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RETOUR SUR LES
MANIFESTATIONS
ETUDIANTES DU MOIS
D'AVRIL



Fresque déposée sur un trottoir du centre-ville (Le Caire).

PORTRAIT

MAHGOUN OMAR:

*In the face of experience
His constancy bridged the gap between
words and deeds*

Profile by **Aziza Sami**
(Ahram Weekly, 2-8 May 2002)



Mahgoub Omar, as one Palestinian friend put it, "has devoted his life to Palestine." A doctor by profession, for 14 turbulent years, from 1968 to 1982, he was active in the ranks of the PLO, first in Jordan and subsequently in Lebanon, leaving when the PLO was forced to move its headquarters to Tunis after the Israeli invasion. It was only then that he returned to Egypt.

When the Israeli army's current invasion of the West Bank and Gaza exploded with such mind-numbing violence at the end of March and everyone seemed to be fishing around for Egyptians to interview who might have direct experience of such events, who might provide a meaningful commentary, his was the name which seemed to be on everyone's lips.

Mahgoub Omar: I was familiar with the name for it had appeared many times in the lead of articles, often published in the now defunct opposition newspaper *Al-Shaab*. But for those who did not always delve deeply into

that paper -- among whom I must include myself -- Mahgoub Omar might all too easily have appeared just one writer among many who peddled their views on the one-time socialist oriented, and then Islamic, pages. I was familiar, too, with the face: I had seen an occasional, passport-sized photograph accompanying an article. I did not, though, at the time know that this was the face of the man Jean Genet had described as "the most beloved" of Palestinian commanders, despite his penchant for discipline, which extended even to the banning of card games.

Mahgoub lives with his Lebanese wife, Mouna, in a small, ground-floor apartment in an old building in Qasr Al-Aini. It bears remarkably few signs of affluence and is devoid of gadgets except for a personal computer connected to the Internet.

Mahgoub is 70 now, and has some health problems. He sits behind a high table, high enough so that he will not have to bend too much. In the corner of the room a television is switched on to

the Palestine satellite channel, though occasionally he switches to other stations, providing a running commentary. "This one," he says, having switched to Al-Jazeera, "was never really pro-Arafat, not before the siege of Ramallah, not after. But they do what they do under the guise of media freedom."

He last spoke to Yasser Arafat by phone on 28 March, a day before the Israeli army began its siege of Arafat's Ramallah headquarters. Since then there have been no communications, a situation that has hit Mahgoub hard. He has known Arafat since 1968, the year Mahgoub joined the PLO, and the year Arafat became chairman of the organisation.

Mahgoub (born Raouf Nazmi Mikhail in 1932) hails from the traditional Egyptian left. He joined the Egyptian Communist Party as a student in the early 1950s and was twice imprisoned under Nasser. Less prone to theorising than many of his political co-travellers, he was also rather more willing to work with his hands. Among those who shared his imprisonment he is remembered as someone who would roll up his shirtsleeves and trouser legs, tilling a plot of land in the prison grounds with a yellow striped towel over his shoulder. Later still others, in the *fedayin* bases where he was in charge of political and military training, remember his uncomplaining approach to the most menial chores.

"His actions showed the kind of consistency between word and deed rare among the ranks of the Egyptian left," the prominent leftist intellectual Ismail Sabri Abdallah says of Mahgoub.

In 1966, following his release from a second stint in prison, Mahgoub published many articles, among them "Sources of Fragmentation in Arab Political Movements" and, in 1967, "The Art of the Possible, and the Inevitability of Confrontation".

He joined the PLO in 1968 because, he says, he saw it "not as a theorising body but a movement for and of the people, a movement that refused defeat on the ground."

"It represented, if you will, the sum-total of the Palestinian will to return to the land." Palestinian liberation, furthermore, is, Mahgoub believes, "the first line of defence" for the Egyptian nationalist movement.

