

Security Provision in West Asia and North Africa in times of Social and Political Change

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Amongst the various demands of the thousands of people who took to the streets in West Asia and North Africa since late 2010, one common theme has been an end of arbitrary police violence and corruption. Throughout the uprisings and in an attempt to contain the growing insecurity, people started policing in the absence of police. Prominent examples are the *liġān ša'biya*, the popular committees, in Egypt and in a different shape and outreach in Yemen. Though considerably more militarized, popular committees in Syria – consisting of local residents in neighborhoods – have played a similar role before being coopted by the Assad regime. Yet even before the uprisings, non-state actors have policed territory in spaces of limited statehood, such as Hizballah in Lebanon, or the People's Protection Units in Syrian Kurdistan.

To this regard, the findings in a recent survey on popular security perception in Yemen (Soudias & Transfeld 2014)¹ are all the more curious. Although people in most of the country's governorates consider police work to be either ineffective or entirely absent, they seem to generally call for more police presence despite their often-bad experiences. While these observations are fairly recent phenomena in the Middle East and West Asia, they are not new in a global context. Müller's (2012)² study on policing in Mexico City's poor neighborhoods demonstrates that local residents do not abandon state institutions as security providers, despite their predominantly negative perceptions about and encounters with the police. Higazy's (2008) case study on Nigeria investigates the interaction between the state, vigilantes, and militias.³ Here, non-state security actors, mostly militias, cooperate with the police in order to legitimate their claims and use of violence. This is corroborated by residents claiming that local militias do a better job than the police in security provision.

¹ Soudias, D., & Transfeld, M. (2014). Mapping Popular Perceptions: Local Security, Insecurity, and Police Work in Yemen *Policy Report* (Vol. 3). Sana'a: Yemen Polling Center.

² Müller, M.-M. (2012). Addressing an Ambivalent Relationship: Policing and the Urban Poor in Mexico City. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 44(2), 319-345.

³ Higazy, A. (2008). Social Mobilization and Collective Violence: Vigilantes and Militias in the Lowlands of Plateau State, Central Nigeria. *African Journal of the International African Institute*, 78(1), 107-135.

This workshop aims at conceptualizing these ambivalent relationships in comparative perspective. As a broad frame of reference around which the workshop shall be structured, two theoretical notions offer striking analytical insights. Hansen & Stepputat's (2001) notion of the "paradox of the state" explores how while people are demanding more rights, entitlements and institutions from the state, the state's authority is constantly questioned and functionally undermined.⁴ They further argue this has to do with the persistence of the imagination of the state as an embodiment of sovereignty and legitimacy, as the sole source of order and stability. This myth persists in the face of everyday experiences of the often profoundly violent and ineffective practices of police or outright collapse of state institutions.

Secondly, within the nexus of legitimacy and legality of violence and security provision, the concept of 'securitization' (Balzacq 2005; Buzan et al 1998) offers valuable insights.⁵ It is interesting to note that securitization moves and discourses are not only being practiced by state authorities, but also from below. Non-state security actors, in their effort to take up the roles of security provision, produce discourses of securitization in order to legitimate their policing efforts and use of violence despite their illegality. Simultaneously, practices of corruption, violent crime, and police abuse contribute to a situation in which local police forces undergo a process of delegitimization (Müller 2014).

In order to structure panel discussions, we suggest using the theoretical notions of the 'paradox of the state' and 'securitization from below' as conceptual lenses in order to analyze the following actors and themes:

Actors:

- Non-state security actors that substitute/support the role of the state in security provision without wanting to destroy the state (e.g. popular committees, vigilantes)
- Non-state security actors that want to undermine the state in spaces of limited statehood, or who seeks to rule where the state is unable to govern (e.g. militias such as Amal and Hizballah in Lebanon; shia militias in Iraq)

⁴ Hansen, T. B., & Stepputat, F. (Eds.). (2001). *States of Imagination. Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*. Durham: Duke University Press.

⁵ Balzacq, H. (2005). The Three Facets of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context. *European Journal of International Relations*, 11(2), 171-201; Buzan, B. Waever, O., & de Wilde, J. (1998). *Security. A New Framework For Analysis*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

- Non-state security actors that intend to destroy state structures and establish new ones (e.g. National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, Kurdish People's Protection Unit, ISIS, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula)

Themes:

- Relations between state and non-state security providers
- Appropriation of space; territoriality and social control for security provision
- Upholding or introducing new socially defined norms of discipline and behavior
- Norms of gender in security provision and use of violence (femininity & masculinity)
- Markets of violence / Economy of Violence (police loses monopoly of violence. Violence is then being used as a tool for maximizing (profit) / strategic circulation of the category 'legitimacy')
- Methodological approaches (thematic, reading-based discussions on cross-case comparisons and issues that arise in collecting data. Readings may be situated in entangled history, global history, comparative politics, comparative area studies)

With this workshop, we seek to discuss non-state security provision in West Asia and North Africa since 2011 with scholars (discussants) who have observed similar occurrences in other regions. Through this, the workshop intends to bring together scholarship in a transregional perspective in order to not only transfer knowledge, but to generate new and deepen existing conceptual tools for analyzing the phenomena in question.