
Male voices in a Cairo social movement

Voix masculines dans un mouvement social au Caire

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MALE VOICES IN A CAIRO SOCIAL MOVEMENT

ABSTRACT

This ethnographical study explores the role of the male voice inside a volunteer movement fighting *al-taharrush al-ginsy* (sometimes translated as “sexual harassment”) in the public sphere in Egypt, through dialogue-based awareness-raising activities and non-violent direct intervention. The movement treats the phenomenon of *taharrush* as a continuum of verbal and physical violence, defined as “any speech or action that is unwelcomed by another person and of a sexual nature, and infringes on the individual’s privacy or body or makes them feel lack of respect, trauma, insult, fear or exploitation.” This group has specifically sought to incorporate men into actively addressing *taharrush*, and changing how other men think about inter-gender interactions. Thus, masculine vocality plays a key part within the movement’s gendered struggle for public space, both as a support to the female voice and as a new and distinctive type of male voice, standing out from other masculine positions performed on the street. Through volunteers’ narratives, this paper analyses how the movement has become a laboratory in which new models of gender identity are elaborated, then are performed in a socially constructive way in the street through the struggle against *taharrush* and the negotiation of women’s share of public space.

INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 2012, I began to work with an anti-sexual harassment movement based in Cairo. Their original mission was to tackle any and all social issues based upon popular demand. This movement was founded in the summer of 2012 in response to the dramatic increase in gender-based violence, the creation of platforms from which to openly address the issue, and the simple fact that more people were willing and able to publically discuss sexual harassment and violence.¹ Beginning as a group of friends that welcomed all and made a point of being apolitical and nonreligious, the movement has expanded and currently works on a multitude of projects across Cairo. To address the problem of sexual harassment, more commonly referred to as *al-taharrush al-ginsy* (التحرش الجنسي), the movement deploys two specific methods: dialogue and non-violent intervention. Part of these practices involves engaging men (as well as women) in the process of creating solutions rather than simply targeting them as the cause of the problem. The use of dialogue is put into practice during regular awareness-raising campaigns across the city, while both the use of dialogue and non-violent intervention practices are visible during the deployment of patrols. Born out of necessity during the political turmoil following 2011, patrols were organised to stop attacks on women and if necessary, to rescue them, but are now mainly deployed during Eid festivals in the Downtown area. Patrol members intervene in instances of sexual harassment as well as sexual violence, but when talking about situations and incidents, the most commonly used term is *al-taharrush al-ginsy* or *taharrush*, which was originally used to mean “sexual abuse” but is currently understood as “sexual harassment”.²

The focus of this paper will be the work done by men of this movement in terms of masculine vocality. I intend to explore the role of the male voice in this movement as a supporter of the female voice and in contrast to other masculine positions performed both within the movement and on the streets of Cairo. This is especially important because part of the struggle to end *taharrush* is a gendered struggle for public space. Public space becomes the stage on which political identities and citizenship are shaped and reshaped, and on which voice is as powerful as action. To clarify, ‘support’ does not mean male presence in order to socially validate, or approve of, what their female counterparts are doing; ending *taharrush* is a shared goal. I do not wish to draw attention away from the myriad of women’s movements and groups at work in Cairo, but to use the stories of men at work in similar areas to draw attention to the fact that *taharrush* is an issue of concern to both men

1. Abd Alhamid & Zaki: 2014.

2. See Kreil: 2012, p. 168.

and women. Because my research is still in progress, the group I work with will not be identified by name.

This paper begins by briefly exploring the use of the term *taharrush*. It clarifies the definition used and disseminated by the movement, thus establishing its use throughout this paper. This is followed by the use of stories from the informal teams of 2012 as a framing device for understanding the types of masculinity at play and what exercising one's voice means in this particular context. Finally, training sessions for patrol/intervention teams demonstrate the role of the male voice within the movement and the organisation of formal and regular patrols as spaces that reconfigure ideas of masculinity. There is a controversy surrounding the use of the word 'victim' when referring to casualties of *taharrush* and rape because its use dehumanises the persons involved and strips them of their agency by labelling them forever helpless. Members of different movements I have encountered, have actively avoided using the word. In an attempt to dislodge this idea I will refer to women in jeopardy as 'cases'. This word carries its own inadequacies, but it will at least contribute to the process of moving away from a term that seems to permanently lock individuals in a specific state.

EH AL-TAHARRUSH? WHAT IS TAHARRUSH?