His involvement with the PLO took many forms: he worked as a doctor in refugee camps in Southern Jordan, compiling lists of medicines required by the Red Cross. He was a military and political trainer in *fedayin* bases, first in Al-Tafila in Jordan, then in Lebanon. In the late 1970s he headed the PLO's bureau for planning.

Perhaps it was his association with *Al-Shaab* that fuelled rumours that along with the name change there had been a change of religion. The subject of the rumours, though, smiles when they are broached. No, he is not a convert. Mahgoub Omar, he explains, was adopted as pen name, as well as a kind of code name, after joining the PLO.

"Differences," Mahgoub believes, "must never be allowed to obscure the fundamentals upon which we all agree."

Fatah, the largest faction of the PLO, appealed to him not only because of its popular base but because of the

catholicity of its membership: it embraced, he said, "Muslim and Christian, right and left with an all-encompassing plurality."

(A pack of cigarettes, inadvertently left by Mouna, lies on the table in front of Mahgoub. He toys with one of them, playing with it in his fingers, before lighting it and smiling. The smile is that of a child caught doing something he should not. The cigarette is left half smoked.)

It is a plurality with which Mahgoub has been familiar since he was a child. His father, Mikhail, an employee in the postal service, made no distinctions between Muslims and Christians, save, perhaps, Mahgoub says, that he had a slight aversion to priests. But the family home was open to all, and Mahgoub was early introduced to the Quran, an introduction that resulted in a daily habit of listening to Quranic readings.

The televised images of violence, the random killing of civilians in Jenin and Nablus, indeed, all across the West Bank, are scenes with which Mahgoub is already familiar. He has seen it all before, in 1970, in Amman, during Black September. (His eye-witness accounts of events at Al-Ashrafiya hospital in Amman, bombarded by the Jordanian army, have been published in book form.) He was in Tel Al-Zaatar in Lebanon six months before Israel's phalangist allies massacred the inhabitants of the camp in 1976.

At Tel Al-Zaatar he was responsible for the supply of goods to the camp from the nearby industrial district, where the factories were owned by Maronite Christians. The camp, in return, provided workers for the factories.

"For a time there was Lebanese Palestinian intermingling, and it acted to protect the Palestinians."

It did not, however, last. The massacre at Tel Al-Zaatar provoked reprisals by Palestinians in the Maronite village of Al-Damur, as events spiralled into civil war. All of which served only to reinforce Mahgoub's belief in building bridges. "The guns," he insists, "when they are pointed should be pointed at the common enemy, not among ourselves."

Following the 1978 Camp David Peace Accords between Egypt and Israel Mahgoub "felt tormented by the way the media in Arab countries dealt with the role of Egypt and attacked the Egyptian people."

"Even if public opinion was with Sadat then and against the Palestinians," he says, "I never felt that it was justified to attack the popular base."

In July 1980 he wrote a paper, "The Strategy of the Egyptian Negotiator," which though unpublished was widely circulated. In it he argued that the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel, as contracted, had deprived Egypt of important levers that should have been maintained even in peace. Relinquishing war as a strategic option within the context of the Camp David accords being one example. It placed Egyptian negotiators in an impossibly weak position, he wrote, leaving no room for the exercise of even the minimum pressure necessary in any political negotiations.

Following the PLO's expulsion from Lebanon Mahgoub settled in Egypt, paying only brief visits to Tunis. "Not," he says, "because there were any differences with the PLO but because I

felt, especially after the rift between Egypt and the Arab world, that a Palestinian base was needed inside Egypt." To which end he devoted his energies, writing and compiling a bibliography of works on Palestinian politics, history and culture.

It was at this time that he began working in the room made available to him by Dar Al-Fata Al-Arabi, the publishing house with which he had been associated since its founding in Beirut, and which moved its headquarters to Cairo in 1975.

