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Reclaiming the Streets for Women's Dignity: Effective Initiatives in the Struggle against Gender-Based Violence in between Egypt's Two Revolutions

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RECLAIMING THE STREETS FOR WOMEN'S DIGNITY:
EFFECTIVE INITIATIVES IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST GENDER-BASED
VIOLENCE IN BETWEEN EGYPT'S TWO REVOLUTIONS

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Executive summary

This paper is about the struggle to combat gender-based violence in public space in Egypt through the sustained collective action of vigilante groups who organically formed to respond to the increasing encroachment on women in public space from 2011 onwards. The study examines the emergence of a distinct form of collective action (informal youth-led activism aimed at addressing sexual violence in public space) at a very distinct historical juncture in the country's history: the phase after the ousting of President Mubarak in February 2011 through what became known as the 25th of January Revolution and up to the ousting of President Morsi in what became controversially known as the 30th of June Revolution of 2013.

In a context of lax security and the collapse of law and order (which already had inherent weaknesses during Mubarak's era), the sudden wide circulation of weapons, women reported a dramatic increase in their vulnerability and exposure to sexual violence in public space. One study released in 2013 showed that over 99 per cent of Egyptian women have experienced sexual harassment, a third of whom stated they were raped, gender-based violence in public spaces. Between 2012 and 2013 sexual violence in public space emerged as one of the two main gender issues that drove social activism in Egypt (the other being the drafting of the constitution).

This study distinguishes between politically and socially motivated sexual violence against women in public space. While it acknowledges that both are driven by common structural causes (hegemonic masculinity, lax security, etc.), it nevertheless argues that the policy implications for holding accountable the perpetrators and for awareness-raising are different. The forms of collective action that emerged to counter the rise in sexual violence in public space recognised the need to counter both kinds of sexual violence. Their emergence must be understood against the backdrop of Egypt experiencing one of the highest levels of citizen engagement in street activism experienced in a century. Their survival and sustainability is dependent on a number of structural and agential factors, which are discussed at length in the report.

Through a process of broad-based consultation on what constitutes effective interventions and which initiatives meet this criteria, three cases representing different models of effective interventions were selected: Shoft Taharosh, Bassma and Opantish. An appreciative inquiry approach was adapted to understand what enabled and constrained their efforts to elicit positive social change in norms and practices associated with gender-based violence. Bassma has distinguished itself by its highly regimented taskforce that works on two levels: rescue operations and awareness-raising campaigns. Its work with the security forces has also a marker of its credible reputation. Shoft Taharosh is a successful model of collective action across different initiatives, and which have capitalised on the diversity of skills and resources available within the different groups that it brings together in order to initiate awareness-raising campaigns, rescue operations and engage in policy influence. Opantish is a distinct example of an initiative that emerged to respond to a very specific phenomenon witnessed in protest spaces: women who become the targets of collective/gang forms of sexual violence. Bringing together virtually all the active informal youth-led actors involved in combating sexual assault, it has orchestrated rescue operations on a large scale.

Despite differences in political orientation, strategies of engagement and relationship with the government, what binds initiatives such as Bassma, Shoft Taharosh and Opantish and the many other iniatives that have engaged in street politics (at least at the level of the founders and organisers) is their belief in the *unconditional* right of women to bodily integrity irrespective of where they are, who they are with and how they are dressed.

Some of the indicators of their success include: high levels of volunteer recruitment, broad-based community endorsement, recognition by the local and international media of these actors as authoritative sources of knowledge on the incidents of gender-based violence in public space, and the rescue of women who are targets of assault.

The report shows in detail how men's involvement in gender-based violence work, completely unconventional in the case of Egypt, de-ghettoised women's issues and helped build a constituency for gender justice. The report also highlights the role of collective action, as opposed to simply a critical mass of men, in enabling effective interventions on the part of these three initiatives. Finally, the report argues that these initiatives in conjunction with others may develop into a new movement of major influence and political weight, provided a number of agential and structural factors allow this.

Policy recommendations

The report highlights a number of policy recommendations geared for different actors: (1) western policymakers and donors who have expressed a commitment to addressing gender-based violence and/or support processes of positive social change involving civil society in the Arab world; (2) the Egyptian government whose policies and practices play a critical role in both mitigating gender-based violence as well as creating an enabling environment for youth-based initiatives to thrive; and (3) the collective actors working on gender-based violence in the hope that the documentation, deliberation and analysis presented above will provide useful points for discussion around their future work.

International policymakers and donors: The emergence of these alternative, unconventional informal youth-led initiatives that have been so successful in addressing gender-based violence offers unlimited opportunities for informing donors' own practices and policies not only for Egypt but more broadly for its global framework for combating GBV. Moreover, international actors can also play a positive role in creating forums and spaces to enable exchange of experience across initiatives engaging men in gender-based violence from Latin America, Africa, South America, Asia. In view of the importance of the collective nature of these initiatives, it is critically important that donors funding policies promote *collective action* across the initiatives rather than for supporting individual capacity-building of the initiatives which often, if provided in large amounts of money, transforms them into professionalised entities disconnected from their constituencies.

With respect to the Egyptian government, it should take measures to activate article 11 of the proposed constitution which stipulates that 'the state shall also be committed to protecting women against all forms of violence'. These measures include: (1) the new Egyptian parliament (2014) to pass a new law combating gender-based violence in public and private spaces; (2) the Ministry of Interior to initiate security sector reform with respect to the attitudes and practices of its officers, from the lowest to its highest tiers

Moreover, the Egyptian government should secure the freedom of association of all informal youth initiatives and recognise them as viable actors even if they do not become legal entities (i.e., non-governmental organisations [NGOs]).

For the youth-based initiatives: There is a need to focus on internal capacity-building while being cautious not to adopt the culture of NGO professionalism which often leads to an elite disconnect with the grass roots level. In view of the new political phase which Egypt is going through, strategies will need to be adapted to both engaging the street, political parties, civil society as well as the government.

Initiatives will need to incorporate victims of sexual violence in any transitional justice plans. In order to support movement-building, initiatives should find a space and time that is convenient for the different initiatives to touch base and catch up on a regular basis, irrespective of whether there is a need to work collectively or not. Finally, initiatives should seek to build cross-country links with other actors who have worked on gender-based violence with men.

Introduction

This paper is about the struggle to combat gender-based violence in public space in Egypt through the sustained collective action of vigilante groups who organically formed to respond to the increasing encroachment on women in public space from 2011 onwards. The study examines the emergence of a distinct form of collective action at a very distinct historical juncture in the country's history: the phase after the ousting of President Mubarak in February 2011 through what became known as the 25th of January Revolution and up to the ousting of President Morsi in what became controversially known as the 30th of June Revolution of 2013. These 28 months between the two revolutions were exceptional on many fronts. On the one hand, the absence of rule of law and the growing levels of violence had their toll on women, who suddenly found themselves vulnerable to unprecedented levels of gender-based violence in public space. On the other, women and men had fought together in protest spaces under the banner of 'bread, freedom and dignity' in large numbers and were not ready to give up on their rights to the streets. The revolutionary fervour was sustained, and the level of citizen engagement in street activism and politics more generally had reached its apex in no less than 60 years.

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which collective action and the involvement of men influence the prospects of effectively changing community perceptions and values regarding gender-based violence towards women. The case study of Egypt was selected because of the level of collective action observed around gender-based violence in those 28 months, and the high level of volunteerism of young men in these initiatives. We wanted to explore whether the involvement of men and the collective nature of the interventions made a difference. Since this was an exceptional political moment in the history of the country, it was critically important to arrive at measurements of success that were realistic and contextually appropriate.

In what follows, the paper will first briefly discuss the rationale for examining men's involvement in gender-based violence initiatives and collective action and the methodological approach and process pursued in engaging with the issue. This is followed by a delineation of the changing political context in relation to both the growing problem of gender-based violence in public space and the nature of street politics at the time. It also briefly discusses past initiatives to engage with GBV in the Egyptian context.

The three case studies representing different models of successful interventions – Shoft Taharosh, Bassma and Opantish – are then discussed at length, drawing on their different approaches and the reasons behind their success in combating gender-based violence. The final part of the paper will reflect on the unintended positive outcomes of their interventions and what is needed in order to scale up and sustain their interventions in this highly dynamic political environment. It suggests a number of policy directions which may be useful for different stakeholders such as the international policymakers and donors, the Egyptian government and local initiatives working on gender-based violence in Egypt.

1   Rationale, background and methodology

The aim of this paper is to present effective interventions involving men's activism in collective action around gender-based violence which have positively contributed to changing social norms and values. The paper sought to contribute to the burgeoning literature on the role of men and collective action in addressing gender-based violence (Barker *et al.* 2007, 2011; Esplen 2006; Ricardo *et al.* 2011). Perhaps the most renowned example of a successful intervention working with men has been Program H, developed by a coalition of NGOs including Instituto Promundo and Salud y Genero. Program H is a community education approach that began in Brazil but has been adapted to different country contexts in Central America, the Caribbean, Tanzania, India, Croatia and Vietnam. It focuses on tackling gender-based violence by changing social norms around masculinity and uses many of the approaches that were initiated in the Egyptian context as well, such as peer-to-peer male education, enlisting men as allies and communicating messages via the media (BRIDGE forthcoming).