"There is a difference between when someone looks at you like this..." Fawzia³ paused to look around the room, ensuring that each person saw the blank expression on her face. *"...And someone who looks at you like this."* The trainer's facial expression changed to take on an obscene gaze, a half-smile, half-smirk with eyes that beckon and almost wink. Some men in the group made clicking noises with their mouths but everyone in the room recognised that look.

Fawzia, had been explaining what *taharrush* was to a group gathered in preparation for an upcoming Eid event. Her voice was very firm but kind, and while she allowed for the pursuit of secondary lines of questioning, she was always able to return the groups focus to the point at hand. Run by the movement, the goal of this gathering was to train volunteers to participate in the two aspects of the Eid event: raising awareness and patrolling the streets. Raising awareness consists of engaging passersby in dialogue to impart information on *taharrush*, the laws regarding it and to elicit opinions while having people think alongside volunteers concerning how *taharrush* negatively impacts Egyptian society. Patrols or intervention teams, consist of groups of men who walk the streets in lines looking for instances or potential instances of *taharrush*. Once one is identified, men act quickly to protect the 'case', secure the harasser, and aid in filing a police report if requested.

3. All individual names have been changed in this article.

Fawzia began by asking the group what they thought *al-taharrush al-ginsy* was. The first man offered a definition of any instance of touching, or use of hands. Another man suggested looks. Once people ceased to offer suggestions Fawzia explained that anything that makes someone afraid of another person can be *taharrush*. She had written people's contributions on a flip chart and once the conversation died down she brought up the definition of *taharrush* on the projection screen behind her. As the group took notes she read aloud:

"*Taharrush* is any speech or action that is unwelcomed by another person and of a sexual nature, and infringes on the individual's privacy or body or makes them feel lack of respect, trauma, insult, fear or exploitation."

"التحرش الجنسي هو أي قول أو/وفعل غير مرحب به وذات طبيعة جنسية ويعتدى على خصوصية الفرد أو جسده أو يشعره بعدم الاحترام أو الصدمة أو الإهانة أو الخوف أو الاستغلال."

Fawzia made the point of stressing the phrase "غير مرحب به" or "*unwelcomed*", drumming into participants' heads the idea that it is an action or sound that the intended recipient does not agree to. She then went on to explain that one could not talk to people on the street about what *taharrush* was and what to look for without knowing for themselves what it was and the types of *taharrush* that existed.

The issue of *taharrush* is one that is problematic in both terminology and definition. Abd Alhamid and Zaki have argued the English term 'sexual harassment' does not accurately describe the range of vocal and physical assaults women and the men helping them experience, but the term is prevalent in common speech, as well as in NGO reports, including the one issued by Harassmap and UN Women.⁴ Kreil gives a very thorough explanation of different terminologies used and their English counterparts, but here I will address the issues surrounding definition.⁵ People who attended the training session were very aware of how subjective the above definition could be and even raised the question of misuse. At one point a group member suggested that *mu'aksa* (معاكسة) is a form of *taharrush*. Fawziah admitted this is a subject to be careful about but at the same time agreed it could be *taharrush*.⁶ She also described it as *haga dowsha* (حاجة دوشة) or normal chatter that Egyptians regularly engage in. The group was asked to pay attention to the context of the exchange. The problem of a lack of collective understanding of what *taharrush* is, can be addressed in part by the involvement of witnesses and encouraging passers-by not to remain silent if they see someone being harassed.

4. Fahmy et al. (Harassmap/UN Women), "Study on Ways and Methods to Eliminate Sexual Harassment in Egypt," 2014.

5. 2012.

6. *Mu'aksa* is considered a form of flirtatious exchange. For further explanation, see Kreil: 2012.

In total participants of this training session were taught 14 types of *taharrush*: looks that scrutinize the body (النظرة المتفحصة للجسد), facial expressions (التعبيرات الوجهية), catcalling (النداءات), comments (تعليقات), stalking (الملاحقه او التتبع), sexual invitations (الدعوة لممارسة الجنس), sexual photos (الصور الجنسية), *taharrush* via the internet (التحرش في الانترنت), sexual phone calls (المكالمات الهاتفية), unwanted attention (الاهتمام غير المرغوب فيه), touching (اللمس), flashing (التارى), threats or intimidation (التهديد أو الترهيب), and finally group or mass *taharrush* (التحرش الجنسي الجماعي). These types of *taharrush* correspond with the range of the most recent laws. These are the acts and utterances that awareness campaigns focus on, and patrols look out for (except for internet and phone calls). These are what men in this movement combat with their voices and bodies. The key remains that such occurrences are unwelcomed, unwanted and visibly demonstrated as so.

