



"This Is Our Square": Fighting Sexual Assault at Cairo Protests

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"Sitt al-banat." Graffiti on Muhammad Mahmoud Street in Cairo.

HOSSAM EL-HAMALAWY

"This Is Our Square"

Fighting Sexual Assault at Cairo Protests

Vickie Langohr

In June 2013 popular anger, excitement and apprehension rippled through Cairo. Lines at gas stations snaked into major roadways, paralyzing traffic. Artists occupied the Ministry of Culture to oppose a new minister from the Muslim Brothers' Freedom and Justice Party who had fired respected cultural leaders. Artists, including the Cairo Opera ballet troupe, performed in solidarity in front of the Ministry, in a pointed retort to a member of the *salafi* Nour Party who said that ballet "provoke[ed] people to immorality." Determined to oust then-president Muhammad Mursi, citizens signed the Tamarrud (Rebellion) petition calling for early presidential elections and planned to attend anti-Mursi demonstrations on June 30. And groups

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of women and men, most in their twenties or early thirties, met repeatedly to strategize about how to protect the women who would go to the protests from sexual assault.

The "blue bra incident" of December 2011 is the iconic case of assault on Egyptian female protesters, when a woman anti-harassment activists call *sitt al-banat* (the best of all girls) was stripped of her *abaya* and dragged through the street by army officers. Much more common, though, are attacks in which large numbers of men in civilian clothes grab the body of a female protester and grope her with their fingers, frequently stripping off her clothing and in some cases penetrating her with sharp objects. Harassment and assault of female protesters by unidentified civilians began at least as early as July 2011, but came to widespread attention only after 19 women were assaulted

during protests commemorating the second anniversary of the uprising on January 25, 2013.¹ In the June 30, 2013 anti-Mursi demonstrations, 46 women were assaulted. That night, Ayman Nagy, a founder of the group Against Harassment, participated in the rescue of a woman trapped with her brother in a room in the Arab League building in Tahrir Square. As he wrote in a Facebook note, the woman said that the people in the room had assaulted her, and she felt she had lost her virginity. As activists tried to lift another woman over a fence to safety, men pulled off her clothes while others took pictures with their phones.² A tea seller tried to repel the attackers by spraying boiling water at them, scalding Nagy, as the tea seller could not distinguish rescuers from attackers. On July 3, as the army removed Mursi from power to ecstatic celebrations, the group Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment/Assault (OpAntiSH) announced on Facebook: “We need more people [today] than any other previous day because today Tahrir will have many times the number of people [than usual].” Amidst the unprecedented crowds, over 80 assaults were reported.

Evolving Activism

During the 18 days of protests that forced Husni Mubarak’s resignation, sexual harassment was remarkable because it was rare. While several women protesters were harassed by Mubarak supporters or security forces, most women experienced Tahrir as a harassment-free zone. As feminist activist Dina Wahba noted, “These were the only 18 days in my life in Egypt that I wasn’t harassed at all.”³ On the night that Mubarak fell, however, CBS correspondent Lara Logan endured a mass assault, in which her clothing was torn and she was repeatedly raped by her assailants’ fingers.

Attacks on women became a regular feature of protests beginning with the July 8, 2011 sit-in against the rule of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). During the November 2011 demonstrations against military rule, Mariam Kirillos and Engy Ghozlan organized a meeting in a protest tent in Tahrir to strategize about responses to harassment.⁴ Members of HarassMap, a group co-founded by Ghozlan that works to prevent and record instances of street harassment, put up banners about the problem in Tahrir. According to anti-harassment activist Sally Zohney, after the July and November 2011 attacks, “We tried to encourage the girls [who were attacked] to speak up and send pictures of harassers to expose them. The call did not have much effect and no movement took any action, [to] my knowledge.”⁵ Days later, the assault of *sitt al-banat* prompted the first mass response to sexual assault—a march of approximately 10,000 raising the slogan, “The women of Egypt are a red line.”

