

Interactive comment on “Socio-environmental cooperation and conflict? A discursive understanding and its application to the case of Israel/Palestine” by T. Ide and C. Fröhlich

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We thank the reviewers for their positive and insightful comments which were of great help when we revised and improved the paper.

Anonymous Referee #1: “The methodological part would benefit from more details on the approaches, not every reader is familiar with the terms/methods mentioned.” JR Romero: “I agree with the first referee that the methodological section is in need of more specification since the concepts referred to are not always familiar to the reader. You also fail to outline sufficiently why the methods chosen fit your case better than others would.” We extended the relevant parts on the diverse case technique, sampling,

C491

macro- and micro-analysis, maximal and minimal contrasting, coding, theoretical sampling and phenomenal structure. The manuscript also explains now why we selected the respective sampling and discourse analysis techniques in the context of our specific research design. In short, the main reasons are (see revised manuscript for further details): compatibility between the theoretical and methodological part of the analysis, accordance with established research standards, ability to capture the breadth and depth of a discourse without micro-analyzing the whole corpus and adaptability to new contexts and particularly to conflict environments.

Anonymous Referee #1: “The choice of the level of analysis is not always clear: national discourses are compared to the discourses in a transnational but finally communal project; would the results have been different for a comparison between the FOEME initiative and two local level assessments, i.e. in communities on both sides that are not involved in the FOEME project? In both cases, discourses are crucial for the understanding of the conflict but the different orientation of the discourses is a striking case in point and it is not so clear which role the level of analysis may play in this context. A national discourse may always be different from a local one. Please explain how far this is the case or why not and why the comparison then makes sense.” The term “dominant national” discourse is misleading in this context and has been replaced in the text by “dominant discourse”. Indeed, the dominant discourses are the ones by far most widely accepted in Israel and Palestine, so they are not only dominant on a national level, but their core elements should (with some variation) be recognizable on various levels (communal, regional, national), in different locations and among various sectors (e.g. media, politics). This is supported by existing research (e.g. Feitelson 2012; Fröhlich 2012; Lipchin 2007; Messerschmid 2012). Therefore, we suggest that a comparison between the GWN discourse and the discourse of several randomly selected communities along the border would have yielded essentially the same results. This point is already implicit in the first paragraph of conclusion: “Based on an analysis of the existing literature, we have concluded that confrontative and mutually exclusive discourses are a major driver of the Israeli-Palestinian water conflict. This applies to

C492

the inter-state level, but it can also explain why many communities along the border between Israel and the West Bank abstain from cooperation over local water resources.” In the introduction, we also state: “And even if beyond this, there still is no explanation for why some scientists, local communities and NGOs in Israel and Palestine do engage in water-related cooperation, while most do not.” In the revised manuscript, we have decided to discuss this issue more explicitly in the introduction: “Firstly, we aim at explaining the puzzle of the simultaneity of water conflict and cooperation in Israel and Palestine. This refers not only to the simultaneity of water conflict on the inter-state-level and water cooperation between the GWN communities. It also refers to the apparent consensus about the perpetuation of the water conflict in Israel and Palestine and the widespread lack of cross-border water cooperation (Daoudi, 2009; Messerschmid, 2012), while GWN communities simultaneously work actively towards replacing the water conflict by water cooperation.” We also qualified that some of the statements cited do not just apply to the local level, but are seen as general truths in the region. For instance: “This water interdependence is not just diagnosed for the local level, but portrayed as a general fact, at least in the Middle East. Phrases like “water [. . .] has no border” (interview, 26/05/2013, Bethlehem) were articulated in nearly every interview.” Finally, we now distinguish explicitly between international interactions (which can also encompass the GWN project) and inter-state interactions (which are limited to interactions on the official government or state level).

JR Romero: “The quotations you included from your interviews demonstrate that they were conducted in English, which is not the native language of your interview partners. Though this is comprehensible from the point of effort and cost, an analysis of discourse that is not held in the mother tongue could be methodologically challenged on this account. I would thus recommend to explain your position on this issue in a footnote.” We added a footnote stating: “All interviews were either conducted in English or in Arabic/Hebrew with the help of a translator. The translators were instructed to translate the interviews as close to the original wording as possible and to pay special attention to formulations with might have an ambiguous or metaphorical meaning. The

C493

likelihood of misinterpretations due to not conducting the interviews in the native language of the interviewees was reduced by the comparison of various interviews during the macro-analysis and by a member check of the results (see below).”

JR Romero: “What I however noted in your analysis section was that you did not quantify the weight of your outlined three dimensions of the water discourse. What is most important for the people you interviewed? Which aspects were mentioned more frequently? Particularly to the “developed-underdeveloped” discourse, was this present in all or most of your interviews or did it enter only occasionally?” We understand discourses as “performative statement practices which constitute reality orders”. Reconstructing a discourse therefore involves an interpretative analysis of texts which also has to focus on indirect meanings, aspects which are not mentioned, ambiguous meanings of words etc. These elements are hard to quantify, and this is why almost all discourse analytical approaches (including the ones of Keller and Jäger on which we draw in the paper) abstain from and do not recommend quantitative or frequency analysis (e.g. Hajer 1995; Jäger 2004; Keller 2013). However, all five dimensions of the phenomenal structure described in section 4 have been detected in the large majority of the interviews conducted, while no or very few contradictive text passages were found. In order to make this clearer, we added a sentence at the end of paragraph 1 of section 4: “Each of these five dimensions was detected in almost all of the interviews conducted.”

