Understanding Politically Motivated Sexual Assault in Protest Spaces: Evidence from Egypt (March 2011 to June 2013)

Mariz Tadros
University of Sussex, UK

Abstract

Women have been at the forefront of protest movements in Arab revolts, and whilst their activism has been the subject of a growing body of scholarly work, there is a paucity of literature on their exposure to sexual assault during demonstrations. This article is an empirical study of the increasing politicization of sexual assault in Egypt's transition between March 2011 and June 2013, which seeks to contribute to the broader literature on sexual violence in contexts that are politically tumultuous and polarized but are not technically 'at war'. It draws on the literature on rape as a weapon of war without isolating sexual aggression in protest spaces from the continuum of gender-based violence that is socially, politically and legally embedded in the context of Egypt. The article argues that a number of factors if analysed individually suggest there is no difference in the dynamics of sexual violence in protest and non-protest spaces, however, when taken as a constellation of factors, they suggest a pattern that is politically driven, in particular, when their commissioning and targeting are commensurate with the political deployment of sexual violence identified in the rape as a weapon of war literature.

Keywords

Egyptian, politics, protests, revolution, sexual, violence, women

Corresponding author:
Mariz Tadros, University of Sussex, Falmer Road, Brighton, BN1 9RE, UK.
Email: m.tadros@ids.ac.uk

Introduction

There has been a burgeoning scholarship on women's revolutionary roles in protests and demonstrations recently. However, very limited data have captured the violent nature of these spaces and struggles in which they have found themselves. For example, in Yemen, women protestors were sexually assaulted by assailants who openly chastised them for challenging the government. In Tunisia, one of the female protestors was arrested and sexually assaulted in the police station in July 2013.[1] Human Rights Watch (HRW) also reported that female protestors in Tunisia were called 'whores' by the police and female journalists were called the same and threatened with rape (HRW, 2013). HRW (2013) documented 136 incidents of sexual assault on women protestors in Egypt between June 2012 and 2 July 2013, some of them requiring urgent medical attention.[2] However, this figure is likely to be a gross underestimation of the full scale of the phenomenon, one which HRW called 'an epidemic'. The collection of case studies through interviews in this study was unaccounted for in the figure above. Moreover, in view of the deep social stigma associated with sexual assault, many people choose not to report their experiences (HRW, 2013).

The aim of this article is to examine sexual assault against women (although men have been sexually assaulted too), in a particular space (protest space) and in a particular political moment (in a country experiencing political turmoil after a dictatorship of 30 years was overthrown after a popular uprising). The research questions informing this study are as follows: What evidence is there of the occurrence of sexual assault in protest spaces in Egypt, what are its drivers and what contribution can this empirical research make to the study of the politics of gender-based violence (GBV)? The article seeks to contribute to the understandings of sexual violence in contexts characterized by political volatility and polarization as distinct from contexts of war/armed conflict.

The first part of the article sets out the conceptual terrain regarding sexual violence in conflict settings and its drivers. The second part is a review of different regimes' instrumentalization of sexual violence against their opponents prior to and after the Revolution of 2011. The third part discusses the empirical data from protest spaces and the inferences for conceptual understandings of sexual violence. This is followed by conclusion and some final reflections.

Methodology

The article draws on primary and secondary data in both Arabic and English. Research on politically motivated sexual assault was particularly challenging to undertake in view of the high levels of social stigma associated with being sexually violated in a highly conservative society. During the time the research was being undertaken in December 2012, there were still fewer testimonies made public than was the case in February 2013, when more women spoke publicly after being assaulted in Tahrir Square on 25 January 2013. Primary data were collected from two sources. The first source comprised 15 first-hand accounts of sexual assault, out of which there were 5 interviews that I undertook myself and 10 entailing first-hand written testimonies made available to me by El Nadeem Centre (see below).

The five in-depth interviews I conducted with women and men who were victims of various forms of physical and sexual assault[3] were selected through purposive sampling, applying the following criteria: experience of sexual/physical assault, willingness to share their accounts and confirmation that they do not anticipate that such collaboration would cause them further harm.

In-depth interviews were critical for understanding how individuals experienced assault, their perception of the actors, motives and relationships through which they were enacted and on information on other persons whom they knew to have been sexually assaulted on the same day or at other junctures in protest spaces.

The 10 testimonies and accounts collected by psychologist Farah Shash at El Nadeem Centre were made available for this study in full (except for the names, which were withheld in accordance with their confidentiality policy). El Nadeem Centre for Victims of Torture and Trauma is one of the country's leading human rights organizations in providing psychological rehabilitation for citizens, of any political orientation, who have suffered violence, and these were persons who came to the centre for treatment. The second source of primary data was 30 additional interviews, which I undertook with women and men protestors who had witnessed first-hand incidents of sexual assault in protest spaces. These were all men and women who had frequented protest spaces. Among the 30 interviews, 24 interviews were with young women and men who had organized into collective initiatives to patrol Tahrir Square and other spaces, where large protests were occurring to protect women from being subjected to sexual violence and rescue those who are being assaulted (Tadros, 2014a).[4]

Six of the 30 interviews that the author conducted were with lawyers, doctors and women's rights and human rights activists who had engaged first hand with survivors of assault. These additional interviews were important for corroborating evidence in terms of the minutest details of the spatial dimensions of people's congregation in protest spaces prior to, during and after incidents of sexual assault occur. These include questions regarding the exact timing, whereabouts, composition of the crowds, means of relaying information on the occurrence of incidents of assault and the role of those present in the vicinity (i.e. informal street vendors, shop owners, passers-by, police if they are present in proximity and others).

Several interviews were undertaken with Farah Shash to comment on the cases that El Nadeem centre had treated. Some had faced psychological and physical and psychological abuse over the course of several years under all three regimes (Mubarak, the Supreme Council for Armed Forces and the Muslim Brotherhood). These interviews became an invaluable source of information on sexual assault across space (areas associated with protests as opposed to those not) and time (under different political authorities). Interviews were also undertaken with human rights activists and two lawyers who specialize in cases of sexual assault. The two interviews undertaken with lawyers shed light on the Egyptian criminal law, its implementation and how various organs of the state (such as the police, department of forensic medicine and the judiciary) dealt with cases of sexual assault.