Another round of assaults attracted attention in June 2012, during protests against the Supreme Court’s verdict that Mubarak was only an accessory to—not directly

responsible for—the deaths of protesters during the 18 days of the uprising. On June 2, Nihal Saad Zaghloul went to Tahrir with friends, including a female journalist. Men groped Zaghloul and pulled off her veil; her journalist friend experienced much worse. As Zaghloul described it in an interview with CNN, “She said that there were about 50 [men], all ages.... They stripped her naked; they had fingers everywhere.... They pinned her down on the floor.”

With a larger protest scheduled for June 8, the Egyptian Institute for Personal Rights (EIPR) issued a statement that the unprecedented rates of assault suggested “these are intentional attempts to deter women from protesting.” Co-signed by 19 other organizations, the statement called for increased respect for the safety of female demonstrators in the next day’s protest. Zaghloul, Zohney and Leil Zahra Mortada organized a march against sexual assaults for June 8 in front of the Hardees fast food restaurant in Tahrir. As soon as the protesters began marching, they came under attack. Zohney said she was “shoved and found myself inside a clothing store.... People were pushing to get in, the women working in the store pushing from the inside to close the glass door while the owner...was pulling the metal door. Meanwhile, I heard the harassers screaming, ‘Get out! We’ll have a party on you,’ just like the police!”⁶ To “have a party on” (*ih tafal ‘ala*) someone means to hurt or humiliate, or to take pleasure in another’s injury or humiliation.

On November 22, Yasmine al Baramawy participated in mass protests against Mursi’s declaration claiming extraordinary executive powers and rushing the contentious process of writing a new constitution. She was sexually assaulted while being dragged through the street, her pants cut with knives. At one point during the attack, her hair was pinned to the ground by the wheel of a car that had stopped next to her. She was then put on the front of a car and driven away, with armed men dissuading passersby from intervening by telling them that she had a bomb strapped to her stomach. Her ordeal finally ended when a woman in the street demanded to see the supposed bomb, after which armed bystanders freed her.⁷

This attack, and others that occurred during the November protests, led organizers to supplant earlier modes of activism—demonstrations against assault, trying to convince survivors to speak out—with a system for rescuing women under attack. A female staffer at EIPR noted to colleagues that previous interventions in assaults had happened after the attacks and suggested finding a way to intervene before they occurred. Dalia Abd el Hameed, the gender and women’s rights program officer at EIPR, and another EIPR employee—acting as individuals, not on behalf of the organization—bought phone lines to serve as hotlines on which assaults could be reported.⁸ Friends and acquaintances met in Tahrir Square on November 27 and dispersed throughout the protests wearing pink armbands.



"I wanted to celebrate with you, not for you to have a party on me."

OLA TAWFIQ

Activists quickly realized how difficult conditions were for such a project. One volunteer ended up with five girls who had sought refuge in a field hospital, a tent in which injured protesters were treated. Men tried to attack the hospital to reach the girls, who were evacuated by ambulance. To bolster their numbers to respond to another assault, activists called youth hanging out at a nearby art gallery, G'z Corner.

The next night, the group of supporters and volunteers from G'z Corner discussed their experiences. They were joined by activists from Mosireen, a media collective that began with filmmakers and ordinary citizens recording the anti-Mubarak uprising and now documents state human rights abuses. Attendees recounted their previous attempts to rescue women whose assaults they happened upon while protesting and concluded that "depending on individual efforts to rescue women is not productive, and so we have decided to form rapid intervention teams."⁹

This group became OpAntiSH. It is one of the organizations that intervenes before, during and after attacks. OpAntiSH volunteers are in Tahrir during most major protests. They distribute cards with the hotline numbers and flyers advising people what to do if they see an assault. Other members staff the hotlines and relay the information to intervention teams in the square. Volunteers wear white T-shirts that say in red "Against Harassment" on the front and "A Square Safe For All" on the back. Another team waits in apartments close to Tahrir with first aid items,

clothing and shoes for survivors, who have often been stripped during their assaults.