One notable feature of most of the programmes engaging men in efforts to address gender-based violence such as Sexto Sentido initiated in Nicaragua, Stepping Stones initiated in Sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya, South Africa and the Philippines, and Men as Partners and the One Man Can initiatives in South Africa are all primarily focused on domestic violence, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS. This country case study from Egypt examines men's collective action to address gender-based violence in public space, and therefore offers important lessons in what it means to tackle sexual violence of a different kind. This is not to suggest that hegemonic masculinities that inform domestic violence are different from those that affect sexual harassment on the streets, however, it offers an important opportunity to examine the different strategies and tools used across different spaces. Demarcations between public and private spaces have long been contested by feminists on grounds of being artificial and that all kinds of violence are interlinked, and women's disempowerment can manifest itself in agency on multiple planes. The focus here on gender-based violence specifically in public space is not to suggest that it does not have common structural causes with intimate partner violence, nor to suggest that the kind of power dynamics which influence its perpetration and perpetuation are dissimilar. Rather, as the youth informal actors focused their attention on a particular phenomenon that had reached new levels of threat, and which happened to be associated with public spaces, the paper chose to focus on examining their actions in those spaces.

This paper's approach to examining the question of men and collective action in tackling gender-based violence is informed by normative values about what constitutes positive social change. For example, positive social change recognises that state and society need to move towards rejecting gender-based violence in all its forms, without qualifications and without blaming women for its occurrence. This is critically important because while the research was being undertaken, there were movements with high level of men's engagement in collective action who addressed gender-based violence through extensive media and outreach work and whose work was not documented as qualifying for 'eliciting positive social change'. These included religio-political movements that warned women not to be the source of temptation for men, not to dress in a way that may be inappropriate and strongly discouraged women from leaving their homes as the solution for reducing their exposure to gender-based violence. The assumptions guiding such movements regarding women's agency and sexual harassment were rejected, both in terms of their interpretation of the causes of the phenomenon as well as the kind of society they espoused.

In determining what constitutes success/effectiveness in appraising interventions, it is important to note the following: first, the indicators were inductively drawn from the actors in the context in which the initiatives were being implemented (three criteria of influence were

identified, see below). Second, as processes of social and political change are highly complex and the actors involved in public action are multiple, it is important to recognise that direct correlative relationships between the actions of actor A and result B are very difficult to establish. It is in effect impossible to disentangle a particular outcome from the planned and unanticipated actions of a variety of actors. In practice, it means that the paper recognises that contribution rather than attribution is a more accurate way of describing the role of these actors in eliciting positive social change, where it occurs.

The question of measuring success in eliciting social change with respect to gender-based violence is one that has been repeatedly raised in the literature. A scoping study by Birchall for BRIDGE (forthcoming) noted that:

> When reviewing evaluations of interventions to tackle gender-based violence, it becomes clear that there are gaps and limitations in the extent to which impact and success has been measured (Gender and Development Network 2012c, Bott el al 2005, Guedes 2004). Evaluation quality has been uneven, and one major problem for many programmes is that no baseline data was collected before work began. It is therefore very difficult to back up claims that attitudes and behaviours have changed as a result of the intervention, and many evaluations are based on self reported perceptions of change. The Gender and Development Network briefing on M&E included in section 2.1 below states that "although there are some exceptions, few violence against women and girls programmes have incorporated robust systems to monitor and evaluate their impact and the current evidence base is weak. This is due to many factors such as the difficulty of obtaining reliable data, the complexity and context specificity of interventions, and the political and social dynamics surrounding these issues.
>
> (Gender and Development Network 2012c: 2)

In terms of measuring agency and change, it would have been very difficult to have a before and after scenario of interventions and their success before men's collective action and after because the contextual factors had changed so dramatically (as a consequence of the revolutionary ruptures). Similarly, comparing across countries would have also been very difficult because of these contextual specifics associated with this particular historical juncture.

In order to understand whether, and how, collective action and men's involvement made a difference in their ability to address gender-based violence, an appreciative inquiry approach was pursued. It asked participants to explain what positive intervention looked like, what contributed to it, how the outcome would have been different, if the variables had changed. From these narratives, interviewees spoke about different situations in which they found themselves, and how for example, the outcomes were influenced by whether they were engaging as individuals or through collective channels.

In order to understand what was in early 2011, a nascent and emerging phenomenon of collective action around gender-based violence in public space, IDS partnered with the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo to identify who were the actors, the networks, the interventions and the spaces through which they engaged. The research was driven by a fundamental belief in the importance of an inductive approach through which stakeholders in Egypt would contribute to the conceptualisation of what success looks like in such a volatile political context, and what would be its most appropriate indicators. Together with partners at AUC a scoping of the actors who are most active in addressing gender-based violence. An analysis of the context led to the development of a number of criteria regarding the actors to be investigated, they were:

- Collective actors who had emerged in the post-Mubarak era, thus excluding some of the coalitions that had been formed prior to that. This is because it is in the new revolutionary initiatives where the energies were being diverted.
- Focus exclusively on informal collective actors. By informal we must not registered as legal entities, which in the case of Egypt normally took the form of a civic association or a non-profit civil company. The decision to focus on these informal collective actors is again reflective of the context in which citizens sought to engage through processes that empowers the government to regulate their activism.
- Actively combating gender-based violence in public space. We included initiatives that adopted street action strategies as well as those that tried to deal with what they perceived to be the structural causes behind the phenomenon (such as lack of protection in the constitution, etc). We excluded political/religious movements whose approach to gender-based violence was to press women to stay at home or feel responsible for the harassment on account of their attire or behaviour.
- Initiative involve men whether as leaders or active participants.
- Is an ongoing initiative (i.e., it exists/is functional at the time of research). Some of the initiatives that we examined had to be excluded from the database at a later stage because six months later, they had failed to exist in their previous form either because they died or had metamorphosed into another initiative.
- They were effective. The level of effectiveness various tremendous from one actor to another, however, all actors had one or more of the following criteria of effectiveness:
  - people on the street approach them and tell them the importance of their work, consult them or share their experiences with them;
  - volunteers joining;
  - media coverage of their issues and their work.

These criteria emerged out of the scoping workshop undertaken in November 2012 (see workshop report, Tadros, M., November 2012) and individual consultations with activists as well as press and media review.

The work was carried out intermittently because local researchers were forced to halt the process of collecting data several times due to the highly volatile political situation, which sometimes made internal transport difficult or when accessing the participants in the database was difficult. In-depth interviews with the members of the movement, in particular the male members all in all 12 in-depth interviews were undertaken, involving four men from each initiative, in addition to interviews with other leaders, members and informants. This was complemented with a literature review covering press articles, reports, and a scoping of their online resources including Facebook pages, statements and blogs.

2 Country context

This section presents an overview of the broader political context of Egypt, a brief history of gender activism and some background on work specifically tackling gender-based violence.

2.1 Political context

Egypt has witnessed three regime changes within the space of two-and-a-half years. On 13 February 2011, former president Mubarak was ousted from power after 30 years of rule, following a period of 18 days of sustained protests involving the participation of over a million citizens. The Supreme Council of Armed Forces, led by Field Marshal Tantawy, governed Egypt from February 2011 up to June 2012, during a time of extreme turbulence as the country witnessed parliamentary and presidential elections and experienced regular protests, some of them pressing the army to hand over power to civilian rule. In July 2012, Mohamed Morsi the nominee for the Muslim Brotherhood, the region's oldest Islamist movement, won the elections and became President. On 30 June, the country witnessed the largest number of citizens rising in protest in its 5,000-year history as millions took to the streets calling for early presidential elections. Discontent over increasing impoverishment and diminishing quality of life, absence of security, and the majoritarian politics of the Muslim Brotherhood had contributed to the growing dissatisfaction with President Morsi's governance. On 3 July, the military intervened, and removed President Morsi from power and appointed the head of the Supreme Constitutional Court as a temporary President until new parliamentary and presidential elections occur.

2.2 Collective action, men and GBV in Egypt

From the mid-2000s up to the ousting of Mubarak, the national women's machinery: the National Council for Women with many non-governmental organisations worked on combating domestic violence, largely through research, awareness-raising interventions and lobbying the government for the issuance of a law (which never materialised).

Collective efforts to tackle gender-based violence were mobilised at the wake of the International Conference on Population and Development staged in Cairo in 1994. Development organisations and feminist groups became engaged in research and policy work on gender-based violence in the private and public sphere, on topic such as domestic violence, female genital mutilation and rape. The Beijing Conference of 1995 served to keep the momentum of work on gender issues. It was also a phase which saw the proliferation of women's NGOs, many of which sought to tackle gender-based violence in their work, though it was often defined quite broadly to include deprivation from education and early marriage as forms of GBV.

In the 2000s, international civil society organisations championed the recognition and prioritisation of GBV globally. This created a ripple effect in Egypt where the national women's machinery adopted the elimination of gender-based violence at home as a key issue, where coalition were formed to work specifically on the topic and as one of the key issues raised in the CEDAW.

