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When I was sent to the Brothers

In 1953, my father asked if I wanted to join the Muslim Brotherhood, which was a movement that was operating openly in the Gaza Strip. So I ended up joining the Rimal Neighborhood branch early in 1953. I was especially keen after Sheikh al-Baghdadi told me that I was a Muslim Brother before I even knew I was, simply because he ‘caught’ me praying regularly at the mosque. As for my father, he offered me the opportunity to join because he wanted me to stop playing in the street, and instead practice sports in the Muslim Brotherhood branch building, which had table tennis and volleyball facilities, and was cleaner than playing barefoot in the alleyways.

In the Muslim Brotherhood, I saw several things that did not accord with my outlook. The first problem arose in the beginning of 1953, when the Revolutionary Leadership Council in Egypt decided to dissolve Egyptian political parties, after accusing their leaders of treason. I rejected the accusation of Mustaf al-Nahhas, the leader of the Wafd Party, of treason, while the Muslim Brotherhood insisted that this allegation against him was correct.

The second divergence took place in May 1953, when a savage Israeli assault was launched against Al-Bureij Refugee Camp in Gaza. A huge demonstration took place at the time in Thalatheeni Street, extending more than one kilometre. The security apparatuses arrested 34 leaders of the demonstration, accusing them of communism. In fact, there was only one communist in that demonstration, Mouin Bseiso. He was a teacher in Al-Bureij School, and he led this demonstration to protest against the failure to defend Al-Bureij, and its inability to prevent the Israeli massacre of dozens of Palestinians, who were left completely defenseless. Ironically, the Palestinian Communist Party (PCP) had not yet been formed, for the Egyptian security apparatuses had managed to destroy *Usbat al-Tahrur al-Watani* [the precursor to the PCP] in 1952.

When I asked Haj Sadiq al-Muzayani, the head of the Muslim Brotherhood branch in the Rimal area, “What have we done?” he answered, “We must pray and give alms”. I reiterated, “What have we done for the people of Al-Bureij who were just massacred”, and he replied, “We must strengthen our

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connection with God Almighty". This talk was utterly unconvincing to me. I was asking about doing something tangible and material, something that we could and should do, and his answer did not convince me. My relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood began to wane from that moment onward.

The third issue arose when I read an announcement on the bulletin board stating that Musa al-Khalidi had been suspended from the Muslim Brotherhood. When I asked Haj Sadiq al-Muzayani, "Why was al-Khalidi suspended?" he said, "Because he teaches girls!" I answered, "He is in the sixth grade, and he is teaching girls in the first and second grades. These are children. And you must remember that al-Khalidi and his family live beneath the wall of your palace, under a roof made of two grain bags. If he was teaching girls, he was doing so to feed his family!" He said, "No, and he must not be in contact with the opposite sex". Of course, this kind of talk did not appeal to me.

The fourth incident took place when the group tried four young members of the Muslim Brotherhood internally. The first was accused of going to the cinema, and when he confronted Sadiq al-Muzayani by saying, "Your son Salman goes to the cinema with us", the leader replied, "What my son does is none of your business". This was despite the fact that his son was a member of the branch! The second member was tried for walking in the street and taking photographs of sites he liked. Al-Muzayani told him, "Photography is not allowed!" As for the third member, Al-Muzayani told him, "You joke with people". The member answered, "I play with my tongue, whereas you play with your hands" (and he was referring here to Sheikh Hashem al-Khazindar). The three were suspended from the Muslim Brotherhood. This incident shocked the organisation's youth wing, not least because of the draconian approach that was used in the interrogation, and the absence of fairness. All of these incidents distanced me from the Brotherhood.

At the Doorstep of the Communist Party

Truth be told, my late father did not pressure me to stay in the Brotherhood. At the time, there was a presser in our neighborhood called Ramadan al-Hayek. He asked about my opinion of the communists. I said, "They are good people who are enthusiastic patriots. However, they would have been better if they had prayed". He laughed.

This presser was a cultured person who used to write novels and lyrics. He would even post the songs he wrote to Farid al-Atrash, but the latter never sang any of them! He was also an avid film viewer, and regularly went to the cinema. I liked that about him, because I myself used to go every Monday, to watch every new film as soon as it was released. At any rate, what was

important was that I had no reservations about the Communists, except this prayer issue.

In the 1953-54 school year, I moved with my family to Al-Areesh, and my relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood was renewed there through Mohammad al-Ifranji, who currently resides in Cairo. But this relationship was strained once more at the hands of the Mathematics teacher (a Muslim Brother from Ismailia). This teacher used to rebuke me every time he saw me drawing, saying, "Drawing is not allowed!" This, of course, used to upset me...

At any rate, I spent two years at the doorstep of the Communist Party, totally ready to enter it. In terms of class background, I was poor and used to see my salvation in the just redistribution of wealth. Politically, I was very impressed by the struggle of the communists and their fortitude. Intellectually, I had read the book *Palestine in the Claws of Colonialism* by Ahmad Sadiq al-Sa'd and been incredibly impressed. When I asked about the author, I found out that he was a communist. A little while later, I came across Mustafa Haikal's *A Summary of Das Capital* and was even more prepared. I was only prevented from joining the party by two major factors that were later removed.

Joining the Party

As for my actual joining of the CP, it is a story worth telling, for it was not easy to move from the Brotherhood to the communists... In the summer of 1955, a Palestinian teacher arrived at the Palestine School in Gaza from Iraq. Students at the time used to tremble at the sight of teachers. However, due to my early involvement in political and journalistic work, the teacher 'fraternised' with me. So I used to walk with this teacher, whose name was Atya Miqdad. During one of these walks he told me, "Abdel Qader, every once in a while the police summon you. What do they tell you?" I responded, "They tell me that I belong to the communists". So he said, "Why don't you deny that you are a communist?" I answered, "It would be shameful for me to deny that I am a communist. Politically, I am with them, but I have two reservations". He asked, "What are these reservations?" I said, "The first is peace, and the second is atheism". He said to me disapprovingly, "Do you think that peace means telling Israel *bon appétit!* Enjoy Palestine, which you just took over, and let's make peace? No, peace is just peace, peace is returning rights to their owners, and only then we can have peace". He continued, "Secondly, communism is not atheism and it is not directed against God. Communism is concerned with the relationship between man and his fellow man. What is important is not to have someone dominate or exploit another. Aside from that, a human being's relationship with their God

is theirs to decide on; they alone carry the weight of its responsibility, as it does not harm others". So I told him that I was ready to join, and thus became a member of "The Palestinian Communist Party in the Gaza Strip" [...]