It is Dar Al-Fata Al-Arabi which published Mahgoub's children's books. Alongside these he has produced a myriad articles, on the history and politics of Palestine which, together with several full-length studies, detail the dispossession of the Palestinian people and underscore his unwavering belief in the fundamental right of return and compensation of the Palestinian refugees. Indeed, the collection of books and other published material amassed by Mahgoub throughout his life, and to which he endlessly refers for his own works, constitutes one of the finest Palestinian archives in the region. It is stored in the flat above that occupied by Mahgoub and his wife.

After all he has seen, after all his involvement, how does he feel about what is now happening in Palestine?

"My first reaction," he says "is optimism, despite everything." The Oslo Peace accords, despite all defects and inconsistencies, at least afforded the Palestinians a foothold to fight for their land while they were on it. New realities, he believes, are being created on the ground every day: it is no longer a war by proxy, there are no more

"Palestinians on the outside and those from within." The problem has gone back to its roots, which will, he believes, serve to clarify issues.

A few weeks ago he forwarded an e-mail to Yasser Arafat including an article, written by the Israeli author Israel Shamir, whose support of the Palestinian right of return has ensured his ostracism by the Israeli establishment. The article, "The Return of the Knight" -- the title is a pun on the name of Farris Ouda, the Palestinian boy whose photograph, standing alone, slinging a stone at a tank as it closed in on him became one of the most enduring images of the Intifada -- argues that the Palestinians need neither compassion nor pity but, rather, due recognition of their dignity, and of the chivalry of their fight for independence. (Farris was killed by an Israeli sniper a few days after the photograph was taken.)

He is currently engaged in compiling a selection of writings from the Israeli left which will be published under the title *Exodus*. On the wall of the room in which he works is a photograph of Khalil El-Wazir (Abu Jihad), the PLO leader assassinated by Israel in his home in Tunis in 1988. Countless of his friends, and his "children" as he called them, have been imprisoned, assassinated, killed in action.

Any attempt to embroil Mahgoub in debates on "wars against terror", to induce him -- who has lost so many friends -- to repeat yet again the justifications for the Palestinians armed struggle, would be an affront.

Recently he sent the diaries of a nurse who had witnessed the Sabra and Shatilla massacre to writer Gamal El-Ghitani, extracts from which Ghitani

published in the weekly literary magazine *Akhbar Al-Adab*. Yet beyond his compiling of *Exodus* Mahgoub's own writing has been curtailed by ill-health.

Does he feel frustrated that he cannot do more?

No. Egoism is not part of his character. He has never felt that he is the only one, nor that his role has been unique, singular. Events in Palestine have been "written by many" he says. "There are many bridges. Mahgoub Omar is one." ■

RETOUR SUR LES MANIFESTATIONS DE SOLIDARITE

Chronologie des protestations...

DU 29 MARS AU 16 AVRIL

Source : Presse égyptienne

▪ Vendredi 29 mars

A la sortie de la prière du vendredi, quelques centaines d'artisans du quartier d'Al-Azhar sortent de la mosquée en manifestant contre l'invasion la nuit dernière de Ramallah par l'armée israélienne. Manifestation très vite circonscrite

▪ Samedi 30 mars (Journée de la terre aussi)

Manifestations massives dans les universités du Caire et d'Alexandrie. Dans la banlieue du Caire, à Maadi, c'est plus de 1000 étudiants d'une école militaire qui manifestent dans les rues, appelant au renvoi de l'Ambassadeur israélien. Au centre-ville, au syndicat des Avocats, des centaines de personnes tentent de briser le cordon de sécurité mis en place autour du bâtiment pour aller manifester dans la rue. Confrontations violentes, de nombreux avocats sont blessés.