Finally, the research benefited from participant observation in 2011–2013. I took part in several protests in Tahrir Square and marches from different quarters of Cairo (such as Shubra), into the main squares, as part of a broader research project of understanding the

political trajectory of revolutionary movements in post-Mubarak Egypt. Such participant observation provided first-hand experience in some of the phenomenon captured here, such as the sudden electricity blackout that occurred in Tahrir Square when thousands of women demonstrated against the stripping of a woman by an army soldier in December 2011.

The synthesis of the data involved a number of processes. Initially, first-hand accounts collected through interviews or testimonies obtained from El Nadeem Centre were corroborated with other sources, both primary (doctors and human rights activists) and secondary (reports such as those by HRW and Federation of International Human Rights Defenders). Secondly, the analysis involved an iterative process of examining the primary evidence from different sources and sharing emerging analysis with key local experts such as Farah Shash, human rights activists and key informants. Another dimension of the data synthesis involved the corroboration of evidence from different sources, the verification of facts and the study of the incidents against the broader political context. Thirdly, in such a complex and volatile context such as that of Egypt in 2011–2013, it was extremely important to interpret the data against the backdrop of broader social and political forces influencing the emerging context. This was especially important in the light of the political moment that this research was being undertaken in December 2012/January 2013: a country in the throes of revolutionary activism where the reconfiguration of power was constantly changing. The historicization of the primary data was also important in that the occurrence of politically motivated sexual assault was not a sudden phenomenon that emerged in post-Mubarak Egypt, but was deployed by the former regime's security apparatus against political dissidents in police stations and prisons.

The study was limited by the highly charged political climate and political turbulence, which the country was experiencing. The social stigma, associated with the subject matter (sexual assault) as well as the trauma that many survivors experienced, meant that the sample was quite small.

Unpacking Sexual Violence, its Instrumentality and Context

Sexual violence is defined here in accordance with HRW description as 'an overarching term used to describe "any violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality"' (HRW, 2003: 2). Sexual violence includes:

> rape and attempted rape, and such acts as forcing a person to strip naked in public, forcing victims to perform sexual acts on one another or harm one another in a sexual manner, mutilating a person's genitals or a woman's breasts, and sexual slavery. (HRW, 2003: 2)

This article draws on elements of rape as a weapon of war and broader understandings of sexual assault as being on a continuum of forms of GBV. Both elements of rape as a weapon of war and the structural dimensions of GBV provide opportunities but also limitations to understanding the phenomenon of sexual assault in protest spaces in Egypt between 2011 and 2013.

The conceptual framing of sexual violence as a weapon of war in literature on sexual aggression in armed conflict offers some critical analytical inroads to understanding

sexual violence in protest spaces in Egypt, a non-war context. Such scholarship emphasizes that sexual violence needs to be explicitly recognized in its own right whilst recognizing that it varies in prevalence, form and targets (women and men), perpetrators (individuals or collectives), motives and duration (Wood, 2008). There has been a growing body of literature on sexual violence in the contexts of armed struggles, conflict and war (Butler et al., 2007; Christian et al., 2011; Enloe, 2000; Jacobs et al., 2000; Sjoberg and Via, 2010; Solangon and Patel, 2012; Wood, 2008; Zinnstag, 2006).

In 2008 the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820 was passed recognizing sexual violence as a tactic or weapon of war in modern armed conflict intended to humiliate, intimidate and terrorize wider populations conceived of as opponents and exclusively a by-product of instability and chaos. It is extremely difficult empirically to prove the systematic deployment or strategic commissioning of assaults, as it requires proving the intentions behind the acts (Crawford, 2013: 13). Moser (2001: 36) defines politically motivated violence as 'the *commission* of violent acts motivated by a desire, conscious or unconscious, to obtain or maintain political power'. Moser contends that political violence can manifest itself in sexual acts such as rape, sexual torture and sexual abuse as well as forced pregnancy and sterilization. Politically motivated sexual violence may be instigated by guerrilla conflict, paramilitary conflict or armed conflict between political parties.

For Moser (2001: 36), political violence is to be distinguished from economically motivated violence that involves the 'commission of violent acts motivated by a desire, conscious or unconscious for economic gain or to obtain or maintain economic power'; these would be apparent in abductions and rape during economic crimes. It is also to be distinguished from social violence – violent acts committed by a desire, conscious or unconscious, for social gain or to obtain or maintain social power. This would be manifest at the interpersonal level through spouse abuse or sexual harassment by gangs, thugs or various public actors.

Moser's demarcations of political, economic and social violence are not rigidly set, and often violence involves the intersection of political, economic and social determinants. However, this categorization is useful in encouraging an analysis of the motives behind the perpetration of violence in each category.

The other critical factor that distinguishes politically motivated sexual assault from other assaults is the targeting of persons on the basis of their perceived political orientation/association. Whilst socially motivated sexual assault can be pre-planned or spontaneous, women victims are not targeted because of their political ideology.

However, the theoretical construct of sexual violence as a weapon of war has its limitations in understanding the nature of sexual assault in the context of Egypt. Such limitations are twofold; the first is associated with the disjointed conception of sexual violence and the second relates to its applicability to non-war contexts. One of the critiques of the rape/sexual violence in war settings is that it isolates this violence from the wider context of GBV prior to and in post-conflict situations (Crawford, 2013: 505).

