Community psychology and civil society: Opportunities for growth in Egypt and Lebanon

Article in Journal of Community Psychology · January 2015
DOI: 10.1002/jcop.21688

4 authors, including:

Mona M. Amer
The American University in Cairo
34 PUBLICATIONS  286 CITATIONS

Brigitte Khoury
American University of Beirut
33 PUBLICATIONS  1,145 CITATIONS

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:

Development of Mental and Behavioural Disorders chapter, Eleventh Revision of the International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-11), World Health Organization View project

All content following this page was uploaded by Mona M. Amer on 15 January 2015.

The user has requested enhancement of the downloaded file.
COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY AND CIVIL SOCIETY: OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH IN EGYPT AND LEBANON

Mona M. Amer and Salma El-Sayeh
The American University in Cairo

Yasmine Fayad and Brigitte Khoury
American University of Beirut

Western theories and products, focused mostly on the individual level of analysis, inform psychology in Egypt and Lebanon. Psychologists in these nations have not yet played a significant role in addressing systemic community priorities, such as poverty and politically motivated violence. In the absence of community psychology, a vibrant network of civil society organizations has emerged to address urgent national concerns. We discuss and critique three types of civil society efforts that intersect with community psychology values and practice: community development, refugee services, and human rights advocacy. The emerging specialization of community psychology can address limitations of these fields and provide an alternative psychological perspective to community practice. This article examines how Egyptian and Lebanese community psychologies may transpire, including the roles community psychologists can play, values that may be integrated in this work, and considerations for formalizing training programs. © 2014 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Egypt and Lebanon are distinguished from other Arab nations by their locations at the intercultural crossroads of three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa. Egypt is found at the northeast tip of Africa, whereas Lebanon is situated at the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Both countries continue to experience the adverse cultural and economic...
consequences of having been colonized by several world cultures; this has been further exacerbated by recent sociodemographic and political strains.

Egypt has an overwhelming population of over 85 million. It is estimated that 43.5% of the population is concentrated in urban areas and 50% is aged 25 years or younger (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2013a). More than a quarter of Egyptians live below the poverty line and more than 13% of the labor force is unemployed (The World Bank, 2013a). Crises in shelter and basic needs are evident in Egypt's largest cities, where rapid urbanization and a high population growth rate have resulted in the establishment of vast informal settlements with economically marginalized residents (Sims, 2011; United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2003). These housing stressors are compounded by recent influxes of refugees. Economic pressures worsened after the 2011 popular uprisings that unsettled a relatively stable repressive regime. The uprisings were followed by political turbulence, politically motivated and sectarian violence, and street crime in response to a security vacuum.

Lebanon, on the other hand, has a much smaller population of about 4.2 million, nearly 90% of which lives in urban areas (CIA, 2013b). Similar to Egypt, it is a country of youth, with nearly 40% of the population younger than 25 years of age (CIA, 2013b). Although Lebanon is considered an upper middle-income country (The World Bank, 2013b), over the past decade economic growth has been slow and unequally distributed throughout the nation. Refugee camps in particular are marked by disproportionately high rates of poverty, with unemployment reaching 60% (Chaaban, 2009). Subsequent to the civil war (1975–1991), there has been recurrent political violence—including the 2006 July war with Israel and sectarian armed conflicts—which has produced crises related to shelter and basic needs.

In response to these national stressors, vibrant networks of civil society organizations were launched in both countries to alleviate economic and social concerns. Surprisingly, community psychology has not yet played a significant role in these efforts. With its focus on individualized mental health service, Arab psychology has evolved into a field of minimal relevance or usefulness to present day national urgencies (Amer, in press).

The purpose of this article is to envision prospects for how the nascent field of community psychology may emerge in Egypt and Lebanon. We first review the history of psychology in both countries and examine factors that may have contributed to the absence of a community specialization. Next, we critique three examples of civil society efforts that share key values and methods with community psychology: community development, refugee services, and human rights advocacy. We argue that there is room to develop a distinct field of community psychology alongside these three fields. In the final section, we consider ways in which community psychology may take shape in Egypt and Lebanon.

