في حوار مع هاني شُكرالله

If the sun were to drown
In the sea of sad clouds
If the earth were engulfed
by a wave of dark shrouds
And sight died away
From all eyes and all minds
And the pathway went missing
Amidst circles and lines
You might get around
(You think you're so wise!)
Yet you haven't a guide
But the words' very eyes

Ahmed Fouad Negm

Tora Prison[1], 1970

1. 'Oyoun El Kalam, Ahmed Fouad Negm, 1970. Translated from Arabic, name of translator unknown.

In Conversation with Hani Shukrallah

Hani Shukrallah (June 13, 1950 – May 5, 2019) was an astute political commentator and a champion of revolutionary politics. He belonged to the Egyptian communist student movement of the 1970s, the major Marxist group of the decade. Hani's political consciousness, which he passed on to successive generations of journalists and activists, was heavily informed by his years in the student movement — its scope, dreams, and eventual demise.

On November 27, 2018, we recorded an interview with Hani at his family home in Giza, where he spent a large part of his life. Hani rummaged through his memory for four hours, bursting into laughter as he spoke about his years as a leading member of the Egyptian Communist Workers Party, and as a journalist at Al-Ahram.

In his (re)reading of the student movement and the 2011 revolution, Hani, an eternal optimist, speaks with a rare kindness for someone reflecting on such moments of defeat. He offers poignant insights on a political trajectory that began for him in the 1960s, the moment of his first demonstration.

"In Conversation with Hani" includes the full transcript of our interview, with added excerpts from eulogies published following his death, in addition to an audio episode taken from the original recording. The transcript has been edited for a smoother reading experience while retaining the context and feeling of the interview.

Excerpts of our conversation with Hani were first published as part of the four-part podcast *Mesh Masmou',* the project for which this interview was originally conducted. Hani passed away before he got a chance to listen to the podcast or review the transcript.

If I get off on a tangent or ramble on without end, don't feel shy to say:

Stick to the point for heaven's sake. Okay?

We usually start with milestones of your political life...

The first demonstration I took part in was in '64 — I hadn't turned 14 yet. I was in first secondary at Al-Noqrashy Model School, which was next to the General Intelligence building, in Hadayek El-Qobba, I think. I can't remember exactly. Prior to Al-Noqrashy, I went to Amun Private School. At the time, the belief was that in order for your children to do well in high school and get into a good university, you had to send them to public schools, not private ones. Public schools were supposedly better at the time. So I used to go to Al-Noqrashy.

One day, Gamal Abdel Nasser gave a speech, the one where he said he would not rerun for president, so we marched in huge numbers. I remember the chants: *Nasser, Nasser, no one can replace Nasser,* and *Nasser, our beloved, the next step is Tel Aviv.* We kept going for three days. By the third day the headmaster decided that it was enough, so he told the teachers to hold batons and stand by the school gate to stop us from walking out. So we started to chant *Down with the headmaster, agent of colonialism!* He must have been terrified. Anyway, this is all to paint a picture of how it all began.

I was brought up in a house that loved Abdel Nasser. We believed in him, especially my siblings and I. My father was skeptical, but he never said it out loud. He used to work at the Arab League, and for him the most important issue was the question of Palestine. My father always made fun of our relatives who were angry at Abdel Nasser for nationalizing their property. He would say things like, they are beggars; they had nothing to nationalize in the first place.

Then we left for Canada. My father was the head of the Arab League office in Ottawa, Canada, and then in New York. That was between '65 and '70, so the late '60s: The Vietnam War was ongoing, in '68 Che Guevara was killed in Bolivia, Cuba was in full force, and, of course, the most decisive event was the '67 defeat. I remember that day very well because we were gathered at the house of the Egyptian ambassador [in Ottawa] when we heard Abdel Nasser's resignation speech. Until that moment, we didn't believe we got defeated — we just couldn't believe it. On Canadian channels, we watched as Israeli soldiers swam in the Suez Canal… of course my father immediately knew. But I remember my brother Alaa and I refused to admit it — we thought it was surely a distortion. Meanwhile, we listened to *Sawt Al-Arab*[2], which reported that we had shot down 70 planes and things of the sort, fantastical things that don't even happen in world wars. Nobody shoots down 70 planes in a single day.

So we were in Canada, as I was saying. The general political sentiment was leaning left, with the Hippies and the anti-Vietnam war movements. We were constantly faced with the challenge of defending the Palestinian cause, amid an environment that considered Arabs anti-Semitic, Jew haters and sons of bitches because they supposedly want to toss Israel into the sea. Things of the sort. Meanwhile we had many Jewish colleagues, most of whom were inherently Zionists. So we began to lean towards the left. We still believed in Abdel Nasser and the Nasserite experiment, but we started to view it critically.

I remember it like it was yesterday… There are certain moments in life when one's memory never slips. You can forget what you had for lunch yesterday but remember something that happened 70 years ago… No, not 70; I haven't reached 70 yet, but I'm heading there.

I was in Grade 10, which is to say the first year of high school. Or was it 11? No, it was 10, because for most of my first year in Canada I stayed silent. We hadn't studied at a language school so we didn't

2. A prominent Egyptian transnational Arabic-language radio service.

learn English as a subject. I was very shy, and Alaa was just as oblivious but he started speaking English on his first day. Hala had attended an English school so she didn't have a problem with the language. She was the youngest; she was only 11. So for the first year I almost didn't speak. I used to study using a dictionary. I had an Arabic-English dictionary next to me at all times. By the second year, somehow, I had a better grasp of the language. Now I believe my English is better than that of Americans. Better than that of most of them at least, but that's a whole other story .

I had a history professor called Ted Bozilov, he was Bulgarian. He used to listen to me ramble on about imperialism and things of the sort, so in one of the lessons he told me: "I have a book for you." He gave me Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. I had that book until two or three years ago, the same copy I mean. I don't know what happened to it. After that we became good friends and I discovered that he was a Marxist. He had escaped Stalinism, been tortured and gone through hell until he managed to arrive in Canada. So I read the book, and surely I failed to understand most of it, but the second I finished it I considered myself a Marxist. I declared myself a Marxist.

There is another issue that we do not need to address in detail. From an early age my relationship with religion began to… and this had nothing to do with politics. My mother was the most religious person in our family. My father was a fierce libertine. They used to send us to Sunday school. You know I was born to a Christian family. That was before we went to Canada, so around the time of *Nasser, Nasser, no one can replace Nasser*; we were attending Al-Noqrashy Model School and at the same time going to Sunday school. Anyway, our teacher at Sunday school told us that a good Christian must read a chapter from the Bible every night. That included both the Old and New Testaments (the Old Testament is full of legends about our cousins, the Jews.) I was an avid reader and an introvert. I used to read zealously from a very young age, and I spent a lot of days at home since I would often fall ill because I had acute asthma, so I took the task seriously.

The more I read the more I thought, what's this bullshit? I apologize if I'm offending anyone. I started with the Old Testament, which is a disaster. It's full of horror stories, including the one about the "Festival of Sacrifice" — the story of the man who was about to slaughter his son. The man who is supposed to be our great grandfather, us and the Jews, Abraham. A father is prepared to slay his son because God told him to? I could not fathom how a god can tell a man to kill his own son. And the man, to prove his piety, almost slaughtered his son but was stopped by an angel who descended with a lamb. Of course as an Egyptian nationalist, by the time I reached Moses and the ten plagues that God inflicted on Egyptians, the strikes seemed so illogical. Among them was the one where God turned the Nile water into blood so that no one would be able to drink... That's genocide, that's an extermination of the Egyptian people. Then locusts descended upon them, and when people survived he killed every firstborn until the sea parted and they were able to pass through... I mean, it started as a rejection of the Old Testament, but when I read the New Testament I realized that the whole thing referred back to the Old Testament.

Anyway, we had a science teacher in second preparatory [Grade 8] at Amun Private School whom we loved very much. At one point, he explained Darwin's theory to us. I don't even know if it was included in the curriculum. This is one of the moments I remember vividly. I can even remember the classroom and where I was sitting. My heart was beating loudly as I listened, because what he was saying made sense; it sounded like the truth, but it contradicted all the stories you were told to believe growing up. It ambushed them in a flash. I was shivering. I did not say a word, but some of the kids in class asked him, okay, what about Adam and Eve and all that? He said: 'Look, I

am a science teacher, not a clergyman or a priest. Those questions are for your clergy and priests to answer. Don't ask me. I teach science.' I mean, I think it's a brilliant answer. So anyway, stuff like that had an impact on me.

Then came '67. That was a decisive moment for our entire generation. As a self-declared Marxist, '67 was the moment I rebelled against Gamal Abdel Nasser, and it's when I got serious about politics and started to read a lot more. Then came the Battle of Karameh of '68[3], which marked the start of what was then called the Palestinian Revolution, the armed struggle. And then of course Jerash and Ajloun, the massacre that took place in Jordan. So that was the scene.

We were active in the solidarity movement; the solidarity movement with the Palestinian Revolution was the most urgent issue for us in Canada. In '68 or early '69, I don't remember exactly, we organized a big conference in Montreal alongside Canadian Marxist organizations in solidarity with the Palestinian Revolution. I was among the organizers. We had invited many leftist organizations from across North America, so I suggested that we invite a representative of the Black Panthers. That was around the time of the civil rights movement of Stockley Carmichael, Angela Davis and others. These people were our heroes. And Malcolm X of course. To you, it's like speaking of Lenin, ha? I can tell you more about Angela Davis in particular, because I once had breakfast with Angela Davis.

Back then I was mad. I had no limits. My father was the head of the New York office [of the Arab League] in addition to the office in Ottawa, but he was based in New York. I told them we must invite someone from the Black Panthers Party — does anyone have a connection? I went to my father in New York: 'Does anyone know a member of the Black Panthers?' No. So I took the subway and went to Harlem. Can't go wrong, I thought. I walked around Harlem — which was considered a forbidden area at the time, you had to be insane to go there — asking people: where can I find the office of the Black Panthers? Finally someone was able to direct me. I went up and told them that we were organizing a conference and that we wanted someone from their party to attend, so they did send someone.

Here's another funny story. There was a famous Lebanese or Syrian singer at the time whom people loved... you know Canada was full of Lebanese and Syrians, early immigrants from the beginning of the twentieth century. So, with a group of Arabs I organized a concert for that singer, with revenues going to Fateh and other organizations. My father donated the whiskey, which was smuggled of course; he was a diplomat so he bought the liquor tax free, so it was very cheap. That night, Alaa and I waited on tables because we wanted to save money. This was one of the most horrible things I ever had to do because I used to forget people's orders. And of course none of them were there for the Palestinian Revolution to begin with; they were only there for the singer.