Tahrir Bodyguard emerged alongside, but completely differently than, OpAntiSH. While many of the core activists of OpAntiSH knew each other and came from human rights work, the early members of Tahrir Bodyguard were strangers who responded to tweets sent out by the group's founder Soraya Bahgat. On November 25, Bahgat, head of human resources at a development company, was heading to the protests but, fearing assault, decided not to go. On November 27—the same day that the group that became OpAntiSH first operated in Tahrir—Bahgat's initiative began with the Twitter message: "We set up this account to help keep you safe in #Tahrir. If the government can't protect us, we can protect ourselves." The nature of the effort was inchoate at first, with the earliest tweets asking female protesters alone in the square to tweet for help, noting, "We are a collective effort and we want to grow. Please tweet @ us if u want to join or if u have ideas. We are just starting #TahrirBodyguard." Within an hour Bahgat had tweeted the idea of volunteers wearing vests in the square. Bahgat and a young man who was one of the first responders to the tweets went to Tahrir to inform the security committees of the political parties—who are charged with protecting demonstrators—that the new group had no political affiliation and would be present the next day in vests.¹⁰

In using Twitter to start a new initiative, Tahrir Bodyguard modeled itself on Tahrir Supplies, a group whose Twitter account broadcasts requests for medical and other supplies needed at field hospitals so that followers can purchase and deliver them. Bahgat tweeted that Tahrir Supplies was her inspiration for Tahrir Bodyguard, and Mary Awadallah, Tahrir Bodyguard's public relations manager and a member of its leadership team, had responded to Tahrir Supplies calls before Tahrir Bodyguard was formed.¹¹

Like OpAntiSH, Tahrir Bodyguard receives calls reporting assault and sends intervention teams to rescue women. Volunteers wear yellow vests and hardhats. Bodyguards sometimes provide protection for marches, as on International Women's Day 2013, when members clustered at the front and back of the march and along the sides to prevent harassers from entering. They also organize free self-defense courses for women.

While both OpAntiSH and Tahrir Bodyguard began working in November 2012, the first real trial came on January 25, 2013. OpAntiSH received reports of assault even before the intervention team had arrived at the apartment overlooking Tahrir that served as the group's base. Later, Dalia Abd el Hameed could see from the apartment's balcony four separate mobs, each circling around one or more women. "Our people were very small in their midst.... In each one of these circles there were four or five white T-shirts, trying [to rescue them].... At that time, you feel a really terrible helplessness, that you can't do anything." When attackers tried to enter their building, OpAntiSH volunteers barricaded the door from inside with an iron bar, while group members on the street tried to deflect the men by spraying fire from gas canisters like those used by street food vendors.¹² One of the most brutal cases that night, documented by the human rights organization Al Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, happened to a woman who was only passing through Tahrir to go home from work. During her assault, she was raped with a sharp object. As she described her rescue: "I lost conscious [sic], and when I woke up I found that the two men who were trying to save me took me inside the building and the men who were assaulting and raping me tried to break down the building's door.... When the ambulance came, the ambulance doctor...told the men when I was getting out of the building that I died, and they still attacked the ambulance car and were trying to stop it and break the door. I heard the doctor telling the driver, 'Don't stop. Don't stop no matter what or she will be killed!'"¹³

Organized Chaos

Who is responsible for this brutality? Since no one has been brought to justice for the over 200 cases of protest assault since 2011, there is no definitive answer. Many believe that the assaults are organized. As Mariam Kirolos of OpAntiSH

argued on the television program "Direct from the Capital," "We are convinced that all of the cases of sexual assault that have happened in Tahrir...are trying to frighten women and marginalize them to the extent that they will not participate in political life."¹⁴ One reason for the belief that attacks are organized is that they frequently follow a similar pattern by which "a group surrounds the victims, the number increases and she is almost suffocated.... Tens of hands pull her in every direction. Tens of hands mess with all parts of the body.... Tens of hands strip off [sic] the victims [what they fail to remove manually, they use weapons to remove]. Those surrounding her have said, according to most testimonies, 'Do not be afraid; I'm protecting you.' Meanwhile, his hands are ravaging her body."¹⁵