HISTORY OF PSYCHOLOGY AND EMERGENCE OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

The development of psychology showed remarkably similar trajectories in Egypt and Lebanon. By the late 1800s and early 1900s, psychological material was introduced in some Egyptian and Lebanese university courses (Ahmed, 1992; Ahmed, 2012; Khoury & Tabbareh, 2012). However, psychology as a distinct academic discipline materialized...
only in the mid-20th century, when departments were established in 1950 at Egypt’s Ain Shams University (Ahmed, 2012) and in 1951 at Lebanon’s American University of Beirut (Khoury & Tabbareh, 2012). By the 1970s, several universities offered undergraduate and graduate degrees (Souef & Ahmed, 2001).

The professors who pioneered Egyptian and Lebanese psychology had mostly trained in England, France, and the United States (Ahmed, 1992). Many programs were thus modeled after Western curricula; for example, in Lebanon degrees were often based on American or French models (Khoury & Tabbarah, 2012). Because of these influences, a 1955 article in Psychological Bulletin remarked that in the Arab Middle East “there is some suspicion that psychology is an instrument of Western imperialism” (Prothro & Melikian, 1955, p. 309). While such suspicions may have diminished, present day psychologists in Egypt and Lebanon continue to follow Western models in their work (Amer, 2013; Khoury & Tabbarah, 2012).

Contemporary psychology in Egypt and Lebanon tends to focus on the individual, including subdisciplines such as clinical, educational, experimental, and cognitive psychology. The development and diversification of the field continues to be hindered by an overreliance on culturally insensitive Western-based theories and assessment tools, lack of specialized training, and marginalization of indigenous theories and practices (Ahmed, 1992; Ahmed, 2004; Amer, in press). Another obstacle to growth has been the dominance of the medical model; psychologists often gain legitimacy when offering clinical services such as psychological testing and counseling within the psychiatric context (Amer, 2013; Khoury & Tabbarah, 2012). Thus, despite being collectivistic societies in which sense of community is emphasized through values, traditions, and extended family influences, a specialization of community psychology has not yet fully emerged in either Egypt or Lebanon.

A key event that may trigger the formalization of community psychology is the 2010 launch of a Master of Arts program in community psychology at the American University in Cairo, Egypt. The program was initiated after a feasibility study documented a need for psychologists to gain skills in community outreach and systemic interventions. Situated within a U.S.-accredited university, it is not surprising that the curriculum was modeled after American programs and training competencies outlined by the U.S.-based Society for Community Research and Action. However, as discussed by Carrillo and Forden (2013), faculty and students have needed to tailor the American model to the cultural and political contexts. This new program is not likely to significantly affect Egyptian or Arab psychologies given that it is taught in a relatively isolated, privileged, English-language institution.

On the other hand, it has the potential to influence civil society practice. The program prepares students to conduct community assessments, evaluation, prevention, and nonprofit consultation using strengths-based, empowerment-oriented approaches. These types of skills are in high demand in the nonprofit sector, where five Egyptians from the first and second cohorts have found work. Moreover, many civil society organizations have been exposed to community psychology values and methods through consultation and workshops offered by program faculty. It is worth noting, however, that the current program gives marginal attention to critical approaches, community organizing, and grass roots activism.

With respect to Lebanon, although community psychology does not exist as such, a specialization in social work called “animation sociale” or “social animation” is offered at Saint Joseph University in Beirut, one of Lebanon’s leading French universities. The aim of social animation is human and civic promotion. It encourages interaction within
communities and the general public and focuses on improving quality of life (Université Saint Joseph, 2013). This program’s description may be the closest field to community psychology in Lebanon.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Civil society organizations offer natural employment matches for graduates of community-oriented university degrees. These organizations have long recognized societal challenges resulting from poverty, political violence, conflict, and oppression and have spearheaded much-needed interventions. Perhaps the three types of civil society specializations in Egypt and Lebanon that have the closest parallels to community psychology are community development, refugee services, and human rights advocacy. Although psychologists have been virtually absent from their workforce, these specializations could serve as a good foundation for the development of a distinct discipline of community psychology. Below we describe the history of these three fields in Egypt and Lebanon and the associated current challenges and limitations to their effectiveness, as well as analyze their intersections with community psychology.