Anyway, by the time we returned to Egypt in '70 I considered myself a radical Marxist. I rejected both the Soviet and Chinese courses, the two dominant lines at the time. I went about looking for people who were of the same mind. I joined the Faculty of Economics and Political Science [at Cairo University] and it was there that I found like-minded people. I met Ahmed Abdallah, Mohamed Sayed Said and Taha Abdel Aleem, who was a Marxist by the way. Then one day Zein El Abdedin, who was studying at the Faculty of Arts, came to me... I got to know him through seminars and such things. 'Why don't we go for a walk?' We walked around campus and he told me that there was an organization, a secret group, etc, etc, which later came to be known as the Egyptian Communist Organization, up until it turned into the Egyptian Communist Workers Party

3. The Battle of Karameh took place in Jordan during the War of Attrition. It was fought between the Israel Defense Forces and combined forces of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Jordanian Armed Forces.

in '75. It was the most radical organization in the Egyptian Marxist movement. And it was the first, because it was founded in '69, December '69. The rest followed. That became the cornerstone of my life, intellectual work and party politics.

The funny thing is, I got into journalism by chance. The first job I got after graduation was at the Arab-British Chamber of Commerce while we were still abroad. I was issued a work permit and residency. I worked in the media section of the chamber. I used to joke to my friends that if I had stayed at the chamber I would be living in Park Lane by now, driving my favorite car: Jaguar. This is actually my biggest weakness — I've always wanted to own a Jaguar. None of the new ones; the new ones look like Toyota Corolla. I mean the old Jaguar with the wings on the sides of its hood.

Afterward, I worked in management consulting [in Egypt] — can you imagine? I did that for 7 or 8 months and then I left. I could not take it. Then I got into journalism, first as a correspondent for *Middle East Magazine* then *Middle East Mirror*. I sneaked into *Al-Ahram* fortuitously. Mona Anis asked me to replace her for a month because she was going on vacation. Hosni Guindi, who was the editor-in-chief at the time, had told her, 'You have to bring in someone who does things exactly like you do.' So I did it, thinking it was impossible for me to work at *Al-Ahram* on a permanent basis. I was doing Mona a favor at first and then I got seduced into it. It was Hosni Guindi who wanted me to stay — he was a beautiful man. So this is how I got into journalism.

Of course I used to write for the university's wall magazines and the party's newspapers. I was a party member until 2001, the Egyptian Workers Party. I often joke that it was I who closed the door on the party. I lived through the 90s, a period when party members kept walking out and never coming back. Members kept fizzling out, and at one point I found that I was completely alone, so I turned off the lights and shut the door, and that was it. But this is another story for another time.

What are other moments that you remember that influenced your development?

Look, there's of course [the protests of] '72 and '73. That was a major one, and you will be surprised at the sense of euphoria... It seems that as one gets older, feelings start to grow colder somehow.

January '72. Sadat gave his 'fog speech'. We had been working since the beginning of the year, the academic year '71-'72. We had spent months, since September, putting up wall magazines and mobilizing within the party, especially within Cairo University's Faculty of Economics and Political Science and Faculty of Arts, where most students were communists and we were the major group. This becomes integral in my reading of the January 2011 revolution.

So, we were constantly working, putting up wall magazines, clashing with the administration, organizing seminars, and so on. Life was very strange back then. Now when I look back on those days I don't know how 24 hours were enough. I was the first to arrive on campus in order to make sure that our magazines were up by the time the rest of the students arrived. I yelled at anyone who was late. We spent hours discussing the magazines. We organized trips and formed groups and "student families". Within my faculty, we formed the "Abdel Hakkam al-Garahi family". I was its president. We also formed a group called "Intellectual and Political Issues", headed by Ahmed Seif.

Then on January 18, I think, I arrived to find the walls of our floor completely covered in magazines, brought by regular students. Ok, that's not a nice thing to say, but I mean brought by non-activist groups, students who weren't affiliated with any political party. Everyone was standing around; nobody went into the lecture halls. They stood along the corridors and in the main room that

was opposite the lecture hall. That is why I've always said, organized movements do not start revolutions or uprisings; the masses are the ones that do. The role of an organization or a party is to lead the revolution, give it direction. And by the way I didn't come up with that. It is a quote by Napoleon Bonaparte. Yes, he aborted the French revolution but the statement stands true.

We were stunned, even though we had been working for two years and had organized camps over the summer. And we were a pushy bunch. We had a strong influence on students. We were considered an elitist faculty — our entire class included 200 students, and there were 400 in the whole faculty. Trips to Luxor and Aswan were organized for LE25, including week-long stays at hotels and so on. We used to cancel them because we considered them bourgeois trips that only well-to-do students could afford; we were no-fun. But at the same time we had a cinema club, for example, which was run by Yousry Nasrallah, and we organized seminars all year round.

But nothing prepared us for that moment, the moment of January 18, '72. You work on influencing students, you do all kinds of things. Your messages may reach this or that extent, but arriving on campus to find that all of the students did not go into their lecture rooms, and that they had brought their own wall magazines with them — not our magazines, the activist Marxist group — was impressive. It was inconceivable. So we immediately called for a conference.

We were very bold. When we wanted to organize a conference or a meeting following the uprising, I would walk into Lecture Hall 1, the biggest room in the entire faculty, and ask the professor to leave in the middle of his lecture. 'Our conference is about to begin.' We were unapologetic.

The entire student body attended in a fury. And then there was Ahmed Abdalla... I have never met an orator as good as him. That was one of the things that baffled me whenever I went to the square during the January 2011 revolution... how can a revolution not have an orator? Anyway, Ahmed Abdalla... you cannot imagine the magnitude of applause, and the tears. Egypt was an occupied land at the time and Sadat's speech... the ceasefire that was in place under Abdel Nasser had ended and Sadat was supposed to renew it. Instead, he said: 'We were planning to fight, but due to the fog caused by the Indo-Pakistani War we decided to extend the ceasefire.' So that was the spark that ignited the movement.

We started the sit-in on the same day. There was one at the Faculty of Engineering and another one at the Faculty of Arts. The same thing happened across a number of faculties. On the following day, there were already discussions with the state. They asked us to send representatives from the student body. Sit-ins had been set up across universities all over the country. They wanted us to send a delegation to meet Sayed Marei. I don't remember whether he was the head of Parliament or the head of the Socialist Union at the time. He is the one Kamal Khalil chanted against when he said: *Sayed Marei, Sayed Bey, meat costs a pound a kilo.*

So we put together a delegation from across Cairo University and went to Parliament. This is also a moment that I will never forget. I was 20 or 21 year old; we were about 15 students, representing three faculties. What I remember quite clearly is that nobody addressed them formally. In our early twenties, we were addressing state officials with a kind of boldness that was unthinkable at the time. It still surprises me when I look back on it now. At the time it seemed reasonable to demand that they bring Sadat — the head of state! — to us so we could hold him to account. 'Bring him to campus. He needs to come so that the students can question him.' At the time we did not sense the irony by the way. Now, years later, I sense the irony. It felt as though we were equal.

What do you mean?

Dealing with the highest state bodies with such disrespect at such a young age, not realizing that there was something radical about what we were doing… I mean that is something you experienced in the January [2011] revolution.

By [January] 20, the sit-ins had extended to the entire university. We broke the gate of the main hall and moved the sit-in inside the domed hall. We formed the Higher National Committee of Cairo University Students, which was chaired by Ahmed Abdallah. Of course it included Zein and Ahmed Baha Shaaban. What a day, I was in disbelief. I was a party member and an activist, and had been active for two years prior to that moment, but still, I could not believe the number of students who showed up in support. The fervor and enthusiasm were unbelievable! And then Ahmed Abdalla stood up and started speaking… You cannot imagine.

We drafted what was then called the student declaration, which I contributed to. It included about 15 demands: launching a wartime economy, arming citizens, establishing democratic freedoms, and ensuring the formation of political parties freely. And there was a hilarious demand: Two Palestinian men had been arrested in Egypt for killing then-Jordanian Minister of Interior Wasfi Tal, one of the people responsible for the September massacres in Jordan. So we demanded 'the immediate release of the two heroes, so and so — I forgot their names now — who carried out the will of the people and killed the traitor Wasfi Tal.' That was one of the demands from the student declaration, which I remember verbatim. And of course the main demand, which was controversial and hence widely discussed, was that Anwar al-Sadat was to come before the students so that they could hold him to account, and that we would continue the sit-in until that demand was met. We had to agree on a reason behind the sit-in, a specific demand for it to continue. As was the case during the [2011] revolution when you demanded that Mubarak step down. We only asked that he come to campus. It was impossible for a bunch of students to demand that the president step down, even if there were thousands of us.

The other thing that always takes you by surprise when people mobilize is the level of creativity that is set in motion, almost spontaneously. I mean, you organize, you hold secret meetings, you have cadres, etc, but [when there's a mass movement] there's a completely different organizational capacity. All of a sudden, a sustenance committee was formed. They collected money from people to buy ful and *taameya* from a nearby stand called "Baba Abdo", the worst ful and *taameya* in Egypt's history — greasy, terrible, but it was all we could afford. And watch committees worked along the gates. We were very careful not to be infiltrated by informers, which they could then use as an excuse to beat us up. During the daytime, there were thousands of students across the entire campus and inside the Abdel Nasser Hall, attending sessions organized by the higher national committee and other seminars. Otherwise we stayed on campus. The university was ours. Campus security officers had disappeared completely. We were the only ones there, and a large number of students spent the night.

We formed national committees across all faculties, so there was the higher national committee and there were sub-committees in each faculty. This is an integral difference between our generation and that of January 2011. To us, political organization was paramount. Not just in terms of running secret organizations and such, I mean street-level, mass mobilization, you know? Establishing popular alternatives to the hegemony of the socialist union. Anyway, we decided to send a delegation composed of members of faculty committees. Sadat's response was: 'I am not

going.' He made a hysterical speech and spat as he spoke. He was furious. 'They want me to come? Well I won't!' I really liked that bit, that's why I remember it so well. I mean, he could have put it in a more eloquent way, but that was the IQ level we had to deal with, and it's been downhill since.

They requested a delegation, and so we went. By then it was probably January 23. We asked for a meeting between students and all members of Parliament, so they held an evening session especially for us. They sent busses to take us to Parliament. We were around 50 students, something like that. Ahmed Abdallah stood up to speak. The MPs were in tears. We had to find a way to go back on demanding that Sadat come to campus, and in any case we did not want to look at his goddamn face. It was all just a pretext. So, we listed our demands, our conditions to end the sit-in:

1-Broadcast the student declaration in full, through television and radio, and publish it in the official newspapers

2- Recognize the higher national committee as legitimate representatives of the student movement

We needed to have something that was not under the government's control, a popular student organization that was independent of the state. And of course the experience of the '46 uprising of workers and students was on our minds. With every uprising, one tends to call upon history. In fact, our generation revived events that preceded the '52 era. The Nasser regime blocked out everything that took place before '52; it hardly even referenced the 1919 revolution, as if nothing had happened. If you recall popular songs from that time, it would seem as though we were in deep hibernation until Nasser woke us up. But that's not true. We had had a long history of struggle, and that was what we called upon [in '72'].

