

Martin Kipping:

**Water Security  
in the Senegal River Basin**

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**Water Cooperation and  
Water Conflicts**



# 1. Introduction: Water War and Water Peace

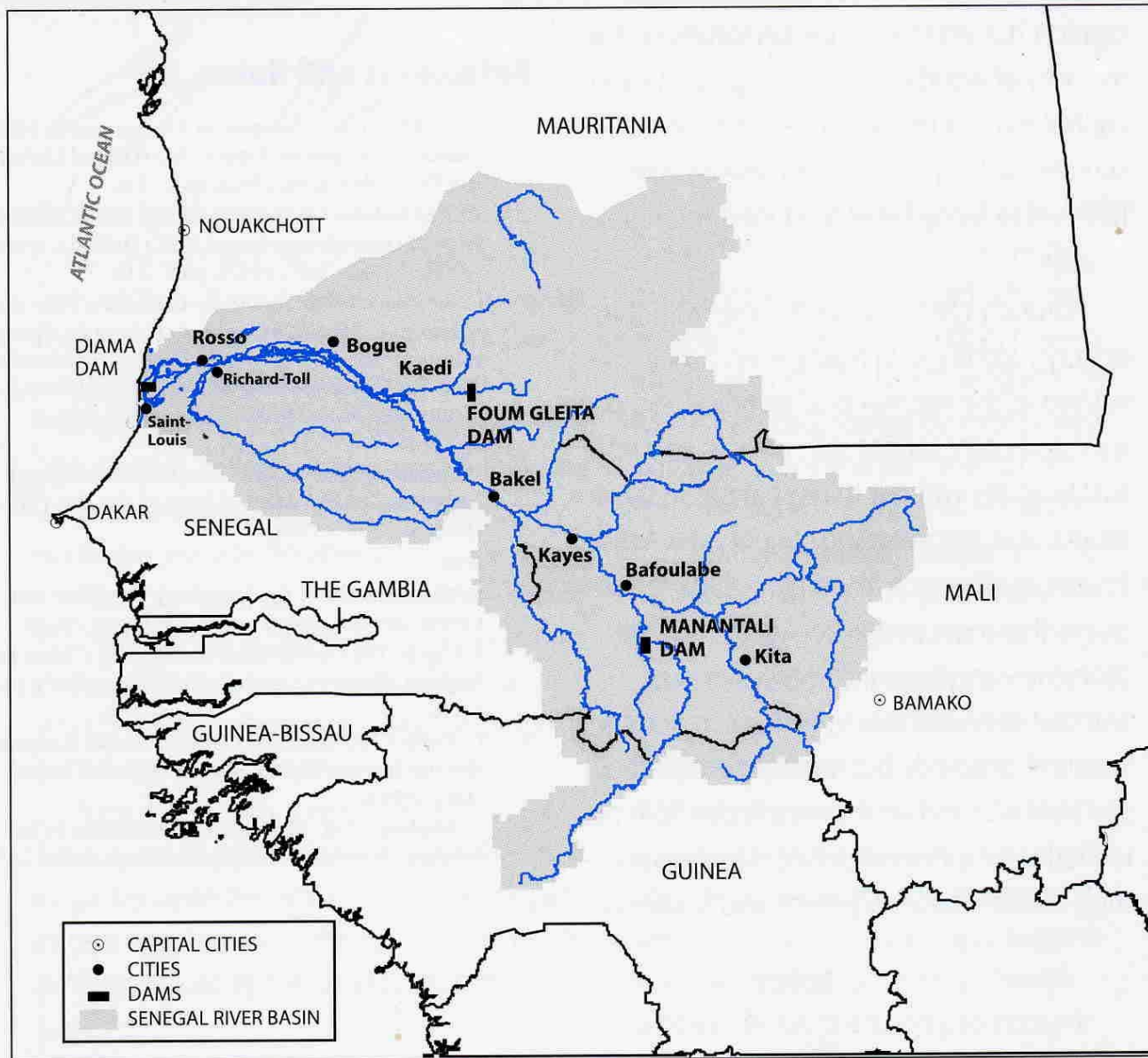
- Environmental Security and Environmental Conflicts
  - Neo-Malthusians versus Cornucopians versus Political Analysts
  - “Water War Hype“ and Wolfian revisionism
  - Methodological shortcomings of research on water conflicts: biased case selection, insufficient data for quantitative studies, Malthusian bias
- ⇒ Need of refined causal hypotheses for comparative analyses and large-N studies

# Outline

2. Case Selection: Why the Senegal River?
3. Hypotheses for the Puzzle of ‘Anti-Malthusian’ Correlation
4. Process-Tracing: Causal Mechanisms of Cooperation and Conflict over the Senegal River
5. Conclusion: Strengthening the Water Peace