**Community Development**

Community development practice can be described as collective action for economic and social progress (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2011). In the Arab world, these types of efforts can be traced back to the time of the Ottoman Empire when there was mobilization for poverty alleviation (Sallam, 2002). Early Arab development interventions evolved into a more distinct field in the wake of adverse socioeconomic aftermaths of colonization, a system in which income inequities were perpetuated. Although Egypt and Lebanon were emancipated from European colonial powers in 1952 and 1943, respectively (CIA, 2013a, 2013b), sociopolitical changes that ensued prevented the legacy of colonization from being dismantled.

Egyptian and Lebanese states attempted but failed to escape Western economic dominance through industrializing (Dodge, 2012; Zaazaa, 2005). Reasons behind such failure included the replacement of colonial power with an authoritarian inefficient state in Egypt (Davis, 2012; Dodge, 2012) and the preservation of feudal income inequities in Lebanon (Zaazaa, 2005). This hindered the transition into more just societies in both contexts. In the 20th century, the adoption of neoliberal economic reforms, shaped by international financial institutions, worsened economic inequities (Abu-Odeh, 2009, p. 352; Hassan, 2011). These inequities were exacerbated in Egypt by rapid population growth (Handoussa, 2010), and in Lebanon by wars and civil conflict (Zaazaa, 2005).

Against this backdrop of social, political, and economic disparities and failed national states, a contemporary civil society has grown in attempt to provide social services such as education and health care (Hassan, 2011; Arab NGO Network for Development, 2008). Moreover, large sums of donor aid were funneled to less wealthy countries such as Egypt and Lebanon, which catalyzed the establishment of development organizations (Arab NGO Network for Development, 2008; Davis, 2012). Currently, these organizations target a wide array of aims such as poverty alleviation, gender equity, youth development, political democratization, and environmental sustainability.

Many development organizations face challenges that limit their effectiveness. Donors often have preset agendas that are not always aligned with priorities at the grassroots,
and multilateral organizations’ conditional funding (which often demand neoliberal economic reforms) affects programmatic coherence and autonomy (Davis, 2012). Often times, donor-funded projects end once the donors exit, thereby disrupting the sustainability of program effects. In Egypt’s case, state restrictions on community development organizations’ registration, activities, and funding sources further limit the degree to which the organizations can represent community priorities (CIVICUS, 2005; Davis, 2012; Hassan, 2011; Human Rights Watch, 2005; Piffero, 2009).

An additional recent trend in Egypt has been skepticism and conspiracy theories around donor agendas and money (Newby, 2012), which affects the ability of donor funded programs to gain local trust and participation. In the Lebanese case, civil society’s progress toward a more participatory sustainable development approach was reversed by the 2006 war with Israel when large segments of the country were destroyed and organizations shifted back to emergency relief modalities (Arab NGO Network for Development, 2008).

With respect to methodologies, the principles of community development parallel those of community psychology. This is especially true given the shift in international definitions of community development toward concepts of empowerment, local participation, sustainability, and capacity development (Craig, 2005). These are consistent with community psychology’s values of collaboration, community empowerment, capacity building, and self-reliance (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005).

An example of a community development program that in many ways resembled community psychology was a European-funded program aimed at developing urban informal settlements in Cairo, Egypt. Its core principles included accountability, empowerment, and partnership. Its interventions and fund disbursement were managed through local advisory groups that included diverse stakeholders from the community, and participatory needs assessments were conducted to identify stakeholder priorities (Abdel Halim, 2009). In practice, however, participatory approaches were constrained by broad, preset donor objectives, and program staff had to align activities with local governance, thus producing activities that were not always consistent with community priorities (Piffero, 2009).