For example, the "student family" I chaired — the one we called Abdel Hakam al-Garrahi — was named after a student [who took part in the movement] of '36. There was a march on Abbas Bridge — I am not 100 percent certain of the accuracy of this story. A British soldier pointed his gun at Abdel Hakam al-Garrahi and ordered him to stop three times. Garrahi, who was carrying the flag, kept on walking until a soldier shot and killed him. That is to say we draw from popular legacy, absorbing facts and legends alike. I could never determine the accuracy of this story; nonetheless, it's very romantic.

So, we headed to Parliament with our list of demands. The higher national committee negotiated with the house speaker, and we were told there had been talks with Sadat. Things of the sort. So they agreed [to our demands], or at least that was what we were told. So we got on the bus and headed back to the university, forming a procession as we entered campus. Victorious, marching towards the main hall like soldiers who had just returned from battle, in an unbelievable state of euphoria — *unbelievable!* We walked in with our heads held high, triumphant. The rest of the students had already received the news, that's why we were met with a warm welcome. Then Ahmed Abdalla got on the podium and recounted what had taken place in the meeting, confirming that all our demands would be aired on the news broadcast at 11 or 12 pm. Everything, including the student declaration and the faculty committees. Then it was time to rest and eat something, time to wait.

When it was almost time, the hall — which takes up to 20,000 — was at full capacity. Not only were all the seats full, the corridors too. Members of the higher national committee got up on the podium, turned on the radio and placed it opposite the microphone. The news came but there was nothing; no mention of the declaration, no mention of the committees. Nothing. Anguish filled the air, everybody was silent — you know the lull before the storm? Raw rage. So Ahmed

Abdalla stood up, 'Tomorrow we take to the streets, and if they slaughter us people will slaughter them.' Back then, if you went out on the street you got shot, so we were prepared for martyrdom.

The most heartwarming moment was… We had an assistant professor, fair skinned and chubby. A man of means. He sat next to me, and I was very fond of him. He was a nice person. He wasn't really active though — he was a bit clueless — but he just got fired up like everybody else. And he lisped, which made his esses slushy. After we chanted, *If they slaughter us, people will slaughter them,* and everyone was charged, he leaned in and said: 'Hani, you know, political (th)truggle i(th) beautiful but difficult.' I still quote him to this day: *Political struggle: beautiful but difficult.*

Thousands began to leave while the rest spent the night, around 1,000 students. Most of them slept in the same hall. We slept at our faculty. We were ready to go out on the street the day after thinking come what may. We were set on heading to Tahrir. And we really thought they'd shoot us, but at least we would have mobilized the masses.

And were you ready for that?

Yes, we were ready, but your generation was worse. I once stood at the corner of Mohamed Mahmoud Street and saw something... it was unprecedented. I never thought I'd witness such a scene, and I don't think it happened anywhere else in the world. Maybe it did. It's often a state of mind.

Our generation is used to going out in demonstrations, but we ran back as soon as the police attacked us with batons. We would hurl stones at them and then we would run. Hurl and run. During the clashes in Mohamed Mahmoud Street[4], I saw people being shot at and at the same time running towards those who were holding the guns. I couldn't believe my eyes. And those kids on motorcycles racing through, carrying the dead and injured. Protestors were running in waves to attack their shooters, who were carrying weapons not batons! If this was to be made into a film, I think nobody would believe it.

Anyway, I was asleep, and then around dawn someone woke me up: 'Hani, wake up. Zein is outside and he wants to speak to you.' So I got up. The gates were made out of wood and glass. The scene was as follows: Mohamed Sayed Said was standing on a desk, shouting: 'We will resist until we die,' and things of the sort. Zein was standing outside the gate, which was now locked. I walked towards Zein who asked me to calm Mohamed Sayed Said down. 'We have decided to surrender politely and quietly, without resorting to violence.' I was immediately convinced that that was the right thing to do. How can you resist? I mean, Zein was surrounded by five high ranking officers and two lines of central security officers holding riot shields. They had broken down the main gate and entered the university. They had raided campus. They entered the main hall — the Abdel Nasser Hall — in which most students had spent the night. But they walked in harmlessly, they didn't beat us up, so the higher national committee negotiated an agreement. There were some discussions after which we agreed to surrender on the condition that we would be treated with dignity and respect, or else we would wreak havoc. So I went to Mohamed Sayed Said and told him that there was a consensus [to back down]. We were too few to resist anyway. We were about 1,000 students all in all, if not less.

So we walked out, exiting the main hall in a queue. We walked one after the other in a long line, very disciplined. This was also a moment I will never forget, a very romantic scene. Two lines of central security officers wearing helmets, holding riot shields, and the students, women and

4. The Mohamed Mahmoud Clashes, which erupted on Nov. 19, 2011, saw protestors clash with police and military forces near Tahrir Square for days, demanding an end to military rule. The Mohamed Mahmoud Clashes remain among the deadliest confrontations with security forces since the start of the revolution.

men, marching in the middle in a procession. A very long queue, extending between the Faculty of Economics and Political Science building and the main gate, in front of the statue of Egypt's Renaissance. We were singing "Beladi" (it was not yet the national anthem.) At the time the anthem was "Wallah Zaman Ya Selahi", which is a shitty song — excuse my language. So we sang "Beladi" as we walked towards the gate, and the sun was just about to rise. Police trucks were parked outside, so many of them. They filled them up one after the other. Some students would kneel down when they reached the university's gate to kiss the ground, which is something I never did. I mean it looks good but it's just not my thing.

They took us to a place we called "the stable". It was like a huge hangar with a tin roof. They kept us there, women and men in the same place, around 1,000 people. One of the things that always surprises me is the unique sense of creativity that is born with every popular revolt. The walls of the stable were quickly covered in slogans and cartoons, completely covered. And then a strange thing happened. When exhaustion set in and everyone fell asleep on the floor, you could see women resting their heads on their male colleagues' laps and things of the sort, which was very unusual at the time.

Then they turned on the radio to a speech by Sadat, the one where he said that the student body had not been compromised but that there were 30 troublemakers that must be arrested. *I want them!* he said with wrath. When our parents heard the speech they thought we were all among the 30, since we were all still detained. Then they took us to the Police Academy. It was painless all in all; I was released after three days. They didn't take me seriously at the time. Others were detained for 15 days. Those were taken to the Citadel prison, for whom [poet] Ahmed Fouad Negm wrote "I Went to the Citadel Prison."

On the following day, students arrived to find the campus surrounded by central security forces. They realized that those who were in the sit-in were arrested, so they headed to Tahrir. Tahrir Square was occupied by protestors for three days, or something like that, I don't remember. These were the demonstrations that Amal Dunqul wrote about in his poem "The Petrified Cake" [also known as The Book of Exodus]. El Sheikh Imam, Negm and many other poets were there. Almost all of Egypt's intellectuals were in Tahrir at the time.

Why Tahrir in particular?

Look, at the time Tahrir was truly at the center of the city. It no longer is. The farthest point in Cairo at the time was Helwan [in the south], Maadi, and on the other side was Heliopolis. Nasr City [to the east] had not been built yet. Then at the other side of the Nile there was Dokki. It [Tahrir] was really central. And all of the public transport lines converged in Tahrir. At the time there was a tramway and a metro, I think. Everything converged there. Afterwards it became a symbol rather than a geographical location. And of course it is a huge area. At the time there was also the base for a statue which, I think, was meant for Khedewi Ismail. Then the '52 revolution happened and everything was postponed. They suggested at one point to put up a statue of Abdel Nasser, but again that was postponed. Abdel Nasser died and Sadat forgot all about it, until they removed it completely and erected the latest monstrosity when Sisi came to power. So Tahrir was a logical site. And to get there from Cairo University you just cross two bridges, right? El Gama'a Bridge and then Qasr El Nil. Even if you are coming from Ain Shams University, it was still central. So it was a logical choice. Plus it's where the Egyptian Museum is located. It becomes a matter of symbols. Whatever.

We returned to campus but soon the university closed. They forced us to go on an early mid-term break. The following year saw another uprising. That was the same year of my great escapade. Are we going to get into all of this?

I don't know if there are words to describe my feelings toward Hani or the history that unites us. I left Egypt over 40 years ago, but Egypt never left me. At heart, Egypt is all the loved ones, friends and family, the common history, intimate gatherings and the discussions, both the heated and not-so-heated ones. We were leftists and Marxists, patriots of the nation, always striving to change it for the better, spurred on by social justice, human freedom and the nation.

I met Hani in the 1970s at the height of the student movement, amid an attempt to rebuild the leftist parties that dissolved themselves in the 1960s. We were each a part of a different organization. They considered us rightists; we called them "ramrods" because of their rigid leftism. We disagreed often but agreed even more, especially as we grew older.

On April 22, 2019, Hani wrote on his Facebook page: "I'm plagued by the sense that we urgently need a paradigm shift. It's no longer possible for us to keep addressing each other, arguing with each other, or competing for leadership or popularity with each other within our socially, politically, ideologically, and culturally closed-off cliques." He wrote that about the recent referendum for the constitutional amendments, but it was as if he was commenting on the history of the leftist movement and everything we had experienced.

It reminded me of a moment between us in October 1973. A few days after the war began, many of us went to campus to discuss and agree on the student movement's stance on the war. We all came bearing our partisan leanings in advance of the statement. Our group's view — I remember among us were the late Hisham al-Salamouni and Ahmed Seif al-Islam — was that we supported Sadat's decision to go to war and demanded that he keep fighting to liberate all of Sinai. We wanted a war of liberation, not a war to reposition power at the negotiating table. (Reading the memoirs of Former Chief of Staff Saad al-Din al-Shazli, it seems as if Sadat heard us, and he ordered the military into the passes, leading to the so-called catastrophe of the breach, when Israel crossed to the west bank of the Canal.) The opinion of Hani and his group was that this was already a war to reposition power, undertaken in collusion with US imperialism, and we had to expose this. Ahmed Bahaa Shaaban was in a third organization, whose opinion was that we should say nothing. In any case, the various opinions were put to a vote and we won. At the time, the majority was accused of having insufficient consciousness, as opposed to the informed minority. But we were all fools, acting as if we had won or lost the real war.

My relationship with Hani and his entire lovely family grew deeper in London. It's a family that never stops smiling — you'd never see Hani, his brother Alaa

> or his sister Hala without a smile on their faces, whether in real life or in photos. That came down mostly to their father, the poet Ibrahim Shukrallah, and their mother Janet, or Juna. Their house in London was a refuge for many friends and an intellectual and cultural hub, not to mention a place for a great meal. As the years passed, our house in London became theirs, and they would stay there whenever they visited the city, and the same happened in Cairo. The days passed, and, in the middle of the revolution in Tahrir Square, the grandchildren of Ibrahim Shukrallah met my children, Khaled and Hanan, and a strong friendship grew between them.
>
> We hosted Hani in our London home many times, and we always discussed and talked about what would happen, how and why.
>
> Over the years and with the lessons of time, our differences faded. We both grew closer to social democracy than socialism of the totalitarian variety, based on the conviction that there can be no justice without freedom, for that is its prime prerequisite and the only guarantee of its perpetuation.
>
> *Hossam Abdallah, Mada Masr*[5]

By the following academic year — '72-'73 — the number of active students in the leftist movement had definitely doubled. We started organizing on-campus demonstrations. They [the security apparatus] groomed two factions over the summer in order to supress the movement: the Muslim Brotherhood — or Ismalist groups in general — and pro-regime thugs. They organized camps over the summer where they attacked communism and atheism, spread religious teachings, and taught karate. We used to call them "fattening camps" because they used to offer extravagant food.

