

Blogs on Arab Vision site - 2015

29.01.2015

### Strong Faith

Egypt is a Muslim country. Yet do not forget the considerably large minority of Christians that live in Egypt, mostly Copts but among others also Catholic, Evangelical, Anglican and Greek-Orthodox Christians. During my stay in Cairo I met with many Egyptian Christians, some of them became my friends. They are so strong in their faith; we in the West have so much to learn from them. Very striking is the music video of Christians from Minya (in the South of Egypt where in August 2013 a lot of churches were attacked) in which they were standing on the remnants of their burned church, singing about forgiveness). I got tears in my eyes the first time I saw this [music video](#). I notice their strong faith also in the answers they give to difficult questions and in their responses in difficult circumstances. "God is good", I often hear. Moreover many Egyptian Christians use the words 'ربنا معك' 'Rabina maak/maaki' (God is with you) when saying goodbye. A very important sentence which my house mate taught me in Arabic is 'ربنا موجود' 'Rabina mawkoed' (God is here; He is present). I certainly noticed this!

17.03.2015

### The cross



I remember it quite well. I was in a classroom of a kindergarten situated sixty kilometres from the Egyptian city Fayoum. These Egyptian children did not yet speak English so with the few words I knew in Egyptian Arabic and with a lot of gestures I tried to talk with one of the children. I told her that I was a Christian too. The girl looked at me; I saw the confusion in her eyes while she pointed at the inside of my white wrist: blank... I understood immediately what she meant without her asking me. "If you are a Christian then where is your cross?" A lot of Egyptian Christians, especially the Copts, have the custom to tattoo a small dark blue/black cross on the inside of their left wrist. A sign which distinguishes them from their many Islamic compatriots. It often happens that mothers have their children's wrists tattooed with a little cross when they are still young. In the same way this girl too, about four or five years old, had already a little cross on her wrist. Why do they do this? You can also ask the question: "why not?" Anyway, this experience gave me a new perspective; things can be different than we are used to. When is something 'normal' or 'strange'? In the eyes of this cute Egyptian girl I was the one who was 'strange'.

## Without a home

4 May 2015 | [Blog](#)

### Without a home

He seems to be of the same age as my nephew... about seven years old. The big difference is that my nephew is nicely tucked up in his warm little bed around this time. It is true that in Egypt children are going to bed far past the bed-time we are used to in my home country. This has to do with culture and the meal times, in Egypt they have dinner 'very late' around 10 PM.

Still this little boy is not just up late, like so many Egyptian children. In my opinion, he is at a place where at this time of the day he shouldn't be. With a feeling of powerlessness and compassion I'm looking at him, from my seat, as he is walking up and down the metro. Outside it's dark already. The children that are still on the street are accompanied by their family. This little boy isn't...

All alone he is walking there through the metro, which at this late hour is almost empty. He tries to sell things as people often do in the Cairo metro. But he is only a child... He should be playing, laughing, being loved by his parents and family. He should be at home... He is probably one of the many street children of Egypt without a home. A heartbreaking sight, a reality that should not be real at all.

## White flocks of 'snow' in Cairo

25 May 2015 | [Blog](#)

It looked funny. The cute little boy from about two years old was sitting sideways on his mother's shoulder; a way of carrying children which I have seen more often in the streets of Cairo. The mother was walking through the metro while she was trying to sell tissues, with her child on her shoulder.

She had given the little boy packet of tissues to distract him. The funny thing was that the little boy had opened the packet of tissues and each time he tore a little piece of the paper handkerchief. Like white flocks of 'snow' they dwindled on the ground. Not the best way to promote your merchandise.

The sight was amusing to see but at the same time a bit depressing. When you consider that this mother had to work so hard that she had to bring her little boy to her work and that he - without being aware of it- was working against her. His mother noticed it, but she didn't stop him. What else could she do? The metro reached the next station and she got off the metro with her little son to walk to the next carriage.

11 June 2015 | [Blog](#)

### Always willing to lend a hand



If you can say one thing about Egyptians, it is that they are very helpful. I'm speaking from my own experience on several occasions. On one of these occasions we were on our way to Moqattam, the Cave Church (actually in Arabic referred to as a monastery) in the hills at the outskirts of Cairo. We were almost there but we still had to cross quite a steep hill, on an unpaved road. The way up was not that steep, but the taxi had already 'climbed' several hills and this last one was just too much. Instantly, three young Egyptian men stood together behind the taxi. They pushed the car a couple of meters, while our taxi-driver stepped on the gas pedal. Slowly the car managed to get up the hill after all. My British friend and I applauded with gratitude and relief. 'Sukran awi awil' شكرا اوي اوي (Thank you so much!) What an experience! Wonderful!