The current assaults resemble attacks on May 25, 2005—known as Black Wednesday—when protesters demonstrated at the Journalists' Syndicate against a referendum on constitutional amendments. One protester said that the police opened a path for thugs to come to her and other protesters. The men penetrated her with their fingers, saying "the dirtiest of words. They're like, 'You want to demonstrate against Mubarak. This is what Mubarak's doing to you. He's screwing you. See, whore, that's Mubarak that you're chanting against. He's now screwing you.'"¹⁶ Wael Abbas, one of the earliest bloggers to expose police abuse, interviewed an attacker who "confessed that he had been paid, and that he and others had been brought by bus from the slums specifically to disrupt the peaceful demonstrations."¹⁷ As Paul Amar has noted, the infamous *baltagiyya* (thugs) began as networks of extortion rackets. They were treated as enemies of the state in the 1990s, but in the 2000s the Interior Ministry deployed them to participate in demonstrations, either to delegitimize the protests with extremist slogans or attack protesters and "wreak havoc."¹⁸

In a December 2012 BBC program, journalist Ramita Navai interviewed two men—on camera but with faces obscured—who claimed they were paid to attack women protesting the Mubarak regime and its successors. One claimed that, during the anti-Mubarak uprising, he was paid to "go out and sexually harass girls, go out and hassle them, and try to touch them, to the point that they'd leave the demonstration." He said he had been asked in "the last couple of days" to do this again, and had agreed because "money is tight now."

While men may be paid to assault women to serve others' political interests, in one case assailants seem to have been driven by their own political convictions. On December 5, 2012, Socialist Popular Alliance Party activist Ola Shahba was assaulted at protests against Mursi's constitutional declaration held at the presidential palace, al-Ittihadiyya. Her attackers included not only *salafis* and Muslim Brothers but also others who believed the anti-Mursi protesters were *fuloul* (supporters of the old regime) or against religion. Some yelled, "You hate God this much?" as they beat her.¹⁹

In an interview on Youssri Fouda's "Akhir Kalam" show the next day, Shahba, whose eye was swollen closed over a bruised cheek, noted that when one of the attackers saw her face, he said that he had seen her on TV speaking out against Mubarak during the uprising and that she was not *fuloul*. Her attackers took her to a police officer, who told the men, "Whatever you want, I will do it to her."²⁰

Shahba's attackers did not initially know that she was a woman, demonstrating a willingness to use public sexual assault to punish male and female protesters. She was wearing a hoodie and a helmet, obscuring her face and body; before her attackers removed her outer garments and realized she was a woman, fingers were inserted in her rectum. When asked why she thought her attackers sexually harassed her while they thought she was a man, Shahba suggested that they saw harassment as "an attempt to break one's dignity—an insult," although she felt they enjoyed and prolonged her harassment more once they realized she was a woman. Male protesters such as Hamada Sabir, who was stripped and beaten, have been subjected to public sexualized abuse by the police. Mariz Tadros notes that the chant "Egypt's women are not to be stripped!" used in the December 2011 protests against the beating of *sitt al-banat* was revised in later anti-harassment protests to "Egypt's men are not to be stripped!"²¹

After the al-Ittihadiyya attacks, several organizations including Nazra for Feminist Studies and the Nadeem Center, two of the most active groups working against gender violence, issued a statement accusing "the president, his group and the government" of responsibility. The groups noted a pattern of attacks on women by "non-state actors supportive of the president," beginning with attacks on female protesters on January 31, 2012 that had gone unpunished, when supporters of the Muslim Brothers and the Freedom and Justice Party had prevented anti-SCAF demonstrators from reaching the parliament building.²² As public attention to the 19 assaults of January 25, 2013 soared, Mursi remained silent. When the police stripping of Hamada Sabir was videotaped only a few days later, the interior minister quickly apologized, and Mursi's office said the president was "pained."²³ By contrast, in February 2013 members of the human rights committee of the upper house of Parliament blamed women protesters for being assaulted. Freedom and Justice Party member Rida al-Hifnawi said, "Women should not mingle with men during protests.... How can the Interior Ministry be tasked with protecting a lady who stands among a group of men?"²⁴ *Salafi* al-Asala Party member 'Adil 'Afifi suggested that "a woman who joins protests among thugs and street inhabitants should protect herself before asking the Interior Ministry to offer her protection," concluding that "women sometimes bring rape upon themselves."²⁵

