

13 June 2012

Testimonies on the Recent Sexual Assaults on Tahrir Square Vicinity

Today, 13 June, 2012, is the day to tweet and blog against sexual harassment in Egypt. On this occasion, Nazra for Feminist Studies is publishing three testimonies of women who were sexually assaulted by a mob on Mohammed Mahmoud Street on Saturday, 2 June. The collective sexual assault and harassment that took place on the vicinity of Tahrir Square on June 2 and 8, 2012 shed light on the gravity of sexual harassment and assault on Egyptian streets. Although the three testimonies do not account for the entirety of the brutality that many women experienced on that Saturday and the Friday after, they are one example that offers a window to the dynamics of mob sexual assault and harassment on those two days, which are not the first of its kind.

The attack on the women was calculated and organized so as to scare women away from the public sphere, to punish women for their participation, and to keep them at home to avoid the premeditated attacks against them. The collective harassment was repeated on Friday, 8 June, during a protest that aimed to protest the sexual harassment and assault that took place on June 2. The testimonies document the experience of the three women, who were walking together, got sexually harassed, and then were suddenly separated by groups of men who sexually assaulted them. The testimonies describe how the women were groped by tens of men all over their bodies, and how the sexual assault reached to tearing the clothes of one of them. The three women agreed to share their stories in hope that this will help in fighting this growing trend, and we thank them for their courage.

Testimonies

Testimony One - By: N

I Felt Evil.

Saturday evening I went to Tahrir with no interest in protesting I just went to check things out, I was really frustrated about the fact that the Egyptian people were not united, that everyone was looking for their own interest and not the interest of the country and its people.

There weren't many people at first but then many came and it felt we were coming together. I was so happy. We were 5, 3 girls and 2 guys, and we were walking in the square among the crowd and I thought it would be safe. But it wasn't. Suddenly men started grabbing us away from each other. They started groping me and grabbing my Hijab (headscarf) then I lost friends...I was terrified ...some men hid me behind a small kiosk but I kept looking for my friends I couldn't find them. I was able finally to reach one of them and she told me she was safe.

The other friend was hurt very badly, my heart aches for her and I keep playing the whole thing in my head over and over again, she was right there in front of me then someone grabbed my ass so I

looked behind then looked back and she was gone, I kept looking for her I couldn't see her anymore, it was as if I was in high sea and all the waves are just tossing me all over the place.

How can people be so evil...why is it that no one is held accountable for what they do? Those men are walking freely on the streets looking for their next victim and there is nothing I can do about it.

I was raised that good people get rewarded and bad people get punished but I came out to the world and it's not true. It's the other way around....and I feel betrayed...I feel angry...I feel guilty for not protecting my friend....I wish it was me not her....

Who should I blame for this? Mubarak for destroying my country's education so those men have no respect for women and have become just animals? Our useless police who are incapable of defending us? Our religious leaders who claim that they want what's best but they don't go to these young men and teach them what's right? Our educators who turned into business men?... Our politicians who just want power? Who????!!!!

I don't know who to blame...But I am really angry at many religious leaders who prefer to appear on TV thinking they reach more people while there are certain people who don't even have a TV...our leaders tweet and do commercials targeting a specific segment of the people leaving the mass majority who needs help....

I am angry at everyone who just does remote control charity and not get involved in the society and try to help them....just throwing some money thinking they have done their part in helping the society...

I am angry at all the mothers who teach their sons that they superior just because they are men....and tell their daughters that they are inferior just because they are women...

I am angry because my friends and I were humiliated....

I am angry but I am not broken...

I have seen the best and worst of people that night...I have faith that Allah will help me through this and will give me the strength to help others...

I know that many will not like that I wrote this about Tahrir square thinking I am trying to vandalize the image of the Egyptian revolution...but this is not my intention, I have participated in almost all the battles and marches since Jan28 2011 but sexual harassment in Egypt is growing and growing and we need to address it. We ignored it for too long and it is becoming a monster that is eating us all...I feel hate towards those men who molested us...I can't smile in the face of anyone that I don't know anymore...hell, I can't smile the way I used to....

I am sorry for not being there to protect my friend...I am sorry for being weak...I am sorry that it was her not me...I am sorry that my country is fucked up...I am sorry that my leaders are addicted to power...I am sorry for the women of Egypt...

I hope no one else will have to face that fear....

I hope that world turns and things get better...

Testimony Two - By: C

On the 2 June 2012, I was on Tahrir Square like I had been several times before to document the protest that took place and didn't reach the foreign news. I'm not Egyptian but I had been following an Egyptian friend (a woman) through the period before, during and after the first round of election. I had been filming her in several protest and marches and so I was on that day.