The new academic year — '72-'73 — kicked off with intimidation and the tearing down of wall magazines. I remember Radwan al-Khashef being lifted and flung to the ground. Things of the sort. Then police forces came to arrest 150 students. Alaa and I managed to get away, not for long though. Police forces were here at the house for three days while we were hiding in a secret closet. Anyway, let us not get into these details. They arrested the leadership of the movement in all universities. The 150 students arrested by police were from Cairo, Ain Shams and Al-Azhar, almost all of Egypt's universities at the time. Assiut too. So we hid for three days and then returned to join the sit-ins. I went back to Cairo University and Alaa went back to Ain Shams. Demonstrations were ongoing. We'd go out to the street, get beaten and get back to campus, go out, get beaten, get back in, and so on, until they closed down the university. Alaa got arrested and I managed to get away.

5. Remembering Hani Shukrallah, the activist-journalist, Mada Masr, May 12, 2019. https://bit.ly/3bp8ihb

Was the 1973 War a moment of defeat for you?

No. We disagreed about the October War[6]. That was one of our major disagreements with Al-Shorouk Organization[7], for example. But we were not idiots. We knew that the war was not a liberation war, not by any means. It was a war with limited objectives; it was only meant to lay the groundwork for peace negotiations with Israel.

When the war broke out, the university campus was closed. We had already been on holiday, so they just extended it. The following day, on October 7, a group of about 50 students met on campus to discuss what was happening. That day, I disagreed with a dear friend of mine. He had drafted a statement in support of Sadat and brought it along, endorsing the military and 'the courageous Armed Forces' and so on. So I drafted a second statement saying, 'Yes, we support the Armed Forces, but we also demand the arming of citizens, a wartime economy, and a guarantee for public freedoms so that the war turns into a people's war,' or something to that end, all of which made for nice slogans but none were feasible. But in moments like these you have to take the right stance no matter what.

The second thing we did during the '73 War was that we volunteered in the popular resistance organization. They suited us up in uniform and made us stay at the camps. It was a move to calm us down. We'd march through the campsite in uniform. It drove the officers mad.

So as I was saying, I drafted an opposing statement, but I was outvoted. Our faction usually won the majority vote, but during the '73 War the majority sided with the others, opting for a position that we considered to be right-wing, regardless of the absurdity of those definitions. So that was the war.

The last student uprising took place in '75. It was triggered by a workers' uprising — it began as a workers' uprising. Workers marched from Helwan to Tahrir and we joined them. This set off another student uprising. We were arrested again and I managed to run off, again, but that break out was insane. I was in charge of the party's getaway operations in Cairo. There were about 70 party members in hiding at the same time in Cairo alone, complete with secret apartments and rigged IDs and things of the sort.

The years between '75 and '79, or 80, were marred with fierce infighting. The party turned into an exclusive, extremist camp. The popular movement retreated, and the most important question became the question of national liberation, as most members were either students or intellectuals. There were some workers, but not that many. That was a turning point, one that I wrote about extensively, if you go back to my writings on the Workers Party. The war was over, right, so the poignancy of the national liberation project, the main drive behind the mobilization of intellectuals and students, dwindled. Meanwhile, it unleashed the workers. Because for the longest time, workers were forced to suppress their demands in favor of national unity because of the presumed state of war. So, there was a student and intellectuals' movement that was falling back and a workers' movement that was witnessing a stunning surge. Unfortunately, the direction within the movement was to uphold the national liberation project as the most urgent issue; the leadership 'refused to surrender' and equated surrendering with treachery, and there were many other theories along this line. Practically, this meant that the party turned inwards as members grew preoccupied with finding secret apartments, etc. This made way for absurd allegations, that the party was 'building a communist society inside a capitalist mold' and other equally foolish claims.

6. The October War is also known as The Yom Kippur War or 1973 War.
7. A faction within the larger communist movement in Egypt.

Did you think it was foolish at the time, or do you think so in retrospect?

That was around '75…

I was hiding in an apartment in Shubra, or rather I moved from place to place until I settled in an apartment in Shubra. There were three of us, two men and a woman; I was the leader among them. It was a two-bedroom apartment. The external arrangement was as follows: two of them were married, and I was her brother. That was what we told the landlord. It was a furnished apartment, for which we paid LE25/month. It was considered a luxurious one. Anyway. Because the other guy was somewhat bald, he looked older, so he posed as her husband. It was '75 which means I was barely 25 years old, no, 24, because my birthday is in June. So that was the story we had made up. We didn't expect people to barge in on us while we were sleeping, but the strange thing, one which I still can't wrap my head around, was that we decided that the couple, who were not in a relationship, would share a room and sleep on the same bed while I slept in the other room. And then one evening, she came to me in tears. She had woken up to find that our colleague was assaulting her (should we be recording this?) So we raised hell. I summoned someone from the central committee — I was a regional representative at the time, not a member of the central committee. We carried out an investigation and demoted him. That was all we were able to do at the time. It's a pathetic story, I know.

When I look back on any experience, I have no problem admitting that I was an idiot. I don't consider it shameful to admit when I have misunderstood or misread a certain situation. One is constantly learning by reading and practicing politics. You have to practice to improve.

In '75, the leadership of the party was replaced by a group that had been released from prison. Two things happened in '75: By the time our colleagues were released, Vietnam had won the war. I remember we spent all our money on a bottle of wine to celebrate Vietnam's victory and the release of our fellow comrades. Then they sent me, alongside another comrade whose name I won't mention, to establish the party's branch in Beirut. They took advantage of my father's appointment as ambassador to the Arab League in India. I completed university in India, but I was mainly based in Beirut. Every once in a while I would fly to Aligarh University, where I spent my final year. I spent two years in hiding, '73 and '75, during which I did not sit for exams at Cairo University, so that delayed my graduation. Then the Lebanese Civil War broke out. We were in contact with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and other leftist Palestinian organizations. I met everyone back then, from Fawwaz Traboulsi of the Communist Action Organization in Lebanon to Kamal Jumblatt, George Habash, Nayef Hawatmeh and so on. We even met with Arafat himself.

We began, the other comrade and I, to sense that something was not right. Decisions that we objected to were being passed or adopted, exclusionary policies that pulled the party inwards instead of opening it up for collaboration. The workers' movement was on the rise, and instead of allying with it we were developing strange theories, things like 'the party and the newspaper are one and the same.' There were documents, so many documents. Meanwhile, there were disagreements within the Cairo branch. The first disagreement led to the expulsion of Galal al-Gemei, Samir Hosni and Radwan el-Kashef. I had to stand by the party's decision although they were very close friends of mine. Discipline was paramount. When the majority took a decision, even when you didn't agree, you had to go along.

We began discussing the fate of the party's overseas branch. At that point, we had a strong influence on the Palestinian left and the radical left, especially those who were opposed to the two-state solution, like the Popular Front and George Habash, with whom we'd become good friends, although we were just kids. He was someone who had been working for 50 years, and had founded the movement of Arab Nationalists and then the Popular Front following '67. Anyway, our disagreements began to escalate, causing a rift in the Popular Front. We — the ones who were abroad — believed that we should expand our influence rather than cause a split. The split-up was announced in Cairo, and we were surprised to hear about the formation of the Palestinian Communist Workers Party. Our political leader at the time was some kind of megalomaniac; he wanted to be the leader of the Arab communist movement, not just the Egyptian one, although the movement in Egypt was in a hopeless place. But the major mistake was that the party retained the national liberation project as the most pressing issue, at the expense of other issues through which it could have been truly effective, allying with thousands upon thousands of people. We thought that what they were suggesting was insane, and that we needed to change the leadership. The party had decided that it was best we didn't leave Lebanon. The fear was that we would be immediately arrested if we did. But in '79, I decided to fly back. I could feel a disaster looming ahead. The thought was that if I got arrested, they'd release me eventually. Ultimately, they didn't arrest me.

Around the same time, there was another group [in Cairo] that was opposed to the leadership, a subgroup in the party at the time — the minority. I got in touch with them and with some people from the majority. I started to push for a change in policy. The presiding strategy was on the wrong track; we had to change it, we had to resist. I targeted two members from the majority group who were close to the secretary general of the organization, Saleh Mohamed Saleh, a very famous person. I was writing a position paper and at the same time completing my military service. We outlined our disagreements in a position paper that Salah al-Amrousi wrote. I decided not to join either bloc, partially because I was plotting to win over the majority. I did not affiliate myself with the minority although I was in constant communication with them. So both Salah and I were writing papers. I wrote 120 pages while Salah, a prolific writer, wrote around 250 pages.

Anyway, gradually some people started criticizing what was then described as a faulty leadership style. To me, it was not just a matter of one person's leadership style; the problem lied within an entire approach that was unsound, exclusionary, and draconian. It was alienating us from the masses, from popular movements, etc. The one person who wholeheartedly agreed with me, although she was second to the party leader, was Arwa Salih, may she rest in peace. On my days off from military service, I would go to the party's headquarters to meet Arwa and Salah al-Amrousi. I would criticize what she had written, give her harsh criticism. She would read it and laugh, and she'd agree with me. So, the balance of power within the central committee shifted. We called for a meeting of active members and organized a party conference where the secretary general was expelled. In other words, we abolished the position of secretary general and restructured the central committee and the political bureau. That was when I became in charge of the party's organizational activities, so that's around '80. We attempted to change course but by then we had already entered an era where everything was on the decline.

The intellectuals' movement turned into the elitist movement — which included nationalist groups and what not — and it remained so up until the January [2011] revolution. All the while, we considered the Islamist movements our adversaries, unlike the nineties generation, especially the Revolutionary Socialists, who used to organize joint activities with Ismalsists. We considered them to be just like the regime.

Listen, that remains the most difficult era to accurately evaluate when and why mistakes were made. The idea at the time was to be open to collaborations with other movements, and to work on building whatever platform was possible. At the same time, there was a sweeping Islamist rise. University students who used to turn to the left were now turning to Islamism. Islamists co-opted student unions and became the dominant force. The prevalent ideology became half-neoliberal, half-Islamist. Meanwhile, millions moved to the Gulf, which caused the workers' movement to plunge as well, although between '73 and the January '77 Uprising[8] it was steadily on the rise. The ['77] uprising was suppressed and a gradual shift to economic liberalization began.