THE EXPERIENCE OF INTERVENTION

Taharrush is widely perceived to be a women's issue, which is part of the reason why this group engages men they encounter (and not just women) in the street in dialogue, to get them involved in addressing *taharrush* in their local community. Their repeated presence in the same parts of town and maintaining contact with people met on previous occasions, constitutes a repetition which is vital to the internalisation of the message. This becomes part of both parties' listening practice, as explained by Hirschkind, and has an impact on moral conduct.⁷ The repeated presence of patrols (also known as intervention teams) has a similar effect supported by a certain type of physical presence. When forming the lines for a patrol (explained later), men are told it is very important to move through the crowds in silence and with serious facial expressions. One cannot wave to one's friends from the line, for example. While the first publically discussed occurrences of *taharrush* and mass sexual violence occurred in 2005 and 2006, the socio-political events of 2011 created a surge in debate and created the space within civil society for more groups to actively tackle the situation.⁸ More recently, the stripping and rape of a woman during the celebration of President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi's inauguration resulted in a demonstration against the normalisation of such events incorporating slogans such as "*Don't tell me what to wear, teach them not to rape*".⁹ Men I have worked with in the movement (including Khaled who is introduced later) have told me it is perceived as 'feminine' to work against harassment (returning to the argument that it is a 'women's issue') or indica-

7. Hirschkind: 2006.

8. Abd Alhamid & Zaki: 2014, Fahmy et al (Harassmap): 2014, Rizzo: 2014.

9. Examples of such slogans have been seen in demonstrations in both India (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/Dont-tell-me-how-to-dress-tell-them-not-to-rape/articleshow/13008664.cms>) and Egypt (<http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/06/15/demonstrators-rally-sexual-harassment-2/>).

tive of a personal experience of harassment, assault or attack. The majority however, have not been physically violated or verbally assaulted, but instead, have witnessed others (often friends) being attacked, motivating them to join movements. Many join because they feel personally motivated to pursue the cause, in spite of these negative associations. Many then become active in intervention teams charged with halting assault, rescuing 'cases', and aiding in the filing of police reports. Unfortunately it is not uncommon for men coming to the aid of women being assaulted, to also come under attack.

When people are asked about the intervention experience, the refrain from people (mostly men) across movements is the same: why should we talk about our experiences and trauma when women go through so much worse? They feel that what they experience in rescuing women from attack, and in many cases witnessing the results of their failure to do so, is not worth the attention that could be focused on the cases themselves. What some may not realise is their speech and use of voice can serve as a form of awareness-raising. Their voices are heard on the streets and sometimes on television, radio and internet (members of the movement have given television and radio interviews, many of which can be found on Youtube) and their actions (also a form of voice) seen and others are inspired to follow suit or at least, to cease to do harm. Numerous volunteers to the movement admitted to becoming volunteers after being inspired and motivated by Khaled, Ismail and others.

I met with Khaled, Ali and Salma, with whom I had worked previously in the movement, in a very old and very well-known cafe in Downtown Cairo. The location had been selected for its quietness, but even indoors one could hear the honking of cars, shouting of street vendors and pedestrian conversation. It also held a special place in the group's collective memory: it was the location of their operational headquarters during their first outing in 2012. The clinking of tea cups and the beeping of Samsung mobiles contributed to the existing din. The space itself was conducive to echoes as it was more of a cafeteria than cafe in addition to having a high ceiling and being bordered by large windows. Middle-aged waiters walked back and forth seemingly searching for customers in need or at least staying within earshot. I had asked them to tell me stories of the work they had done as part of the intervention team. As Khaled, Salma, and Ali recounted their stories, their voices lowered and became very stern and serious; their earlier exchanges were peppered with jokes as if shaking off the weight of what they were reliving. Eventually the jokes stopped.

Khaled, Ali and Salma had been working against sexual harassment for at least a year. Khaled is in his early 30s and heads a company with his childhood friend. He began working in intervention in 2012, along with Ismail. They were later joined by Ali who at the time was a university student (he graduated in summer 2014 with a degree in Engineering) in his early 20s. Salma is in her mid-20s and at the time, was working on her Master's degree. She is also involved in a number of volunteer initiatives across the spectrum of development.