Other than a few exceptions (Harassmap and the Coalition on Sexual Violence) most of the non-state efforts focused on domestic violence. Most of the coalitions (with the exception of Harassmap) were comprised of NGOs working together on common campaigns. The leadership was predominantly of an older generational group and by and large emanating from a privileged background (middle and upper class). The majority of interventions on GBV emerged from within the development practice area of work as opposed to political activism or feminist engagement. Moreover, very few men were involved in such initiatives and where

they were, it was in their professional capacity as workers or NGO leaders, rarely as volunteer activists.

The Egyptian revolution that was instigated on 25 January 2011 had a profound impact on citizen agency (Tadros 2012). While people had been participating in protests for some years before the revolution and their frequency had increased tremendous between 2008 and 2010, nevertheless, the participation of citizens in *millioniyyas* (calls for one million person protest) as well as its wide pollisation in the media created a new energy around the expression of voice and challenged people to fearlessly cross 'red lines'. The ousting of President Mubarak removed the fear barrier for many, who dared, for the first time ever, to go out and join in demonstrations, sit-ins and marches.

2.3   Gender-based violence in the Egyptian context

It is important to note that women (and men) have been exposed to two kinds of gender-based violence in the Egyptian context. The first and most prevalent is socially motivated violence, which as per Moser's definition comprises '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' (2001: 36).

This is to be distinguished from political violence which is 'the commission of violent acts motivated by a desire, conscious or unconscious, to obtain or maintain political power' (2001: 36). Examples of political violence is manifest in the use of various forms of sexual abuse as *political acts* which may include rape, sexual torture and sexual abuse, as well as forced pregnancy and sterilisation. Politically motivated sexual violence may be instigated by guerrilla conflict, paramilitary conflict or armed conflict between political parties, etc.

There are important similarities between both kinds of gender-based violence, social and political both in terms of the underlying values and norms informing male behaviour. For example, notions of power and dominance inform the acts of violence, which are played out on women's bodies, whether they be politically or socially motivated. Also in terms of reactions to politically or socially motivated gender-based violence, for example, social norms that condone assault, i.e., blaming women for the assault; a culture of silence on incidents on accounts of protecting honour and preventing community shame are very similar, etc. There are, however important differences that exist between socially and politically motivated gender-based violence, in relation to questions of accountability. Politically motivated sexual assault is usually pre-planned, organised and orchestrated whereas it is not necessarily the case with socially motivated gender-based violence. Both types of gender-based violence are analysed below.

Socially motivated gender-based violence

According to a recent UN report published in 2013, 99.3 per cent of women in Egypt surveyed reported being exposed to one form or another of sexual harassment. The most commonly reported type is the touching of the body (reported by 59.9 per cent), followed by verbal (catwalk) harassment. A shocking 30.3 per cent admitted to being raped (el Dabh 2013). The lax security situation and the increased pervasiveness of a highly misogynist discourse towards women, primarily, though not exclusively, disseminated by Islamists seems to have made matters worse. The author's own research through focus groups in Cairo (Fayoum, Minya, Beni Suef and Qena) shows that women have experienced an increase in the frequency and type of harassment in the past two years: namely, that they are more vulnerable to being sexually harassed more often, and it is becoming more daring (more groping/touching/attempted removal of clothing).

This is corroborated by further evidence from research undertaken by the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA). In late 2012 CEWLA conducted a survey in seven governorates (Aswan, Sohag, Qena, Asiut, Cairo, Fayoum and El Minya) with 476 persons answering the questionnaires (205 women and 271 men). The results revealed that at the top of the list of issues that were identified as affecting women's situation after 25 January were:

1.   the deteriorating economic situation;
2.   sexual harassment;
3.   the kidnapping of women.

Hence sexual harassment features prominently as one of the prime concerns. When asked what undermines their sense of security in the period post-25th of January Revolution, 21 per cent of respondents said the absence of security personnel in the streets, 19 per cent cited their exposure to sexual harassment, and 10 per cent said the prevalence of arms and weapons and another 10 per cent said unemployment (as the most common answers) (CEWLA, unpublished survey, 2012). On how can streets become a safe space once again, among the top responses were: 20 per cent said the presence of a fair and capable security force able to withstand criminals in society, 16 per cent said the issuance of a law that protects women from sexual harassment, 12 per cent said the speedy trials of criminals and the detention of those who had escaped from prison.

What is clear is that gender-based violence on the streets of Egypt has become a pressing concern affecting citizens in a very tangible manner. In response to the absence of security on the streets, some of the women interviewed in focus groups mentioned that one of the responses that some families took to protect them from harassment was to prevent their daughters from going to schools or universities. Other responses have been to not allow women to leave unaccompanied, and to press them to carry tools to use as self-defence.

Politically motivated gender-based violence

Egypt has witnessed a *pattern* of politically motivated sexual assault in *protest spaces* since 2011. Various actors have been responsible for commits acts of politically motivated sexual violence in post-Mubarak Egypt: the army was implicated in a number of widely reported cases when it was ruling the country between March 2011 and June 2013; the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups such as the Salafis were also responsible for organised acts of sexual violence in particular when they were officially in power. Many acts in Tahrir Square were committed by unknown parties believed to be hired for the purpose of targeting women for sexual assault motivated sexual assault assumes the following pattern: (1) it occurs in squares and public spaces associated with protests; (2) it takes place in these spaces during times of protests and demonstrations; (3) the victims are disproportionately activists, whether women or men; (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, simultaneously assaulting the woman collectively; and (6) sexual assault does not happen in a passing moment, but is sustained over a period of time. In Tahrir Square where protestors gathered to voice their anger at the status quo there were some particularly horrific cases of intensely violent sexual assault occurring in June 2012, November 2012, January 2013 and June 2013. There was also a wave of sexually violence at el Ettehadiya presidential palace where protests were against President Morsi in December 2012.

It is important to note that while all parties admit to the occurrence of violent sexual assault on women in Tahrir Square and its vicinity, the question of whether it is politically motivated or not, i.e., the actions of mobs who spontaneously act on women's vulnerability in crowds is hotly debated. There is also much controversy over, if assuming that these acts are politically motivated, who is behind them (for further research on this see Tadros 2013c).

3   Three case studies

This part presents an overview of the three selected initiatives, Bassma, Shoft Taharosh, and Opantish in terms of their most distinctive features pertaining to their activities that highlight men's involvement in collective action to stop gender-based violence in public space. The initiatives are presented in the chronological order of their emergence, although there is some overlap in the time frame of the informal emergence of Bassma and Shoft Taharosh. A more comprehensive coverage of the three initiatives is available in www.ids.ac.uk/ publication/database-of-collective-actors-involving-men-tackling-gender-based-violence-in- public-space-in-post-mubarak-egypt and http://interactions.eldis.org/gender-based-violence and a succinct summary is available in the appendix.

3.1   Bassma

Bassma is an informal initiative that started in July, 2012, one month after Nihal Zaghloul, one of the founders was personally sexually harassed while protesting in Tahrir Square. Ironically in June 2012, Nihal had joined friends in Tahrir Square to protest the growing phenomenon of women being exposed to sexual assault when joining demonstrations. She wrote a deeply moving blog http://zaghaleel.wordpress.com/2012/06/04/evil-vs-good/ which attracted a lot of readers to write and say they want to join her in stopping this violence.

Nihal called for an event at Mohamed Mahmoud Street in Tahrir Square – a stand-in, in order to speak out against women's sexual assault. Many of her friends responded, and through this exchange on the Internet people brought their friends along and through face-to-face meeting a movement came into being. On the day of the protest, it was agreed that the men would form a human chain around the protestors but as dusk fell, suddenly the lights in Tahrir Square were turned out, they were hit with water, and a wave of sexual assault started by mobs who tried to break through the human chain. The group learnt from that experience that they were in a battle that they had to prepare well for.

The core group comprised 30–40 people, all between the ages of 20 and 30, many of whom at the time of formation were completing undergraduate or graduate degrees.

The initiative comprised the three founders and two members who joined later, there is a division of labour in the movement happening through three teams: (1) research and development; (2) planning; and (3) media relations.

1.   **Research and development** team go to the street, conduct field research and report back on people's perceptions, opinion and reactions to issues such as harassment. This informs the movement's plans for interventions. In a practical way, for example, when they go out to a heavily crowded area, they needed to find a way of scoping the area, initially they used to place a person at a different spot but they found this not to be very effective so we came up with the idea of patrols, that we would move in a group around the area – constantly on the move and we found this to be a highly effective strategy.
2.   **Planning:** This team puts into place the action plan and its implementation: to develop an action plan. This team decides the places to be visited in order to raise their awareness and the security patrols (see below).
3.   **Media relations** working in informing public opinion on Bassma's work and sexual harassment more broadly.

Bassma has become most renowned for its 'security patrol' involving a group of male youth in uniform surveying the hotpots where assault may potentially take place (crowded areas, protest areas) in a highly regimented, organised and disciplined manner. Nihal Zaghloul

explains 'if we are 50 persons, we don't ask each one about his/ her opinion [on what to do]. It is waste of time. We should have one purpose for the patrol. There should also be a leader. If the leader told any member that s/he should jump, this person should respond without discussion. In such critical times, a girl is at stake, so it is pointless to engage in discussions in this case… I am convinced that this methodology is the secret of Basma's success. Basma is still working while the other two groups aren't.'