Plus, workers resorted to what we referred to at the time as "the solitary solution." Why would you go on strike if you could go to Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates or Libya or Iraq? How many Egyptians were in Iraq at the time? There were a million in Iraq alone, and another million in Libya, I think. There were maybe four or five million Egyptians working overseas at the time. So, we had an Islamist rise, migration... the complete obliteration of political life in Egypt. We also witnessed a transition to the rule of the oligarchs, which I wrote about extensively. We used to refer to them as "the bureaucratic bourgeoisie." They ruled like cronies along with the private sector, like they were managing their own personal property, the spoils of which they split among themselves.

That marks the beginning of the Mubarak era.

> Although I was five years older than our comrade, I regarded him as a peer, although this young man demonstrated exceptional maturity during our arguments within the party's political bureau, which was the reason why he was selected to join the party's central committee, with the committee's approval.
>
> He was calm, solid. He spoke as though he possessed the wisdom of the elders, always objectively. His goal was to convince or be convinced, and he was not like those bourgeois peacocks who criticized only to stand out. Whether it was during a debate in a meeting, or within the pages of the party's newspapers, he maintained a discreet, friendly demeanor, with a steadfast and honest spirit. For years, I never saw him lose his temper or give up on his communist ideas during periods of conflict within the central committee as of 1978, a time of division into a 'minority' and 'majority'. He refrained from gossipping, never badmouthed his comrades. Despite the widespread use of such tactics by some, devoid of any comradery, he never participated or encouraged them, maintaining respect for the two opposing factions. He insisted, in every position he assumed, to hold on to his beliefs and convictions in a principled manner. He also played a role in all of the above when he resided outside the country for long periods of time, which granted him a wider view of the situation. He used to visit me in my secret hideout to see his friend, colleague and mother of my children, Bahraini Hanaa al-Gashi, their friendship extending for decades after their graduation from the Faculty of Economics and Political Sciences. He'd bring me a book, or bottle of wine, or anything, which is a testament to his sincerity. Our time together always extended beyond party work. He used to tell me about his fascination with crime novels and how he was following

8. The 1977 Uprising, or the Bread Riots, erupted in response to an International Monetary Fund-backed government decision to end subsidies on essential foodstuffs. It is considered an extension of the student and worker movements.

> Star Wars, and I would tell him about my love for Greek music, dancing, and how both are filled with life and vitality.
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> *Said al-Eleimy, Al-Hewar Al-Motamaden*[9]

By '87, we had organized the first conference for the Workers Party. We were an underground party, but our bylaws stated that we must hold a conference to elect the central committee. Prior to that, we used to hold meetings, which we referred to as conferences, the participants of which were selected by the central committee from among the most prominent cadres of the party. We met to make decisions, like what happened in '90-'91. There was a decision to overthrow Saleh Mohamed Saleh, to expel him from the party. Until today, I wonder whether it was the right decision, or whether it was excessively brutal. I don't know. It was in part because he was a manipulator. Anyway, I think one will always have doubts about moments of ruthlessness. At the time, we thought of them as revolutionary decisions; we thought we could make real change, bring on a socialist revolution, put an end to thousands of years of social inequality. So naturally it was a big deal for us, and we acted accordingly.

Did you refer to it as a revolution back then?

Yes, it was a socialist revolution from the get-go, since our foundation in '69. Among the founding documents of the party is a document titled, "The Nature of the Next Revolution", clearly stating that the next revolution would be a socialist revolution.

When did you stop referring to it as a revolution?

I never stopped; I'm still a man of the revolution.

The Workers Party had a critical mass. At one point memberships exceeded 1,000. For Egypt at the time... one thousand active members, not just supporters... one thousand disciplined militants living and struggling underground — that was huge.

The '87 conference was an electoral conference. We organized regional conferences, and each conference had to elect 10 delegates. No, sorry, every 10 members were represented by one delegate. For example, if the Upper Egypt conference had 30 members they would elect three delegates to attend the general conference, and so on. I remember this period well because for the first time we had an accurate estimation of the scope of the party. We are talking about '87, a period of a severe decline. We had 50 delegates, which means we had at least 500 active members. Despite the rise in migration and the overall decline, we still had 500 members.

Then came the 90s, the decade of dissolution and total collapse. One of the resolutions of the conference was to unite the various radical communist groups in Egypt, decisions that Salah al-Amrousi and I outlined in position papers that I have kept until this day. We started a unification process; we started reaching out to all the remaining groups: January 8, Al-Matraqa, and so on. That, followed by the collapse of the Berlin Wall and bidding farewell to the Soviet Union, were the final straws. Although we had always been critical of the Soviet Union, still, something was unfinished.

9. A eulogy for the revolution and the late Hani Shukrallah, Al-Hewar Al-Motamaden, May 9, 2019. https://bit.ly/3saMyvn

The collapse of the Soviet Union created a major ideological crisis within the party, making way to absurd and cynical discussions within the central committee. I remember that period well. I redefined *my Marxism* in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall. I began to read a great deal. I read the whole Trotsky tradition, which we had not taken seriously before. We considered its followers the Shias of the communist movement, and maybe they were. Even so, Shias can have something good to say. So I went on reading the literature, including [Isaac] Deutscher and Trotsky himself. It had a rattling effect on the movement.

Meanwhile, we were trying to open up to the world. We wanted our members to engage with the world outside the party. NGOs? Let's push them to work with NGOs. Tagammu' Party? Send people to Tagammu'. The idea was to push members to explore what else was happening, gain experience, particularly as the party was at a low ebb. Some went to Tagammu' and never came back, and those who joined NGOs never came back. Everybody left, no one looked back. The idea was to send them out so that they can recruit people, or not necessarily recruit but at least win them over somehow. But they left and never came back. Despite the unity, I don't know if that was the right way to go. God knows. In all honesty I am still unsure. The 90s in particular continue to be difficult to untangle, and I feel deeply guilty because the curtain dropped on my watch. If you'd ask me what should I have done differently, I would say worked harder? I don't know. Maybe. Maybe it would have made a slight difference, but I don't think it would have mattered much.

That was around the time the Revolutionary Socialists emerged. On the one hand, you are going through an intellectual crisis, and on the other hand they've emerged with a capsule solution. Since Stalin, we have regarded the Soviet Union as a manifestation of state capitalism. So, it made sense that the few who were interested in Marxism [following the collapse of the USSR] would steer clear of you and your questions and join those with certitude.

Did you [as an organization] consider joining the Revolutionary Socialists?

I don't think so. Neither group considered it. I had many discussions with members of the Revolutionary Socialists. Many of those who work with me at Belahmar[10]. In fact, most of them are members of one faction or the other. I don't have anything against them per se. They were the ones who initiated this animosity, not us. They had a clear line of thought as we were trying to come up with a new understanding in light of what had just happened. But ultimately, you are talking about small numbers of people. There was little that could be done.

In the 70s, young intellectuals naturally turned to Marxism. You had Vietnam, the Palestinian Revolution, Che Guevara, the leftist movement in Europe, Germany and the May '86 events, the film industry, Godard and the likes. It was a moment when the entire world was going left. [However], they were born at a moment where nothing was happening. The 90s was a moment of complete stagnation everywhere, and on the other hand, a moment of victory for neo-liberalism and liberal thinking in general.

In the 90s I wrote about the absence of an independent leftist project in Egypt. It was a time when the left oscillated between liberal ideologies and national Islamist influences. Depending on the situation, the same organization, sometimes even the same person could be a liberal one day and an Islamic nationalist the next. But there wasn't an independent leftist voice — I firmly believe so.

Gradually, members started to disperse and I could feel the party slowly melting away, until I reached a point when... It wasn't like there was a decision to be made. We didn't 'decide' to close

10. Belahmar is a leftist online publication that Shukrallah founded in 2017 and led until his death in 2019.

down the party. The central committee, most of the cadres with whom I came of age and worked for years, had all left, and the remaining group were affiliated with other organizations with which I had no common language. There was no party, no cadres, no mass movement. Nothing. That was it.

In 2001 — I remember the date — we published the last issue of "Intifad", the party's popular newspaper. We also put out "Egyptian Communist" and "The Debate", which was the internal newspaper. I can show you old issues at some point. I kept loads.

Did you consider joining the Revolutionary Socialists as an individual?

Listen... I was once invited to dinner at my girlfriend's house. [My friend] Amir was with me here in Mohandiseen, and my girlfriend at the time lived around the corner. So I asked him, "Aren't you coming to dinner?" He said, "No, I am not going, and besides I wasn't even invited." That sums up my relationship with the Revolutionary Socialists. On an organizational level, it was very difficult for me to join them. I have huge reservations regarding their relations with England, for example, and their position vis-a-vis the Muslim Brotherhood in particular; I think it is ridiculous to regard them as a reformist group, an idea that has unfortunately been imported. But at the end of the day, they are fellow fighters with whom I continue to work, but it was very difficult to… It's like my friend put it: I am not going, and besides, nobody invited me. Although they were very interested in recruiting from the Workers Party, they kept their distance from me in particular.

Then came the Kefaya movement[11]. At that time I was engrossed in journalism, in *Al-Ahram Weekly* and then *Ahram Online*. I was skeptical of Kefaya from the onset. When I look back on it I believe I was wrong, because at the end of the day it did achieve something. Doors that had been shut for years were opened to it. Taking to the street was taboo; all throughout the 80s and 90s, if you took to the streets you were immediately chased away. We saw that with the Palestinian Intifada in 2001 and the shooting and killing of [Muhammad] Al-Dorra, and then the invasion of Iraq [in 2003] — the biggest demonstration since [the bread riots of] '77.

Did you join any of those events?

Yes, but I was very selective. I was angry, but I was convinced that my taking part would not change anything. I was a one individual, unaffiliated with an organization or a political party. But I was angry. For me, Al-Dorra bore resemblance to [my son] Hossam. He was almost of the same age, so there was immediate identification. For a father to watch his own son get shot while he's in his arms... it was horrific.

But I didn't join any of the Kefaya-organized protests. I was asked to join in the early stages of its establishment, but for some reason I was almost certain that it was formed to settle some kind of inner conflict within the regime itself. And there was some truth to that, but at the end of the day it opened up the street as a site of protest. At least it ushered a new possibility that I think influenced what happened in 2011. Hardly a week went by without a march taking place in some location or the other, attracting hundreds, more or less. I remember — I even wrote about it in an article — when Emad Atteya, a dear friend of mine who was very involved, organized a protest in Shubra: About 500 or 600 protesters standing on the street, surrounded by cordon upon cordon of central security officers, and scores of bystanders standing outside the cordons, silently watching from

11. A grassroots political movement that was founded in 2004, attracting activists and politicians from across a wide spectrum.

afar. The image struck me. When I brought it up with Emad, he said, and I later quoted him: 'Listen, I kept studying their faces, trying to figure out whether they held expressions of sympathy, anger or rejection. The overwhelming expression was that of surprise.'