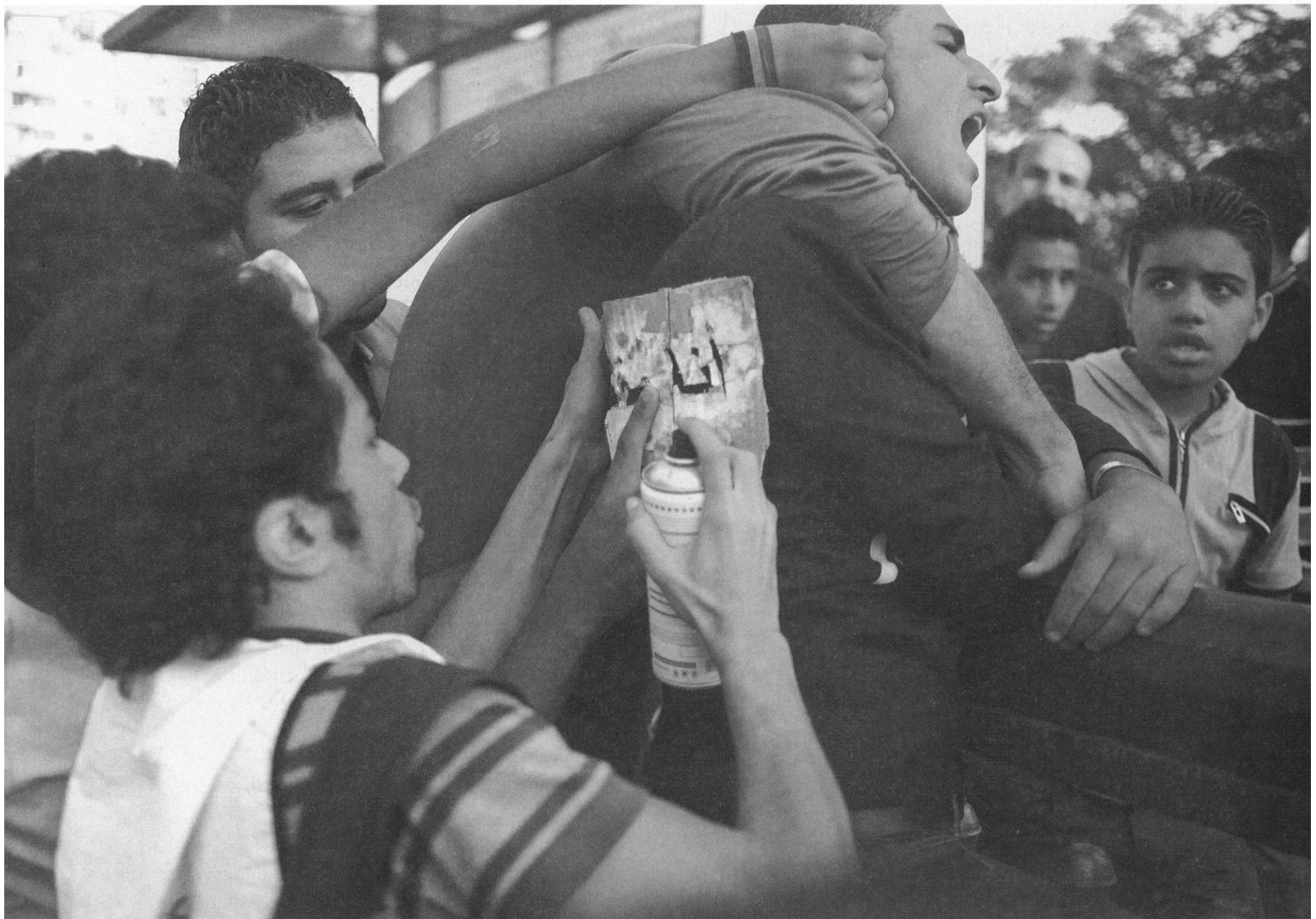
While Islamists absolved the Interior Ministry of responsibility for protecting women, Azza Suleiman, director of