In effect, if you swap the fluorescent colour vests with a kaki uniform, you would think they belonged to the army. It is important to note that this particular way of operating was in reaction to their experiences on the ground in trying to rescue women from mob assaults. They encountered incidents at the beginning where their presence as individuals (rather than a collective) was of no effect in overcoming the crowds.

The advantage of their tightly knit patrol is three fold. First, they have developed among all the other actors a reputation for being able to move swiftly in an organised way and intervene in a timely manner in the middle of highly chaotic situations. (See box below.)

> We were patrolling the Square and at the entrance to the Metro [subway] station close to Kasr el Nil street, it was very badly lit, we learnt that there were two women being assaulted there. We arrived as a group, the persons well trained to intervene went in to shield the women while some of the other members were responsible for pressing the crowds to leave since half the people who congregate on any one occasion are spectators, and the rest of us starting making a group around the women and formed a chain, and announced anyone who tries to cross this line will be beaten – but since there was a fence over us, they got on top of the fence and started jumping within, trying to get to the women. We realised that if we are then pushed inside the metro [subway], we will lose control of the situation. A member of the team went and fetched an ambulance and got it to open its doors at the back just where the women were, we pushed them inside and blocked the doors to prevent the mobs from going after them until the ambulance was able to move away.

The second advantage to their highly regimented patrols is the power of numbers. Since assault cases in crowded spaces often involve mobs, some of whom are heavily armed, individuals on their own may be beaten or even assaulted themselves as a way of deterring them from saving the victims. Unless they stand united and intervene in a highly synchronised way, they would not be able to resist the crowds enough in order to be able to get to where the women have been encircled.

Through their stringent observance of a line of command in how they implement security patrols. Nihal reflects on Bassma's own way of working and says: 'Basma is dictatorial. The last event that Basma has done was on Valentine's Day in Talat Harb Street [2012] for three days. The turnover was 137. There were more than 40 harassment cases during the first two days. On the third day, Talat Harb street was empty and there wasn't any harassment.'

The third advantage of walking in a group is the image it gives to the public: a group of young men highly disciplined patrolling the streets to ensure that women are not being exposed to harassment. In a highly patriarchal (and homophobic) society such as Egypt where harassing women is part of a macho culture, the image of these men (nothing effeminate about them) committed to stopping other men from assaulting women is a powerful one. It attracts volunteers and implicitly changes the image of what it is to be a man (a theme we will return to later).

However, the collective action does not start when they step into the street, there is a great deal of pre-planning that goes into the process of organising the group's patrol. For example, when they plan to go down at the Eid [feast] in downtown Cairo, a time when heavy crowds gather, and also a time when many incidents of mob assaults on women occur, the members of Bassma go to the areas where they know that crowds are at their worst, and they ask

those who have shops there whether, in the event that they need to help a girl escape whether the owners would allow their venues to be used for refuge. In most cases, the owners refuse because they worry that the attackers would destroy the shops. In these instances they have spoken to the closest venue where people are willing to cooperate (for example, in one case the nearby church agreed to collaborate in their initiative).

Bassma was also one of the first initiatives to become very active in undertaking security patrols in Metro [subway] stations. Transport has been one of the key public spaces in which women have experienced gender-based violence (see workshop report, 2013). Amr Shaaban, head of the organisational unit at Bassma explained that they have approached the Ministry of Interior in order to leverage their support. One of the signs that they have won the trust of the security force is that they were issued with official permits to pursue their work. The permit is usually for the day in which they intend to do the patrol. The permits were neither granted automatically nor without intensive engagement with the personnel in the Ministry. At the beginning they would go there and wait for hours until they were eventually issued with a pass. Later, the process became far easier.

As the numbers of the volunteers grew, they would stand at more than one platform, known to the passengers and the police by their fluorescent vests. They would intervene in cases where men are assaulting women, and if the latter wishes to file a police report, they would accompany her, and ensure that the assailant is also handed to the police officer. The other main activity is to stop men from entering the women-only carriage in the subway. There are nine carriages on the Metro, the seventh and eighth are reserved for women only. The members of Bassma feel strongly that this space should be respected as being for women only, and that by violating the regulations, men are infringing on women's space. They have repeatedly removed men from these carriages, and have by virtue of their repeated actions, encouraged other women to speak up and insist that the men leave their carriage. In view of how extremely overcrowded the Metro is during rush hour, the removal of men from the women's carriage would certainly protect women from exposure to harassment.

Bassma have also played an important role in awareness-raising and outreach work in the community. They have taken advantage of being in the highly crowded spaces of the subway to engage with the men there on sexual harassment and respecting women's spaces in the subway. This is done through peer-to-peer contact through the male volunteers.

One of the successful elements of Bassma's work is their ability to build allies within the Ministry of Interior who are now open to learning from the team's work. The Ministry of Interior has for example asked them to come and talk to the police force about how to handle cases of sexual assault that they encounter when on the job. One of Bassma's founders argued that the fact that when on patrol on the platforms, they are quick to protect the police officers and not just themselves, and that they never resort to violence and that they have been positively received by the public has earned them the respect of the police force. They are in effect helping to change one of the least gender-friendly institutions from the fringes.

3.2   Shoft Taharosh

Shoft Taharosh was established in October 2012 at the time of the feast of Sacrifice [Eid el Adha] (26 October). Downtown Cairo had become notorious over the course of many years (since 2006) for the frequency and intensity of sexual harassment cases during the Eid [feast] periods. There were particular hot spots which became infamous for heavy crowds molesting women such as the areas in front of the cinemas where the youth line up to purchase a ticket to watch the newly released movies. A group of youth got together and decided to start an initiative that would intervene in crowded contexts to rescue women from sexual harassment and raise awareness within the broader community about the need to put an end to such practices. The initiative was composed of members working in six pre-existing initiatives:

1. Fouada Watch (informal initiative, see their coverage in this database);
2. ACT (a company);
3. Heya (an NGO);
4. Sharia' Wa'i (an informal collective initiative working on citizenship issues – see their coverage in this database);
5. Etkesfoh (an informal collective initiative working on sexual harassment);
6. Shabab al-Mahrousah, a revolutionary informal group.

There is a core of 15–35 members who comprise the intervention operations on the ground. The field members of Shoft Taharosh are of two types: there are those who work on awareness-raising campaigns and those who intervene to save women from those harassing them. The group that intervenes to save women from harassment is exposed to a high level of violence: it is an all-men team with the exception of one woman.

The first activity initiated by Shoft Taharosh was during the Eid el Adha holiday in downtown Cairo (October 2012). Janet recalled: 'Some of us went to coordinate with the workers in the cinemas so we could stand on the doors and watch the ticket line up close [where harassment often takes place]. Some of us have some connections in downtown places so we were able to create safe passages for girls who were assaulted…'

They try to also identify the harasser (though in incidents of group harassment this is very difficult). In such cases they follow up with psychological support and if the woman agrees, with legal support.

One of the distinctive features of Shoft Taharosh is their commitment to work on different tiers: grass roots activism, internal policy-influence and international outreach. They work on several planes and in strong partnership with other initiatives. Shoft Taharosh have played a core role in the intervention groups and with the groups that provide on-the-spot care and emergency assistance to women who have been assaulted, often as part of Opantish. They have also led awareness campaigns. When Shoft Taharosh are not engaged in intervention operations to save women from harassment, they undertake awareness activities, taking advantage of the large crowds that gather in downtown on occasion of the feast. Janet explains that they would talk to young men and women about women's right to their bodies and a girl's right not to be violated just because she's a girl. To the women, they would say: 'No one should lock you up in the house on the Eid, for example, because you're afraid of harassment happening.' To the men they would ask them why they do it, explaining its effect on girls psychologically. They would compare sexual harassment to theft: just like they might steal a sandwich because they're hungry, they steal a touch' – insisting on the illegality of it.

One of the successful dimensions of Shoft Taharosh's work is in their commitment to not only rescue women from assault but to catch the perpetrators and hold them accountable. This is especially difficult in situations where women are being encircled by a group of men who are assaulting them from all sides. When dozens of hands are all over their bodies and in many instances women are almost at the moment of suffocation from the crowds, it is difficult to identify who exactly are the perpetrators. However, in instances where it is possible to catch the perpetrators in the act and ensuring that they don't get away with it, this is conducive to dealing with some of the structural causes of the perpetuation of gender-based violence in Egypt: namely that people know and do get away with it.

