



التخطيط من أجل مجتمع آمن Planning for safer communities

Arab Center for Alternative Planning / 25 May 2022

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## Executive Summary

The aim of this roundtable was to share research on and discuss, with key interlocutors from among Palestinian communities in Israel, public safety through **community-led alternatives to the police**, that could generate expanded and sustainable notions of justice. The roundtable evolved out of a wider research collaboration between AC-AP, Dr. Catherine Charrett (University of Westminster) and Dr. Sharri Plonski (QMUL), in response to rising violence and fear from state and criminal networks that acutely impact on Palestinian communities. Working with a variety of stakeholders, this roundtable sought to cultivate new solutions and pathways that could be pursued towards ‘planning for safer communities’.

Two focal issues framed the day’s discussions:

- 1) the relationship between policing, organised crime and everyday violence;
- 2) the range of practices communities have already developed for contending with multiple modes of violence, within Palestine and around the world, from which we could learn and translate to the local context.

This roundtable brought together current experts, researchers, community leaders and external consultants to discuss alternatives for community safety beyond policing. It responded to two important interrelated phenomena, the growing rate of violent crime amongst Palestinian communities in Israel; and the distrust and harm caused by Israeli police in Palestinian areas. Building on comparative research from a range of contexts – including the US, Brazil, the UK, Mexico and Palestine – preliminary evidence shows that

increasing police presence in minority areas will lead to an increase in crime and incarceration of targeted populations, while organised crime and police violence remains unaccounted for. Projects from these cases on alternatives to police offered insightful examples of how minoritized/marginalized communities can and do respond to both over and under-policing, in ways that strengthen community resiliency and the capacity to reclaim neighbourhoods.

Any project that tackles the dual problem of police violence and violent crime needs to respond to the specific and individual needs of the community, given the uneven ways policing and local governance structures interact with and may make space for violent crime. Responses should be multi-pronged, in that they involve multiple actors, at different levels working on multiple fronts. After a day of deliberation and reflection, four tracks of action were identified: 1) place-making; 2) leadership; 3) accountability and 4) communication. We are expecting that future projects would incorporate aspects of each track, as part of a multi-layered response to violence, which would stem from the community and be for the community.

**Place-making:** From our conversations, place-making would involve both reclaiming land, as an act of justice making, and include a grassroots/ bottom-up approach to its design. Place-making should combat the increasing sense of alienation and individualisation amongst the community. Youth groups and community leaders should generally be involved at the level of project framing. Any such project should take into consideration gendered dimensions of urban planning initiatives, and planning outputs should foster youth engagement and their involvement in activities. Place-making activities may also involve public events, festivals, and public art projects, and again should involve young persons from affected communities.

**Leadership:** The idea of strengthening current leadership mechanisms (as a way of responding to acute violence and organised crime) is an arena already being discussed and developed by affected Palestinian communities in Israel. The main actions taken involve the establishment of Peace Committees, initiated by and then feeding back into the High Follow-Up Committee. It is still too early to assess the outcome of this work. Our discussion focussed on how to support this work. In particular, working with and

reframing women's leadership is an integral response to the dual source of police and criminal violence. Examples from other contexts demonstrate that women have played a leading role in shifting the narrative around crime and violence in important ways.

**Accountability:** 'Accountability' means that projects should address the multiple fears that communities have in relation to direct and indirect violence. In this case, monitoring the outcome of police investigations and monitoring levels of police violence is essential. This also means tracing how state structures, and specifically how police embolden local organised crime networks and maintain links with community leaders. Holding violent actors to account is dangerous and any project should consider the ethical and safety dimensions of this work.

**Communication:** Future projects should seek to improve communication networks between communities impacted by acute and police violence, and between the various partners within a project. Different localities are impacted in similar and dissimilar ways, due to existing structural and uneven relationships to/with the state. Any project should reflect the individual characteristics of these localities. Communication between actors, in order to learn about best practices across different geographies, experiences and lenses is important. Communication between different partners and stakeholders within a single project is essential and can be integrated at the point of project design.