Ali and Khaled began by explaining how they came together as a group to patrol the streets and stop harassers; the movement itself did not yet exist. Ali asked Khaled "*Do you remember that day?*" which allowed me to share in the memory. It began with an invitation to protect the women participating in the anti-sexual harassment stand in June, 2012. Starting from another part of town, a friend had brought a group of women together to demonstrate against the assaults perpetrated by men several days earlier.¹⁰ Within the exchange that forms the retelling of this story, the men endeavoured to lay out details in chronological order. They explained that friends gathered and donned brightly coloured vests to form a protective ring around women while they demonstrated in Tahrir Square. They had also come armed with spare clothing in case women were physically assaulted. Supposedly members of other movements were present. After about an hour the group wanted to move to a secondary location. Initially patrol members disagreed with this move, fearing loss of control of the space, but eventually they acquiesced. *En route* to the second location the group was caught in a location where the power had been cut and by this point it was after dark. Things took a terrible turn. Unknown men began winking at women, progressing to catcalls and attempts to touch and grab. Khaled and Ali admitted they were not prepared for this advance; each one sought a specific woman to protect and remove from the situation as quickly as possible. In order to protect the circle of defence (between harassers and women) Ali felt forced to hit a harasser in order to keep him at bay. Khaled supported Ali's description of the situation him by explaining that if that man had broken the line of defence, the situation would have unravelled much faster. One woman hit her harasser and when her brother (or friend, they were not sure) came to her defence, he was mistaken for the harasser and beaten, which allowed the harasser to carry on his actions. On that day 3 or 4 women were taken away by harassers though the rest of the women were accompanied to safety. The story ended here for the storytellers; they did not witness what happened next. Later they had heard men had taken women to a nearby restaurant and used scissors to remove their clothing (a technique also used on men defending them). They said no one was raped that day, but it remains a disaster to them, one that strengthened their resolve to organise and coordinate their protection efforts. In the aftermath they were all upset that they were not able to safeguard all present that day.

What we see demonstrated in this story is an aggressive negotiation of public space: older forms of gendered identities coming into conflict with newer identities expressing themselves both vocally and through physical presence (demonstrations, counter-demonstrations and walking in the street). In order to come into their own, these newer expressions of identity must be

10. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jun/09/egyptian-women-protesters-sexually-assaulted>, <http://www.rt.com/news/egypt-assault-apologies-elbaradei-471/>.

negotiated between the individual, others and the government, partially through exploration of one's voice.¹¹ These encounters become a form of discussion or argument in which men and women are arguing for the right to share public space and men representing traditional forms of masculinity are responding with a resounding 'no'.¹² The identities of those pushing for space may be expressed as more fluid masculine and feminine types establishing themselves in the common space where various discourses are played out. There, they are met with resistance by older, more traditional views of gender roles or hegemonic masculine types.¹³ This does not necessarily involve the intervention of *baltagiyya*.¹⁴ While the notion of *baltagiyya* as perceived perpetrators and or instigators of group sexual violence persists, it is mainly associated with the events starting in February 2011.¹⁵ Nonetheless, on that particular day there could very well have been *baltagiyya* amongst the harassers Khaled and Ali faced, given the political atmosphere of the time.

It is the 'everyday' Egyptian who commits *taharrush* irrespective of social class (either on the part of the actor or the target).¹⁶ A common story told amongst movement members is one where a woman was groped from the window of a Mercedes.¹⁷ To this end there has been debate amongst NGOs, organisations and movements over how to engage men in reducing and ultimately eliminating *taharrush*. Many endeavour to avoid calling on men to defend women, thus equally avoiding the implication that women are not capable of protecting themselves. Instead, whole communities are called upon to actively watch out for and stop men who leer at women, or call out to them, or attempt to touch them in an unwelcome way.¹⁸ My point is that men in patrols do not deny a woman's ability to protect herself, but men see themselves as helping women to aggressively (when necessary) carve out their space in the public sphere, an act that makes them politically engaged in reshaping their social environment (similar to Hirschkind's politically active citizens).¹⁹

The motivation and strength of feeling on the part of Ali, Salma, Khaled and their friends gave rise to the movement, the campaigns and awareness-raising events, and the metro patrols; since their first 'outing' the men

11. Giullianotti: 2005.

12. Giullianotti: 2005, Hirschkind: 2006.

13. Rizzo: 2014.

14. *Baltagiyya* (plural) have drawn media attention in recent years as perpetrators of State-sanctioned violence. Viewed as a 'type' of criminal (along with *al-futuwwat* and *al-barmagiyya*) by Egyptian police in the 1930s (Jacob: 2014), *al-baltagiyya* more recently became a term often used to describe plainclothes police or police associates who were sent to attack and assault protestors (Amar: 2011). Defined in English as 'thugs' or 'gangsters', *al-baltagiyya* represent a specific masculine image associated with extreme violence (Jacob: 2014).