Mohamed Abd el Wahab from Shar'I Wa'I is a member of the founding group and organisers of Shoft Taharosh. He described how in one instance at Gam'et al Dowel al Arabiyya (the Arab League Building) [in close proximity to Kasr el Nil Bridge and Tahrir Square] he and the team with him managed to get an ambulance, reach the women who were encircled, and protect the ambulance doors from being forcefully opened by the crowds until the vehicle departed. However, in the middle of this ordeal, he discovered that many of the perpetrators who were sexually assaulting the women and then attacking him and members of the rescue team were actually wearing tee-shirts with the name of *x** party on it, a non-Islamist political party that was associated with the youth's revolutionary struggle. Shoft Taharosh did not stop after rescuing the women but persisted in trying to identify how it is that a political party who was responsible for keeping Tahrir Square safe was involved in sexually assaulting women. Shoft Taharosh caught one of the men in tee-shirts and he confessed that he was paid to go to Tahrir Square to sexually molest women. He happened to be living in one of the poor informal settlements in Cairo. When *x* party announced that they need volunteers to keep Tahrir Square safe, he was instructed to put himself forward, thus giving him access to the space. Shoft Taharosh follows through with the police to find out whether those caught are released (the police's preference) or whether rule of law is applied and the perpetrator is prosecuted. Through press coverage and campaigning, they try and put pressure on the authorities to hold the perpetrators to account.
*The name of the party has been removed in case litigation is currently being pursued.

The process of holding the perpetrators accountable is a long and thorny one because it is not simply a matter of pursuing legal procedures. In many cases Shoft Taharosh struggles to convince the woman who was harassed to agree to file a lawsuit. The option of filing a lawsuit for many women is not an easy one. First, there is the pressure from members in the police force on her not to file a suit. The tendency is to encourage her to accept the apology of the assailant and go home. Second, in many instances the women who have been assaulted fear the reaction of their family should they know that they have been harassed, even if they have not incurred any physical harm. Parents fear that the women will bring shame upon the family and dishonour them. If the woman is not married, the idea that she has been touched by a man raises all kinds of rumours about her chastity and means a tainted reputation. This is particularly so since the law does not specify 'harassment' in its articles, the word used is *hatk ard* (literal meaning of which is violation of honour). Third, even if the family were to be supportive, there are also fears that if a lawsuit is waged by the perpetrator, he may revenge via retaliatory measures that may place the woman and her family in danger. Shoft Taharosh has provided support to women who have chosen to go ahead with a law suit and have often provided counselling for the entire family.

3.3 Opantish

Opantish (Operation Anti Sexual Harassment) emerged with a very clear and specific mission: to respond to the phenomenon of *collective or group* sexual assault on women in Tahrir Square. The group formed in November 2012 after coming to the conclusion that these are not individual acts on women and collective action is needed to put an end to them.

While the organisers became aware that after 11 February 2011 (the date of the ousting of Mubarak), sexual harassment began to increase, from mid-2012 and into early 2013, the organisers of Opantish felt sexual harassment took a more organised form involving groups targeting women for sexual assault. Opantish formed to fight against pre-planned forms of gang sexual assault on women during demonstrations and provide protection and support in those protest spaces.

Opantish is composed of three groups who work together:

- **Confrontations group** (اشتباك): This group is responsible for rescuing the victim by entering the circle of the harassers through direct confrontation and physical force. They are ten persons approximately in each fight group, with about five groups differently positioned in Tahrir Square.
- **Safety group** (أمان): This group is responsible of delivering the victim to a safe place such as her home or ambulance or hospital.
- **The core group (control room)**: This is the group that manages the control room – which is responsible of coordinating the work between the two other groups, receiving calls regarding where incidents are happening and planning and managing the implementation of activities.

Opantish is composed not only of individuals but also of initiatives that were formed prior to its own establishment like Shoft Taharosh. The initiative is primarily led by revolutionary youth, women and men whose experience of protesting in Tahrir Square and public space ultimately changed after the ousting of Mubarak when reports of sexual violence began to be made. Young men found that the women whom they stood side by side with in Tahrir Square were being exposed to sexual assault, and that as individuals, they were incapable of effectively intervening to stop the sexual violence. For the revolutionaries for whom Tahrir Square symbolised people's revolt for freedom through solidarity and collective action, the incidents of sexual violence in these very spaces was shocking. The battle became one not only to rescue women but rescue Tahrir's reputation as well.

Mohamed Zaghlool recounted what drove him to become involved in a collective initiative on combating gender-based violence in protest spaces: when he was in Mohamed Mahmoud Street in a march and three of his friends got harassed by a group that was able to overcome them. 'We tried to form a cordon around our friends so we can move them towards the closest safe place. In the end we managed, but after great strain, because we were not organised, we did not know the techniques of rescue operations or crowd management.' With other revolutionary youth having similar experiences, they started to meet and develop the strategy of intervention.

The planning process starts on the day when marches and protests are planned. Where these are intended to happen in Tahrir Square, they hire a room overlooking the square in order to be able to have surveillance of the place. Groups patrol the square and hand out flyers with the hotline number for reporting any incidents. Intervention groups are informed of the exact whereabouts, and move quickly to the scene. The scenes are often violent, and members of the intervention groups have gotten sexually assaulted and physically injured (including being stabbed) during their work.

What is particularly interesting about Opantish and Shoft Taharosh is that women are part of the intervention groups. Zaghlool explained that when a woman has been the object of extreme sexual violence from the men who have encircled her, she finds it very difficult to trust a male stranger and follow his lead, even if he tells her he is part of a rescue operation. When one of the female members of the rescue team arrives on the scene, she often carries a bag with clothes and first aid and often accompanies the woman rescued to the safe site, or to hospital. The men in Opantish were very keen to emphasise that they are not fighting this battle on behalf of women, but in partnership with women. Zaghlool and others pointed out that they are keen not to assume a patriarchal oversight over women and their protection. The question of women's leadership in the intervention groups is not only an instrumental one, it is an ideological one as well. Maya feels that this stance which recognises women as fighters not victims is what distinguishes Opantish from other groups who 'do not like the idea of having girls with them during the confrontation. In the first meeting they looked around and saw many girls in the room then they asked "what are the girls doing here?" They believe

that it is difficult for them to have the responsibility of protecting girls who are with them in the group while trying to rescue the victim.'

The team refines, and develops its tactics from the experiences it accrues in protest spaces. Ahmed Awny explained that the intervention's group singular aim is to rescue the person from the middle of the group assault. 'If we had ten people at the site working in a random way, they won't be effective. We put in place a plan, and we have been trained on implementing it, and we have given each one of us a number and follow through in the division of labour, some would have the role of forming a cordon, some would be delegated with breaking through the crowds while their backs are being covered by another group, while another group would be trying to get to the woman in the middle. We need 25 people for this operation to succeed. On the tragic day of the 25th of January [2013] some horrific sexual assault cases happened in the Square and we did not have a plan, it was the second time for us to go down and we were working randomly, we are a group, let us throw ourselves in to get the person assaulted with each one of us trying through individual effort. When we managed to rescue the women, they had to be transferred to hospital [because of how badly they were sexually assaulted]. But when we developed a plan, the next time they intervened in a protest, they were able to get through four cases in three minutes [after they had been informed of where they are] and before the level of sexual violence had become acute. This is what is great about collective action, if you are a guy who has commitment and you want to participate but you are not for example able to engage with physical confrontation, that is where the division of roles comes in.'

4 Tackling gender-based violence collectively: inroads and challenges

This section analyses how the movements have fared in terms of the indicators of effectiveness, and the enabling factors and constraints that have influenced their ability to elicit positive change.

4.1 Rescuing women targets of assault

The assessment of success in rescuing women from assault is difficult to present in quantifiable terms. What constitutes success? And what do the numbers mean, in absolute and relative terms. Is success when we have saved all women who were targets? But then how do we identify these women in the first place since there is no systematic way of scanning what happens in very volatile and dynamic settings? As Opantish is the biggest of all these initiatives (and Shoft Taharosh is part of it), it has been able to intervene most in rescue operations. Maya from Opantish shared the dilemma that the initiative faces when they come to appraise their work at the end of the day: 'The measure of success is not concrete: I sometimes tell myself that I have done a great job today, we rescued two women from being raped but at other times I feel that it was not enough because I heard about another case that was raped and so I felt that I failed to protect her although it may have happened at another place altogether. Because there are lots of cases, it is difficult to feel that you are successful or not. It depends on the cases you face on that day.'

However, what distinguishes these three initiatives, is that out of all the others, they have played a pioneering role in rescuing women in contexts of sexual violence. Some have been rescued at an early stage when the circles of men are just beginning to form around them or when they are being followed, some were rescued when they were in the middle of the circles and were being molested, others were rescued when they had their clothes torn off and were subjected to extreme violence, others were rescued just before they were about to be raped. These women's suffering would have been worse had it not been for these initiatives' work. This is not to say that the rescue operations have been successful in all cases: many of the men and women who are involved in rescue operations at the time of the interviews were still deeply traumatised by the women whom they had failed to rescue from assault. Some of the men involved in these operations were suffering from deep distress by the cases of women who were captured and retained in spaces inaccessible to them and raped.

4.2 Volunteers

The capacity to mobilise supporters into wanting to join an initiative and give of their time, effort and resources out of belief in its work and mission is an important indicator of success. All three initiatives initially started with a small group of young women and men (often less than 20) and now have a repertoire of more than one hundred volunteers. In Egypt, most of the people who are engaged in gender-related activism are paid professionals based in civil society organisations. While many of these professionals working in civil society be they fieldworkers or leaders are often committed individuals who genuinely care for the issue, there have also been concerns expressed more lately that some parts of the gender and development work was beginning to look like a profit-making industry (see Tadros forthcoming for the boutique syndrome). Egypt is also a context of high unemployment and poverty.