People were beaten to the core. It was one of the Mubarak regime's clever moves, which I used to call "selective oppression." The regime went easy on intellectuals. They would arrest them, assault female protestors if they organized a protest in front of the Journalists Syndicate, beat up one or two, shove them onto buses and drop them off in the desert, that sort of thing. Meanwhile, when dealing with poorer citizens, the regime was brutal. That was a period of collective punishment: stripping women and hanging them in front of their husbands, executions, torture, etc... and not just against members of the Muslim Brotherhood. There was also the movement against changing land ownership laws. By '97, the state had left a million *fellaheen* without land. They took away land they had been cultivating for generations. If you were caught walking down the street by a lieutenant who didn't like the look of you, you could be tortured to death. Meanwhile, scores of people were insulting the state's top official, chanting *Down with Hosni Mubarak*, denouncing the president, and hardly anything happened to them. They let them be.

So as I was saying, I buried myself in journalism. I wasn't a member in an organization, I was somewhat skeptical of Kefaya. Obviously it was good that protests sustained over time; that was beneficial. But still, I didn't feel that that was where I could make a difference. And by the way, I could neither chant nor throw stones. That's been the case throughout my whole life, even at the height of the student movement.

I remember in '73, when the sit-in ended and we took to the street, we got beaten up by the police, so we went back to campus where a volley of tear gas and stones ensued. We were inside the university and central security officers were outside. Students were throwing rocks, and they were all on target; you could hear the whoosh of the rocks as they were hurled. When a gas canister was thrown toward us, they'd reach for it and throw it back, which is everything you girls witnessed over and over in 2011. Now I was supposedly their leader; my name and photo were plastered all over campus because they thought I had been arrested. I couldn't just stand by. So I picked up two rocks and walked towards the gate so I could throw them at the police. I threw the first one but it fell five meters ahead of me, and the second one went as far as four meters. I looked up and *takh takh*; two rocks hit both my knees. So I said, 'Okay, this is not for me.' So I broke into the university press. We carried a tree branch and broke the door open — you know how they used to do it during the Middle Ages? I took out the printer, wrote up a pamphlet and we made copies of it. At least that was something I knew how to do. At least I was a good writer.

But your son, and your children in the broader sense — your nieces and your friends' kids — were involved in Kefaya in a way. Did you discuss your reservations with them?

Listen, I have always been opposed to ideologizing one's children. The kids, for the longest time, had nothing to do with politics. They hated it; they were turned off by their parents, the meetings, the arguments, and so on. We used to get into intense debates. There were bloodbaths over at the other apartment. When raising Hossam, I was keen on explaining to him the theory of evolution, Darwin, for example, and I encouraged him to read, that sort of thing. He charted his own path eventually, but he definitely knew what his parents stood for. I was surprised to find Hossam in the square.

When there were demonstrations [before 2011], sometimes I would go down to watch, not to participate, to try to understand what was happening. I remember seeing my niece in one of those protests. There were 40–50 protestors perhaps, all young, and they were surrounded by security forces. They got carried and thrown into police trucks, literally hurled inside. I also don't like to preach. I don't like to assume the role of the wise man. It's damaging. If someone wanted my opinion, I would gladly share it, but I wouldn't offer unsolicited advice. That has always been my approach when dealing with Hossam. He charted his own path eventually, and of course he drove me crazy.

> In this context, or shortly before, a virtual left-wing group was formed, comprising hundreds of people. They called themselves "The Progressive Group" to reflect on a distinct leftist contribution to the public debate over the struggle for democracy. Hani was quick to share a coherent analytical framework, based on his past experiences, in lieu of the new context, taking into account the differing opinions of those seeking to change it. In a long position paper (one that unfortunately hasn't been published), Hani developed an argument exploring the disadvantages of being fixated on what was known among leftist forces as the national liberation project. He began to search for historical roots for the national question, going back further than the oligarchic era. In that paper, Hani wrote about the burden of the contradictory formation of the *effendia* class in the context of integrating Egypt into the global capitalist market whilst cultivating authoritarian modernization practices in conjunction with said integration. For Hani, *effendia* are a distinct group who found themselves in a distinct position from the rest, without necessarily having to mingle with the other powerful class: landowners. At the same time, the *effendia* were impregnated, from birth, with an obsession with renaissance and catching up with the colonial West, with a rooted awareness of the difficulty of the task precisely because of the same colonial relations that allowed the formation of the *effendia* to begin with... In a comic observation, Hani wrote, "It is impossible to imagine the dominance of an intelligentsia that lacks the minimum level of intelligence."
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> This defective foundation outlined by Hani continues to shape, in various forms, the *effendia*'s perception of the question of democracy — exemplified by their rejection of the political mobilizations of 2005 — bethey Islamic, leftist, or part of the left-wing nationalist or the Islamic nationalist groups. This defect is what established Chinese walls between the leftist intelligentsia and its supposed audience, drawing it to "the stairs of the Journalists Syndicate" and a strategy of constant wagering, wherein we wait for the rise of what we assume are cracks and conflicts within the ruling class, forcing us to play favorites and reducing our role to mere allies. Not to mention the fondness of what he called the "Down with… Down with…" tactic, or the instinctive adherence to a perception of change that occurs with a knockout punch by virtue of a few demonstrations led by a genuinely loyal and faithful group with lofty ideals but without an accurate conception of the nature of class struggle and our role within it. Of course, it is now legitimate to raise question marks and criticisms

> about Hani's vision, perhaps even to describe it as somewhat reductive. But it is certainly worthy of taking the conversation on the dilemmas of the democratic struggle at that stage to a deeper level, pointing to the pitfalls, the repercussions of which we saw following 2011, with the eruption of the poisonous controversy over identity, which dragged many factions among the sincerest and most enthusiastic about democratic principles to its waste yards.
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> *Amr Abdel Rahman, Medina*[12]

I had a heart attack about a week or 10 days before January 25; I had just undergone cardiac catheterization. I was recuperating at home, not allowed to go to work, and I heard about the call for demonstrations on Police Day. No, wait. Let's go over it chronologically.

It started with Alexandria, Khaled Said[13]. I had a feeling that something new was emerging. Then came the anticipated arrival and reception of the silliest of men, the Nobel prize laureate — what was his name? El-Baradei, yes. Followed by December 31, 2010, the Two Saints Church attack. We had planned to go to Ras Sudr to [my sister] Hala's beach house for New Year's Eve. We were a group of friends. I wasn't in the mood at all; I didn't even dance that night. I left the party early, went up to my room and got a phone call with news of what had happened. I had a call with Fouad Mansour, my managing editor at the time, and Salma Shukrallah [a reporter] to figure out how to cover the bombing. I spent the whole night writing an article that was published the following morning, the one that was titled "J'accuse."[14] I think it is the most read article I have ever written; it was shared everywhere. In the final paragraph I wrote, 'Our choices are not poor to the extent that we are either obliged to resort to the United States or accept massacres. We must have the brains and will to make our own choice.' Or something to that end. After January 25 was over, people insisted that I had prophesied the events of the day when in fact I had not anticipated that magnitude at all.

I was initially weary of the protests planned for January 25. I was pissed at the kids and at the same time I feared for them. I was certain that they'd get beaten up and hurled into police trucks. That was the scene I imagined would take place, as had been the case since the beginning of the millennium. I thought that 500–600 people would show up and immediately become encircled by a mix of central security officers and thugs twice their number. That was what I had seen in previous protests, when I used to go and watch, so that was what I expected. As I sat there watching Al-Jazeera, I started to sense that something was different. Those weren't the usual suspects; those weren't us, with our various generations. I turned to the state-owned channel to find that image [of empty streets] so I switched back to Al-Jazeera. Then, Fatma came and asked me: 'Do we send the girls to school tomorrow?' I told her: 'Definitely not. I think we are witnessing a revolution.'

There was a huge disparity between my feelings that morning and my thoughts at the end of the day. January 28 hadn't happened at that point, but it felt as though something completely different was emerging. I also realized that that was a revolution that belonged to its generation, fueled by an imagination that was different from ours. I was certain of that when… Well, firstly, I

12. Hani Shukrallah: Exiting the Warehouse, Medina, May 14, 2019.
https://cutt.ly/YyhiiPV

13. Khaled Said was beaten to death by Egyptian police in June 2010, sparking a new wave of protests. A Facebook page set up in his memory was the first entity to call for demonstrations on January 25, 2011.

14. J'accuse, Ahram Online, January 1, 2011.
http://tiny.cc/3114nz

didn't belong to any organization, so how could I have played a role? Someone suggested we hold a meeting for leftist groups. It was held at the Tagammu' Party's headquarters. Even though there were tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands nearby in Tahrir — the office was around the corner — the leftist party's headquarters was completely empty. Inside the main meeting room, the office that belonged to [party head] Refaat al-Said, there were about 50 people, none of whom were of your generation; they were a bunch of old people. I could not believe what was being said, so much blabber. So I said: 'Guys, there is a revolution. There is a revolution taking place outside and you're not the ones behind it. Sure, maybe you should be thanked for paving the way, or whatever, but what is happening is born out of a different imagination, one that isn't yours, that isn't ours, myself included.' Myself included. One of those present, who spoke for like half an hour, said: 'The democratic revolution has been achieved, now we have to move to the socialist revolution.' I mean, who the hell are you? You have no influence whatsoever.

Then the funniest thing happened, a comedic climax. They suggested that we issue a statement. They went on discussing it for hours: what it should say, who should write it, who will be on the drafting committee, etc. So I interrupted them: 'Do you even have a printer?' No, the printer is locked up. 'So you want to issue a statement when there are at least 100,000 people protesting nearby, if not more, only five minutes away but you do not have a printer? And you just spent two hours discussing what to say in the statement? Aren't you useless! Please let the young people who started this revolution lead it.' So I decided as the editor-in-chief of *Ahram Online* that the only thing I could do was to transform *Ahram Online* into the international platform for the Egyptian revolution. I was writing daily columns, in addition to our regular coverage: sending reporters out, and working together with Amira Howeidy and the rest of the team.

Everybody at *Al-Ahram* was shaken. Nobody knew what was going on, and this meant that I had complete liberty. We had launched [the platform] during the parliamentary elections of 2010; I insisted. Amira Howeidy and Fouad were managing editors at the time. I told them we must launch in time for the elections. They had said we weren't ready; on the technical level we were not in a good place. But my rationale was that since we live in a country where politics are dead, and the practice of journalism in the absence of politics is futile, we at least had to cover the elections. So we launched earlier than planned.

We published their scandals on a daily basis, maintaining objectivity. Our reporting was meticulous. We sent reporters to polling stations where there was rigging and violence, and I was writing my op-eds. Then one day, in the midst of the elections, they called me: 'The editor in chief of *Al-Ahram* — what was his name? I can't remember, anyway — is standing at the door of *Ahram Online*. He wants to speak to you.' So I went out to meet him. 'Hani, what are you doing? [Interior Minister Habib] al-Adly just called me complaining that *Ahram Online* has turned the elections into a farce, and foreign correspondents are quoting it. As soon as you publish about rigging in some location, foreign journalists rush over there to cover it. This cannot go on, Hani!' So I promised him that we'd quiet down, which was always my approach, whether I was at *Al-Ahram Weekly* or *Ahram Online*. I would say: 'Yes, no, okay.' But Fouad and Amira were very upset: 'What shall we do now?' I assured them that nothing would change. 'Forget he said anything. Leave it to me.'