Un mélange d'officiers de la sécurité nationale et des forces de police assurent le contrôle des événements. Un officier : *« Personne ne sortira, les gens peuvent crier tant qu'ils veulent mais nous ne laisserons personne sortir et risquer le chaos dans les rues. Croyez-moi, si cela servait à quelque chose, je les aurais rejoint ».*

Le comité des avocats nassériens appellent à une manifestation deux jours plus tard, à l'extérieur de l'Université

▪ Dimanche 31 mars

Manifestations se généralisent, visibles à Giza, Héliopolis, Maadi, Boulaq, Doqqi, ville du 6 octobre, Alexandrie, villes du Delta et du Saïd. Les slogans étaient à peu près les mêmes partout : *« La palestine est arabe », « Nous nous sacrifierons pour la Palestine », « Rompre avec Israël, avec les EU », « Nasser l'avait dit : l'occupation est américaine ».*

▪ Lundi 1^{er} avril

Des centaines de forces anti-émeutes sont postées devant l'Université du Caire. La manifestation est prévue à 12h. Dix minutes après l'heure prévue, des centaines de personnes sont déjà rassemblées devant la porte principale, et cinq minutes plus tard ils parviennent à briser le cordon de sécurité et à se diriger vers l'Ambassade israélienne. La charge est donnée, les manifestants suffoquent sous les gaz lacrymogènes et sont forcés de se replier vers l'Université. La manifestation va se poursuivre pendant des heures avec des flux et des reflux. Les forces anti-émeutes répliquent à coups de matraques. Les étudiants se sont joints depuis longtemps aux manifestants extérieurs, c'est leur convergence avec ces derniers que les forces tentent à tout prix d'empêcher. Des manifestants des écoles avoisinantes et de la faculté d'agriculture tentent de rejoindre les manifestants qui sont en face et dans l'université. Les manifestants viennent de tous les côtés, est, ouest et nord. La détermination des manifestants n'a d'égale que celle des forces anti-

émeutes. Jets de pierre contre matraque et gaz lacrymogènes.

▪ *Mardi 2 avril*

Une manifestation encore plus grande à l'Université du Caire. Un étudiant : « *Peut-être que c'est à cause des images que je vois tous les jours, peut-être que c'est à cause du fait que je n'ai toujours entendu parler que de défaite, jamais d'Etat palestinien ou de Jérusalem libre. C'est pour cela que je suis désespéré et en rage et que je m'enfiche que la police me matraque ou me casse la tête en deux* ».

Un officier de police : « *Pensez-vous vraiment que l'on a envie de battre ces gens ? Dieu seul sait ce que je ressens à l'intérieur* ».

▪ *Vendredi 5 avril*

5000 personnes entament une manifestation appelant au Jihad à la sortie d'Al-Azhar. La sortie des mosquées a donné lieu à des manifestations dans les villes du Delta (Tanta, Kafr El-Sheikh) et dans les centres urbains du Sud (Qéna). Durant la prière, les croyants ont fait la prière de l'absent (salat al-ghaeb)

L'Union des femmes palestiniennes basée au Caire et le syndicat des Artistes ont fait chacun des lettres, la première à Bush et la seconde à Arafat pour lui exprimer admiration et encouragements. Le syndicat des pharmaciens annonce un boycott des produits américains qui ont des équivalents génériques en Egypte.

▪ *Samedi 6 avril*

Manifestation devant la Ligue Arabe au moment où son secrétaire général tient une conférence sur la situation dans les territoires occupés. Le syndicat des journalistes fait un sit-in de solidarité avec le peuple palestinien

face à des policiers qui entourent le bâtiment.

Le comité populaire égyptien de solidarité avec le peuple palestinien (CPESPP) a fait un don de 80 000 LE sous formes de provisions et de médicaments.

▪ *Dimanche 7 avril*

Des centaines d'avocats du syndicat tiennent leur troisième manifestation en 2 semaines et 3 heures de sit-in.

▪ *Lundi 8 avril*

Des milliers d'étudiants manifestent dans les Universités du pays : Aïn-Shams, Caire, Helwan, Tanta, Canal de Suez, Minya, Sohag. Pour la première fois, une cinquantaine de femmes, américaines et étudiantes à AUC, organisent un sit-in de protestation silencieuse devant l'ambassade américaine. Un arsenal impressionnant de forces de sécurité les disperse en 15 minutes. Dans le même temps, une petite centaine d'étudiants d'AUC manifestent comme chaque jour depuis 2 semaines.