Anonymous Referee #1: “In the conclusion, it would be interesting to link the findings to the debates on peace-building.” JR Romero: “I also suggest to extend your concluding section. You have provided a very valuable analysis of discourse and a better comprehension of this dimension can support peace-building initiatives. I would thus urge you not to give away the opportunity to formulate policy recommendations to open your paper to a larger readership.” We extended the conclusion in order to formulate more explicit policy recommendations and to link our findings to recent peacebuilding debates (although we could not go too much into details here since it is not the central

C494

issue of the paper): “If discursively constructed identities and situation assessments are important explanatory factors for the occurrence of conflict and/or cooperation over water resources, attempts to find accepted and sustainable solutions to water conflicts should focus on those discourses, too (Buckley-Zistel, 2006). A mere focus on technical or functional water cooperation is insufficient at best and counterproductive at worst (Aggestam and Sundell-Eklund, 2014; Bichsel, 2009). Israeli investments in wastewater recycling and seawater desalination have increased the amount of water available in Israel and Palestine considerably, but this caused no transformation of either the confrontative dominant water discourses or the inter-state water conflict (Aviram et al., 2014). Instead of investing development aid or peacebuilding funds in water infrastructure problems, which might not get permission (especially in the West Bank, see Selby, 2013) or lack local commitment, it therefore seems more promising to support local initiatives which engage in discursive conflict transformation (Ochs et al., 1996). This resonates well with current debates which are critical about the liberal peacebuilding approach (with its focus on external, one size fits all technological fixes) and instead recommend strengthening the local (and the associated values and initiatives) in peacebuilding efforts (Richmond, 2009). Of course, the question about the “true” nature of the local remains (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013), for instance when (local) Palestinian GWN activists report instances of (local-level) resistance against the project: “[Interviewer: Was there any, any difficulties or any skepticism with, from the people in Auja? They did not like you to, to meet Israelis or to work with them?] This is what we managed to overcome. Ok? Because when we started here working in Auja, they said that is, that institution is normalization.” (interview, 07/06/2013, Auja) Nevertheless, we remain optimistic that a discursive approach to socio-environmental conflict and cooperation not only yields important analytical insights, but that the transformation of confrontative into (locally grounded) cooperative identities and situation assessments is a promising way for promoting environmental conflict resolution and environmental peacebuilding.”

Anonymous Referee #1: “The question of the relevance of these findings for other
C495

world regions, as mentioned in the conclusion, would also benefit from a clearer statement on the level of analysis and actors concerned. The citation on pastoralist conflict seems to refer to the local level and the mobilisation of group identities at this level, but the citation right after this points to national level policies.” Besides addressing this issue more explicitly in the introduction, we also made more explicit in the conclusion that our findings refer to local, national and international levels. Next to the example of local conflict/cooperation in Africa, we also added reference to an inter-state case (Euphrates-Tigris river system) in order to provide further support for our argument.

JR Romero: “Page 1003: We are optimistic that our findings on the relevance of discourses for socio-environmental conflict and cooperation are valid in other contexts (...).” Your optimism is not sufficiently underpinned by fact. You should provide more substantial arguments for why you believe your findings are transferable to other regions.” Next to the similarity of climatic and land use patterns, which are already mentioned in the respective part of the manuscript, we added the following explanation: “This is the case because if discursive factors can explain the occurrence of cooperation in the midst of an “intractable conflict” (Bar-Tal, 1998: 22), they are likely to have some explanatory power in less deadlocked conflict settings, too. Our findings are also well in line with the theoretical expectations as discussed in section 2.”

JR Romero: “Page 1013: You repeatedly refer to the myth of the fellah (which I would put in italics). You only briefly introduce this myth on page 1013. Yet, for readers that do not engage regularly with the region, the story is not known and should be more substantially explained since it is important to your analysis.” We put fellah in italics and added some information about the background and content of this myth: “The central characteristic of the fellah is perseverance (Arabic *sumud*) in the face of recurring humiliation and assault; the myth is alive until today and relates not only to those who actually work with and on the land, but also those who protect the land by simply maintaining their livelihoods in the Occupied Territories and by witnessing the Israeli occupation.”

JR Romero: "Page 1020: While all your interviews are cited with a concrete location, the interview location on page 1020 is only specified as "Israel". It was agreed with the interviewee to give no further information on the location of this interview in order to protect the anonymity of the interviewee. This statement is quite explicit and critical and thus might have the potential to cause troubles for the interviewee. An explanatory footnote was added to the main text.

Please also note the supplement to this comment:

<http://www.earth-syst-dynam-discuss.net/6/C491/2015/esdd-6-C491-2015-supplement.pdf>

Interactive comment on Earth Syst. Dynam. Discuss., 6, 1001, 2015.