15. Amar: 2011 (IFJP).

16. Abd Alhamid & Zaki: 2014.

17. There is a lot to be said about the specific role of class in these exchanges and the work being done but it needs to be addressed in another paper.

18. Rizzo: 2014.

19. Hirschkind: 2006.

claim to have seen much worse. Khaled told me they would spend seven hours at a time in the metro, removing men from women-only cars. They did this in conjunction with the metro police and with their permission (a nod towards Abdallah's powerful or State-sanctioned masculinity).²⁰ Movement members would wait for the metro cars to arrive and without entering them, check for the presence of men. Once if men were found there, they were ejected from the car. This patrol occurred during the Eid al Fitr festival holiday of 2012 and increased the movement's following.

Then came an awareness-raising event on Talaat Harb square, during the following Eid al-Adha, 2012. Ali had not yet officially joined the movement but he saw an event organised on Facebook and decided to attend. The storytellers reminisced about beginning with a simple banner and a few pieces of wood for a booth which they set up in the middle of Talaat Harb square in the morning. When more members arrived later that day they were divided into groups and began to move about the streets looking for signs of impending *taharrush*. Something as simple as a look was considered a potential danger. They then approached the harasser and explained that their actions were unacceptable, and if they continued they would be taken to the police. Three days yielded positive results: 3 mass assaults were halted and 80 individual cases stopped (this included unwelcomed looks/stares and commentary in addition to unwelcome physical contact). At the time there were more than 130 volunteers covering the whole area of Talaat Harb Street and Square, while women in particular manned an area designated as the control booth, where updates were posted on social media and distress calls were taken and routed to patrollers.

In another instance Khaled described how women were plucked by men from crowds while other men coordinated to protect the perpetrator as he whisked the women away to a dark corner or side street. These men formed circles around the harasser as a shield, which mirrors the techniques used by intervention teams to protect. Khaled said this was the worst thing he had witnessed; men arming themselves and organising themselves with the intent of doing physical and psychological harm. He warned me of specific small side streets in the downtown area to which women are taken. These experiences allowed for one of the men to devise a plan that came to be part of how patrols and intervention teams are currently coordinated (detailed further on). Since 2011, there has been a backlash against the progression of women's rights. This manifests itself in part in the form of increased attacks on women in the public sphere. As Abdallah and Rizzo argue, men are pushing to restore what they see as the natural order by reasserting the patriarchal bargain and restricting women to the private sphere.²¹

20. Abdallah: 2014.

21. Abdallah: 2014 p. 63, Rizzo: 2014 p. 119.

In the centre of all of this, both (figuratively and literally) stands the woman. According to Khaled, even when approached by intervention teams, women do not trust anyone because many men have pretended to rescue them just in order to harass them. Often they scream and yell even while being moved to safety. In Tahrir Square, at the height of the period when Intervention teams were needed, they said, there was a lot of noise and shouting in general, and as a result everyone else had to shout to communicate. Here we see sound as an additional barrier, almost equally as powerful as the push and pull of the crowd. According to Khaled, men in the crowd carried sticks, knives and once a man was armed with a "sword". Ali stressed the importance of showing courage: it was imperative they kept moving to get to the women. This offers a window into understanding how masculinity represented by these men as courage is traditionally considered a masculine trait.²² They described instances where they have had boiling water thrown on them by men who had set up makeshift tea stands, in one case to break the circle of defence and allow harassers through. This one action took the situation from one under the patrol's control, to one where the harassers gained the upper hand and the woman was completely stripped of clothing. Because they did not know who was there to help and who was there to harass, they chose to hoist the woman over the wall of a nearby building with help from its security staff, who ensured she reached the other side, where she was taken to safety by car.