We were five, three women and two men. We felt safe and were crossing the square going to the Muhammed Mahmoud Street corner. Suddenly it got more crowded around us and I noticed a man was following us. He had a phone in his hand and it kept ringing without him answering. I thought it was strange and I told my Egyptian friend, when she turned around he was gone and we decided to get away from the crowded area of the square.

The best way we saw was to go through the metal fence and on to the street walk. On the way I felt a man grabbing my breast. I pushed him away and continued.

By the short time I have spent in Cairo I have experienced sexual harassment many times and I knew that this was a big problem. We continued and suddenly all the men around us started touching us all over the body. It was as if they surrounded us at the same time and separated us from each other. This happened while we were getting through the metal fence on to the street walk. From there I didn't see any of my friends except one of them (Egyptian man) who was trying to get the men away from me as they got more and more.

Before I knew it I was thrown up against a wall where a motorcycle was parked. I was standing on top of the bike while my friend and a few other men tried to make a half circle to protect me. But there were more men trying to hurt me than protect me and I was grabbed all over and my pants and shirt were ripped. In that moment it was as if the men got even more crazy. My pants were pulled down by the many men and they raped me with their dirty fingers. I managed to pull my pants up again and I could still see the face of my friend still trying with all his power to keep at least some of the men away. I really saw the best and the worst of men. My friend was beaten and putting his life at risk trying to save me while other men were fighting just to get near me with only one intention, to hurt me as much as possible.

All the time, I tried to protect myself but there were too many hands and too many animals. More and more came to join the assault and suddenly I saw another face I knew. It was an American friend and

he and my Egyptian friend kept telling me that everything would be alright, that it would soon be over. I didn't believe them and I don't think they did themselves.

I threw my camera to my American friend and told him to run. I knew that he would only get in more trouble staying. He ran off with the camera and in the same moment my Egyptian friend and I decided to try to escape. We counted to 3 and I jumped in his arms and it created a second of confusion for the men who were hurting me. But again they were all over me. I was thrown into the ally and up against a wall.

I didn't know who was trying to help and who wasn't. The only person I trusted was my friend. Others said they were helping but really just trying to get in the first row, getting a piece of the cake. Others were actually helping but it was impossible to know who.

The men were like lions around a dead piece of meat and their hands were all over my body and up under my destroyed clothes. Again my pants and underwear were pulled down with violence and several men at the same time raped me with their fingers. I was suddenly on the ground and the men pulled me from my hair, legs, and arms while the raping continued. Somehow I got up again and the door of a hallway was opened next to me and I was pushed and pulled in there.

In the hallway about 20 men managed to enter before the door was closed again. I didn't see my friend among the men. It was the first time I had a chance to see the men for a few seconds and they were from all ages. The looks in their eyes were really like animals. Not human at all and the way they were throwing me around was as if I was not a human but a piece of garbage.

Again I was surrounded this time from all sides in the middle of the floor. There was even a man lying on the floor being stepped on by the others, forcing his fingers between my legs. That happened from all sides and more fingers at the same time. I was sure that they wouldn't stop before I was lying dead in that hallway. I really tried to fight and protect my body but it was impossible. Every time I tried to kick out more hands were between my legs and every time I tried to hit someone or remove hands, my shirt was even more ripped and my breasts pulled. For one second, I had the chance to hurt one of the men back. I pressed my finger, with all the power I had left, in one of his eyes but he just continued hurting me with his fingers.

Two or three men managed to pull me away from the others and on to a chair in the corner. I know now that they were trying to help me but I didn't know that at the time. I was so afraid and saw no ending to this. Suddenly I could hear a loud sound and I saw an old man with a big wooden stick in his hand. I saw him hitting a young man over the back and I was pulled into a back room while some men were trying to hold back other men. I got a chance to finally pull up my underwear and ripped pants and a man gave me a big Egyptian flag to cover myself with. I was told to go up the back stairs. The old man with the stick was leading and about four or five men followed. Others stayed and were holding back the rest of the men.

Going up the stairs, I had no idea what would happen. I only knew what was down there and that I couldn't go back. I keep falling because I had no energy left. The stairs were never-ending and I kept

falling and crying. I didn't trust any man. One man kept saying "everything is okay, Egyptian men are good men." One time I fell and the man walking behind me put his hand on my back trying to help me up. On the way he just touched my breast a last time and when I pushed his hand away and looked back at him he just said sorry like it was an accident. It wasn't and I was disgusted by him and even more scared of what was waiting at the end of the stairs.

But luckily they were helping me and I was so relieved to finally see a woman when we entered the apartment at the end of the stairs. She was the wife of the man leading me up the stairs and they didn't let any of the men into the apartment. The women took me to the bathroom and gave me some of her clothes. When I got to the bathroom I couldn't stand up for another minute. I fell down on the floor just crying and crying. I don't know how long time I sat there but suddenly my Egyptian friend (one of the girls I got separated from when it all started) came in the door. I have never been so happy to see anyone as I was when I saw her. She hugged me and helped me change my clothes and wash most of the dirt off my face, hands, and arms.