As illustrated by this example, on-the-ground community development practice in Egypt and Lebanon often falls short of community psychology’s emphasis on participation and empowerment. Many development organizations apply a top-down and deficit-focused approach rather than one based on strengths. Both Egyptian and Lebanese civil societies are dominated by professional elites, another hindrance to participatory and empowering community development (Hafid, 2009; Zaazaa, 2005). Moreover, although critical perspectives have become increasingly valued by community psychologists, they are often missing from community development efforts, despite assertions (e.g., Gilchrist & Taylor, 2011) that they should form the basis for development interventions.

Other differences between the two fields include the focus of the work. Community development efforts in both countries often emphasize macro-level socioeconomic indicators while overlooking psychological factors across different ecological levels. For example, urban upgrading initiatives may relocate people from informal areas to safer shelter options without examining how resettlement may affect psychological well-being, social ties, or sense of community.

Refugee Services

While community development efforts focus on citizens, specialized refugee services address the needs of displaced migrants. Egypt has been host to refugees since the early
1900s. In recent decades substantial influxes of people arrived from Africa (e.g., Somalia, Sudan) and the Arab states (e.g., Palestine and Iraq) to escape war, violence, and/or persecution (Grabska, 2006). While a large proportion of refugees reside temporarily as part of international resettlement programs, many find permanent residence in larger metropolitan areas. Multilateral and international organizations as well as local civil society organizations provide refugees with aid such as financial assistance, legal counsel, education, medical care, and/or psychological care (Wahba, 2010). These include the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which determines the status of asylum seekers and facilitates resettlement (Grabska, 2006). Other well-known organizations include Africa and Middle East Refugee Assistance (AMERA), Caritas, and Catholic Relief Services (Wahba, 2010).

Lebanon has also been a host to significant flows of displaced persons from neighboring Arab states. About 10% of the people living in Lebanon are Palestinian refugees forced out of their lands by the 1948 establishment of Israel and subsequent wars, more than 200,000 of whom live in camps (Suleiman, 2006). The current ongoing civil war in Syria has moreover yielded a crisis of refugees in Lebanon, with more than 800,000 affected people arriving by December 2013 (UNHCR, 2013). Multilateral organizations such as UNHCR focus on registration of refugees and emergency relief (Médecins Sans Frontières [MSF], 2012). International humanitarian organizations have also played significant roles. For example, International Medical Corps (IMC) began working in Lebanon in July 2006, offering relief to those affected by the Israeli–Lebanese conflict. It further expanded to provide psychosocial and health services to Iraqi and Syrian refugees, including establishing mobile health clinics and supplying aid to medical institutions (IMC, 2011, 2013). Médecins Sans Frontières has also assisted recent Syrian refugees with medical and mental health care in addition to providing emergency relief items (MSF, 2012).

Refugee organizations in Egypt and Lebanon face numerous challenges. Although services are provided in times of crisis, they are almost never maintained due to financial constraints, poor sustainability plans, and inadequate human resources. Recently, for example, one of the few entities offering refugee legal support in Egypt was at risk of closure due to a shortage of funds (AMERA, 2013).

Refugee services’ focus on displaced, marginalized, and vulnerable people is consistent with community psychology’s emphasis on empowering and transforming the situations of marginalized groups (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). However, although refugee organizations often adopt a holistic approach to the multiple issues facing their service recipients, they typically tend to place emphasis on the individual or micro level. Community psychologists, on the other hand, would additionally consider macro level interventions. Examples could be advocating for national commitment to international refugee conventions, contesting disempowering policies and institutional discrimination, and supporting refugees in organizing their social networks and community linkages in empowering ways. These approaches would also be more consistent with community psychology’s emphasis on transformative as opposed to ameliorative interventions (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Levine, Perkins, & Perkins, 2005).