**International River Basins of**  
**AFRICA**



## 2. Case Selection: Why the Senegal River?

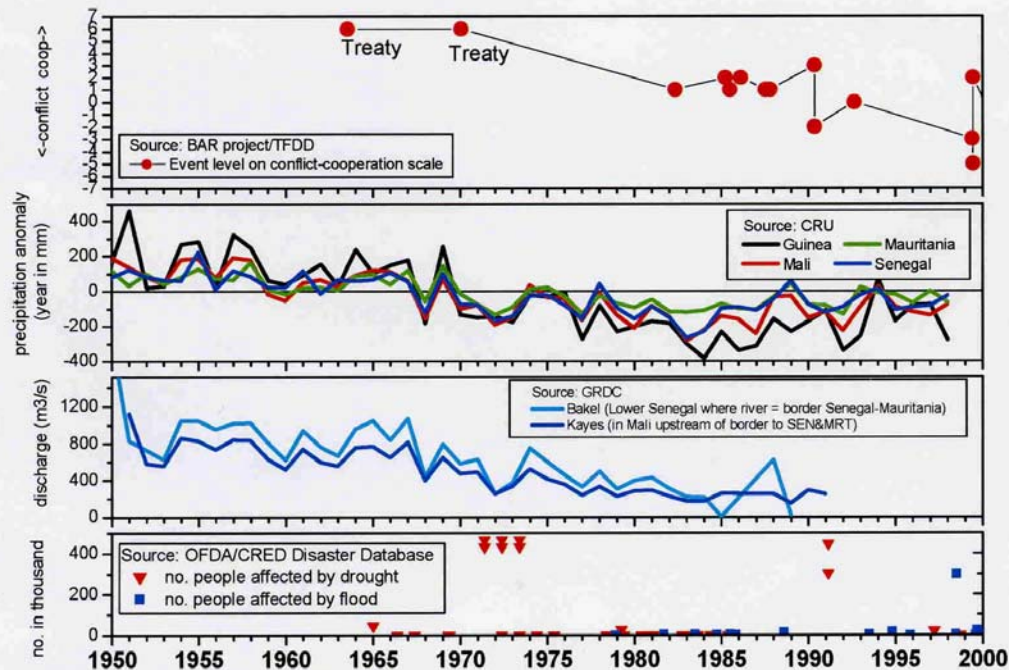


Figure 5. Time-series of events of conflict and cooperation, precipitation anomaly, annual mean discharge and the occurrence of natural disasters in the Senegal River basin.

Source: Wolf / Stahl / Macomber 2003

### 3. Hypotheses for the Puzzle of ‘Anti-Malthusian’ Correlation

- Intensified International Cooperation in Times of Growing Water Scarcity
  - Realist approach: Hegemonic Stability
  - Institutionalist approach: Win-win cooperation
  - Liberal approach: Domestic polity and politics
- Intra-State Violent Conflict in Times of Growing Water Availability
  - “Water is not a lootable resource” (Gleditsch 2004)
  - ENCOP: Socioecological Heterogeneity
  - Increasing incongruence of resource discrepancies and power discrepancies

# 4. Process-Tracing: Causal Mechanisms of Cooperation and Conflict over the Senegal River

- Intense Cooperation: Infrastructure Projects of the Organisation for the Development of the Senegal River (OMVS) after the onset of the Sahelian drought
  - Growing interest of the riparian states to develop their common river
  - Weakening donor reluctance due to the severe Sahelian drought



# 4. Process-Tracing: Causal Mechanisms of Cooperation and Conflict over the Senegal River

- Violent Conflict: The Mauritanian “Events” of 1989/1990, following the construction of the OMVS dams
  - Historical conflict between Moors and Black Africans, leading to exclusive Moor control over security apparatus
  - Considerable public investment in irrigated agriculture
  - Growing profitability thanks to OMVS dams



## 5. Conclusion: Strengthening the Water Peace

- Observation of “Anti-Malthusian” causal mechanisms in hydropolitics of the Senegal River
- Operational consequences: Do not consider international water cooperation as desirable *per se*, but also think of possible intra-state effects
- Consequences for research on hydropolitics: Be more precise regarding riparian states' specific interests, the influence of external actors and the nature of the states in question



# Thank you for your attention!



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## Water Conflict and Co-operation over the Senegal River

Research on “hydropolitics” – i.e. conflict and co-operation over freshwater – suggests that no international “water war” ever occurred in modern times. However, the dominant Neo-Malthusian discourse in this field of research still claims that growing water scarcity necessarily causes conflict and hampers co-operation between riparians of shared watercourses. The case of the Senegal River in West Africa provides an opportunity to challenge this view: On the one hand, three riparian states – Mali, Mauritania and Senegal – have intensified their co-operation within the *Organisation pour la Mise en Valeur du Fleuve Sénégal* (OMVS) through the implementation of a common infrastructure programme (two major dams) after the onset of the severe Sahel drought of 1968-1973. On the other hand, Mauritania has experienced the bloody expulsion of population groups from the river valley in 1989/90 after their land had become economically valuable due to the surplus of water provided by the dams. Hence, an “anti-Malthusian” correlation between the amount of water available and the degree of conflict or co-operation can be observed in these two cases.

The present study explores the causal mechanisms behind this correlation: It shows that the drought boosted the riparian states’ interest in jointly developing the river and enabled them to obtain the corresponding financial means from donor countries. Thus, growing water scarcity seems to have been a necessary condition to intensified co-operation on the Senegal River. As regards the Mauritanian conflict, the study shows that the growing amount of water available for irrigation has – at least in part – motivated the “land grab” by the Moorish elite, leading to the expulsion of the non-Moorish population of the river valley. Although it cannot be established that this is a truly necessary condition, it is plausible to assume that growing water availability has significantly contributed to the Mauritanian conflict.

In conclusion, the author demands more complex research on the linkages between water scarcity and conflict that pays more attention to the riparians’ specific interests. On the operational level, possible unintended consequences of international water co-operation within co-operating countries should be integrated into policy considerations.