the Center for Women's Rights Legal Aid, raised the possibility that the Ministry might have a hand in the assaults. Suleiman believes the Tahrir attacks were organized "and the first actor in it is the Interior Ministry." State security, she suggested, benefits from such assaults. They do it "so that women won't participate...and they want to embarrass and settle accounts with Mursi and settle accounts with us [human rights activists]. I have women who come to us [to open a police file] after an argument with their husbands. The police say, 'Let the revolution help you' (*khalli al-thawra tinfa'ik*)."²⁶ SCAF rule included high-profile incidents of military violence against women, such as the "virginity tests" of protesters in March 2011 and the harassment of protesters in July and November 2011. An anonymous army officer justified the "virginity tests" to CNN by arguing: "The girls who were detained were not like your daughter or mine. These were girls who had camped out in tents with male protesters in Tahrir Square." His denial of women's right to protest safely next to men—or right to state protection from assault—is strikingly similar to that voiced by Islamist deputies after the January 2013 assaults.

While many believe that protest assault is organized for political purposes, many activists also acknowledge a connection between these attacks and the endemic—albeit much less violent—verbal and physical harassment of women on the street and in public transportation. A statement from the group Nazra for Feminist Studies shortly after the January 25, 2013 attacks argued: "While we recognize the political nature of the crimes in the Tahrir area, we cannot separate it from the general harassment women face.... In our view, the recent events are a brutal escalation of the widespread social pathology that is sexual violence.... The discounting of harassment and sexual assault has only encouraged the emergence of brutal gang rape at political events."

Debating Gender Roles

While protest assault vividly demonstrates the dangers to women participating in large-scale protests, activists have differed on how to minimize the danger without enabling patriarchal conceptions that women in public space need "protection." In the march decrying the attack on *sitt al-banat* in December 2011, a male cordon formed around female protesters in an attempt to keep potential harassers out. One of the men in the cordon told Dalia Abd el Haneed that he was there "to protect you," implying that women needed such protection in public space. She refused to walk within the cordon. Sally Zohney, an organizer of the June 8, 2012 stand against harassment at Hardees, opposed the cordon that formed when protesters started to march "because it solidifies the notion that women cannot walk alone in the square without protection, which is unnecessary and untrue."²⁷ Nihal Saad Zaghloul, another organizer of the stand, did not oppose the cordon, and a month later she and one of



Activists spray-paint "I'm a harasser" on a man caught redhanded in Cairo.

TARA TODRAS-WHITEHILL/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

the young men who had initiated the cordon co-founded Basma, a group which intervenes against harassment during the celebrations of 'Id al-Fitr and 'Id al-Adha.²⁸

The different conceptions of OpAntiSH and Tahrir Bodyguard on whether women should participate in intervention teams—and why—demonstrated an early difference between the two groups. A key principle of OpAntiSH is that intervening to rescue assaulted women in Tahrir needs to be done without enforcing ideas about male "protection." Intervention work is very dangerous: Many men and women have been attacked, including Aida Kashef, who was severely assaulted after helping rescue another woman. Despite these risks, the OpAntiSH founding statement notes, "Women's participation...is a main part of the group's philosophy. Participants...are very much aware of the magnitude of the risk that they are under in case of participating in such an initiative. But this group of men and women believe in full and equal participation of women without trying to impose protection or guardianship from men." At the first

open meeting of the group on November 29, 2012, the first suggestion from the floor was that women not participate in rescues. Group members responded, "This is not open for discussion. If someone doesn't want girls to participate, he shouldn't come."²⁹

