

Our visit to Musaffah: Visit to Suma's place (part 3)

The two male members of our group got the opportunity to visit the workplace and residence of our research collaborator Suma and his colleagues. Our female colleagues could not join us since women were not permitted at sites with male-only accommodations. Women were prohibited from visiting the company housing, where Suma lives. This made the situation very interesting. This was not the first time I encountered gender-based access. Even throughout my research stay in Sharjah, my (male) gender was both a key and a barrier to accessing the interior lives of women and men migrants living in shared migrant households, so called *ijaza* houses.

Suma took us to his office, which is also the warehouse of the company he works for.. He introduced us to the Syrian-owned event-organizing company via the company's official YouTube channel. What struck me was that in the little movie introducing the firm, one can observe the variety of the workforce in terms of nationality and ethnicity. After seeing the movie, Suma showed us around inside the warehouses, which were filled with large boxes of various equipment required for stage setup and event organizing.

Suma's place was unique because his accommodation was in the company's warehouse. We also met a young man from Guinea who was getting ready to leave but shared his thoughts with us. Suma and his friend stated that this was a low-cost offer in which they could avoid the cost of expensive outside lodgings as well as the cost of daily commutes to work. Nevertheless, according to Suma and his buddies, living in the company house also had its downside. This implied that, according to them, they were accessible to work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in case of emergencies, urgent issues, or any demands of the company, which they could not refuse or have an excuse to decline. They were constantly torn between work and life. There was no clear border between the two. This created a dilemma and put pressure on them since it was cheap and affordable financially but expensive emotionally and mentally.

'I am delighted that I can pray very well here on time without any hassles,' Suma added after we did the noon prayer (*zuhr*) together in his workplace. He also expressed his delight at seeing me on this level as a black Muslim African working and studying in a European institution.

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