



Concept Paper

Societal Violence and Alternative Security Practices



| About Nazra for Feminist Studies

Nazra for Feminist Studies is a group that aims to build an Egyptian feminist movement, believing that feminism and gender are political and social issues affecting freedom and development in all societies. Nazra aims to mainstream these values in both public and private spheres.

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| October 2012

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Summary

This program works to identify and establish dialogue with alternative urban-community practices of violence reduction, human-security promotion, and societal safety that have emerged in Egypt since the transformative events of 2011. We aim to support communities as they articulate the novelty of the new practices and concepts. And we will build on these alternatives to shape new policy tools and public participatory mechanisms that will have national, even international, impact. Our target is to increase the democratic nature of reform in the areas of bodily safety, urban crime, policing norms, and socio-economic security. We will bring new research, artistic, and policy-making tools to support Egypt's democratic spirit and energize the current collective demand to revolutionize the security sector "from below."

Moving from the community level to the media to the state, this initiative will identify, analyze, and establish routes toward public engagement and policy dialogue.

The types of local-level anti-violence and safety initiatives we engage include:

- Women's societal security collectives,
- Youth protection organizations and militant sports clubs (Ultras, etc),
- Artistic movements aiming to critique and reimagine crime and insecurity (locally based street art, new media, street theater, etc),
- Parastatal coercive and racketeering organizations (baltaga, rogue police militias, etc),
- Various types of 'Popular Committees for Security' (in wealthy areas as well as 'slums'),
- Movements that critique identity politics, inventing more inclusive societal security and conflict resolution practices (in refugee areas, or sites of sectarian conflict),
- Movements to protect popular cultures, spaces and forms of embodiment and popular religiosity from moralistic attacks (new Sufi movements, public sexualities, etc), and
- Other gender or class-inflected creative movements that are working to secure public bodies and streets or community spaces against harassment or displacement.

In particular, we aim to help social groups in communities recognized as conflict resolvers or security innovators, or those targeted as dangerous, racialized, immoral, or crime-generating. We assert that their voices and innovations should be the center of the security-reform process. Our researchers and facilitators focus on certain local community case studies, in depth. This local focus on certain innovative spaces allows our team to develop contextualized perspectives, to gather qualitative and quantitative data, and build relationships of trust.

Going beyond corruption trials and top-down accountability initiatives, this program will build on new urban imaginations and generate new mechanisms for participation in security reform that will make the sector a realm of debate and creativity, not just of fear, victimization, and outrage. And this

program will create dialogue on the nature and policy-potential of these alternative visions and provide public interventions. These interventions will produce:

- Seminars for facilitating dialogue, between academics and activists, between government policymakers and community innovators,
- Press conferences wherein local model projects will speak for themselves,
- Regular focus groups with model community projects and their beneficiaries and critics,
- Town-hall meetings,
- Formal debates in public, and
- Publications in local and national forums and communities and in local and international
- Media.

Context

The Civil society and youth uprisings in Egypt in 2011 were driven by outrage at violence and socio-economic injustice perpetrated by corrupt and brutal security services and policing agencies. Now, as Egypt transitions to democracy, youth, gender-empowering, and civil NGO security sector and police-reform efforts such as that of the cutting-edge Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights focus largely on accountability, oversight and moral responsibility, via the indictment of leading officials responsible for violence and repression, and on legal and policy change within the government. To complement these efforts, this program will fill important gaps in the current security-sector reform process by tapping into the vision of urban community and youth organizations that have sprung up to create real grassroots alternatives for providing security since the revolution. Building on this alternative youth, gender and class-sensitive visions of security, this program also does the urgent work of tracing the threats of new kinds of entrepreneurial behavior among ex-official and parasecurity and policing agencies that have gone rogue since the January 25 Revolution.

During Egypt's national uprising that gained revolutionary momentum on the 25th of January, 2011, masses of demonstrators battled their way through phalanxes of heavily armored security troops. On 28 January, urban communities rose up throughout Egypt and in many of the most densely inhabited urban quarters of Cairo to destroy police stations and security-detention centers, and confiscate intelligence and surveillance files before they could be shredded in the waning hours of the Mubarak regime (Doyle 2011). Much to the delight of protesters, when the president resigned in February the more than one-hundred thousand uniformed and plain-clothes agents of Egypt's State Security and Central Security forces (*Amn al-Dawla* and *Amn al-Markazi*) seemed to suddenly vanish into thin air.

However, after these security agencies were officially disbanded (Mohammed 2011), Egypt experienced a spike in organized crime and sectarian violence (Salafi Muslims versus Coptic Christians, Sufi and Shi'i Muslims), destabilizing the country just as it began to build civil peace and launch an epochal experiment in democracy. Western commentators began to speak as if strife

between religious groups and criminal militia activity were long-standing problems in Egypt (Kirkpatrick 2011, Bohn 2011) and to imply that the rollback of the police and security state since February triggered the eruption of these supposedly age-old problems. Yet, historically, Egypt has never experienced the kind of sectarian tensions identified with, for example, Lebanon or Iraq. Although there have been isolated outbursts in the past (in the 1930s and 1980s), Egypt has long stood as a model of relative inter-communal conviviality (Al Amrani 2006, Badrawi 2000) and has enjoyed remarkably low levels of crime (Zimring 1999, LLC 2010).