There are more commonalities between politically and socially motivated violence in terms of the survivor's, perpetrators' and broader community's notions of honour,

blame, shame and redress. However, the aggregation of politically and socially motivated sexual assault on account of their common patriarchal basis may be analytically unhelpful. Patriarchal, hyper masculine values do not necessarily bear a causal relationship with sexual violence. Wood (2013: 146) points to countries such as Sri Lanka that have rigid gender hierarchies subordinating women yet do not experience high prevalence of sexual assault in conflict. She concludes that 'while the devaluation of women is a necessary condition for the occurrence of sexual abuse of women, this general notion of patriarchy is too broad to account for the observed variation (it is not a *sufficient* condition)' (Wood, 2013:146).

One of the limitations of the use of sexual violence in war is its contextual specificity. Leatherman (2011: 80) identifies a number of factors that point to a gendered pattern of violence in conflict-ridden contexts. These include gender polarization, rise of hyper masculinities, loss of space for women in public and private, mounting pressures on women to be providers in a context of diminishing economic opportunities and loss of safe havens such as places of worship and clinics. The war setting is ultimately a different one than that of a country in transition, even if there are commonalities of unrest and unpredictability.

An unintended, unfortunate consequence of a focus on the particularities of sexual violence in war settings has been a kind of exceptionalism whereby politically motivated sexual assault is not sufficiently explored in non-conflict contexts.

Acts of sexual aggression can be deployed strategically for the achievement of political ends, whilst also being embedded in a continuum of broader social, political and economic determinants of GBV. To single out these acts would be to fail to understand the underlying power relations that influence them. Conversely, to interpret them as yet another manifestation of pre-existing GBV is to obscure the particular temporal and spatial patterns that render them their political nature.

Politically Motivated Sexual Violence from Mubarak's to Morsi's Reign

The Egyptian regime has a long history of deploying sexual assault against women and men to repress, curb and punish political dissidents. A number of intertwining contextual factors sustained a culture of silence and impunity in relation to sexual assault, irrespective of their motivation including (i) the deeply entrenched social more associated with honour being embodied in the sexual purity of women, (ii) the legal framework and (iii) the political will and practices of the ruling regimes.

The use of the word 'ard' has a particular meaning in the Arabic language; it is a conception of honour that can only be used with reference to sexuality, making it deeply embodied and gendered. In Egypt, as in many conservative patriarchal societies, men's honour being tied to women's chastity. When women are sexually violated, this brings dishonour not only to the woman but to the husband, family and to the clan. These deeply entrenched notions of honour discourage women from seeking justice when exposed to sexual assault. Zuhur notes that women's bodily and sexual rights are 'denied through commodification, which is linked to their vulnerability under the honour system' (Zuhur, 2008: 38). This is especially relevant for the discussion of sexual assault, which will be

discussed below, when members of the Egyptian army were accused of enforcing virginity tests on a group of protesting women in Tahrir Square, their 'morals' were questioned with the intention of suggesting that they are a 'cheap' commodity, unlike the other virtuous women who do not go out to protest (see Zaltsman below).

Moreover, the legal framework governing crimes involving sexual violence in Egypt as in many Arab countries has served to legitimize the highly patriarchal status quo and the embodied conceptions of honour. Zuhur notes 'criminal codes in the Middle East and the Muslim world consistently remind us that the primary social identification of women is as reproductive and sexual beings who are constrained by men, the family and the state' (Zuhur, 2008: 17).[5] Criminal law in Egypt has been largely modelled along Napoleonic French law, dating back to 1882. Prior to the adoption of Napoleonic principles, the country was governed by uncodified Shariah (Islamic law) and by a number of laws that were administered through the courts. The penal code in effect was promulgated in 1937 and has been subject to a number of amendments since then (Reza, 2011). The modern penal code in Egypt and the rest of the Middle East is highly patriarchal in nature, informed by the regulation of women's sexuality, which in turn is esteemed to be a measure of both men's and family's honour (Zuhur, 2008: 24). The shift from the application of Shariah Law to civil law did not erase the objectification of women as the sexual possessions of men. For example, an article in the current Egyptian code sustained to this day emanates from the French penal code of 1812 that allows for a reduced sentence for a man who kills a female relative on account of suspecting her morals (Abu Odeh in Zuhur, 2008: 24). Feminists, human rights organizations and lawyers have for decades critiqued the articles dealing with sexual assault that were in effect up to 2013 (Articles 267, 268 and 269 of the penal code[6] enacted at the time)[7] and have mobilized for their revision (EIPR 2010; Tadros 2014b). They have critiqued the language of 'violation of honour' (Article 268) and its failure to explicitly articulate the different forms of sexual assault and the failure of the law to recognize non-vaginal and non-pennile forms of forced penetration as rape suffered by both men and women (FIDH et al., 2014; Shash, 2013; Tadros, 2013b).

The third factor contributing to a culture of silence and shame around sexual assault is the regime's own ideology and political practices. The fact that the country was run by military men for 60 years led to the militarization of social relations in pervasive ways, generating hyper masculine identities. Under Mubarak's authoritarian regime, soft and hard forms of power were exercised to co-opt, contain and terrorize oppositional figures and movements that included the use of both media vilification campaigns as well as incarceration and torture (Amar, 2011). Most acts of sexual violence (including threats to use sexual violence against the person or female acquaintances) occurred in detention such as in police stations, secret political police's premises and in prisons. In 2005, a female reporter was publically stripped of her clothes by men who were believed to be hired thugs of the regime and incidents of sexually harassing women in protests became more widely documented by human rights organizations in the last years of Mubarak's rule (Amar, 2013).

Sexual violence was also deployed by thugs believed to be hired by the security forces' in a bid to quell the people's uprisings in January 2011 (Amar, 2011). However, in spite of tactics of intimidation, women continued to flock to Tahrir Square and other

key squares. The abdication of Mubarak saw the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) assume power and was subsequently opposed by youth revolutionary forces for its monopolization of power and excessive use of force to repress political opposition (Ali, 2013: 161).