**Concluding discussion:** The main objective of working across these different tracks, particularly in light of ACAP's strengths and areas of work, should entail reclaiming land and space for community projects and should start from a community's needs, sense of justice and feelings of (in)security. These projects should advance youth leadership, a gendered approach to space and cannot be sustained without the direct buy-in and commitment of the communities themselves.

Substantive report

### **Part 1: Diagnosing the problem with policing – some key terms of reference**

The first session of the roundtable offered an analysis of the converging relationship between policing and crime, drawing upon a multiplicity of local and global contexts. This

comparison was part of a wider diagnosis of the kinds of violence Palestinians in Israel are facing and dealing with and how policing practices impact on minority communities in particular ways.

**Distorted responsiveness** means a politicized mixture of over and under policing that affects minority and racialised communities. The largest collection of narratives on policing from minority communities to date (800 participants from 23 neighbourhoods across five cities in the US) showed that police are overly present on small infractions and use the ‘law’ to attack and abuse non-white members of the community. On the other hand, police are grossly absent when there is a real risk of violence or danger to the community, and they are slow to fully investigate serious crimes. This mirrors the mixture of under and over policing in relation to Palestinian communities in Israel.

**Selective policing** means that the police choose when to respond and when not to respond. This is evidenced by policing in Areas A, B and C in the West Bank where Israeli military forces block policing in Areas C, which has led to a growth and concentration of crime in these areas. The result of this, is that selective policing moves crime into minority areas. These areas are often already enclosed, economically disadvantaged and suffer from a lack of services from the state. Moreover, research from the US shows that increase in crime in racialised neighbourhoods coincides with land appropriation; a practice that further resonates with Palestinian communities in Israel.

**Divisive policing** creates divisions within communities and increases state surveillance of minority populations. Communities affected by crime ask for increased police presence. However, examples from Majd al-Krum, as well as Chicago and Baltimore, where police infrastructure has been expanded, show that the increase in police presence has not led to a decrease in violent crime. Increasing police presence targets certain parts of the community, creating divisions within minority groups. The increase of police presence can create a ‘war like’ situation for communities, where the presence of multiple forms of violence from state and non-state actors leads to the death, coercion and oppression of bystanders. For example, in the Maré, an informal working class neighbourhood in Rio, Brazil, citizens face a matrix of violence from organised crime, paramilitaries and police.



**Concluding discussion:** Reliance on policing creates dependency on an institution that does not work. Once the police get involved communities tend to take a step back and rely on the police, who offer little in the way of justice or security. Palestinians have always had a structurally controversial relationship with the police. As such, the group called for a collective decision by the Palestinian community, that would lessen their dependence on a police force that does not protect them.

## **Part 2: Summary of main issues affecting levels of crime**

The second session of the day sought to unpack the current situation in Palestine before moving on to operational solutions. Much of what was discussed was the need for **increased data gathering** on crime, policing and everyday violence, as well as increased communication with different localities and partners. Different localities face similar, but also dissimilar relationships to structural issues (like state violence, economic inequalities, infrastructural neglect), and solutions should reflect these **unique contexts**. There is a need to address how structural violence and state practices, such as police impact on levels of organised crime. There is also a need to **disentangle the question of organised crime**, from **other types of criminal activities**. For example, work should consider how organised crime is distinct from (and even produces) petty crime.

Between 2015-2020 there has been a **58 percent increase in the homicide rate** among Palestinian communities in Israel, compared to a nearly 50 percent decline in the West Bank during the same period. Baladna has released a report which finds in 2018, for example, the number of homicides among Arab Palestinians in Israel reached 67, compared to 24 in the West Bank where the population is nearly double. That same year, almost twice as many Arabs were murdered than Jewish Israelis, meaning that the **homicide rate was effectively eight times higher in the Arab Palestinian society** than it was in the Jewish Israeli sector. They found that homicide rates were highest in the Centre district in urban centres such as Lod, Jaffa and Ramle.