Moreover, most initiatives working on gender-related work do not have a constituency – the people who give legitimacy to a campaign by being willing to endorse an initiative as

representing them and their voices. The large number of persons that have put forward their applications to join these initiatives is one indication of the legitimacy of their work, even if all three initiatives filter the applications according to their stringent criteria. All three initiatives have each received over the course of less than one year (2012–13) anywhere between 150 and 200 applications from persons who want to volunteer.

4.3 Community sympathy

While this is a more difficult indicator to capture, from observation of the author when in the company of members of these initiatives, it appears that people recognise some of the faces of the individual leaders, approach them and tell them that they congratulate them for the work they are doing and wish them luck. This is not to suggest that the men have not suffered from social stigma. They have often paid a very high price for being involved in something considered to 'girlie'. They have sometimes been told that they should not waste their time on '*elat adab* (shameful or embarrassing) matters. However, in other instances, a wide cohort of people have stopped them in the streets (as they are in uniforms) to ask for their intervention, to seek their advice, to ask them to speak to a group of harassers or in some cases to assure women that they should not stop wanting to go down to the streets. Moreover, the fact that individual citizens have often instantaneously offered them support in difficult circumstances (such as an informal tea vendor in Tahrir Square using his gas cylinder to scare off the crowds that have encircled a woman being assaulted, so that members of Opantish rescue operations can get to her) is also indicative of community endorsement of their work and a recognition of its worth. Similarly, Bassma's ability to win over the endorsement of the transport police for the work and their issuance of official documents for their security patrol work in the Metro station is also indicative of their acceptance as not just a group of young people passing time.

4.4 Influencing international and local public opinion

Opantish, Shoft Taharosh and Bassma have been able to influence public opinion, and the policy arenas, on issues of gender-based violence in three distinct ways:

- **Raising community awareness:** The three initiatives have been very visible on the streets in crowded settings be they protests or during the Eid when people congregate in the city centre squares in Cairo with their tee-shirts, flyers and brochures, walking in groups. They have played an active role in not only intervening to stop harassment but also in raising awareness of the need for a community response to this phenomenon. For example, as part of their planning ahead before the day when crowds are expected to gather, all three initiative have been involved in speaking to the shop owners and property owners in the vicinity of the squares to alert them to the possibility that women may be exposed to assault in their areas, and to request their collaboration in providing them with a refuge. Shoft Taharosh for example has produced material which effectively communicates their messages to the broader audience in order to dispel myths about sexual harassment of women, for example, a poster would have the pictures of different women; with a veil covering head and neck, a veil covering the face, women with no veil, etc., and they would ask the passers-by to point to which woman's image in the poster is likely to have been harassed. They then start a discussion about how all these women in the poster have been harassed, even the woman in the *niqab* (face veil) and that harassment has nothing to do with attire.

- **Becoming an authoritative voice of knowledge and resource on the issue:** Up until the emergence of these informal youth initiatives, local authoritative sources of expert knowledge on gender-based violence were usually NGO activists, often of an older generation or the National Council for Women (which is considered a quasi-non-governmental organisation, often cautious in its critique of government policy). All three initiatives have brought their knowledge of what is happening on the streets, the evidence they have collected on the phenomenon to the attention of the world. Their knowledge is valued and the evidence is in their appearance on television, being quoted in the national and international media as well as being used as the authoritative source of information on incidents of sexual violence in protest spaces by human rights organisations. For example, Opantish was quoted by Human Rights Watch in its coverage of sexual violence.
- **Holding the authorities accountable through their press releases, statements and public appearances:** Bassma, Shoft Taharosh and Opantish have openly criticised the government for failing to provide security for women on the streets and have challenged discourses that blame women for their own assault. They have challenged government accounts of the events that take place, and have often produced counter-evidence to support their position. However, in view of the fact that some initiatives such as Opantish saw the authorities as lacking in legitimacy, the campaigning was never intended to engage authorities per se, but to expose their shortcomings.

4.5   Reasons for these initiatives' success

There is a constellation of factors that have contributed to the success of these initiatives, both structural and agential. Some offer important lessons for effective strategies of intervention on gender-based violence beyond the Egyptian context, some are more specific to the historical juncture in which they emerged. However, among the key factors are the following:

Role of collective action

The critical role played by collective action in deterring and rescuing women from gender-based violence is evident in the narratives of the activists involved in these initiatives. They have all emphasised that when they ventured into public spaces solely as individuals or in small numbers either to rescue women or to influence crowd behaviour, they were highly ineffective. They often suffered serious blows, some becoming the subjects of sexual assault themselves, and were often overcome. However, with respect to rescue operations, while numbers are important, the critical mass is insufficient to make collective action successful. Collective action was pivotal for their ability to achieve their objectives when it involved detailed planning, rehearsals, scenario setting, division of labour, synchronisation of efforts both within the single initiative and across initiatives.

Collective action was enabled by the repertoire of friendships, pre-existing contacts and collaborations between individuals, even though the circles often expanded to include new faces. The gravity of the situation was a major stimulus for people to mobilise to present a unified front. Janet from Shoft Taharosh notes that on the ground, there is much to overcome to create a unified front among the different initiatives: 'Success is hindered when we forget the problem we're supposed to be working on and focus on whether the logo of your institution will go before mine, or the log of that initiative will be before mine. I think some of these problems are silly. If there aren't people around who are able to contain and deal with that quickly, the collective action won't work. On the Shoft Taharosh initiative, we realised that the problem was huge. One of the most important reasons for its success is that everyone forgot about themselves. Fouada Watch was involved, the Heya Foundation, the

[*shari' wa'i*] initiative, the Teh Marboutah movement – everyone came together and worked, forgetting about their own initiatives and talking only about Shoft Taharosh.'

It is possible to think of concentric circles of collective fronts emerging to respond to the challenge, while maintaining their autonomy and identity, for example, Shoft Taharosh bringing together a number of initiatives, Opantish bringing together Shoft Taharosh as well as Bassma and others in its operations.

Men challenging hegemonic masculinities

Conventionally, interventions on gender-based violence in Egypt and many other countries have been led and implemented by women. The area itself is strongly associated with 'women's issues' and often tackled as a women's problem. In Egypt, when men are involved in such work, it is often in their capacity as paid professionals/employees rather than initiatives and advocates. The presence of men as founders, leaders and members of the newly formed youth-led informal initiatives such as Shoft Taharosh, Bassma and Opantish has changed the face of gender activism in Egypt. It is not only a question of numbers of challenging hegemonic masculinities that underpin men's attitudes and behaviours towards women. Through their open endorsement of a zero-tolerance policy towards harassment (made visible through their tee-shirts and conversations) these men walking in groups have changed the image of what it is to be a man. As one activist said, 'I do not harass because I am a man.' The machismo culture that associates manliness with seeing women as bodies for their pleasure is challenged. The fact that these men in tee-shirts are revered and respected by the broader community makes it more difficult for those who assault to discredit them as sissies (though certainly they have attempted to do so). Second, because members of these initiatives (in particular Bassma and Shoft Taharosh) engage in peer-to-peer conversations and debates with men as individuals and groups, their identity as men helps them engage in open dialogue on issues that are more difficult to discuss with women strangers.

Third, these initiatives' awareness raising work has focused on deconstructing men's categorisation of women as those belonging to woman's family (the virtuous) vs. the other women, the fair game. While veiled women have been exposed to sexual harassment (and rape) irrespective of their attire and circumstances, men often consider that it is only women *who are asking for it* that get harassed. They may harass women, but cannot conceive of *their* women being harassed because *their* women are virtuous, not like the other women on the street. While they may be dishonour another man by assaulting his women, they find it inconceivable that anyone would be touching their honour by harassing their women. By alerting men to the fact that all women in Egypt have been assaulted, and by urging the men who harass to ask their mothers, wives and daughters whether they too have been harassed, the men in these initiatives seek to challenge the very constructs which objectify women in particular dichotomies. Such efforts, such as Mohamed Abd el Wahab, reflects, do not always generate a one hundred per cent on-the-spot transformation of the men who regularly harass. However, it has succeeded in many instances in getting many out of their comfort zones. He explained that in talking to a group who were all harassing women (whistling and following them, trying to touch them), he would talk about how this is – as they speak – probably happening to their mothers and sisters, etc. Some may stop and think, and while others may remain unconvinced, at the very least division is created within the group about what is right and wrong.

One effective way in which these initiatives have sought to challenge hegemonic masculinities is by encouraging men to think and engage with gender-based violence *as human beings*. Hence, without directly talking about women's rights, by using notions of humanity and fairness, a new narrative is put forward.

Other enabling factors for success

The founders of the initiatives were all very clear regarding their objectives, which made them able to focus on their priorities in a context of chaos and unpredictability. The objectives were very concrete – from stopping harassment in crowded contexts to specifically intervening in incidents where women become the target of group/mass assault to preventing men from boarding women's carriages in the subway. While these objectives were fulfilled through various activities, from security patrols to engaging the media to having rescue operations, the drivers of such activism was unambiguous.