It is difficult to determine when the first incident of sexual assault against protestors in Tahrir Square occurred. However, the first widely publicized incident of sexual assault against women protestors occurred 1 month after Mubarak stepped down. On 9 March 2011, a group of women were protesting in Tahrir Square demanding the recognition of women's rights in Egypt. Men attacked some of the female demonstrators, molesting them and putting their hands inside their underclothing. Also on the same day, the military police arrested and detained at least 18 of the women demonstrators and some were exposed to sexual and physical violence including being stripped of their clothes, forced to undergo virginity tests and threatened with prostitution charges (Amnesty International, 2012). The military admitted to the actions, and one military spokesman argued, 'We didn't want them to say we had sexually assaulted or raped them, so we wanted to prove that they weren't virgins in the first place' (Zaltsman, 2012).

The SCAF's engagement with political opposition may bear strong resonance with literature on militarism and its production of normative values regarding manhood and violent masculinity (Enloe, 2000; Sjoberg and Via, 2010). Militarized masculinity projects ideas of manhood as being associated with dominance and control over women who are perceived as weaker beings. However, militarized masculinity has limited explanatory power in shedding light on why SCAF resorted to sexual violence in some incidents and refrained in others. The army went to the streets on 28 January 2011. It stationed several military vehicles in Tahrir Square on that day and for the period that followed. For the next 15 days until Mubarak was ousted, the army was not implicated in any incidents of sexual violence against women or men. In the months during which SCAF governed the country, various Islamist political forces staged several protests in Tahrir Square to demand the implementation of the Shariah (Islamic governance) in Egypt, yet there were no reported incidents of assault of their members. The incidents of sexual assault against women and men perpetrated by the army were consistently enacted against protestors challenging SCAF with no reported incidents of sexual assault against Islamists then. From the above, one possible explanation is that this was not a case of soldiers behaving badly as a consequence of a militarized masculine culture. Rather, it is the outcome of a military strategy selectively targeting particular groups within the population, with a view to intimidate and terrorize them not to challenge the status quo.

There is a marked difference in the use of sexual violence by the army and other actors. In the case of the army, their uniform betrays their identity (such as in the incident of what became commonly known as 'the blue bra woman' in December 2011, see FIDH, 2014). In July 2012, SCAF handed over power to the newly elected president of Egypt, Mohamed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate. There was no official condemnation from the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis of incidents involving SCAF's sexual violence against women. Rather in some incidents they publicly blamed women for participating in protests (FIDH, 2014; Tadros, 2013b).

The identity of the perpetrators in other incidents of sexual assault was less obvious. In some incidents, as that of December 2012, evidence suggests that the Muslim Brotherhood

and the Salafis were responsible for sexually assaulting women and men, yet in other incidents the identity of the perpetrators continues to be unknown. Some members of the vigilante groups interviewed suggested that these attacks were instigated by security men affiliated to the Ministry of Interior on account of their long history of deploying sexual assault to intimidate women dissidents during Mubarak's reign. Incidents of sexual assault were occurring in a political context of extreme polarization between two camps, that is, those who supported the Muslim Brotherhood's ascension to political power and those who believed that their reign would reproduce a theocratic authoritarian regime. Such a struggle became even more divisive after the Muslim Brotherhood assumed power in July 2012 when their nominee, Mohamed Morsi won the presidential elections. During the protests initiated by the non-Islamist camp, a number of incidents of sexual assault were reported in protest spaces. On 8 March 2012, International Women's Day, some of the women who had marched for women's rights were subjected to sexual assault. On 2, 6 and 8 June 2012, there were several cases of women protestors and a number of female journalists endured sexual assaults in Tahrir Square (El Deeb, 2012). In November 2012, there was an increase in incidents (some involving rape) in Tahrir Square (Whitehead, 2012). In December 2012, members of opposition political parties, revolutionaries and citizens gathered at el Etehadeya Palace to protest the presidential decree that centralized the executive, judiciary and legislative powers in the President's hands (Hendawi, 2012). On 25 January 2013, on the second anniversary of the revolution that ousted Mubarak, at least 19 incidents of sexual assault occurred, 6 of which required medical intervention (FIDH et al., 2014: 15)

In the period between 28 June to 3 July 2013, women joined the protests to demand early presidential elections. According to human rights and feminist initiatives who were monitoring the situation on the ground, there were an estimated 101 incidents of sexual assault, some so brutal that they required immediate medical operations to save the women's lives (FIDH et al., 2014: 16; Nazra for Feminist Studies, 2013).[8]

Patterns of Political Violence

Incidents of sexual assault, in particular from July 2012 up until January 2013, show a striking pattern in the manner of their enactment, suggesting they may have been orchestrated. In analysing several incidents in Tahrir Square, Shash (2013) argued that they have common characteristics:

1. they take place in squares and public spaces associated with protests;
2. they happen during times when protests and demonstrations are held;
3. the assaulted are disproportionately activists, whether women or men (even though there have been assaults on citizens who have no history of political activism);
4. sexual violence is used in conjunction with other forms of violence;
5. sexual violence is not enacted on a one-to-one basis but through a group of men, collectively and simultaneously assaulting the victim; and
6. sexual assault does not occur in a passing moment, but is sustained over a period of time.

An examination of each of the six factors identified above independently within the broader Egyptian context, and against the continuum of violence that Egyptian women have experienced during and in the aftermath of Mubarak's reign beyond protest spaces, suggests that they manifest many displays of incidents of non-political, socially motivated sexual assault. Being in heavily crowded spaces whether squares or not, increases women's vulnerability to sexual assault. For example, incidents of sexual violence have occurred in the vicinity of cinemas on religious feast days in downtown Cairo, stadiums and public concerts. Women also report experiencing sexual assault in their day-to-day lives – walking on the street, commuting via public transport, at work and on educational premises in physical and verbal forms (groping, removal of clothing and sometimes rape) (El Dabh, 2013; Kortam, 2013).