Le grand Mufti d'Al-Azhar, Sheikh Mohamed Sayed al-Tantawi qualifie la politique israélienne de terroriste.

▪ *Mardi 9 avril*

Le premier manifestant égyptien à être tué l'a été à l'Université d'Alexandrie, Mohamed al-Saqqa. En marge de l'arrivée de Colin Powell, des centaines d'étudiants manifestent à Alexandrie, Azhar, Banha et Tanta. Près de 260 étudiants ont été blessés lors des violences à Alexandrie, dont 5 sont dans un état critique. 50 étudiants arrêtés alors qu'ils essayaient de rejoindre le centre culturel américain pour remettre une lettre à Powell.

Au Caire, à peu près 100 intellectuels, journalistes, nassériens, islamistes et sympathisants manifestent devant

l'Assemblée du Peuple, encerclés par les forces de sécurité.

▪ *Mercredi 10 avril*

Omar al-Sibakhi, président des Amis des Droits de l'Homme et professeur à l'Université d'Alexandrie, écrit un appel aux ministres de l'intérieur et de l'éducation ainsi qu'au président de l'AP sur les derniers événements dans lequel il accuse les forces anti-émeutes d'avoir répondu par la violence à des manifestations pacifiques et il demande une enquête sérieuse et juste.

▪ *Jeudi 11 avril*

L'Eglise copte organise un rallye de solidarité avec le peuple palestinien en présence de personnalités politiques et religieuses coptes et musulmanes. 10 000 personnes se joignent à eux. Le Pape téléphone à Arafat et retransmet la discussion par haut-parleurs.

▪ *Vendredi 12 avril*

Pour la troisième semaine, des manifestations ont lieu à la sortie des mosquées. Un rassemblement populaire a lieu à la place Al-Raml à Alexandrie, soit 30 000 personnes. Ils appellent à la formation d'une coalition militaire islamico-arabe pour la défense des lieux saints. Le chef du Hamas est joint par téléphone à Gaza.

La filiale de portables égyptienne de Vodafone ouvre un numéro le 2820 dont le prix de la communication ira aux Palestiniens.

▪ *Samedi 13 avril*

Un groupe d'artistes, de sportifs célèbrent le 32^{ème} anniversaire du massacre de Bahr al-Baqar de 1970.

Manifestations étudiantes à Alexandrie, al-Gharbiya, Menoufiya. Les manifestants appellent à la rupture des liens avec Israël. Un

rassemblement politique est organisé à Menoufiya.

▪ *Dimanche 14 avril*

Le procureur général libère les 69 étudiants arrêtés lors des violentes manifestations à Alexandrie. Président Mubarak retarde l'inauguration de la Alexandrine en signe de solidarité avec le peuple palestinien. La branche d'Assiout de l'Université d'Al-Azhar est le théâtre d'affrontements violents. Les étudiants brûlent des drapeaux US et israélien. Le syndicat des ingénieurs d'Alexandrie organise un meeting politique durant lequel Arafat est joint au téléphone. Le syndicat des avocats d'al-Daqahliya fait un sit-in

▪ *Lundi 15 avril*

Près de 200 étudiants d'AUC font une manifestation pacifique à la place Tahrir. Les étudiants disent avoir obtenu la permission de se rassembler sur la place. Ils vont y rester deux heures, dans le calme, sans entonner aucun slogan et vont rapidement se disperser à la sortie des fonctionnaires à 14h, comme il en a été convenu avec la police. Ils ont également nettoyé la place avant leur départ.

Les étudiants de Zagazig, Al-Azhar et Caïre continuent les manifestations.