It is also important to note that these initiatives emerged organically out of a locally identified need. They emerged out of an urgent need identified by youth whose announcement of the need for mobilisation around this cause attracted support and attention. The call for action on gender-based violence was neither in response to the availability of funding from donors, nor was it a response to a new fashion fad in the development world. The fact that it emerged organically meant that there was a strong sense of ownership by those presiding over the initiatives both to the cause as well as to finding locally appropriate means of effecting change.

One of the points that all activists who were interviewed stressed was that although they had clear objectives, there was a great deal of learning by doing. The initiatives responded to internal and external challenges as they presented themselves by innovating in practice. Internally, the institutionalisation of the initiatives came about with the need for division of labour and different organisational fronts to coordinate the work. The security patrols learnt where the hot spots were from studying the pattern of assault occurring. The rescue operations refined their techniques of intervention and follow-up from their experiences on the ground.

It is also noteworthy that one of the enabling factors behind the success of these initiatives is the congruence of the political moment and the issue. These initiatives were the offspring of the revolutionary moment and its contingencies: women claiming public space in exceptional ways, men and women in solidarity working towards common goals, security laxity leading to heightened levels of assault, and a wave of citizen activism sweeping the country in an unprecedented manner, and manifest in the high level of engagement through demonstrations, protests and strikes. Fathi from Fouada Watch and Shoft Taharosh notes: 'The revolution did not create the interest or the awareness necessarily, but the spaces for political activism that opened afterwards in addition to the rising rate of harassment encouraged people to join in: before the revolution of 25 January 2011, there were men working against harassment. It wasn't – at least, they talked about they rejected it. They didn't know where to direct their efforts. After the revolution, when they found initiatives emerging and after the blatant harassment of girls in the square, the virginity tests, the violation of women in the streets, and girls being stripped, people felt compelled to take action and work. That really made young men look for people who were doing work on the ground, to join them.'

5 Where to from here?

While these initiatives were only initiated in 2012, they have developed a high level of institutionalisation in a phenomenally short period of time. Like many new emerging initiatives, they also face a number of strategic challenges to their growth and influence. These initiatives, like most forms of social activism, emerged in Cairo and have by and large restricted their activism to the city centre. In the case of Opantish, this is justifiable because most acts of group sexual violence on women in protest spaces occurred in Cairo. In the case of Bassma and Shoft Taharosh, the awareness-raising work they do is also needed beyond the capital city. The growth of their initiatives would not rest on their parachuting into the governorates to set up groups, but to identify volunteers there, support their formation into a collective and allow them to find locally appropriate ways of engaging with their own dynamics. In governorates where people are even more conservative than Cairo, the challenge of being taken seriously and finding appropriate modes of communication will be even greater. Universities may perhaps be a good starting place.

In view of the fact that the birth of these initiatives was largely associated with a particular historical juncture, there is the question of whether the waning of the revolutionary fervour will lead to a waning of the spirit of activism generally, and by default, the initiatives on gender-based violence. Six months after the 30th of June Revolution, there are signs that the pulse of the street has changed. With the exception of a small group of youth revolutionary groups, the bulk of the citizens are not interested in engaging in street politics any more, they aspire for stability, security and economic betterment. Moreover, the stand-off between the security apparatus and pro-Morsi supporters has generated political violence which has scared people off street activism.. In practice it will mean finding new ways of being responsive to the new pulse of the street in terms of sustaining citizen interest in the campaigns to raise awareness on harassment. They may want to avoid the temptation of reproducing the old model of gender activism that often relied on holding workshops in five star hotels, usually attended by those already converted.

Moreover, once a new government is instated in 2014, there is also the question of policy influence with respect to the much needed sexual harassment law and security sector reform of the Ministry of Interior. The question of engaging policymakers has been a controversial one. During Morsi's reign, Opantish and Shoft Taharosh did not recognise the legitimacy of the government in power and therefore felt that any policy dialogues (such as on the harassment law) would undermine their political stance. Basma was already working with the Ministry of Interior officers in the subway to improve the security situation for women. Whether the three initiatives will perceive the new government as sufficiently legitimate to merit engagement is a worthwhile question. Political society has been highly polarised in Egypt first between the pro-Islamist vs. non-Islamist factions and now is now extremely fragmented across various lines. This may led to the failure to arrive at a united stance on whether to engage the new government that is expected to form in 2014 or to circumvent it. Failure to engage the future governments will mean a missed opportunity in dealing with some of the underlying structural causes of the continued persistence of sexual assault (absence of rule of law).

The other major challenge to these initiatives is financial sustainability. One of the strengths of their work so far has been that their opponents could not claim that they were applying a western agenda funded by western donors. The fact that the initiatives were self-supported and have sustained their activism over the course of more than a year is evidence of the worthiness of their cause for the founders and in the eyes of their constituency. The initiatives may continue with their awareness raising campaigns without financial support but in the long run they will need financial support if they wish to expand their outreach and capacity. The initiatives are not likely to generate sufficient finances from membership fees.

In view of the visible dent informal youth-based initiatives have made on gender activism in Egypt, a pertinent question is whether there is a gender justice movement in the making? As expected, there are differences across initiatives in terms of ideological orientation, strategies of intervention, leadership and relationship with the state. However, there is unity between Bassma, Shoft Taharosh and Opantish and the many other iniatives that have engaged in street politics (at least at the level of the founders and organisers) at the level of the overriding impetus behind their work. They all believe in the unconditional right of women to bodily integrity irrespective of where they are, who they are with and how they are dressed. This unqualified right to freedom of mobility in public space is the point around which there is consensus among the different initiatives, even if they assume different approaches to achieving that.

6 Conclusions

This paper began by stressing the particularities of this critical juncture in Egypt's history: security laxity, complete absence of rule of law, an ideological backlash against women's rights, and the instrumentalisation of sexual violence to discourage women from public activism all led to conditions for an alarming sense of threat on women's bodily integrity as a consequence of an increase in socially motivated sexual harassment and a rise in politically motivated sexual violence in public space. However, the rise of this new threat on half the population and against the backdrop of a deeply politicised citizenry also generated a new kind of social activism around women's rights. This new activism was characterised by being youth-led, managed and driven; by being informal; and by engaging in innovative and unconventional forms of street politics.

Two issues galvanised social activism around gender issues in between Egypt's two revolutions: the constitution and the rise in gender-based violence in public space. The debates around a more gender-sensitive constitution were mainly led by feminist activists with some modest support from political parties. However, it was the informal youth-led initiatives that championed and sustained the work on gender-based violence in public space most visibly and effectively. Through a process of consultation and scoping of the most important informal youth-based actors to have emerged after the Egyptian revolution of 2011, consensus was arrived that *at that point in time*. Shoft Taharosh, Bassma and Opantish were some of the most effective initiatives to have emerged. Bassma sees its work on gender-based violence as part of a broader strategy of supporting social justice in Egypt. Shoft Taharosh is committed to addressing gender-based violence as part of its broader strategy of promoting women's rights in Egypt. Opantish is driven by a clear, specific mission to combat women's exposure to collective/group sexual violence in recognition of the specific challenges and implications that this kind of sexual assault presents. While all three have collaborated and developed their strategies of rescuing women who are subjected to sexual violence, the methods, activities and relationships through which they have sought to do this have differed. The emphasis on the time-specific nature is due to the transient nature of political activism which sometimes means that initiatives assume a short lifespan, much like campaigns.

Through the use of an appreciative inquiry approach, the effectiveness of the interventions was assessed in terms of understanding what worked, why and how, and what accounts for the differences in their experiences (incidents where they were able to elicit the change they wanted in contrast with ones where they failed to do so). This was complemented with interviews with informants and comparison across a wide array of initiatives.

The findings show that the presence of men in the initiatives have greatly contributed to the effectiveness of the initiatives on several fronts: first, they have created a new role model of what it is to be a man, through their own personal projection, but also through their peer-to-peer engagements in public space, as well as their development of communication messages that 'click' with men of different shades (class, political orientation, geographic origin). In view of the deep entrenchment of patriarchal values, women and men in these initiatives noted that often having men approach other men in particular those who are strangers was more effective because they were more receptive, engaged in more honest conversation, and were more willing to consider the arguments put forward. Through their intense involvement, they have also brought numbers, which are important for appealing to a broad audience. In effect, men's participation has contributed to the de-ghettoisation of gender-based violence from being considered a 'women's issue' to being one considered a society issue that is deeply intertwined with concepts of justice, fairness and popular conceptions of rights.

On a more pragmatic level, the presence of men in these initiatives has played an important role in helping to secure the physical welfare of their women peers. In a context where the police had withdrawn from assuming responsibility for protecting citizens who protest in public space, the presence of men often shield women from assaults. Women participants in these initiatives spoke about how when they organised women-only protests, they became an easier target of the verbal and physical assault of men passing by. However, when they were joined by men, though they were still subject to assaults, the resistance and shielding off were much stronger. It is also important to note that the rescue operations would have been impossible without men's involvement

because women became the objects of harassment (though men too, but it seems not as badly). Certainly, women have played a pioneering role in rescue operations, having mastered the 'techniques' for dealing with crowds and group assault and learning from the field. However, in such deeply patriarchal contexts, the presence of men in rescue operations has helped to psychologically intimidate the aggressors and encourage those who want to help but are too scared to join forces in stopping the violence being perpetrated by the group against the women.