As for other factors highlighted in the pattern of sexual assault above, such as the enactment of sexual aggression by a group of men collectively or 'multiple perpetrator rape' (MPR), using excessive physical violence and over a sustained period of time, there have also been reports of their occurrence in non-protest spaces in Egypt. MPR is 'rape carried out by more than one perpetrator, where perpetrators include those who aid, abet, or conspire, as well as those immediately responsible' (Wood, 2013: 134). According to empirical studies worldwide, MPR incidents tend to generally involve higher prevalence of violence inflicted on survivors than lone rapes (Leader, Mullen and Abraams 2007 in Lambine, 2013: 70, Horvath and Woodhams, 2013), and tend to involve weapons and physical assault more often than lone rapes. In view of the proliferation of weapons and small arms in the post 2011 Egyptian context suffering from security laxity, many of the criminal acts witnessed in Egypt, whether sexual or otherwise, were occurring under duress of weapons.

What the above reveals is that the facets of sexual violence experienced against women in protest spaces are not exceptional in their occurrence in non-protest spaces against women in very varied contexts across the country. Accordingly, on face value, it is possible to conclude that the incidents occurring in protest spaces are not politically motivated, but rather are reflective of a broader phenomenon, GBV, which women have historically experienced and which the state of lawlessness and chaos associated with a country in transition accentuated after the 2011 Revolution. The weakness with such an argument is that it ignores the *constellation of factors that amount to a pattern unlike any other form of socially motivated sexual assault experienced elsewhere in the country*. In other words, it is the way in which these factors occur repeatedly together that suggests a particular targeting. The occurrence of these incidents in the same place, against mostly the same actors (people with protest history), consistently involving MPR using weapons and violence, whilst protests were being held (irrespective of whether there are crowds or not) shows a pattern that is not discernible in socially motivated acts of sexual violence accounted for elsewhere. In incidents of MPR, there is no such pattern visible, since incidents have occurred in public and private spaces and there is no profiling of the victim (on their political orientation). Similarly, incidents of sexual assault in crowded spaces in moulids (celebration of the birth of the Prophet Mohamed), feasts and other occasions of public gatherings, may be lone or MPR, it may or may not involve violence. It is this constellation of recurring factors inherent in many of these cases of assault in protest spaces that

suggests an element of orchestration associated with the nature of this space, namely, one of political dissidence.

The specific political *motivation* behind these incidents becomes manifest in (i) evidence of actors' commissioning these acts, (ii) some of the accounts of survivors, which report being treated as political opponents and (iii) the constellation of factors inherent in these acts seen in protest spaces are congruent with patterns of politically motivated sexual assaults deployed in armed conflict/war contexts.

One of the rare pieces of evidence of the commissioning of these acts of violence on political grounds is the account given by planned nature is the fact that as shown on UK's Channel 4 episode titled '*Sex, Mobs and Revolution*', some of these men admitted to being hired to assault women.[9] The two interviewees who spoke anonymously in the programme admitted that since the days of Mubarak, they were paid to go and sexually assault women who dared to publicly speak out against the regime. They said they do not know the identity of their paymasters though they continue to be paid to go out and molest women in the post-Mubarak era. The presenter, however, said the two paid thugs were unaware of who their *new* paymasters were, suggesting that those commissioning sexual assault may possibly be other political stakeholders than those during Mubarak's era.

However, this was corroborated by primary evidence I collected. Fathi Farid, one of the interviewees who founded Shoft Taharosh (harassment seen), a youth-led initiative to combat sexual assault in public space and who took part in the 'rescue operations' in protest spaces had also caught a sexual assailant who later confessed to being paid to go to Tahrir Square to assault women. Farid and other members of his team caught one of the men who had groped a female protestor in one of the protests taking place in Tahrir Square against the ruling powers in 2012. Farid mentioned that the man was wearing a T-shirt with Al Destour party logo on it (Al Destour is a non-Islamist, left-oriented political party). The assailant confessed to Farid that when Al Destour party had announced that they needed volunteers to keep Tahrir Square safe from assault, he was paid to volunteer himself and given instructions to go and assault women. He would not confess to the identity of the patron nor the frequency with which he was paid to do so nor how the actor who paid him communicated with him.

In socially and economically motivated sexual violence, it is possible to have acts of commission (e.g. in cases of revenge or to blackmail/extort money). Hence, it is not the commissioning that makes these acts of sexual assault political but the commissioning to target particular spaces/actors of a political character.

The pattern of sexual violence enacted in protest spaces is congruent with the instrumentalization of sexual aggression for political purposes in the use of rape as a weapon of war literature (see e.g. Leatherman, 2011, Wood, 2013). Enloe notes that in armed conflict, 'where armed groups understand sexual violence as a violation of the enemy family and community's honour, they are likely to engage in sexual violence as a strategy' (Enloe, 2000; Wood, 2013: 145). Sexual violence, in the Egyptian context, argues Farah (interview December 2012) represents the highest form of violence that people can be subjugated to, precisely because of the social stigma associated with sexuality.

Zarkov (2001) contends that in contexts where there are rigid controls over sexuality, the use of sexual violence plays precisely on notions of purity, masculinity, femininity

and sexual norms. Sexual violence is intended to intimidate because, 'It demonstrates the strength of the attacker against the weakness of the opponent who was not able to defend the victim', and establishes the 'superior masculinity of the assailant' (Zarkov, 2001: 77–81). Although Egypt (at the time of writing) was not in a state of civil war, one captured woman was described by her Salafi captor in December 2012 as 'his ghanee-mah', his (war) booty (author's interview with one of the captured women) (Tadros, 2013a). Reference to the captured woman as booty alludes to notions of conquest over the enemy and attaining a woman whose body becomes the site for acting out superior masculinity. It is a term that has often been used in contexts of sexual violence in war, where capturing women is also deemed as one of the 'spoils of war' (Naimark 1995: 71 in Zinsstag, 2006: 139).

In the interviews, I conducted with two of the women and one of the men who were sexually assaulted in December 2012 in front of El Etehadeya presidential palace, they each recounted individually how their captors accused them of being Mubarak loyalists and paid thugs determined to bring down a democratically elected president. They each said in separately held interviews that they were accused of hating Islam and hating Islamist rule (Tadros, 2013a). This is indicative of how they were perceived as political enemies by their captors.