Le parti nassérien organise son premier rassemblement politique depuis l'invasion. Le rassemblement qui a lieu dans les bureaux du parti au centre-ville a réuni de nombreuses figures de l'opposition dont Ibrahim Shukri, chef du Travail.

▪ *Mardi 16 avril*

Le journal Al-Wafd publie une liste de produits à boycotter.

LES MANIFESTATIONS ETUDIANTES DU MOIS D'AVRIL

THE STUDENTS, AGAIN AND AGAIN

Palestinian solidarity has been re-born in the Egyptian collective psyche. But it is the students who have been the most vocal in expressing their resistance.

Fatemah Farag investigates the dynamics that propel the young into action and interviews a founding member of the Egyptian Popular Committee for Solidarity with Palestine (*Ahram Weekly du 26 au 2 octobre 2002*)

The day Egyptians watched in anguish and anger as Palestinian civilians were shot down by Israeli occupation forces, after clashes erupted between both sides as a result of a visit made by hard-line Likud leader Ariel Sharon to Al- Haram Al- Sharif in Jerusalem, is one to remember. It was a day that heralded a new political mood. After years of what had amounted to only mild concern in Egyptian public opinion with regards to the developments in Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Palestinian cause became a household concern.

And so it began: the development of committees for solidarity with the Palestinian Intifada, convoys of medical and other supplies to the Egyptian/Israeli border town of Rafah, the call to boycott American and Israeli products and the many blacklists of commodities, distributed in alley-ways and posted in the elevators of upper-class buildings from one side of town to another. In the course of two years

there have been high points, such as when the Palestinian *hatta's* -- which have come to symbolise the resistance - - were being sold on street corners, and it would not be an odd sight at mid-day to see the traffic blocked by a group of people demonstrating. And while things may seem quieter now, a less overt anger and resistance has settled in. And so soft drinks manufactured by multinationals on the boycott list continue to be sent back at restaurants, and Palestinian paraphernalia remains a must.

But perhaps the most pronounced forms of resistance and anger came from the universities. In that first week when violence erupted in the occupied territories, signalling the beginning of the second Intifada, the first and most emphatic public outcry came from Egypt's student body. Over 6,000 students demonstrated in Alexandria, only to be followed by their colleagues from Menoufia and Zaqaziq through to Cairo's universities, including the usually apolitical student body of the American University in Cairo (AUC), and eventually down south as far as Aswan. At that time the image of Mohamed Al-Durra, the twelve-year-old Palestinian boy shot in cold blood by Israeli soldiers, was a strong impetus to student wrath. Since then they have repeatedly challenged the gates that confine them to campuses and in attempting to take their movement beyond university borders have burned flags and donated blood. They have been arrested and struck by police batons. And it is the students who have suffered the most casualties

as a result of these confrontations, including the death of one of their rank.

Student solidarity with the Palestinian Intifada has been characterised by an ebb and flow in activity, but throughout it has remained the most vocal of resistance movements within Egypt.

And while the relationship between national/regional concerns and the level of student activism in Egypt has been long established, the movement of the past two years is particularly unusual given that this activism comes as a renunciation of a decade-long heritage of political apathy. Often said to resemble the student movement of the 1970s (which shook the system to its foundations) the activism of today does not have the 1967 defeat as emotional impulse or 1968 to provide intellectual framework.

"I think it is important to realise that students have been very influenced by the media focus on the violence in the occupied territories. Kids -- boys and girls -- would come into school crying after having spent the night watching images of the carnage," one student activist from Cairo University, who prefers anonymity, explained to *Al-Ahram Weekly*. The student pointed out that, "Of course it is not just the middle -- or upper -- class students who were getting access to coverage such as that provided by *Al-Jazeera*. Students from popular districts spend their afternoons and evenings at coffee shops, most of which today are hooked up to a satellite dish."

And hence many -- perhaps most -- of those who took action were not politicised students. "The movement has really been a spontaneous

movement," commented a woman activist from Ain Shams who also preferred anonymity. "Students were moved on the grounds of humanity and in many cases on the grounds of religion in the general sense."