**Human Rights Advocacy**

Economically disadvantaged and refugee communities in Egypt and Lebanon experience ongoing human rights violations related to insufficient housing, poor education, and restrictions on civil liberties. Human rights work emerged significantly in the Arab world in the 1970s (An-Na’im, 2001) to tackle these kinds of issues. The concept of “human rights”
Community Psychology in Egypt and Lebanon

stems from an ethical discourse on essential human freedoms; human rights groups attempt to operationalize these concepts through legislative efforts (Sen, 2004). According to human rights theory (James, 2007), all people are entitled to basic rights (e.g., life and freedom), rights that ensure capacity to function (e.g., shelter and healthcare), and rights that enhance quality of life (e.g., education and community participation).

Presently, numerous international, regional, and local human rights nongovernmental organization (NGOs) operate in Egypt and Lebanon. In Egypt, human rights work brings attention to repressive state practices such as constrained political freedoms, brutal crackdowns on protest movements, police and military detentions and torture, military trials of civilians, media censorship, and harassment of journalists (Amnesty International, 2013; Freedom House, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2013). Women’s rights work has also been ongoing, including efforts to curb female illiteracy, sexual harassment and violence, circumcision, and restricted access to divorce (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Other issues of concern to human rights specialists include minority and religious discrimination, housing violations, human trafficking, and abuse of refugees (Amnesty International, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2013).

Similar to Egypt, Lebanese human rights efforts have also focused on combating state repression, including police torture, trials of civilians in military courts, and harassment of media personnel. A major human rights concern is the plight of Palestinian refugees who live in appalling conditions and are denied basic rights such as housing, education, and employment (Amnesty International, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2013). Efforts have moreover been made to support women’s rights, including securing access to divorce and the right to pass on nationality to foreign husbands and children (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

Human rights organizations use similar methods such as advocating for greater commitment to human rights values among the public, promoting legislation to enforce human rights, and offering consultation and technical assistance to governments (Roth, 2004; Sen, 2004). A primary tactic used is investigating and exposing human rights violations to leverage national and international public pressure to catalyze change (An-Na’im, 2001; Roth, 2004; Sen, 2004). Unlike community development and refugee NGOs, human rights groups in Egypt and Lebanon typically do not provide on-the-ground services for stakeholders but rather work to safeguard rights at the macro level.

Challenges have affected human rights work in Egypt and Lebanon. Although ratification of United Nations human rights treaties has led to enhanced awareness of human rights among state authorities and civil society, and in some cases influences on domestic law (Heyns & Viljoen, 2001), there continues to be resistance toward domestic reform and international supervision and enforcement (An-Na’im, 2001; Heyns & Viljoen, 2001). State controls that restrict civil society organizations affect the independence of human rights groups. For example, 43 workers at nongovernmental human rights organizations were recently accused of illegally receiving foreign funds and operating without license and subsequently convicted (Freedom House, 2013). At a practical level, many rights organizations face financial constraints, yet collaboration among organizations is limited (An-Na’im, 2001).

Finally, there is limited public support for human rights work in Egypt and Lebanon. The field is dominated by liberal intellectuals (An-Na’im, 2001), and there is distrust toward human rights initiatives because they are believed to be Western-funded. Thus, some rights organizations are moving away from foreign funding to ensure independence and avoid suspicion around their intentions (Pratt, 2006).
Social justice is deeply rooted in the human rights movement (Basok, Ilkan, & Noonan, 2006) and is similarly a core value in community psychology (Kloos et al., 2012). Critical community psychologists are increasingly moving toward the emphasis of social justice within modern community psychology praxis (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Prilleltensky, 2001). However, human rights advocacy in Egypt and Lebanon focuses primarily at the macro level, whereas community psychology interventions may be directed at multiple ecological levels. As was the case in South Africa (see Bhana, Petersen, & Rochat, 2007), an Arab community psychology aimed at achieving social justice and preserving human rights may entail other features, such as the participation and ownership by primary stakeholders of marginalized communities and grass roots organizing to enhance political mobilization and social activism among professionals who are promoting human rights.