The state is cultivating a **sense of panic** amongst communities, which leads to hasty and dangerous reactions, which puts Palestinian communities under further state

surveillance with no reduction in crime rates. In 2015, the Israeli government decided to establish 11 new stations in Palestinian towns, alongside others opened in 2010; seven of these planned stations have been opened so far. Data on homicide rates from Israel as well as other municipalities, such as **Majd al-Krum shows that the increase in police presence in minority areas does not lead to a decrease in crime.** One example is the murder of three young men in Majd al-Krum in 2019 in broad daylight only one year after the building of a new police station. This created a sense of frustration and anger among residents who were initially suspicious about the establishment of the police station in their community.

Despite the increase in crime, the community should avoid the moralising and stigmatising claims from the state against the Palestinian community in Israel. Instead, it would be helpful to rely on existing research about why groups and individuals, and particularly men and boys move into crime. Baladna is currently doing research on the **reasons groups move into crime**, which can and should feed into future work streams. For example, their work identified a **credit crisis** stemming from the lack of funding and economic support available to particular groups, so young people take out dangerous loans. This offers young men a quick way to strengthen their access to capital, and pride, which is particularly important under conditions of racism and lack of economic opportunities. This reflects a larger crisis around neoliberalism, which advances individualising sentiments over the collective. There was widespread agreement on the **erosion of and feeling of alienation from Palestinian institutions**, affecting the ability to build resilient and connected communities. There was a feeling that the family, or the general **social fabric has been deconstructed**, and society has become a source of violence, rather than providing protecting from violence.

Racial inequity on opportunity for economic growth is mixed with a lack of accountability for violent crimes. In Israel, the police promote a continuation of the martial and military rule that Palestinians have lived with from 1948-1966. In many cases the police work in collaboration with criminal organisations and they have also tried to co-opt local Palestinian leadership. This destruction and exploitation of systems of accountability have led to a growth in crime in Palestinian areas. Furthermore, the participants agreed that the 'punishment' ethos at the core of policing practice is not the solution and requires





reframing. The community does not need more punishment. Due to the terrible economic situation, lack of welfare services, and unequal access to support, Palestinians in Israel are inherently punished in every aspect of their lives.

**Concluding discussion:** What resonated with the research team was the need to build and learn from **multi-pronged models for fighting crime and violence**. This would encourage a mix of initiatives, some stemming from the community and others from organisations and local authorities. There is mobilisation already taking place on the ground, but these actions do not often have a long life. The session ended with a call for **sustainable mobilisations, grounded in the local context**, and yet working across/in conversation with other communities, locally, regionally and globally.

### **Part 3 Solution tracks:**

The final session for the day focused on operational tracks for how to build effective alternatives to policing – stemming from community notions of justice and safety – among Palestinian communities in Israel. Solutions should build on existing projects and the existing strengths of different organisations, to ensure the sustainability of work and impact among those most affected by the situation. There was some disagreement to what extent the communities should ask for a contribution from the state. Yet, ultimately, the sense was it is time to turn away from the state and to look inwards, with a focus on **community leadership and solidarity**.

The following areas of work build off AC-AP's existing organisational strengths, while also recognising that multiple stakeholders should be involved. Diverse localities have different needs and a sustainable, grassroots approach – from the community for the community – would be the most effective way forward. This **measured and bottom-up approach** moves away from the sense of panic cultivated from the Israeli state and moves towards sustained action on the part of the community. The positive point is that there are a lot of people working on this question and keeping channels of communication and collaboration open is important. For example, if Baladna is currently working on gathering data on what motivates decisions to move into crime, this can shape and

generate policy proposals and social planning initiatives. As such, solutions should be multi-track initiatives, and involve several partners. Several courses of action and areas of work were presented and discussed throughout the day, summarised as follows:

### 1) Place-Making

**Place-making** is a line of work which focuses on urban planning and social planning from a bottom-up and grassroots approach. Place-making can **transform the place we live in** and build community resiliency in light of multiple dangers and structural fears. This line of work responds to the erosion and emptying out of Arab villages and localities, which have been filled by criminalised networks over time. Place-making may also reclaim public spaces or unused land away from criminal organisations and may involve rezoning initiatives.

