



مكتب شمال إفريقيا  
North Africa Office



منصة العدالة الاجتماعية  
Social Justice Platform

## Call for Abstracts

# Beyond Crisis: The Course of People and Water in Egypt's Political Ecology

At the moment, the dominant narrative in the media and among some intellectual circles is that Egypt is experiencing a “water crisis” in unprecedented ways. It is often argued that there is a rapidly rising demand for water, one which the government cannot meet due to the tremendous pressure of population growth, lack of finances, and a “natural” problem of water scarcity. The construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), which is set to be completed in 2022, added a significant layer of national anxiety regarding Egypt's share of the Nile, with the government repeatedly expressing its fears of losing water and publicly promising to never allow any country to trespass on Egypt's water sovereignty. Apart from the recent transboundary water tensions, complaints about water shortages in households and in irrigation canals spiked in 2018. And Cairo is reportedly showing up on lists of cities that are in risk of running out of drinking water soon. The Nile River basin is especially vulnerable to climate change, with various reports pointing toward a significant reduction in water flow and irreversible damage to agriculture along the banks.

But Egypt's “water crisis” is neither a simple nor a straightforward dilemma. It cuts across global, regional, and local predicaments concerning agribusiness, environmental governance, economic policies, and political and social justice. Under the impacts of global environmental degradation, it can be easy to fall into the discursive trap of “crises” and “disasters” — forgetting the slow historical process by which these “disasters” come to be experienced and then portrayed in mainstream discourses. The popular approaches to explaining this dilemma often ignore that historical inequalities are reproduced to life-threatening degrees under current environmental conditions. Egypt's perceived water crisis is part of a deeply political history, one that cannot, for example, be explained away by a security approach — which is often blind to how water problems are experienced on the local level and can reinforce hostilities that do not move beyond national security concerns.

Climate activism in United Nations-affiliated events also does not push the conversation to the relevant structural changes needed. And some human rights approaches fail to grasp the damage that a capitalist understanding of water as an economic good can cause.

*Beyond Crisis: The Course of People and Water in Egypt's Political Ecology* takes its starting point from the rejection of alarmist discourses around the “water crisis” that end up, directly or indirectly, giving legitimacy to unilateral governmental interventions. We are seeking contributions that move away from the perceived “crisis” and toward the “course” of water issues in Egypt, with an emphasis on history, political ecology, and the ideals of water justice. Our goal is take a step back from the crisis discourse and its accompanied passivity/blindness to the manifold aspects of water issues today.

Toward this end, we are seeking contributions that establish clear connections between water and national political economy, social rights, authoritarian regimes, political ecology, global economic relationships, developmental agendas, and finally environmental justice. The latter is perhaps the most important conceptual framework that is guiding this project. We ultimately seek to **elucidate the political and economic relationships that help reproduce historical inequalities with respect to water in Egypt, and then propose interventions for alternative governance.** We believe that by shifting our focus to the historical course of water issues, we are not only challenging mainstream discourses, but also allowing more room for creative and just alternatives in the present and future.

We invite journalists, researchers, scholars, students, and others to submit abstracts to us. Submissions will be initially be accepted for participation in a workshop in Cairo this October, where papers will be reviewed, roundtable discussions will be held, and outside guests will be invited for additional talks and relevant presentations. **Upon review, selected papers will be published in an edited volume and their respective authors will receive an honorarium.** The following is a non-exhaustive list of suggested themes:

- 1. Water-agriculture-food nexus:** *How have recent changes in agricultural laws undermined equitable access to water? What is the politics of deeming certain foods water-intensive? Who are the top global/regional/local agribusiness players who shape Egypt's economic policies regarding the water-agriculture-food nexus? How does livestock production affect water resources in Egypt? What are the economic dynamics – and implications – of importing and exporting water (e.g. virtual water)?*
- 2. Water and infrastructure:** *Access to water depends on adequate infrastructure — how can we map the historical and contemporary infrastructural failures that compromise water justice across the geography of Egypt? How is water shortage experienced differently?*

3. **The GERD beyond hydropower and nationalism:** *Who faces the greatest risks due to the development of the dam — both in Egypt and in Ethiopia? What histories can we draw upon to understand the greater political and environmental impacts of dams? What are just and fair alternatives to this method of water conservation, both to people and the environment?*
4. **Water access in prisons, schools, and hospitals, especially in marginalized urban and rural areas**
5. **Water-energy nexus:** *What is the relationship between Egypt's energy policy and water? How adequately is the "crisis" accounted for in Egypt's nuclear projects?*
6. **Water and public health:** *What are Egypt's current strategies to improve sanitation and water treatment? How effective are these strategies? What is the sociological history of water-borne diseases in Egypt?*
7. **Environmental degradation and migration:** *What is the impact of sea-level rise, loss of fisheries, and/or water pollution on the livelihood of local communities?*
8. **A green economy? Water infrastructure overhaul and potentials for just economic growth:** *What are the policy interventions and public initiatives needed to transform this system?*
9. **Analysis of Egypt's National Water Resource Plan**
10. **Diversion of water resources — to upscale gated communities in the new cities and tourist resorts**
11. **Contemporary possibilities for water justice in Egypt:** *What is/was the potential of water-related protests and local movements?*
12. **Local resource management:** *What is an alternative, liberatory model for local resource management that does not espouse a romantic return to atavistic methods nor a hyper-rational techno-modernism?*

**In limited cases**, we highly welcome contributions that offer comparative accounts at the regional and Nile-basin levels.

**Important Dates:**

31st of March: Deadline to submit abstracts

28th of April: Acceptance notification with further details will be sent out

30th of September: Deadline for a full draft

October (Exact date TBA): Workshop

15th of December: Deadline for final draft

**Languages:**

Submissions can be in Arabic or English. In exceptional cases, we will accept French submissions as well.

**Writing Guidelines**

1. Word count for abstracts: 500-600
2. Abstracts must include the main research question(s), conceptual framework, methodology, primary references, and thesis statement
3. Word count for final draft: 6000-8000 words

**Additional information:**

All the submitted drafts will be peer reviewed, and feedback will be provided during the workshop. **A full first draft must be submitted and circulated in advance of the workshop.** Depending on the capacity of participants, some funds will be available for travel and accommodation. We also encourage externally funded participants. Participation in the workshop does not guarantee the publishing of papers. Only those whose papers get selected for the edited volume will receive an honorarium.

**Contact Information**

To apply, send your abstracts and/or inquiries to [peopleandwater@sjplatform.org](mailto:peopleandwater@sjplatform.org)