In their dialogue Khaled raised the issue of what happens when there are multiple cases in distress at once. In these unfortunate instances, they have had to make their way toward the nearest case in an attempt to rescue her. In one instance there was a mother and two daughters who were in jeopardy. The team had chosen to surround the mother first as she was the most at risk, but one man went to one of the daughters. They then had the idea of bringing one daughter to the other to maximise protection, but by this point it was too late. Khaled asked me if I knew what he was talking about. Salma asked if he meant this woman had been harassed; he clarified she had been raped. On the day of former president Morsi's ouster, Khaled claims teams in Tahrir Square witnessed more than 100 cases of rape.²³

Ali and Khaled brought up a story of a woman being raped and then having a knife inserted inside her. They wondered why after performing such a violation, a further trespass could be committed and came to the conclusion

22. Ghannam: 2013.

23. I cannot personally contest or confirm this figure put forward by Khaled, as I was not present that night. An article by the *Guardian* states that there were 80 confirmed cases of sexual assault on the day of Morsi's ouster (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/05/egypt-women-rape-sexual-assault-tahrir-square>). It is commonly known that the majority of sexual assault and rape cases go unreported in Egypt; most women do not file police reports following such assaults. Therefore, there are usually no State-confirmed figures from this period; the only available figures come from confirmed counts by volunteer groups. The groups on the ground at that period, together with the one discussed in this paper, announced confirmed totals of mass *taharrush* and mass sexual assault cases in the same range as Khaled's observation.

that the goal is to cause real and lasting pain. They said it was revenge; the goal was to humiliate. Salma speculated that rather than asking “*Why?*” people were asking “*Why not?*” It was about breaking you, Salma, Khaled and Ali said. After so many experiences (many of which he chooses not to talk about and all of which he wishes he could forget) Khaled still hears screaming, even when he is on his own and in a silent place. These voices have been internalised, becoming more personal; in turn they motivate these men to act. At the same time this is indicative of an emotional response to trauma, considered feminine. Both men have been offered counselling through another organisation but they have refused. There is still a stigma around therapy.

The struggle inherent in these narratives and their emotional fallout warrant a brief note on power struggles. The exercising of one’s voice is heavily influenced by social positionality and Bakhtin stresses the importance of acknowledging intersectionality with reference to a given context.²⁴ The people with whom I have worked thus far have never discussed class or identified themselves as being of a given social class; while it may be easy to assess their social positioning it would also be presumptuous. It is preferable to avoid the trope of “*the privileged speaking for the underprivileged*”. This paper does acknowledge a multi-layered, multi-fronted struggle to be heard, and for space in the public arena.

24. Giullianotti: 2005.

TRAINING

A month before meeting with the members of the intervention team, I entered the movement headquarters, having been allowed to attend a training session for intervention teams or patrols. As the movement maintained a 'men only' policy for intervention teams, women did not normally attend trainings. In reality 'headquarters' was a flat in a noisy section of Cairo whose rooms had been repurposed for meetings and storage. The flat was rented by an organisation who allowed this movement to use it for meetings and training sessions. Ismail, the trainer, had already begun the session by the time I arrived. His voice was high in pitch but low in tone, strong but somewhat raspy. He stood to the side of a white board that had been mounted on an easel which already had a diagram of the formation the group of men always took when on patrol. With 14 of us crowded into a secondary room of the headquarters amongst the desks and shelves mostly covered in small posters, books and miscellaneous, there was a sense of something ominous; men were being prepared for the worst. Once again however, everyone was able to maintain a certain joviality, making jokes as Ismail described the area around Talaat Harb, Tahrir, marked the trajectory of the lines of men who were to patrol the area and talked about shopkeepers who were 'friendly to the cause'.

Ismail is nearing his mid-20s and like many others, his life has seen a dramatic change as a result of the events of 2011. The spirit of cooperation and community he witnessed in Tahrir Square inspired him to volunteer, demonstrate and eventually to devise plans and training courses for intervention teams. With a background in martial arts, business management and human resources, he was well suited to the task of developing the structure adopted by the movement. Originally working in Nasr City, Ismail gave up his job in order to further contribute to the movement and develop it.

Ismail mapped out scenarios of assault using well-known sections of the area around Tahrir Square as the backdrop, and explained in diagrammatic form the strategy for moving quickly through the crowd to encircle and protect the given 'case'. He stressed the point that once the crowd became aware something was going on, many people would rush towards the scene, some to find out exactly what was happening, some to help and others to hinder. It was vital not to lose focus. Each position in the circle had a number associated with a specific role at a given time. There was a man assigned to approach the harasser with two others as back-up, and one man assigned to take the woman to safety. The goal was to be quick and regimented, and Ismail would later compare this to army formations. Traditionally, the military is viewed, both socially and with regard to nation-building, as a symbol of masculine strength.²⁵ Ismail then detailed how these regimented lines, through knowl-

25. Baron: 2007.

edge of where a man was meant to stand as determined by his given number, became the circle which blocked harassers forcefully but not violently. Once the circle was formed, men locked arms to form a barrier. Ismail placed emphasis on being clearly marked as part of the patrol/intervention team (hence the use of coloured vests); people needed to know that you were there to help. He also stressed the importance of mobility. The whole line of men needs to be able to move through the crowd to the scene as quickly as possible. As he spoke, men in the room offered words of support and complimented him on the soundness of the strategies before them.