This work may consider proximity to settler/ Israeli infrastructures, such as gentrification around the Hadar neighbourhood in Haifa, that puts Palestinians at risk of further policing and surveillance.

**Improving the conditions of public spaces** might vary from place to place. Whereby initiatives such as improved street lighting should reflect the particular geographies and topographies of specific localities.

Overall, the solution needs to **start with the community** – specifically the youth – including building back up their relationship to Palestinian institutions, to the public space, to the community and rethinking what those institutions could look like, in the current moment. This was not necessarily a call to return to old patriarchal institutions, but looking at new ways of collective practice and connection.

Place-making can go back to building communities and learning from examples that **moved away from individualisation by transformation of public space** through public projects. It asks: How can we empower the community, as a way to respond to the problem of violence and austerity? Such an approach encourages organising at the level of schools and neighbourhoods. It also triggers a follow-up question: **What kind of planning initiatives and urban and social planning can get youth involved in different activities?**



These activities might involve **monitoring police violence** and racist harassment, it might also involve youth in regeneration projects. There are multiple examples confirming that **public cultural events**, such as festivals and carnivals, can help build up and strengthen community networks. For example, London's Notting Hill Carnival successfully carved out a space for the celebration of British Caribbean culture in the UK, against its criminalisation. In 1976 more than 1500 police tried to shutdown Carnival, now the Notting Hill festival is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest street parade in the world. Carnival is a disruption to public order, and tackles notions of nationalist identity. It **creates positive messaging and integrates community participation in place-making**.

These projects point to the fact that we can **integrate reconciliation and healing into urban planning** initiatives. Best practice from Brazil, US and the UK spotlight the need for these to be inclusive institutions, that reflect fears and struggles around economic deprivation, lack of social capital and social competition in general.

In addition, effective examples from other contexts demonstrate that place-making should necessarily **reflect gendered needs and routines** within the community and consider how women are differentially endangered and assisted by urban planning decisions. For example, in Ciudad de Juarez, Mexico, **women's groups** played a leading role in holding the state to account for increasing levels of femicide in the area. One of these groups – Las Mujeres de Negro – **targeted the impunity of gang violence and the police's tendency to normalise the death of women**. Women played a leading role in changing the narrative, and they argued that just because they were working outside of the house they should not be targets of crime. Instead, they pointed to initiatives that urban planning groups could develop to keep them safer as they travelled to and from work. These initiatives included **better lighting in public areas, and safer transport to and from work**.

## 2) Leadership

The need for stronger **leadership** was repeated as an urgent response to proliferations of violence in Palestinian communities and this initiative also coincides with what communities are already engaged in doing. There is a drive towards **strengthening community leadership in order to combat increasing alienation, discrimination**

**and individualism** within Palestinian societies and communities here. This work includes projects led by the High Follow-up Committee and the cultivation of local Peace Committees to create sustainable and grassroots-led responses to violent crime and distorted policing.

This course of action moves away from a punishment model and towards a healing and **community justice model**. As we learned through discussions of projects from other contexts, peace committees should be coordinated alongside other sites of community leadership, action and governance, such as from local authorities, civil society and welfare authorities.

There may be certain fault lines around progressive and conservative approaches to justice and the need to involve **women and inter-generational leadership in the Peace Committees**. Approaches may also need to reflect gendered issues around pride, fear and how **masculinity and femininity are shaped by police violence and organised crime**.