While Tahrir Bodyguard initially relied on all-male intervention teams, a male member of the group's leadership noted that pragmatism had led them to include a few women in the groups. Early on, he said, "We had imagined that the female role would be in awareness—giving out the flyers and talking to people." They found, however, that women under assault would often hesitate to trust an all-male intervention team, particularly because assailants often claim that they are helping the woman they are assaulting. This realization taught the group that women were needed to communicate with the survivor, but he noted that they still try not to have many women in the intervention team to decrease the possibility that the volunteers will be assaulted.³⁰ There are generally more men than women in OpAntiSH intervention teams

as well, but there is no attempt to limit the number of women. Whatever the proportion of women in the intervention teams, women play prominent roles in the leadership of both OpAntiSH, whose core leadership has a majority of women, and Tahrir Bodyguard, which is led by four men and four women. The two groups frequently coordinate.

Breaking Taboos

Sexual harassment became a topic of public discussion during Mubarak's rule when Nuha Rushdi appeared on Muna al-Shazli's popular "10 PM" show in 2008 to discuss the three-year prison term—then unprecedented—given the truck driver who had harassed her. Survivors' televised stories of assault post-Mubarak, however, have broken more barriers. During Mubarak's rule it was impossible for survivors to accuse government forces or loyalists of sexual abuse. By contrast, Youssri Fouda, perhaps the most popular talk show host in Egypt, interviewed both activist and journalist Mona Eltahawy in November 2011 and Ola Shahba in 2012. Eltahawy, with one arm and the other hand in a cast, recounted how government security forces had broken her arm and wrist as she tried to fend off their beatings, after which she endured serious sexual harassment.

Survivors' televised stories of assault have also challenged the belief that being assaulted is a source of shame. In the two weeks after January 25, 2013, several women, including two who had been assaulted in November 2012—Yasmine al Baramawy and Mosireen filmmaker and OpAntiSH member Aida al-Kashef—spoke in graphic terms about their experiences, sometimes talking for more than five uninterrupted minutes. Baramawy showed the ripped pants she had been wearing during the assault, slashed in the back with knives, while al-Kashef said a man had had his hands inside her pants throughout her entire ordeal and that her underwear had been cut from inside. On the same episode as Baramawy, journalist Hania Moheeb appeared with her husband, Sherif al Kerdani. Kerdani's presence and forceful repudiation of protest assault undermined the trope that women's sexual assault dishonors their male relatives.

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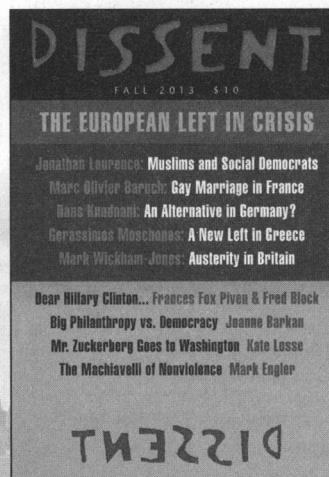
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When cases of assault could not be clearly attributed to the army or Muslim Brother supporters, as in the attacks on Eltahawy and Shahba, many revolutionaries hesitated to speak out about assault for fear of ruining the image of Tahrir Square. Engy Ghozlan noted that friends attacked in protests would tell her about the incidents but that they and others discouraged her from speaking out because it would "make us look bad."³¹ Al-Kashef similarly argued on television that before the Brothers came to power "there were mass sexual attacks in Tahrir but people didn't want to talk about it. The political parties didn't want to say anything, [because] people

were afraid of hurting the image of Tahrir.... I think that was our biggest mistake.”³²

Many anti-assault activists, however, reject the idea that discussing assault “dishonors” the revolution, and insist that victims of protest assault should be honored like any other victim of protest violence. As Ghozlan argued, “These women are heroes, no less than any man who gets injured or attacked or beaten or detained. People celebrate the person who is injured in the revolution, people celebrate the person who is martyred in the revolution, but they don’t celebrate the girl who has been assaulted, because as far as they are concerned it is something shameful and it makes the revolution look bad.” Samira Ibrahim, who was subjected to a “virginity test” and sued the army doctor who carried it out, is widely recognized as a revolutionary icon. Her face appears in graffiti all over Cairo.