We stayed in the apartment with these wonderful people who gave us water and Pepsi to drink. They also gave me a headscarf and some shoes to wear, as I had lost one of my own shoes during the assault. My friend had a phone and was able to communicate with our other friends. After some time I was told that it was safe to leave the apartment but I refused several times before I was talked into it. I was so afraid that the animals were waiting outside.

The old man and his son followed us down to the ally and I was so happy to see our two male friends waiting for us there. We rushed without running through the ally covering my head with the scarf and got to my friend's car that was parked nearby. We drove to the apartment where I lived and met the rest of our friends.

The following days, I could see my brave friends and other women start talking about the big problem. I kept a low profile and returned to my home country after a week. I'm now getting medical and psychological help to recover after the assault. My identity has to be kept secret for my safety and to be able to return to Cairo some day.

I wish the best for the women of Egypt. Without them, there would not have been a revolution. Assaulting and trying to break them now is just to ruin the continuing of the revolution. I have heard some people telling the women to not tell their stories about the harassment, assaults, and rapes because these stories ruin the image of the revolution. I have only one thing to say to these people. No one but the men doing this to the women is ruining the revolution. What will you have left in the square without the strong and brave women?

I do believe that the women will not be quiet and they will not break, but it's also important that each and every man in Egypt takes a position in this subject. Say it out loud, write it on a sign, and wear it on a t-shirt. Do what it takes to tell women and the world that not every Egyptian man would beat up, rape, assault, or harass a woman just for walking on the street, take part in a protest, or simply demand her right to be worth the same as a man.

Testimony Three - By: R

Yesterday, Saturday 2 June 2012, I went to Tahrir Sq. with a group of friends. We walked around the sq freely, then suddenly we wanted to get closer to where the Ultras were, near Mohamed Mahmoud Street. We started to walk towards the street cutting through the Sq. As we got closer, I felt men getting closer to us; we had two guys with us trying to lead us into the crowd. Suddenly I felt a hand grab my butt, I turned around and saw the young guy and stared him down, a few men saw and tried to push me forward away from him, the young man backed away once he saw I looked directly at him. He cowered away.

My friends keep pushing forward, at this point it was obvious we were not getting through, it was far too crowded. We started trying to get to the sidewalk. Suddenly men were appearing to help us, and they formed a human chain around us, trying to push us forward. We were being pushed and lots of men were pushing towards us, I immediately felt the attack coming, these men were too close, they were pressing their bodies onto mine. I was the last in the group, thus I was being pushed more. Suddenly we were pushed onto the sidewalk, and then the men attacked. At first, they formed a human chain around me trying to protect me but the men were grabbing at every inch of my body through the men, grabbing at everything they could, my breasts, butt, and crotch. I felt dozens of hands all over my body. I was screaming and jumping trying to get the hands off me. Suddenly I had men pulling on me, everything happened so fast; I was split from my friends. The last image I have of my friends is my friend N. trying to grab my hand, and our friend A. [a male friend] pushing the men away screaming "Ibn-kalb" to them.

Suddenly I was violently grabbed and thrown towards the wall right next to Hardee's. Then a group of older men formed a human chain around me and protected me. I was hysterical, screaming. I couldn't see my friends, I couldn't tell who was trying to help me or who was trying to sexually assault me. The men turned towards me, all older men in their 50's or so. They were trying to calm me, they keep telling me I was safe, they were protecting me. I then started to panic again, I couldn't see any of my friends, I couldn't get out of the human chain, it was still total chaos there was still men, trying to get to me. I was suddenly terrified, I couldn't see my friends, I couldn't get out. I was stuck, I then tweeted for help.

I could see the mobs of men still attacking C. our friend. I couldn't see her in the crowds. Suddenly, the men moved me to another cordon where there were more women. They were all terrified; there was six of them, all being protected by a human chain. One by one they got us out, I was last. Men had to escort me out of the area. Once I was clear I called my friends, some were waiting near KFC, N. was missing; she was looking for C.. That's when I first realized C. was missing; we didn't know what happened to her. I was finally able to walk through the square with no problems once I got out of that area. I found our two other friends and helped them get a taxi, then walked home.

I cannot express how horrible the experience was, I was completely sexually assaulted by groups of men, pulling on me, grabbing every inch of my body. I remember looking at some of them, yelling at them. They all had the same smirk on their faces, they were enjoying attacking me, they were all

enjoying it. It was a crazy face, like they had lost all senses; they were acting like complete animals. Animals, that is the best way I can explain their behavior.

What happened to C. was even worse, words cannot express the anger and rage I felt when she told us her story and what had happened to her.