So what, then, is behind this suddenly “invented tradition” of violent sectarian mobilization in Egypt? Initial research done in Egypt indicates it is ex-security agents’ transformed *presence* not their absence that has caused, in part, this new wave of vigilantism and strife. This program explores the claim that the social actors and organizational structures of deposed state security institutions are retooling themselves, in the context of political transition, into webs of “violence entrepreneurs” (Tilly 2003, Volkov 2002). These entrepreneurs, if unchecked, would constitute what I call a parajudicial state (Amar 2011c) that could gut substantive democracy in Egypt, overwhelm the fragile post-revolution mechanisms of accountability, unravel human rights strengthening efforts, and sow further conflict in the region (Tayel 2011). It is crucial to the region and the world that processes of judicial oversight, human security reform, and security-sector transparency and reinsertion efforts succeed in Egypt -- home to more than half of the world’s Arab population, crossroads of world trade and travel routes, and host to the most influential political and religious institutions of the Islamic world.

To date, no fieldwork research or community dialogue on this kind of phenomenon has been done *in situ* in time to change policy and reshape public discourse during a post-crisis transition. In the past, these phenomena have been analyzed, in part, by studies of anti-legal vigilantism (Ungar 2002, Davis and Pereira 2003), transitional legitimation crises (Tukchin and Garland 1998, Postel 2006), and accountability movements among those targeted by state violence (Johnson 2002, Boneman 1997). Rather than analyze actions of anti-state protesters, rioters and civil society, this program will measure and theorize how former *state* bodies reorganize into *uncivil*sectarian mobilizations.

Learning from Past Failures

This question requires action by new research methods because well-known precedents clearly indicate the high cost of inattention. After US occupiers launched the ill-conceived “de-Baathification” of Iraq in 2003, disbanded state security services transformed themselves into sectarian militias that fed insurgency, polarized the country’s political culture and brought the country towards civil war (O’Hanlon 2004, Otterman 2005). After Boris Yeltsin’s “auto-coup” in 1993, the agents of the dissolved KGB and their plain-clothes informants morphed into the networks known as the “New Russian Mafia” that has resuscitated and profited from ethnicized conflict in the

Caucasus, Central Asia, and launched organized crime campaigns and woman-trafficking operations in and between Arabia and East Africa (Volkov 2002).

After the "People Power" revolution against Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines in 1986, disbanded enforcers rebranded themselves as guerrilla militias and smuggling operations, mobilizing sectarian identifications to spread civil conflict which has now grown to have troubling regional and geopolitical implications, as well as decimating gendered human security and religious coexistence in rural areas of the archipelago (McCoy 2009). Will this devastating process repeat itself in the case of Egypt's recent popular uprising? The cost of ignoring this question could be catastrophic for the emergence of substantive democracy, rule of law and geopolitical security in the region.

Philosophy

The intellectual foundations of this program draw upon constructive engagement with three lines of thought:

1. **Reimagining human rights politics:** Critical approaches to human rights politics have focused on its tendency to emphasize civil/political rights and to consistently neglect economic and social rights. As it focuses on individual perpetrators of violations, the mainstream human-rights approach tends to ignore forms of structural violence and institutionalized norms that create the foundations for mass social insecurity. In some forms, HR politics reproduces the notion that politics is about individual freedom and/or victimization, rather than about structures and concepts of power that need to be changed more deeply.

This notion of freedom is then connected to a narrowly monolithic notion of the state as a force for domination and repression. This perspective can render HR politics sympathetic to moves to cut back the state which can encourage support for neoliberal policy prescriptions. Nevertheless, human-rights movements remain the most important actors in the public sphere for transforming the state, and not just through law, but by creating new concepts and norms of citizenship, participation, and accountability.

Also there is a gender and postcolonial critique of human rights politics. These kinds of analyses assess the fact that human-rights discourse designates victims and then brings in humanitarian 'missionaries' and heroic lawyers to rescue them. Social and community movements that push for change are thus excluded from this heroic or missionary dynamic, and their members are individualized through the justice process.

Another critique of human rights politics accuses these instruments as being essentially and irrevocably Western or culturally alien. We do NOT support this critique of human rights politics that says the "liberal" human rights are never "culturally relevant" in Islamic societies. That latter kind of critique is not interesting to us. We aim to support the broadening of the crucial efforts

of human rights organizations and leaders, and see our programs as wholly complementary and consistent with their efforts.