The point, according to those who participated in the events of the past two years, is reflected in what became by far the slogan of choice: With our souls, with our blood we will avenge you Palestine.

"This is a very unideological slogan and it beat all the others. So imagine a demonstration starting up with the Islamists chanting 'Khaybar [a battle between the early Moslems and the Jews in which the latter were defeated] oh Jews will make a comeback,' and then the leftists joining in with more secular and anti-regime slogans and people watching on, obviously interested but not really into it. And then the soul and blood slogan would ring out and everyone would join in," recounted one activist who recently graduated from Cairo University.

And yet there was nothing ambiguous about the anger and willingness to violence that characterised the demonstrations of the past two years. The images of young men pulling up the sidewalk to pelt policemen hiding behind high-pressure water hoses and walls of tear gas was all but commonplace. "It is true that students were defending themselves against the violence of the police. It is also true that there is a lot of violence lurking within these young people waiting for an opportunity to vent itself," said the Cairo University activist. He went on to point out that violent incidents between the security at his university and students are an almost daily occurrence. He added, "Before the

wave of demonstrations and since, we have noted that arguments between us and the police take place all the time. Not for political reasons but for reasons closer to what brought about 1968. Issues of personal freedom like a boy and girl friend wanting to sit alone and not be bothered, or a boy or girl trying to bring their partner from another university into campus. And so when a demonstration erupts and there is anger at what is happening in Palestine and a general mood in the country which is pro-solidarity, these guys are ready for a fight."

The predisposition to confront is not just a function of Palestine. It is also a function of high unemployment, lack of services, and poverty. "A lot of kids feel they have nothing to loose. They come from families who are just about making ends meet. They know that it will be close to impossible for most to get decent employment and there are no social activities to absorb their energy. They are frustrated in a big way," noted the Ain Shams woman student.

And not just frustrated. According to Akram Alfi, a social researcher focused on the student movement, "There is a reformulation of the macho persona. In the 1960s, the cool guy was the one who would sit at the coffee shop and talk slick politics and read a lot. Later it would be the guy with the beard who went to prayers on time. Today it is the guy in the nifty brand-imitation jeans who looks good but when he fights is a winner."

Corroborating Alfi's view are stories of how during one of the early demonstrations, the security guards office was burnt down by students an hour after the demonstration had

ended because two guys realised that their girlfriends had fainted as a result of the tear gas used against the demonstration.

Adolescents account for half the population and this week over one million will be entering university. Unemployment accounts for around 17 per cent of the potential workforce -- the highest percentage of which is among college graduates -- and poverty (meaning wages of less than US\$2 a day) estimated by the government to account for approximately 50 per cent of the population. "There is a lot of tension and the students are looking for a fight," argued the Cairo University activist.

And yet, after two years of successive actions, the political forces that have footholds on campus have not succeeded in building on the momentum. "Everyone has done better. The Islamists were teetering in 1999/2000 and have enjoyed a breath of new life. The Nasserists and Leftists were always much smaller in number than the Islamists and yet they have also enjoyed more action. However, none of these has succeeded in creating political fronts or blocks. This means that the movement remains unorganised," argues the Cairo University activist.

According to the recent graduate, if the future does not witness the build up of a political block, or more, the movement is bound to loose momentum. As we spoke this week, two demonstrations scheduled for Saturday and Sunday had already failed to get off the ground. "What is new about the news? The fact that [Palestinian President Yasser] Arafat is under siege was news two years ago

Today we are so used to this state of affairs it fails to move. For a renewed life of the experience of resistance gained in the past two years, something on the scale of an American invasion of Iraq will probably have to take place," added the Ain Shams student.

In the 1970s Sheik Imam sang the poetry of Ahmed Fouad Nigm urging students on in their struggle. "*The students have got it right once again*," he sang. It may not be quite so anymore, but for the young there is always the promise of the future ■