Once everything was explained, we moved out to the foyer in order to practice. Ismail had already demonstrated multiple times how easy it would be for someone to approach you from behind and bring you to the ground before you knew what had happened. He explained to us how an assailant need not use much force, but simply target specific points of the body to knock someone off balance. To make sure everyone was prepared Ismail simulated modes of attack in crowds to ensure team members did not lose formation and did not lose sight of the 'case'. His skill in disarming teammates in drills made one happy he had chosen to combat rather than perpetrate attacks. It can be argued that these practices take 'already approved' masculine traits and redirect them. Men who are already part of the movement and volunteers have their ideas of masculinity reinforced in a way that does not require targeting women as an antithesis or a source of their emasculation.²⁶ This masculine identity is a new one containing traces of the old.

A year later we stood in the same flat with almost the same number of men. This time, training had run for three nights in order to accommodate the large number of volunteers with varying schedules. Instead of the side room, we sat in a forward room that had been designated the meeting room. Once lined with metal chairs, the back half of the room had bean bag chairs of various shapes and sizes and a carpet and coffee table in the centre. As always, Ismail greeted each person by name and when making introductions described when and how he had met those he knew from before. Fawzia was also present as co-runner of the Eid event with two other men who were not present that night. Ismail had since reduced his level of participation in the movement to what he called a 'consultancy role'.

As with the previous sessions Ismail began by explaining what the movement did and its personal history but because this particular evening was solely patrol training there was no explanation of *taharrush*. He recounted the story of the first patrol which was not under the name of the movement, saying they learned a valuable lesson the hard way. This time the men, none of whom I had met before or seen at previous trainings, sat in silence. Ismail explained that we needed to raise awareness alongside patrols in order to

26. Abdallah: 2014.

resolve the issue of *taharrush*. In any given situation there are four parties: 1) the harasser 2) the harassed 3) bystanders or society and 4) the State. If the four do not work together, Ismail said, *taharrush* will continue. He was reinforcing the importance of communication, regular dialogue and the role of men as participants in a wider society. Women, Ismail said, need to know that not all men are harassers and men need to know they are not alone and have a support network (through society and the police). Furthermore, *taharrush* has to be acknowledged and people brought together to solve/address the issue. As he spoke, one could hear music booming from the speakers of a nearby restaurant and the intermittent popping of firecrackers as the last day of Ramadan had already come to a close.

After a while Fawzia brought in a white board for Ismail to use. The board was already covered with the signature circles denoting people in patrol formation. Instead of 3 rows of 8, the board had 2 rows, and in the top left corner, a spoke-like drawing signifying the Talaat Harb Square as it appears on a map. Ismail began explaining the layout of Talaat Harb, the central point of this year's event, while drawing a larger version of Talaat Harb lower on the white board. As with last year, he demonstrated the simple techniques that could be used to take a person off their feet and organised the men into rows to practice. Instead of moving into the hallway like the previous year, men were arranged in the room and Ismail directed them while standing on a chair. For the first time in the movement's history, women had joined the training sessions for patrols and tonight, Fawzia was asked to join the line to complete the 2 rows of 8. Ismail reminded the group that it is extremely important that the man approaching the 'case' says, "*I am from the movement and I am here to help you*" before doing anything else. At the same time, the leader put his arm around the harasser's neck and talked to him, while two others held him so that he could be led away to the police. These are clear-cut demonstrations of the movement's use of dialogue and practice of non-violence at work, which feeds into newer ideas of performing masculinity while maintaining the sense of strength associated with more traditional forms. As previously mentioned, this is fluid, a space where ideas of what makes a man can overlap and intersect without threatening others being threatened.

