *Water Policy* 16(S2), 174–193.
- Zeitoun, M., Mirumachi, N. & Warner, J. (2020). *Water Conflicts: Analysis for Transformation*. Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York.

First received 15 February 2023; accepted in revised form 4 July 2023. Available online 19 July 2023