2. **Critiquing Criminology:** We are also inspired by the work of critical criminology and critical penology (of which Michel Foucault and Frantz Fanon are some of the best known, in distinct ways). Critical criminology, to put it simply, argues that policing was invented quite recently, only in the 19th century. It emerged in colonial and internally-colonial societies (including in highly hierarchical Western ones, such as England during the violent "enclosure" period). Critical criminology argues that policing was introduced in order to shift all blame and moral responsibility for the violence of capitalism and colonialism onto its exploited workers and colonized peoples.

In this view, "crime" and "delinquency" are associated with the inability of workers or the poor or gendered or racialized groups to rule themselves. They must be policed by the state. Rulers see these groups primarily as criminals to be disciplined. Crime discourse, until today, is about reconfiguring workers and the poor as objects of policing rather than as subjects of politics or as self-sovereign actors. Very rarely are the crimes of the rich seen as crimes. Critical criminology highlights how the rich and the impact of wealth inequality on societal insecurity, crime, and violence is rendered invisible, specifically by the operations of crime discourse, and the way policing engages "the streets" rather than, say, the banks, or state institutions. We know that corruption or white-collar crime is very rarely punished. And when it is punished it is done in a way that usually blocks any question of classes or systems of domination.

The problem with critical criminology is that it has produced some very simplistic, masculinist, naive political responses and social movements. Basically many critical criminology anthropologists and sociologists -- like Lois Wacquant and Phillippe Bourgois for example -- glorify "criminals" and gang members. They tend to explicitly adore the masculinity and heroic violence of these criminal figures, and identify rebel working-class men with resistance. They explicitly or implicitly advocate the banishing of all forms of policing and prisons. But this tends to be a romantic, masculinist fantasy.

On the contrary, a new set of of critical, thorough empirical and qualitative analyses have demonstrated that criminal violence is not "resistance," in most cases, and has no emancipatory collective restructuring as its aim. These romantics make the mistake of continuing to associate criminality essentially with worker/poor men. This is a fetish. Instead we must see criminality as equivalent to forms of structural violence, gender/class embodiment, moralization and identification frameworks, and, of course, extractive and racketeering coercion. We need new concepts, institutions and participatory frameworks. We need to go beyond glorifying gangs and rebels.

3. **Reinventing Security Studies:** This critique focuses on politics and discourses of “national security” or “state security” (as well as forms of “security policing” around drugs, terrorism, gangs, uprisings, and subversion).

This school of “critical security studies” aims to turn the conversation around, focusing on which economic and cultural forces, and political elites generate insecurity and fear. How do certain industries produce fear and insecurity in order to then sell security back to people? How do certain cultural and religious groups create divisive identities that then produce sectarian and identity conflict that dissolves social solidarity and community resistance? How do oligarchical leaders create national insecurity in order to justify the transfer of more money, power, and “necessity” to the military, intelligence/mukhabarat apparatuses, and interior ministry? These processes are called “securitization.”

Critical Security Studies, in particular, it investigates how fear and internal enemies are created, through moralistic, nationalistic, and class-based efforts. And this critical school identifies forms of positive, alternative mobilizations, including cultural and conceptual innovations that “desecuritize” the polity, and that make alternative forms of public safety and collective security imaginable.

Research Phases

Specific Methodology for Each Phase

Program research teams focus on specific communities, developing trust, and an in-depth appreciation for contexts, social histories, infrastructures of power, and the uniqueness of local alternative practices.

Phase I: Mapping and Listening

- Subjective Mapping: Having individuals draw creative maps, literally diagrams on paper, of where dangers are produced and how they circulate through space, engage bodies, or connect to other forms of violence production and insecurity. This is the ideological opposite of the “Crime Map” which is the primary tool of modern police and intelligence agencies.
- Infrastructure Investigations: Measuring and characterizing awareness of, or local concepts or metaphors for broader structural, institutional, or “hidden” forms of power and influence, particularly those that generate insecurity or force people to depend on coercive or ‘protective’ power.
- Community Action Research: Collaborative, dialogic, participatory methods of research that are not limited to gathering testimony or data, and that breaks down the observer/observed binary.

Phase II: Dialogue and Debate Training

- Two-Way Focus Groups: Listening, yes, but also producing dialogue and channeling toward policy recommendations
- Debate Training: Staging formal debates on policy areas, within the community, at first, the perhaps on a Cairo-wide scale. These debaters will have researched and practiced their opposing views and positions on key issues that are important to the community.

Phase III: Going Public: Launching New Democratic Security Frameworks

- Mini-films and Art Production: Filmmaker-researchers in our program will work on developing 10 minute youtube films of the community alternative safety/security mobilizations and cultural/artistic expressions we identify
- Policy Channeling: A crucial step in the program, we will channel the model projects in our targeted communities, enabling individuals and leaders in those communities to make policy recommendations for national-level institutional change, and for reimagining the nature of crime, security, and justice, writ large.

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