

Our trip to Musaffah: All eyes on us (part 2)

The fact that our team consisted of both males and females, with six ladies and three men, made it look strange as we walked around the area of the Musaffah labour camp. At first, I thought that the people we encountered were being impolite or that the problem was with the attire that we were wearing. As we continued to travel farther into the area, it became increasingly intense. I did not see any other women in the area, particularly outdoors, which seemed the reason for the surprised expressions and rolling eyes on our team. People walking could not help but stop and gaze at us. Even those who were driving would slow down when they got near us; it was as if we had a traffic sign on us that read, "Slow down and observe us". It was almost as if we had that sign printed on our clothing. As a result, the drivers inadvertently slowed down their vehicles, opened their windows, and stared at us. A few of them even parked their cars and came over to check what we were up to.

It was as if we were some unusual "alien" species that crashed on Earth or some zoo animals that escaped our sanctuary. The attention we were getting was overwhelming, but we could not blame them, as we were a sight to behold, strolling in a mixed group of men and women. It was a surreal experience, but also a bit uncomfortable to be objectified in such a way. However, it also made me feel like we were a group of celebrities for a moment. I even thought of making the celebrity wave. I am sure if Musaffah was a social media platform and our group's transect walk in the area was content posted on the platform, we would have had a record number of followers, viewers, comments, and even subscriptions on the day. We would have been an afternoon sensation.

Everyone in the group started to feel it. We started to talk about it subtly to avoid attracting even more followers or viewers. It was amusing and unsettling to be the centre of attention, but we continued walking, trying to ignore the curious stares and whispers around us. It was a reminder of how much the area is socially segregated by gender and how our presence as a mixed-gender group was breaking those unwritten rules.

(field notes by Saleh Seid Adem, 08/02/2023)