ENVISIONING EGYPTIAN AND LEBANESE COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGIES

Civil society organizations focused on community development, refugee services, and human rights have made significant strides in shaping community and social change in response to national crises. At the same time, the development and sustainability of these fields in Egypt and Lebanon are constrained by a reliance on inconsistent foreign funding, dominance of educated elite, and a top-down approach that limits community determination. Notwithstanding the limitations, the three specializations share some characteristics with community psychology. A single movement that synthesizes community psychology principles and methods, however, is still missing. Below we discuss unique contributions that a field of community psychology can offer to the existing range of community practices, examine some of the values that may be relevant to this emerging field, and present potential considerations for formalizing the field.

Opportunities for Community Psychology

The Egyptian and Lebanese contexts exhibit many of the precursors to community psychology seen in other parts of the world. The “Arab Spring” prodemocracy protests have recently swept across the region. Community psychology was in many cases also established against the backdrop of social justice movements such as civil rights in the United States (Kloos et al., 2012), anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa (Seedat & Lazarus, 2011), and social activism in Latin America (Montero, 1996). There are urgent concerns such as poverty and overcrowding ensuing from the combination of long-standing oppression with more recent sociopolitical upheavals. Other nations likewise saw community psychology emerge within the folds of a history of colonialism and striking political and social transitions (Kloos et al., 2012; Reich, Riemer, Prilleltensky, & Montero, 2007; Seedat & Lazarus, 2011). Moreover, there is an already existing base of civil society organizations, a phenomenon that similarly facilitated the spread of community psychology values and practice in Ghana, Cameroon, and Hong Kong (Reich et al., 2007).

Unlike many nations, however, a psychologist movement that is critical of predominant values, literature, and interventions is still lacking in Egypt and Lebanon. As community psychology unfolds in Egypt and Lebanon, it can play a significant role in enriching and building upon the existing framework of civil society by offering alternative and psychological principles for social change.

Community psychology emphasizes social change through equitable distribution of power and resources (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). As such, there is a potential for
community psychologists in Egypt and Lebanon to address the elitism of current development efforts. This can be done through focusing on different forms of community organizing as tools for building community capacity and enabling marginalized communities to prioritize, act upon, and communicate their interests to existing civil society organizations and society at large. Given the untapped potential of the youth demographic, community psychology practice could emphasize the inclusion, mobilization, and empowerment of youth.

Moreover, there is a valuable opportunity for community psychologists to introduce psychological and ecological lenses to social issues. With the exception of mental health counseling for victims of torture and trauma, psychological theories and practices are largely absent in civil society; as such, interventions may not be fully sensitive to the social and psychological conditions of the primary stakeholders. A psychological perspective would enable existing civil society to better understand and influence human behavior, well-being, and social systems as well as examine their root causes. The community psychology emphasis on prevention would be a valuable orientation, given the financial burdens facing Egypt and Lebanon, when confronting concerns after they surface.

At the macro level, community psychologists have an opportunity to support democratization movements in Egypt and Lebanon. This could include advocating for more transparent, nonpartisan, and socially responsible governance as well as evidence-based policies that target root causes of injustice. Even though such work may expose community psychologists in Egypt and Lebanon to state repression and surveillance, there is much to be learned about the art of advocacy and resistance from the experiences of political activists and human rights specialists.

Values and Concepts Underlying the Field

As the diverse roles of community psychologists emerge in Egypt and Lebanon, it will be important to explicitly examine the essential values and key concepts that underlie practice. Clarification of values can help shape the identity of the field, determine which kinds of professional activities are consistent with agendas of the discipline, and provide guidance for difficult decisions such as whether or not to ally with particular groups and how to challenge dominant narratives of the more privileged (Kloos et al., 2012; Prilleltensky, 2001). Community psychology values should be aligned with the values of the local culture and community (Kloos et al., 2012). It will be essential for community psychologists to be aware of core Arab values and find a balance between respecting value systems while preserving basic human rights and women’s rights that may have been overlooked by some cultural practices embedded in patriarchy. Thus, a healthy dialogue must begin among the first community psychologists in Egypt and Lebanon.