### 3) Accountability

Project suggestions focused on **accountability** that combine holding the state to account for the lack of resources and infrastructure in Palestinian areas; while spotlighting police violence and neglect. These initiatives echo more recent **social justice calls** within Palestine and beyond, for **defunding the police, and reallocating funds to other areas**.

There may be a way to foster accountability through urban planning. For example, by developing **mindful community awareness**, or through the structuring of public spaces and homes which allows people to keep an eye out for each other. This type of project would necessitate a heightened sense of responsibility, in a way that reflects the context of settler colonialism and increased racialised violence. These responses may vary between localities and reflect particular conditions.

Accountability may also include monitoring to identify which actors within Palestinian villages are emboldened by relations with crime, and how best to address issues such as these with the **Peace Committees**. There is a concern that some Palestinian leadership structures, including the Peace Committees have links with criminal activity. Such

projects may also respond to the fact that Israeli police have also gone through a neo-liberalising process. Meaning local authorities have more responsibilities than the central government, which can create opportunities for criminal organisations to move in.

**Public mobilisation** may also be needed to address and enact questions of accountability and this strategy has been used in places like **Umm al-Fahem**, and have been **led by women and youth**. A united anti-police violence parade throughout all of Palestine, which is led by women and youth can be a creative and public way of shifting the narrative, and holding the state to account.

Accountability through monitoring violence may mean mapping out patterns of violence, and paying particular attention to moments and spaces where spikes in violence occur. This may also require **monitoring shifts in legislation** or state initiatives that embolden or shift police power. This may also mean talking to people about their relationship to violence, and addressing how to confront those who rely on violence as a mechanism of coercion. **Responses to various sites of violence, both police and criminal, could be framed as resistance/ simoud.**

Accountability may also mean **police monitoring and cultivating systems for holding the police accountable to its own internal systems**. This could mean battling selective policing when Jews and Palestinians are treated differently by the police. As such, attempts could be made to make the police more accountable to its own internal policies. Examples from such project elsewhere do more than hold police to account; they embolden communities, cultivate grassroots commitments to community safety and justice, and help strengthen their networks.

#### 4) Communication

Projects may include or focus on **improving communication networks between affected groups**, as well partners. It is essential to **share best practices across regions**, as well as to integrate various organisations to better reflect the needs of the community. Many of the discussions on policing and crime are happening across civil society and the middle-class intellectual`qwl community, but solutions must come from the communities most affected and most involved in these circuits of violence. In one example we explored

– The Portals Policing Project (US) – they showed that communities often have a deep awareness of how police power works but have a lack of access to resources to enact change. Future projects with Palestinians in Israel, could respond to this.

There are several different groups working on this area of research, and priority should be given to communication between groups, organisations and parts of civil society. This can come in the shape of **collective bids for collaborative approaches** to the issues covered here. **Collaborations across multiple sectors, actors and communities can frame the ‘implementation’ element of the project.** A key stream of action may involve communication across different affected communities and discussing best practices, perhaps around one specific area of work.

A future project could **aim to enhance communication between different communities**, as it is helpful to know first, how communities have **i) effectively resisted police power, ii) thought about community safety without police.** Policing strategies travel across geographies, both locally and internationally, and so should strategies for resisting police. Solidarity movements in different anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles (such as the Black Lives Matter campaigns and Palestinian resistance movements) already learn from each other in how to effectively confront the police. The former has done exceptional work at **denaturalising the police** and generating discussions that spread globally on defunding the police and abolitionism more extensively. In asking to defund and abolish the police, however, we need to be sensitive to the particular contexts different communities face.

### **Concluding discussion:**

This roundtable placed the discussion of potential calls to abolitionism and calls to defund the police within the local context of Palestinian communities living in Israel. Its aim was to respond to the specific issues the Palestinian community faces in light of increased violent crime and an enduring relationship of mistrust and racialised oppression from the state. The roundtable as such discussed the possibility for community-led and urban design responses to the different forms of violence that impact on the Palestinian community, how these violences relate to each other and how they can be healed.