In the weapons of war literature, sexual violence is intended not only to shame the individual but the community at large. Public shaming has a collective impact because it destroys not only the victim but also the rest of the community who are often forced to watch (Zarkov, 2001: 73; Zinsstag, 2006: 139). From the primary data collected on sexual violence in protest spaces, it appears that these incidents were intended to be public spectacles where citizens could see for themselves what happens to men or women who dare to be politically active and engage in oppositional politics, or who even happen to be in the same space associated with political manoeuvrings.

Finally, one of the recurring themes in rape as a weapon of war literature discussion of politically motivated sexual assault is that the intention of sexual violence is not only to cause psychological trauma but extreme physical pain as well (Solangon and Patel, 2012: 429; Zinsstag, 2006: 139). Secondary data available as well as first-hand accounts collected of victims of sexual assault in protest spaces in Egypt show that sexual assault has been accompanied by extreme forms (physical violence and in some incidents sexual torture such as use of sharp objects in the genitalia) (see Shash, 2013 for individual accounts of survivors). Whilst extreme violence has been observed in cases of non-political sexual assault, it is the constellation of factors above that point to the political motivation of such attacks.

Conclusions

This article examined the occurrence of sexual violence in protest spaces in Egypt at a critical juncture of heightened citizen activism and political polarization. Evidence of sexual violence in protest spaces challenge narratives that celebrate women's political participation but fail to recognize their exposure to severe forms of sexual aggression. In view of the wide prevalence of citizen engagement in protest spaces in other politically polarized contexts (such as Turkey, Tunisia and Yemen at the time of writing), one

area of further study would be to compare and contrast what accounts for the prevalence/ absence of sexual assault in protest spaces and their drivers across country contexts also experiencing dramatic ruptures in political regimes.

The empirical study sought to contribute to broader questions of ways of understanding politically motivated sexual violence in non-war settings by examining the intersection of the scholarship on rape as a weapon of war and the scholarship on use of extreme forms of sexual violence more broadly. Scholarship on the deployment of sexual violence as a weapon of war has provided conceptual and methodological insights into its political nature in terms of its pre-orchestration, targeting of subjects on the basis of their political identity and the intended communal impact of intimidation, humiliation, shame and even as a genocidal strategy (Leatherman, 2011; Naimark, 1995; Wood 2013; Zarkov 2001; Zinsstag, 2006).

However, the usefulness of deploying the framework of rape as a weapon of war to non-war contexts where politically motivated assault occurs is limited on two accounts. First, war contexts are different from non-war contexts in that the former is characterized by a complete breakdown of society and governance (Leatherman, 2011), which does not necessarily apply to non-war contexts. Second, the focus on the deployment of sexual abuse in war often highlights the exceptional nature of the forms of violence that arise out of these conflict situations (Leatherman, 2011). This has sometimes led to missed opportunities for examining these forms of violence as existing along a continuum of forms of GBV that exists in the contexts under study (Crawford, 2013; Henry, 2014).

The literature on multiple perpetrator violence is helpful in bringing to the fore the prevalence of extreme forms of sexual violence in 'peace' contexts. It shows that sexual violence involving high levels of physical violence, more acute forms of sexual assault and weapon use, not only occur in contexts of war but also characterize incidence of MPR in peace contexts as well (Hauffe and Porter, 2009; Ulman, 2007; Woodhams, 2004; Wright and West, 1981) in Woodhams and Horvath (2013). This was critically important for the study of sexual assault in Egypt in exploring whether MPR occurs in non-protest spaces or not, and if it does, then what is it about its occurrence in Tahrir Square and other protest spaces that give it its distinct political nature.

Studies of MPR (Horvath and Woodhams) show a variation in political contexts in which MPR occurs, that is, in stable democracies such as the Netherlands (Hendriks, Wijkman and Bijleveld (2013) and the United Kingdom (Firmin 2013), in post-conflict societies such as South Africa (Jewkes and Sikweyiya, 2013) as well as in war settings (Wood, 2013). However, there is still a gap in international studies of MPR in politically tumultuous, non-war settings. For example, the Harkins and Dixon's 2010 classification of different contexts of multiple perpetrator sexual offending include (among a long list) rape in war, prison rapes and rape in countries under corrupt governments. Technically, none of these quite describe the Egypt context in which politically motivated sexual assault occurred in 2011–2013 under two different non-war governments (military and Islamist), which are best described as 'politically unstable' rather than corrupt per se and sexual assault was not only occurring in prisons but in open public squares as well.

Whilst it is difficult to establish empirically and categorically the motivations for sexual assault in Egypt, this should not deter scholars' and researchers' efforts from seeking to disentangle the various drivers of sexual violence at different junctures and spaces,

whilst recognizing that they often overlap. Understanding sexual aggression as one dimension on a continuum of GBV practices (without conceiving of it as a natural linear progression in levels of sexual assault) is central to avoiding a decontextualized, a historical understanding of the phenomenon that regards it as necessarily always exceptional in its occurrence. An examination of the occurrence of sexual violence in Egyptian public space would point to the occurrence of multiple perpetrator assault and sometimes rape, increased women's vulnerability to sexual assault in crowded spaces, the use of extreme violence accompanying sexual attacks and cases of extended duration of assault. However, what is distinct about many of the attacks that were witnessed in protest spaces in Egypt is the way in which these factors combined to produce a pattern of assaults that suggests a targeting of a particular space associated with challenging the status quo. The politically motivated nature of these assaults is congruent with many of the dynamics of political deployment of sexual assault in war/conflict settings. The idea of politically commissioned acts of sexual assault in the study of sexual assault in armed conflict/war settings is consonant with the confessions obtained by the Channel 4 programme of thugs who confessed to being hired to assault women in Tahrir Square (as opposed to other public spaces) and from the confession of the sexual assailant captured by Fathi Farid and his team. Some of the first accounts analysed also display elements of political deployment of sexual assaults in war settings, such as naming the victim as a political enemy or booty. Moreover, it appears that the intention behind the public assault on these women in those spaces was intended to send a broader message to the citizens, as opposed to an exclusive targeting of the victim.