Then I got a call from Abdelmoneim Said, the chairman of the board. We were friends during the student movement. He was a leftist — it's funny when you learn about those who were once affiliated with the left, ha? Anyway, I told him to get me an interview with [National Democratic Party member Ahmed] Ezz. 'What more do you want? We cover the news, we cover events as we

witness them. If you want us to publish an opposing view, get me an interview with Ahmed Ezz and I will do it myself.' He called me back to say that Ezz was ignoring him. 'I am a member of the National Democratic Party. Why don't you interview me instead?' So I did; I published his lies. I never editorialize my interviews. I quoted him word for word. I even made him out to be more eloquent. And we carried on doing exactly what we were doing. There were moments when you no longer knew who was in charge. If you go back to my *Ahram Online* articles from that period, you'll find that I was ruthless when attacking and ridiculing the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). We used to cover everything.

And I used to go to Tahrir daily, but only as an individual, one among 100,000 or 200,000. One time while I was in Tahrir, I walked towards its center. It was still early; it wasn't very crowded so I ventured in. Then gradually the square started to fill up to the extent that I could no longer find my way out. My heart started thumping in my chest. I felt like I was going to die. Not that someone was going to shoot me or anything; I felt like I was going to die because I could not find my way out. Something about it was fascinating.

Another thing I joined, following an invitation from Ziad al-Elaimy, was the Committee of the Wise Men — I don't know if you remember it. An older, quite incongruous group. A bunch of misfits. It was a strange mix: a former ambassador, a former minister, etc. My intention at the time was to utilize the committee to declare support [for the protestors]. We did succeed in issuing a declaration of support demanding that Mubarak step down, and paving the way for some protestors to take part in negotiations. I was oblivious to the plotting [between the Muslim Brotherhood and the SCAF], which by then had already begun. And then Ziad al-Elaimy called me: 'The Revolutionary Youth Coalition wants to meet with the committee to ask its members to negotiate on its behalf. We do not want to enter into direct negotiations with them. We want the committee to speak on our behalf but also be accountable to us. They have to tell us everything that takes place in the meeting, and then we will decide whether or not we are onboard.' And they did come, around 10 of them, including young Muslim Brotherhood members whom I later asked about. It turned out they had left the group with [Abdel Moneim] Abou El Fotouh. They were among the good ones. We [the committee] were quite surprised by the level of sophistication with which the youth spoke. They were confident and respectful.

After that, the meddling began. If you go back to my *Ahram Online* articles from that time, you will find that I oscillated between two stances: I lauded the revolution, and the courage and creativity of the youth, and at the same time I began to be increasingly critical. The tone of criticism intensified. Why were you not forming organizations? During our time, we set up some kind of framework with each uprising: in '72 it was the national committees; in '73 the committees for the defense of democracy; in '75 the national democratic forum. Anyway, the important question was, why weren't you getting organized? Where is your declaration of principles? Something akin to the student declaration. You needed to state your urgent demands, 1,2,3,4-10... 15 and that would be it. I remember there were about nine items outlined somewhere, but the urgency to get organized was not on the table. Your generation rebelled against classic forms of organization; you refused to put anyone in a position of leadership and rejected the notion of "representation." That was what I used to hear from Hossam as well. And for someone of my generation, that was strange; it was incomprehensible. The most important issue for us was how to get organized, not just on the basis of ideology, but hinging on a condensed and concise political program.

And then I realized that there was not a single mention of the countryside. Yes, it was an urban

revolution, there's nothing wrong with that. Peasants were not in the equation. But that means winning over the peasants should be the most important move. That is how it has been done since the time of Robespierre and Danton and so on. The first thing you should do, because revolutions are mostly urban or city-based — except of course in East Asia and Latin America where the makeup is different — but the Egyptian revolution was an urban revolution. What about rural areas? Were you keeping them as reinforcements for the counter-revolution? And that's exactly what happened; they turned into the reserve of the counter-revolution. And you know how? Through the ballot box.

If you look at the first phase of the presidential elections [of 2012] — we covered it extensively at *Ahram Online*, using graphs and stuff — you'll find that Cairo and Alexandria voted for [leftist candidate] Hamdeen Sabahi, Upper Egypt voted for [the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohammed] Morsi (more or less), and the Delta cities voted for [Mubarak-era minister Ahmad] Shafiq. When I spoke to people in Upper Egypt, they could not fathom what the city people were doing. They considered it an affront. And as usual they were being mobilized; nobody there actually voted. They were crammed into busses and their IDs were taken from them, a tactic that the Nasserite left cannot grasp until this day, I don't know why, although they've witnessed the same scenario over and over.

For example, during the '84 and '87 elections, we had started to collaborate with the Tagammu' Party (I never nominated myself). We would field candidates in joint electoral lists — that was the process back then. Sometimes we'd add one or two of our candidates to Tagammu's list. We used to work hard. I remember in the '84 elections I would go with Emad Atteya at five or six in the morning to stand in front of the Matusian Cigarette Factory. We were in charge of the Giza list. In both years, I was assigned on behalf of the party to monitor a polling station. I would sit at the polling station in a school nearby in Mohandiseen, a middle class district that is mostly inhabited by professionals, lawyers, engineers and the like. I'd spend the whole day only to see two men walk into the polling station wearing trousers. Everyone else was wearing a *galabia,* most probably mobilized from Meet Okba and the like. They were literally escorted into the station, mobilized based on familial ties.

Anyway, I went off course again.

Again, if you go back to what I've written up to this day, you will find a combination of two things: strong admiration for the heroism and courage of the youth, and their aspiration for freedom. I do believe something historical happened in 2011, and that's irreversible. I know the younger generation is in a state of severe depression, but I am in a constant state of optimism, despite the shitshow we are exposed to. I supposedly lived under King Farouk for two years but I didn't know anything then. I can't judge King Farouk. But I lived under Nasser, Sadat, Mubarak, and Morsi, I believe we have not seen anything as horrific, cruel, monstrous, inefficient, stupid or senseless as what we have seen from June 30 [2013] untill today. I say that openly by the way. That aside, I think what happened during the revolution is irreversible. People may be frustrated, but what you have now is a generation, or at least tens of thousands of people who have internalized the experiences and values of the revolution, and that cannot be erased. That is why I think reading and revisiting history is so important. Your generation is talented, and that has always fascinated me. I've seen talents that are extremely diverse and rich. But then of course there is a remarkable stubbornness when it comes to political organization. Whenever I check Twitter or Facebook, the notion of political organization is not on anyone's mind. As I was saying, revisiting the experience

of the revolution is very important, so that people can remember what happened, so that they are able to remind themselves.

You know, there is this quote that I always reference, from *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn*:* "The memory of oppressed people is the one thing that cannot be taken from them, and so long as this memory lives on, revolution is an inch below the surface."

That's my conviction.

We grew up at a time of absent political organization, but you lived through that experience.

Why didn't you do more?

Listen, we're responsible for the mistakes we made during our time. In 2011, there was nothing we could do. You were the ones who started it; it was your revolution, fueled by your imagination. Like I said before, I woke up that morning [January 25] thinking only 500 people would join the protests, and that they'd get arrested immediately. I imagined that they'd be shoved into police trucks and thrown on the side of the road or in the desert, and that would be it. By the evening, I knew it was going to turn into a revolution. That's not to say that it happened without any antecedents; it's to say it was fueled by a completely different imagination. And that in itself was not a bad thing.

At the meeting of the older leftist factions — which included people from the Workers Party, January 8, etc. — nobody suggested taking the lead. The most they could think of was issuing a statement, of which they could not have printed 100 copies only; they had to at least print 100,000 copies. And they had nowhere to print it.

Many of the older generation were at the square on a regular basis. I too used to walk around. I would go to the square to spend an hour or so before heading to the office. For example, on the first anniversary of the Mohamed Mahmoud clashes, I went to observe what was happening. It felt as though I was watching a film from the Middle Ages. Central security forces were taking refuge in a school with the gates shut — they were ashamed I presumed, it was right after they committed one of their massacres — and the protestors were forging ahead, throwing stones at the school. Obviously their attacks weren't effective, because the police had really barricaded themselves in. It was like watching a castle under attack. Every now and then, they'd throw a tear gas canister, but not much was happening. I walked into the side street, looking like I didn't belong. I definitely stood out. And then the funniest thing happened. A young woman who was quite short came up to me, possibly 18 years old. I presumed from the way she looked and dressed that she belonged to the working class. To her I probably was... You know when you have to show a tourist around? She went on to tell me, gushingly, 'They locked themselves inside but we're giving them hell. Don't you worry. We're fucking them over.'

So I understand what you are saying. And by the way when I look back on the revolution critically, my intention is never to criticize one person in particular, because you are a product of your time, and a product of thirty years of a dead political life in Egypt — even since before you were born. As for us, well our generation fell apart. When did we make mistakes? We made them during our time. We didn't leave a legacy… We didn't live to witness to be able to pass on a certain memory.

For example, I think that it was pure madness that after you had gone through a revolution of that size, with palpable continuity, you came out demanding a constitutional referendum. For me it was a what the fuck moment. I'm sorry. Constitutional amendments? Why, are you crazy?

The first thing one does after instigating a revolution, after toppling the head of state, is forming a government, an interim government. That is how it's been done throughout history. Form an interim government from within the square, not tell Mubarak to leave and then go home. You should have demanded that Mubarak leave and that he be replaced by a government that includes so and so and so, tasked with such and such and such and such.

But to be honest, I think the older generation was worse than the younger one. The older generation led you into a labyrinth... I found that discussion psychedelic, the arguments over the six or seven constitutional articles that were amended. And in reality it was a deal between the Muslim Brotherhood and the military and we were left to fight over whether to agree or refuse. I know of fellow leftists, long-time comrades who voted yes and defended their decision. Extremely radical thinkers, supposedly. It was moronic... With all my respect to Baradei, why should he be at the helm? Why should he become the symbol of the Egyptian revolution? Someone who rushes to Vienna or Geneva every time he's upset, who's hardly ever been to the square. Why? Why?

Like I said, there are many moments that baffled me, even though I had a good grasp… Or in other words I tried to understand the reasons behind them beyond individual mistakes, but rather as a whole state that took us by surprise, and no one was prepared for it. For me, that is the basis of rereading historical experiences. The important thing is not to plead mea culpa and whip ourselves into admitting our mistakes. (You know 'mea culpa' is a Latin phrase used in Catholic mass to acknowledge wrongdoing. Shias believe in it too.) The important thing is to build on that experience so that when it happens again, not necessarily in the same way, because at the end of the day, revolutions come in waves. People don't stay in a constant state of revolt. I think that June 30 was the last breath of a people exhausted by revolution, in addition to the complicity of the authorities and Tamarod[15] and I don't know what. That aside, I believe there was true popular support for June 30, but it was the last breath.