The research findings also indicate a direct correlation between collective action and the effectiveness of these initiatives to achieve their goals, be it to secure the safety of the streets, change social beliefs and attitudes, or influence directly or indirectly policy spaces. All three initiatives (Shoft Taharosh, Bassma and Opantish) emphasised that their earlier experiences of intervening in rescue operations were not as successful as the latter ones because the numbers were insufficient and because they had not coordinated their efforts. Fighting a crowd with a counter-crowd usually was insufficient to win the battle because the inner circle of aggressors who had the woman/women entrapped were usually heavily armed and experienced in using violence to ward off attempts to rescue their victim. What the groups learnt from experience was that a synchronised, well-coordinated plan of intervention implemented by sufficient numbers who have learnt how to work collectively in situations of extreme pressure was what made a difference. In other words, the power of the collective lies in a clear division of labour between the different actors, that would then work together in order to achieve their purpose. Not all aspects of the action plan could be pre-orchestrated or pre-planned since there were always elements of surprise that required collective solutions to be found on the spur of the moment . As shown in the shaded box (Opantish), the quality of collective action does make a difference to their ability to rescue women from group assault.

The collective character of the movements and their display of unity (uniforms, logos, messages) also played an extremely important role in conveying a public image of a social force in motion, not a group of scattered individuals with a message to share. Moreover, their effective interventions conveyed in the press/media as well as among the youth virtual circles granted legitimacy not only to their cause but to keeping alive the issue of the need for collective action to stop gender-based violence. It made the issue real, and their accounts served as important witnesses to that.

Other factors which contributed to the success of the initiatives were the clarity of their objectives, their internal cohesion, their organic emergence, the way in which challenges on the ground were met with innovations in the field developed organically. All three initiatives have developed a high level of institutionalisation of modes of working internally that one would associate with movements that have taken years in the making. Other than the division of labour, there are also clear processes of decision-making and consensus-building that serve to enhance group loyalty and a sense of collective identity.

All the above factors together have enhanced the likelihood of the interventions' effectiveness in eliciting change in particular because they build on the success of nurturing *constituencies for change*. Whether they will be able to sustain this is dependent on a number of structural and agential factors. It cannot be reiterated enough that these initiatives

were the offspring of a historic revolutionary phase in Egypt's history in which citizen engagement in politics was unparalleled over almost a century. There are signs of citizen demobilisation (at the time of writing November 2013) with fewer people interested in engaging in street activism. This may have an impact on these initiatives' ability to sustain the interest of the existing volunteers and recruit new ones. It will also require a change of strategy of awareness-raising. There may need to be a shift in approaches to outreach and public engagement. Agentially, the quality of leadership in keeping group cohesion, loyalty and interest in the initiatives will play a critical role towards its sustainability.

Moreover, in order for the initiatives to build up the political weight to scale up influence, efforts will need to be channelled towards building a movement. Across the broad array of initiatives (not just the three selected here), there has already been experience in working together. For example, when protests are expected to happen, initiatives have convened meetings to plan for a division of labour between the different groups so that each group would be responsible for different parts of the square or the main streets. In response to major happenings, initiatives have also worked collaboratively to issue position statements and press releases. However, there needs to be a way of building the movement by finding an organic formula that would allow the diversity among initiatives to thrive, while building some level of unity and boundedness. Despite the differences in political orientation, strategies of intervention, objectives and spaces through which the different initiatives work, there is still one common goal that binds them all together: the belief in the unconditional, unqualified right of women to bodily integrity at all times in all spaces. Complemented with the existing repertoire of knowledge, networks, innovative practice, there is much to support the emergence of a new social movement of substantial influence and weight.

7   Policy recommendations

For international policymakers and donors

- The emergence of these alternative, unconventional informal youth-led initiatives that have been so successful in addressing gender-based violence offers unlimited opportunities for learning. International actors committed to finding ways of making gender issues relevant to broader communities, of bridging the gap between policy goals and constituencies on the ground, of finding ways of sustaining efforts to eliciting positive social change on a long-term basis could benefit from learning from what the three initiatives have to offer.
- Contribute to the sharing of these three initiatives' experiences, practices and methods of engaging with gender-based violence in easy-to-follow publications geared towards practitioner communities, which can be widely disseminated in a variety of languages. These would not serve as blueprints or models to be followed but would encourage deliberation and reflection on practitioners' own practices and serve to broaden horizons on what is possible.
- Create forums and spaces to enable exchange of experience across initiatives engaging men in gender-based violence from Latin America, Africa, South America, Asia. The creation of communities of learning and knowledge sharing is critical for creating mutual support and enhanced practice.
- Provide funding that promotes *collective action* across the initiatives rather than for supporting individual capacity-building of the initiatives which often, if provided in large amounts of money, transforms them into professionalised entities disconnected from their constituencies.

For the Egyptian government

- If the proposed constitution should pass in the upcoming referendum, the Egyptian government should take measures to activate article 11 of the proposed constitution which stipulates that 'the state shall also be committed to protecting women against all forms of violence'. These measures include:
  - the new Egyptian parliament (2014) to pass a new law combating gender-based violence in public and private spaces;
  - the Ministry of Interior to initiate security sector reform with respect to the attitudes and practices of its officers, from the lowest to its highest tiers.
- Moreover, the Egyptian government should secure the freedom of association of all informal youth initiatives and recognise them as viable actors even if they do not become legal entities (i.e., NGOs).
- The Egyptian government needs to revise the non-governmental law to allow for the formation of coalitions, networks and other forms of collective action without inhibitions (such as NGOs requiring permission from the Ministry of Social Solidarity before joining any networks).
- The quasi-governmental National Council for Women urgently needs restructuring in order to create new spaces for founders and members of the informal youth to play a leading role in shaping the gender agenda and in building bridges between the macro-level governmental institutions and the street.

For the youth-based initiatives

- There is a need to continue to build the internal capacities of the initiatives in terms of documentation of its own works, developing a strategic plan, and deepening the institutionalisation of its own culture of ways of working.
- There is a need to develop systematic ways of monitoring and evaluating work and accordingly feeding this into the projected work.
- In view of the growing demobilisation of citizen activism, groups will need to consider whether they need to complement protests, marches and human chains with other forms of engaging the public. In other words, broadening the strategies of intervention.
- In order to retain the volunteers and organisers who have been in the frontline of some highly distressing incidents, groups may wish to consider the provision of special assistance to these men and women who have sustained high levels of trauma.
- Groups will need to find innovative ways of nurturing a support base for their causes whether by tapping into existing reservoirs of youth (such as in schools and universities) or be creating their own spaces to attract youth to their causes (for example, special zero-tolerance to harassment youth clubs).
- The initiatives will need to press political parties before and after they enter the elections on their agenda on supporting a new law on gender-based violence and the initiation of a nationwide long-term programme of rehabilitation of police officers in how to deal with gender-based violence.
- Initiatives will need to incorporate victims of sexual violence in any transitional justice plans. For example, the acts of rape were enacted in the same back-door ground-level rooms in the same buildings (in the vicinity of Hardees restaurant in Tahrir Square) – who owns these rooms, who lives in them, who was given permission to use them, who were the people who gang-raped these women. There is silence on the perpetrators, and they need to be exposed and held accountable.
- In order to support movement-building, initiatives should find a space and time that is convenient for everyone to touch base and catch up on a regular basis, irrespective of whether there is a need to work collectively or not. For example, initiatives may choose one day of every month to meet to touch base, share news, progress and analyse their trajectories.
- Initiatives should seek to build cross-country links with other actors who have worked on gender-based violence with men. Cross-country sharing, in particular with experiences in Uganda, Kenya, India, South Africa and Brazil would be mutually beneficial for all.

Appendix

Summary of main characteristics of the three selected youth-led collective initiatives on gender-based violence in public space

Name of initiative	Establishment/why	Objectives	Key strategy/ Distinctive activity	Men's role	Collective action
Bassma	July 2012 to work on sexual harassment, street children and other societal issues – came into being in response to one of the founder's own experience of sexual assault	Security patrols in Metro stations and crowded areas to rescue victims and help them with filling police complaints in addition to awareness-raising work	Security patrols	Men feature as founders in the movement and play the leading role in the security patrols and across all activities	Synchronisation with other actors working in security patrols
Opantish	November 2012 against group-organised sexual harassment	Intervention to rescue women being harassed in demonstration spaces, and deal with their immediate needs	Belief in women's involvement in male-led rescue operations	Rescue intervention activities are largely dominated by men, also members of core group	They have synchronised with other initiatives such as Bassma, Shoft Taharosh, and others
Shoft Taharosh	October 2011	To create a coalition of actors to raise awareness on sexual harassment on the streets and save women who are being assaulted	Combination of awareness-raising with rescue operations	Men are founding members and are particularly active in the rescue operations in Tahrir	The initiative emerged organically out of a campaign involving various partners

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