One anticipated area for dialogue relates to empowerment, which has been argued to be the crux of community psychology (Rappaport, 1987). “Empowerment” is often included in the mission statements of civil society organizations in Egypt and Lebanon; however, its definition and manifestations are often ambiguous. For example, some women’s empowerment programs may equip women with skills to enable economic self-sufficiency, although they were designed and delivered using disempowering, nonparticipatory approaches.

Moreover, previous scholars have raised concern regarding the central significance of empowerment in community psychology. For instance, Riger (1993) argued that individualism and masculine values of power and conquest are unacknowledged Western biases that underlie community psychology’s emphasis on empowerment. These
concerns ring true in a part of the world that emphasizes collectivism, communalism, interdependence, and holistic approaches. As such, perhaps a different type of community psychology may need to emerge in Egypt and Lebanon, one that primarily emphasizes sense of community and community well-being.

A value in community well-being necessitates an analysis of what the concept “community” means within the cultural context. In Arabic, the word for community (مجمع) also refers to “society,” which poses potential confusion between community psychology and sociology. There is no Arabic expression that carries the flexibility of the English community to traverse group networks at multiple ecological levels. Instead, the terms that most capture the relational networks and bonding at the core of community usually refer to smaller groups of family, neighborhood, and tribal affiliations. In the Arab culture, communal life is “segmentary,” colored by social groupings such as kin or villages that are dynamically shifting, dividing into smaller opposing groupings or unifying into larger alliances depending on the circumstances (Gregg, 2005). Although family ties therefore do not necessarily form the foundation for social organization (Gregg, 2005), the family is of central value to Arab culture. Religion is also often embedded in communal life, offering a rubric for regulating and bonding relationships. Prevailing definitions of sense of community (see McMillan & Chavis, 1986) may need to be reexamined against this cultural setting.

Prilleltensky (2001) argued that although American community psychology values seem to maintain a balance for the individual, family, and community; in reality, practice has emphasized individual and relational wellness over values that enhance collective wellness such as social justice. In other parts of the world such as Latin America and South Africa, values in social justice and empowerment have taken center stage, with a critical orientation and focus on community liberation against oppressive structures and processes (Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom, & Siddiquee, 2011; Lazarus, 2007; Montero, 2008). This may be a relevant model for Arab psychologists intervening at a time marked by popular uprisings against oppressive regimes. However, although a critical orientation has developed among Palestinian psychologists (Makkawi, 2012), in both Egypt and Lebanon it has not yet been cultivated.

**Considerations for Formalizing the Field**

Alongside the clarification of values and concepts, the establishment of training programs will be essential to defining, promoting, and sustaining the field. Programs should be mindful in appraising what skill sets students should gain and how these map onto local community contexts and needs. For instance, given the dearth of empirical research and data records on social issues and interventions, an emphasis on needs assessment and program evaluation may be vital. Because infrastructures and mechanisms for producing change are not clearly defined and rapidly shifting, community psychologists in training will need to gain the flexibility to rapidly shift course in the midst of conducting research or interventions. Community organization efforts may need to be tailored in light of legal restrictions on grassroots mobilization and influences of national security apparatus.

Moreover, creative applications of participatory and collaborative approaches should be adopted when working with communities that have been reinforced to be passive recipients of charity. Considerations such as these have already begun to be articulated by the Master of Arts program in Cairo in light of fieldwork realities (see Carrillo & Forden, 2013).
CONCLUSION

Psychology in Egypt and Lebanon has thus far been narrowly defined, focused mostly on individualized service. The time is ideal for a new subdiscipline to emerge, one that appreciates the ecological contexts and strives for community well-being. The aim of this article was not to foretell how community psychology will formalize in Egypt and Lebanon but rather raise important questions to consider. Of course, the realities of working on the ground will shape the articulation of values and methods for the field. Care should be taken to avoid mistakes of the past such as superficially replicating Western paradigms. This will require community psychologists to gain greater awareness of their positions of privilege and the local cultural contexts to fashion a field that is organically driven and best meets community needs.

REFERENCES