By examining the culture, politics and legal framework governing GBV in Egypt during this time, it is possible to argue that the general environment is one that encourages impunity for sexual assaults, be they politically motivated or otherwise. A culture of silence, shame and guilt serves to discourage women from reporting incidents of sexual violence, irrespective of where they occurred, by whom and how. There are several legal loopholes in the penal code that allow perpetrators to evade accountability. Seeking redress for politically motivated sexual assault in protest spaces is exceptionally difficult on a number of accounts. First, most (if not all) such cases involved multiple perpetrators, in numbers that sometimes make it difficult for survivors to even count them (i.e. 50), in a context of extreme crowdedness and exposure to extreme violence (this may apply to non-protest spaces as well where victims have endured MPR). Second, in many cases, it is unclear who the perpetrators were, and if they were hired, who hired them. Third, in incidents where some of the identified members (such as those belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood) belonged to the political order in power, questions of the independency of the judiciary from the executive branch of the government arise.

The naming of the perpetrators of politically motivated sexual assault and attribution of responsibility are important because one of the tactics of evasion is to simply blame it on 'society', thereby making it difficult to hold accountable particular social and political actors. The evidence corroborated suggests some of the incidents of politically motivated sexual assault were perpetrated by the army in the period when SCAF ruled the country from March 2011 to June 2012. The evidence also points to the Muslim Brotherhood's and the Salafis' responsibility for the acts of sexual assault documented in this article for November 2011 and December 2012. There is insufficient evidence to confirm

the identity of the organized groups who assaulted women, (and men), in many of the other occasions, in particular, those witnessed in Tahrir Square. In addition, responsibility for directly committing acts of sexual assault, SCAF up to June 2012, and the Muslim Brotherhood-led government between July 2012 and June 2013 also bear responsibility for complicity for the acts of sexual assault that occurred in Tahrir Square during the periods in which they governed the country.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. http://nawaat.org/portail/2013/07/26/agression-sexuelle-dune-activiste-dans-un-poste-de-police/.
2. Ninety-one cases between 28 June and 2 July 2012, 19 cases in 25 January, 2012, 10 cases in November 2012 and 7 cases in June 2012.
3. The author captured these interviews on video through the assistance of a professional company. Excerpts of these interviews are available on the Pathways of Women's Empowerment website (Tadros, 2013a).
4. For a profile of these initiatives and their mode of operation and effectiveness see Tadros, 2014a.
5. This of course is not specific to the Arab region and has been noted by scholars for criminal codes at both domestic and international levels (Henry, 2014).
6. See Reza 2011 for a translation and explanation of these articles and a broader description of the Egyptian penal code.
7. There is one article that may apply to verbal assault, that is, Article 306 punishes incidents of verbal insults, for example, cat calling in the street. The sentence can range from a fine of LE100 (equivalent to £9.50 GBP) or 1 month in prison.
8. It is important to note that there has been a great deal of mobilized activism around GBV in public space in Egypt since 2011, however, due to space constraints, it is addressed elsewhere, see for example Tadros, 2014a.
9. http://www.channel4.com/programmes/unreported-world/episode-guide/series-2012/episode-14.

References

Ali R (2013) Producing men, commodities and the nation. In: Stavrianakis A and Selby J (eds) *Militarism and International Relations*. New York: Routledge, pp. 147–163.

Amar P (2011) Turning the gender politics of the security state inside out? *International Journal of Feminist Politics* 13(3): 299–328.

Amar P (2013) *The Security Archipelago Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics and the End of Neoliberalism*. Durham: Duke University of Press.

Amnesty International (2012) Egypt: Acquittal of Egyptian military doctor fails women victims of 'virginity tests'. Available at: http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=19992 (accessed 21 January 2013).

Butler C, Gluch T and Mitchell N (2007) Security forces and sexual violence: A cross-national analysis of a principal-agent argument. *Journal of Peace Research* 44: 669.

Channel 4 (2012) Sex, mobs and the revolution: Episode 14. Available at: http://www.channel4.com/programmes/unreported-world/episode-guide/series-2012/episode-14 (accessed 17 November 2012).

Christian M, Safari O, Ramazani P, et al. (2011) Sexual and gender based violence against men in the democratic republic of Congo: Effects on survivors, their families and the community. *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 4: 227.

Crawford K (2013) From spoils to weapons: Framing wartime sexual violence. *Gender and Development* 21(3): 505–517.

EIPR (2010) Task force combating sexual violence launches draft amendment to the penal code with regard to crimes of sexual violence. Egyptian initiative for personal rights. Available at: http://eipr.org/pressrelease/2010/12/19/1060 (accessed 15 February 2012).

El Dabh B (2013) 99.3% of Egyptian women experienced sexual harassment daily news Egypt. Available at: http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/04/28/99-3-of-egyptian-women-experienced-sexual-harassment-report/#sthash.nzSWzRom.dpuf.

El Deeb S (2012) Alarming assaults on women in Tahrir *Associated Press*. Available at: http://news.yahoo.com/alarming-assaults-women-egypts-tahrir-002456490.html (accessed 15 November 2012).

Enloe C (2000) *Manoeuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Firmin C (2013) Busting the gang rape myth: Girls' victimisation and agency in gang-associated sexual violence. In: Horvath M and Woodhams J (eds) *Handbook on the study of multiple perpetrator rape: A Multidisciplinary response to an international problem* New York: Routledge, pp. 97–115.

Harkins L and Dixon L (2010) Sexual offending in groups: An evaluation. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour* 15: 87–99.

Hendawi A (2012) Morsi's constitutional declaration grants Egypt's president far reaching power. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/22/morsi-constitutional-declaration_n_2175651.html (accessed 8 August 2013).