Groups working against protest assault and street harassment have been featured repeatedly on popular TV shows, including on the comedy news show hosted by Bassem Youssef. Youssef introduced members of Tahrir Bodyguard and OpAntiSH with the words, “We want to have a discussion with people who are really making a difference in society.”³³ These media appearances help make the issue of fighting all forms of sexual abuse a more normative one. As Ghozlan, who handled media for OpAntiSH until June 2013, stressed, “Actually, most of the time we did not want to talk to the media because we didn’t want to make it a sensual topic for people to speak about. We tried very hard to state what we’re doing straightforwardly, but they always take it in a direction that makes it very sexy for people,” with titillating details of assaults. Still, she felt that “we used every opportunity to send a message that we’re there and we’re not going to stop.”

Reclaiming Tahrir

If protest assault is organized to drive women away from demonstrations, it has failed miserably. The January 25, 2013 assaults were repudiated in a large anti-assault demonstration on February 6 featuring huge banners of feminist icons, from Huda Sha’rawi, the first president of the Egyptian Feminist Union in the 1920s, to singer Umm Kulthoum and socialist activist Shahinda Maqlad. At a June 15 meeting of women’s rights activists at the Lawyers’ Syndicate to coordinate women’s participation in the anti-Mursi demonstrations, volunteers distributed flyers that mixed political reminders—such as uniting around the slogan *irball*—with advice on avoiding assault. Wear pants with tight waists that cannot be easily removed, they said, and carry insecticide to spray in assailants’ faces. Discussions of women’s demands in the march were interspersed with performances of songs about women’s revolutionary role. Even the over 150 assaults between June 30 and July 3 did not weaken the resolve of OpAntiSH volunteers, who met later in July to discuss their

experiences. As volunteer Wiam al-Tamami described the mood at the meeting: “Despite moments of vehemence... it was impossibly bright—that of a big family gathering, a family whose lives could quite literally depend on each other.” She noted that, while several male volunteers said they had initially opposed having women in the intervention teams, “They spoke movingly of how the things they had seen on the ground from their female comrades... had made them reflect on their own judgments, transforming their concepts of power and muscle strength, as they began to recognize that it came from another place entirely.”³⁴ The anti-assault movement will continue, calling on others, as OpAntiSH did in a widely circulated video, to “come and stand against the rapists.... This is our square; this is our revolution.”³⁵ ■

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Endnotes

- 1 All figures for numbers of attacks are based on reports to anti-assault intervention groups in Tahrir Square, some of which were subsequently documented by Egyptian and international human rights groups. It is likely that other attacks have gone unreported.
- 2 This note, and information about other attacks, can be found on the OpAntiSH Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/opantish>.
- 3 Dina Wahba, “After the Spring II,” presentation at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, February 25, 2012.
- 4 Interview with Mariam Kirolos, Cairo, June 23, 2013.
- 5 Al Nadeem Center, “Live Testimonies on Sexual Torture in Tahrir Square and Surrounding Neighborhoods,” available at: <https://alnadeem.org/en/node/426>. 6 Ibid.
- 7 “Akhir al-Nahar,” Nahar TV, February 1, 2013. On the program she is identified only as “Yasmine,” but she gave me permission to identify her. Personal communication, August 11, 2013.
- 8 Interviews with Dalia Abd el Hameed, Cairo, June 21, 2012 and June 20, 2013. All subsequent quotes from her are from these interviews.
- 9 From the first public meeting announcement of the nascent OpAntiSH group: <https://www.facebook.com/events/312083305571008/>.
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- 11 Interview with Mary Awadallah, Cairo, June 21, 2013.
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- 21 Tadros, p. 15.
- 22 These and subsequent Nazra papers can be viewed at <https://www.nazra.org>.
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- 25 Ibid.
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