That's how it's always been, from the Paris Commune onwards. People reach a stage of exhaustion, at which point the experience of revolution becomes one of chaos. At the end of the day, people want a state, they want to be able to walk on the streets, they don't want to get robbed. That is the minimum. Especially in a state like Egypt, where a welfare system is entrenched. This doesn't only apply to the oligarchs who are stealing alongside top officials, ministers, guards, etc... I mean poor people. Farmers receive fertilizers from the state, pesticides from the state. That's how welfare dependency works, from top to bottom. At one point you rebel, yes, but if you cannot institute an alternative, and you keep on going, without one gain. You didn't gain a single thing, you didn't make any gains. Every gain you made was de facto not de jure. The de jure gains were illusory.

At a point I joined the Social Democratic Party. My hope was that it would turn into a popular mass organization welcoming all affiliations, one that is united around an urgent program; a group of demands from the countryside, city, workers' rights, personal freedoms, etc. But this never materialized. At a certain moment I thought it might be possible, because it was the first party to be formed after the revolution — I thought that the Social Democratic Party could be an umbrella under which all the different factions come together, creating popular momentum. At that time, Emad Aboughazi was the minister of culture. The military generals said they would form delegations to meet with the different stakeholders, cabinet members, and military men. A mixture of sorts. The Social Democratic Party formed a three-person delegation that I was asked to join. So we sat down to supposedly negotiate. Now how can I negotiate with [long-time friend] Emad? The whole setup was comic. Emad sat there looking very depressed, so after the meeting

15. A grassroots campaign that was established in 2013 in opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood rule. It was eventually backed by the military.

I took him to the side and asked him if there was anything they were planning to propose, any concession they were willing to offer. 'Not at all. It's all a sham and I want to quit.' I asked him not to. At least one of us would be in there trying to push from within. In moments like these, you try to salvage whatever is salvageable.

Did you ever get into a fight with your son?

On the day of The Battle of the Camel, I was at the office at 7 am. I was the first to arrive. At around 8 or 8:30 am our military correspondent arrived. He had contacts at the intelligence agencies, but he was also a good journalist. He told me that he had just come from Giza Square where he had seen scores being mobilized. He mentioned the name of one of the top oligarchs — I always forget their names — and said that he had seen him giving out money to thugs who were readying to attack Tahrir. 'They will clear the square. Tahrir is over,' he had heard the man say.

I knew that Hossam was there. I didn't know what to do. Based on the scale of mobilization our correspondent recounted, it was going to be a massacre, so I called him. I wanted to tell him to take his friends and leave. But then I thought to myself, fuck, has it come to this? I never thought I'd be the one to ask my son to abandon the battlefield. So that was it, that was the only moment when asking Hossam to leave the square crossed my mind, but I could not say it out loud. Instead, I told him that an attack on the square was underway, that they [the regime] had mobilized, and I told him to take care. That was all I could say. A few hours later I went to Talaat Harb Square. I saw the cars as they arrived and unloaded people [thugs].

Whenever there was major fighting, I would always try to get a hold of him, but his phone was either shut or out of coverage. I used to call his mother who would tell me: 'I cannot reach him either. I will call one of his friends.' Anyway, at the end we'd get a hold of him. On the day of the first march to the presidential palace — followed by the sit-in in front of the palace, which you all joined — I was watching the clashes on television. There were no means of communication at all. I was worried that you'd get killed, or worse, tortured. Taking a bullet is easy.

We used to argue, we'd never agree, but I don't think we ever fought per se. He'd usually avoid discussing things with me; he is an introvert. And I wasn't going to assume the role of the wise man every time we discussed politics. We all have failed experiences. I found that the best way to speak my mind is through writing. I am a person who is easily provoked. When you write it's just you and a piece of paper, or a laptop. Whoever wants to read will read, and whoever doesn't won't, there's nothing I can do about that.

> On the morning of May 5 at the Shukrallah family home — which resisted the barbaric demolition that distorted the architectural style of Dokki and Mohandiseen — writer and politician Hani Shukrallah left us; he who spent most of his life seeking for politics to have a humane return, and for journalism to be a light that negates darkness, even to a small extent that allows the rest of us to protect ourselves from some pitfalls.
>
> Hani, as he always insisted that everyone who worked with him should call him, old or young — even when he was in the highest positions as editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram Weekly, Ahram Online* and *Al-Shorouk*, to whose launch

> he contributed, in addition to outlining core values that ensured a departure from misinformation — left us one month before his 69th birthday.
>
> Hani bid farewell the hospital lobbies that he frequently visited in the last ten years, fighting, in his own way, a heart fatigued by sadness over the great and huge dreams and aspirations of the seventies generation, which believed in the strength of Egypt despite economic challenges, and the potential of the Arab world despite intellectual differences; a generation that wanted a free Palestine for Palestinians, a country without torture, a hope for justice, and endless spaces for discussions and confrontations.
>
> Hani's departure was not a surrender to illness, because Hani did not give in. He challenged the disease and did not let it subdue him or his soul, because he believed that a person lives as he loves and does not only live to survive. That was what he always channeled through everything he undertook, in politics and in journalism, whether online or in print, whether English or Arabic, even when he got involved in regional press in the one-of-a-kind experiment "Awlad El Balad", where he was surrounded by a group of young people who, like him, believed there was a lot to be said and told about what happens away from the noise of the capital and its high-level politics.
>
> *Dina Ezzat, Al-Shorouk*[16]

If you were to speak about this moment, about today, what would you say?

You have to consider how the ruling class has regarded the Egyptian people over time. They act as if they are the colonizer; their gaze is that of the colonizer, so imagine the extent of their trauma. These are people who regard themselves as masters while the rest of us are slaves. They can be charitable towards people during Ramadan, or do something kind once in a while, but at the end they consider them to be unworthy. People like us who belong to the middle class are socially mobile. Besides the state apparatus, Egypt is and has always been a police state, a military state. During the Mubarak era, the saying was, 'Let them have their fun,' and he did permit some freedoms, but ultimately those in power were the masters. So for the master to have found himself hit over the head, unseated from power, ridiculed, imprisoned, and humiliated at every step... People whom they regard as scum have forced them to unseat their chief and humiliate him, all the while he pretended he was sick, boring in his nose as he lay on that bed. Those generals see themselves as gods. Any soldier would tremble at the sight of the two swords[17]. So to depict their chief as Pinocchio and launch the Kazeboon campaign to expose their violations, and so on... You insulted them; you humiliated them. And you also terrified them. They were truly scared.

That was what I saw at *Al-Ahram* while working closely with those at the top. Nobody could say anything to me. I was managing *Ahram Online* freely, although the military was leading the country at the time. They were freaked out. There are two issues of *Al-Ahram* that were absolutely hilarious, the one published following the Battle of the Camel, with the headline "Popular protests proclaim love for Mubarak," and the resignation issue, "The people have toppled the regime." A headline in [the state-owned] *Al-Ahram* newspaper, led by the same editor-in-chief and the same editorial

16. Hani Shukrallah: A rich life and a gracious departure, Al-Shorouk, May 6, 2019. http://tiny.cc/w314nz
17. In reference to the attire of high ranking officers.

team. Imagine having had to accept that shift. It must have been humiliating and terrifying.

So what's happening today is partly a form of revenge, and partly to ensure this does not happen again. They've sworn that what happened would never happen again, hence the brutality. At the same time, people are traumatized, imprisoned, tortured. People are being locked up for years. If you recall our prison stories — although people were also beaten up, still — we'd be talking about completely different conditions, entirely different. Now you've got forced disappearances and what not. During our time, these kinds of measures were reserved for the poor. Today, anyone's at risk. Some people decide to push the boundaries, some retreat, whatever. But we knew when we crossed the red line. Today we can't tell, we have no idea. The precariousness of the moment is possibly intentional, designed to maintain a state of terror, and it's also caused by the haphazard nature with which state institutions operate, each pushing for their own agenda. Plus, there's an absence of cadres. Mubarak at least had cadres, a group that was trained under the socialist union in an era of active political life. Although it was an era of false demagogic politics, they still practiced some form of politics. Today, you've got a bunch of ignorant officers who know nothing. Whether they're officers or technocrats, you are confronted with a reality ripe with absolute ignorance and terror, vengeance against the humiliation caused by the revolution, and fear that it would happen again… I mean this is enough to warrant a state of absolute brutality.

That said, when I meet someone of your generation, or slightly older or younger, I am fascinated by their inventiveness and their ideas. Yours is a generation that reads avidly. I don't know, I'm not one to prophesy when the next revolution will happen. I find this sort of prevision ridiculous. I remember a time when people of my generation were saying, 'You prophesied the revolution' or 'Kamal Khalil prophesied the revolution.' My answer was always, 'If someone were to tell you the end of the world is near — you know the dispossessed who wander the streets of London and New York? — and then a meteor hits, would it have been a prophecy?' I am really annoyed at people who insist that Kamal Khalil prophesied the revolution. You know what, Kamal Khalil has been chanting *Revolution is coming tomorrow* since '71. The revolution happened years later, how could you call that a prophecy? And I say that in spite of my deep love for Kamal.

So what I want to say is that the show is not over. I don't think so. How long will it take us? I have no idea. How will it happen? I don't know. But I think there's something... Ultimately, the human race might be committing suicide. What are we going to do about that? I don't believe in historical determinism, not one bit. I always go back to Rosa [Luxembourg]'s famous saying: Socialism or barbarism. We might end up choosing barbarism. But I see something that is giving me a glimpse that something new might happen. You know when I catch myself wrapping up an interview with something that may seem prophetic, I have to say, 'God only knows'. Because you never know. I find those who have absolute certainty extremely annoying.

If we seem to many of those who came before or after us to be fallen angels, that's only because they believed in our angelic nature — in the purity of our leftist kitsch — and thereby gave us more credit than should be allowed to any human being. These days the dreamers are no longer wide-eyed stargazers (and perhaps never were) but people permeated through and through by the feculence their rebellion stirred up. The tragedy of a generation that lived the experience of rebellion is that no matter where each individual ended up, whether they took the safe path (repentance, pragmatism, even repudiation of all the old radical ideas), or the path of remorse (emotional collapse, withdrawal from the world, mental illness) they can never go back to being the person they were before the rapture took them. They can never be free of the memory of that magnificent moment of transgression, of freedom; of a lightness whose beauty is almost unbearable. The dream will remain, as exhausting as compunction, as inspiring as the purest moments of exuberant life, and so painful.

Arwa Salih

The Stillborn, 1997[18]

18. The Stillborn: Notebooks of a Woman from the Student-Movement Generation in Egypt, Arwa Salih, 1997. Translated from Arabic by Samah Selim, 2018.