Hendriks S, Wijkman M and Bijleveld C (2013) Group sexual offending: Comparing adolescent male offenders. In: Horvath M and Woodhams J (eds) *Handbook on the study of multiple perpetrator rape: A Multidisciplinary response to an international problem*. New York: Routledge, pp. 82–96.

Henry N (2014) The fixation on wartime rape: Feminist critique and international criminal law. *Social and Legal Studies* 23(1): 93–111.

Horvath M and Woodhams J (eds) (2013) *Handbook on the Study of Multiple Perpetrator Rape A Multidisciplinary Response to an International Problem*. New York: Routledge.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2003) *We Will Kill You If You Cry: Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict*. New York: Human Rights Watch.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2013) Epidemic of sexual violence, July 3rd, 2013. Available at: http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/07/03/egypt-epidemic-sexual-violence (accessed 5 February 2014).

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Nazra for Feminist Studies, New Women Foundation and The Uprising of Women in the Arab World (2014) Egypt: Keeping women out: sexual violence against women in the public sphere, FIDH. Available at: http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/egypt_women_final_english.pdf (accessed 11 September 2014).

Jacobs S, Jacobson R and Marchbank J (2000) *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence and Resistance*. New York: Zed Books.

Jewkes R and Sikweyiya Y (2013) Streamlining: Understanding gang rape in South Africa. In: *Handbook on the Study of Multiple Perpetrator Rape – A Multidisciplinary Response to an International Problem*. London/New York: Routledge, pp. 116–131.

Kortam H (2013) Harrassmap: More than half of sexual harassment takes the form of groping, daily news. Available at: http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/04/01/harassmap-more-than-half-of-sexual-harassment-takes-the-form-of-groping/ (accessed 19 March 2014).

Lambine M (2013) Numbers matter: Characteristic difference between lone, duo and 3+ group rapes. In: Horvath M and Woodhams J (eds) *Handbook on the Study of Multiple Perpetrator Rape A Multidisciplinary Response to An International Problem*. New York: Routledge, pp. 67–81.

Leatherman JL (2011) *Sexual Violence and Armed Conflict*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Moser C (2001) The gendered continuum of violence and conflict: An operational framework. In: Moser C and Clark F (eds) *Victims, Perpetrators Or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*. New York: Zed Books, pp. 30–52.

Nazra for Feminist Studies (2013) Brutal sexual assaults in the vicinity of Tahrir Square and an unprecedentedly shameful reaction from the Egyptian authorities: 101 incidents of sexual assaults during the events of June 30th 2013. Available at: http://nazra.org/en/2013/07/brutal-sexual-assaults-vicinity-tahrir-square (accessed 8 August 2013).

Reza S (2011) Handbook of comparative criminal law. Stanford University Press. Available at: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1854895 (accessed 1 March 2013).

Shash F (2013) Uncovering stories of sexual assault in the shadow of the Brothers. Pathways of Women's Empowerment. Available at: http://www.pathways-of-empowerment.org/Uncovering_Stories_of_Sexual_Assault.pdf (accessed 11th July 2013).

Sjoberg L and Via S (eds) (2010) *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives*. California: Praeger.

Solangon S and Patel P (2012) Sexual violence against men in countries affected by armed conflict. *Journal of Conflict, Security and Development* 12(4): 417–442.

Tadros M (2013a) Shaming the shameless. Available at: http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/news_items/shaming-the-shameless-the-politics-of-sexual-assault-in-post-mubarak-s-egypt-exposed.

Tadros M (2013b) Politically motivated sexual assault: The Egypt story no one wants to hear. The Guardian. Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2013/mar/11/politically-motivated-sexual-assault-egypt (accessed 11 March 2013).

Tadros M (2014a) Reclaiming the streets for women's dignity: Effective initiatives in the struggle against gender based violence in between Egypt's two revolutions, IDS Evidence Report no 48. Available at: http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/3384/ER48.pdf;jsessionid=D5C205529B69DD08BC7046485FCD5206?sequence=1 (accessed 1 September 2014).

Tadros M (2014b) Politically motivated sexual assault in violent transitions, IDS Evidence Report no 8. Available at: http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/2950/ER8%20final%20online.pdf?sequence=1&utm_source=idswebsite&utm_medium=download&utm_campaign=opendocs (accessed 10 December 2014).

Taha R (2013) Shura council members blame women for harassment. Daily News. Available at: http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/02/11/shura-council-members-blame-women-for-harassment (accessed 11 February 2013).

Whitehead R (2012) Muslim brotherhood 'paying gangs to go out and rape women and beat men protesting in Egypt' as thousands of demonstrators pour on to the streets. Available at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article2241374/muslim-brotherhood-paying-gangs-rape-women-beat-menprotesting-egypt-thousands-demonstrators-pour-streets.html (accessed 2 January 2013).

Wood E (2008) *Order, Conflict and Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wood E (2013) MPR during war. In: Horvath M and Woodhams J (eds) *Handbook on the Study of Multiple Perpetrator Rape A Multidisciplinary Response to an International Problem*. New York: Routledge, pp. 132–159.

Zaltsman J (2012) Women under siege. *Women Media Center*. Available at: http://www.women-nundersiegeproject.org/conflicts/profile/egypt (accessed 8 February 2012).

Zarkov D (2001) The body of the other man: Sexual violence and the construction of masculinity, sexuality and ethnicity in Croatian media. In: Moser C and Clark F (eds) *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict, and Political Violence*, London: Zed Books, pp. 69–82.

Zinsstag E (2006) Sexual violence against women in armed conflicts: Standard responses and new ideas. *Social Policy and Society* 5: 137–148.

Zuhur S (2008) Criminal law, women and sexuality in the Middle East. In: Ikkaracan P (ed) *Deconstructing Sexuality in the Middle East: Challenges and Discourses*. England: Ashgate, pp. 17–41.