There is a debate among movement members around the idea of all-male intervention teams. While this is the first year that women are invited to participate in patrol training, they still do not go out with men on patrol. The argument is made that women in intervention teams automatically become targets and are therefore the weak links in a physical chain of volunteers that needs to remain strong to protect the women in jeopardy. It is argued that men would then have to rescue their female counterparts instead of focusing on their original target. At the same time, the argument returns to the implied idea of men as deliverers of freedom and agency, to the assumption that women are simply not strong enough to protect themselves. However, the men I have spoken to admit that even a man who is targeted by a mob would

not be able to defend himself, and ask how a woman would be able to do so. This argument is problematic in two ways: it highlights the point that no one person alone can defend themselves successfully against a mob, rendering the original argument ineffective, but then argues for the supposed inherent weakness of women, reinforcing the dominant gender dynamic in place. Thus, is it not possible for women to find ways to defend themselves when they are part of the protection ring? Originally, other volunteer groups had used intervention teams that incorporated both men and women successfully, making the argument for male-only interventions teams harder to sustain. For example, one movement (no longer in existence) deployed all mixed-gender intervention teams, raising a further question of how to successfully tackle this very gendered issue without returning to traditional gender roles and tropes. These debates and questions remain amongst groups still at work, but without clear cut answers.

"Sexual harassment is not about sex. It is about violence", Ismail explained to me in a definitive yet soft tone. Almost a month had passed since that first session in headquarters and we now sat in a cafe located in a quieter part of central Cairo. The cafe itself was also quiet and sparsely populated with the multiple televisions set to music television channels muted. It seemed to have been designed to give one a sense of being outside while inside, large windows and light, cushioned, wooden furniture with appropriate ventilation for sheesha smokers. We sat with another mutual friend, Ahmad, each of us nursing our caffeinated beverage of choice while Ahmad checked his phone at regular intervals. Ismail went on to tell me that the term *'sexual harassment'*²⁷ is completely wrong and feeds into the common misunderstanding that women want and enjoy harassment, that there is flattery to be found in it for women and a reassurance for men that one is indeed a 'man'. He was worried that by using the term 'sexual harassment' we continue to place emphasis on the wrong points and send the wrong message. This returns us to the story of the woman who had been raped, including with a knife. It would seem Ali, Khaled and Ismail agree that a form of self-assertion is behind these transgressions. One could argue that this stems from a particular need to prove one's masculinity in a space perceived as rapidly robbing men of perceived masculine markers, but that would be over-simplifying and to a certain extent, dehumanising the situation.²⁸ In fact, that there are multiple masculinities at play, both in terms of perceived harassers and the men in the movement, and that said masculinities are not necessarily divided along those lines. According to Mostafa Abdallah's notion of 'damaged masculinity', for example, it is possible to argue that men join patrols in part to reaffirm their masculinity.²⁹ Khaled once told me in a separate interview that part of the reason patrols

27. This exchange occurred in English, hence the use of the term "sexual harassment".

28. Abdallah: 2014.

29. 2014.

were important to him was because they served as an opportunity to physically combat *taharrush*. When part of the formation, men are publically seen as actively contributing to society in a way that, while not specifically defined in traditional Egyptian ideas of gender roles, still looks 'manly'. At the same time this action absorbs and nullifies the idea that fighting *taharrush* is 'feminine'. However, Ismail's original assertion that space and terminology are still gendered is problematic, but remains valid.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this paper was to explore the role of the male voice in combating *taharrush* and the forging of newer masculinities in the process of supporting women engaged in the fight. It is agreed that the use of the term *taharrush* is problematic, but it persists as a vernacular for the myriad of acts and vocal intrusions experienced on (and now beyond) the streets of Cairo. The men portrayed in this paper represent an experiment in masculine identity; they work with women to redraw the boundaries of acceptability within public space but also the lines of social identity. They do not wish to become the focus of attention or to draw attention away from the issue at hand, but their presence does not go unnoticed and as such warrants discussion. In their accounts we see both personal struggle, and a struggle to end *taharrush* as a barrier and 'punishment' for women who dare to cross certain boundaries.³⁰ Devotion to a cause has led to the creation of the movement but also to a safe space in which to continue the experiment. The movement later becomes a sort of laboratory where ideas of both masculinity and femininity are reshaped and developed, to be performed and defended either during awareness campaigns or patrols. Men find newer ways to display and perform their gendered identity in a manner that can be seen as socially productive. At the same time the formation of the patrol is reminiscent of army formations which reflect the traditional masculine role of the protector. However, these patrols incorporate dialogue when dealing with both the case and the harasser. On the street men and women engage in negotiations that range from civility to violence as part of expressing their long-term presence. What remains to be seen is how the men engaging in these newer masculinities keep the ground they are fighting to gain within Egyptian society, as part of aiding women to establish themselves as actors in public space.

30. Abdallah: 2014.

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