## Ramadan

26 June 2015 | [Blog](#)

It's the first time I experience Ramadan in Egypt. I understand from my Egyptian fiancé that it's not appropriate to eat or drink on the street or in public transportation during this period of fasting. Easier said than done! With summer temperatures I long for water now and then. It was on a Friday and I went to church. I had drunk some water there so I wasn't thirsty when I was sitting in the new metro with air-condition. I was hungry.

When after a while I was by myself with just one Muslim lady, I thought 'I'll just ask her if she minds'. So I addressed her politely in Arabic and requested if I could eat something, although it's Ramadan. 'Oh' she said in Arabic 'of course', 'berachtik' which means something like 'take it easy'. I thoroughly enjoyed my sandwich.

Then she asked me 'where do you come from? You are not Egyptian, are you?' A nice conversation followed. She told me my Arabic was good. I told her that I needed someone to practice my Arabic with. She told me 'oh I can help you but my English is not good!' I answered 'that's just perfect that's what I need!' We exchanged phone numbers. When I left the metro, I thanked God. Because believe it or not, just when I got on the metro and sat across this Muslim lady, I had thought and prayed 'I need a friend to practice my Arabic with, only Arabic, not someone who wants to talk English to me'. And not even ten minutes later God answered my prayers. Isn't that great?

## Firm policeman

6 July 2015 | Blog



Red : only for women, at all times

According to Islamic tradition, there are separate women carriages in the Cairo metro. There are two colors for women carriages: green and red. The red carriages are at all times only for women and forbidden for men. The green carriages are for women until 9 'o clock in the evening, from that time on men are allowed to enter as well.



Green: only for women till 9 pm, after that also accessible for men

About a week ago I saw the following happen. I had just left the metro and saw a man who entered a red carriage, one that is forbidden for him at any time.

at any time.

The women in the carriage immediately started protesting and called a policeman who stood on the platform. The policeman, this time not one of the many young boys you often see in police uniform, but a firm man of middle-age, walked towards the man. He spoke to him through the window. The man, however, remained inside. In the meantime the doors of the metro had closed.

I couldn't help it, I just had to stay and watch how this would end. It seemed as if the trespasser would be able to get away with it. But the policeman didn't give up that easily; immediately he tried to re-open the doors. There was still a tiny opening but on his own he wasn't able to open the automatic metro doors. He kept on arguing with the disobedient man and in the meantime other men came to help the policeman. Together they managed to open the metro doors again with their bare hands. Unbelievable! After that the police man entered the metro and not long thereafter the man had to get out, whether he liked it or not.

# Metro misunderstanding

3 September 2015 | [Blog](#)

## Metro misunderstanding



The metro station Attaba in Cairo can be quite confusing if you don't know your way around. It is the metro station where all new lines of the metro come together, a metro junction. By now I know my way around there, although when I'm very tired I sometimes still take the wrong direction. Also for Egyptians finding your way at Attaba isn't always easy. Just a few days ago I stood in the doorway of a metro which was waiting to leave at the station Attaba.

The metro doors were still open, people were still able to go on board. A woman came walking to-

wards the metro she was completely veiled in black, only her brown eyes were still visible. She asked us (me and the other women in the metro) of this metro was going to Shohadeq, also a well-known metro station, one of the other metro junctions. I responded just like the other women with 'tututu' (a kind of sound you make with your tongue, in Egypt they use this to say 'no' and I have taken over this habit). The woman however wasn't convinced, because in the inside of the metro

taken over this habit). The woman however wasn't convinced, because in the inside of the metro carriage she saw the route of the metro with among others the name of the metro station Shohadeq. What she didn't understand though was that this metro was the same metro line but in the opposite (and so for her wrong) direction. So if she got on board she would go the wrong way.

The unconvinced woman stepped towards the metro and said in Arabic "but look Shohadeq". She was just about to get in when the metro doors shut automatically. She was just in time to pull back her head but her black robe got stuck between the doors. We from the inside tried to get her robe from between the doors, which we weren't able to do. Luckily a man immediately came to help her and he was able to get her black robe away from between the doors, just before the metro started moving away from the platform. Phew that was close!

## Never a dull moment ...

11 September 2015 | [Blog](#)

### **Never a dull moment!**

"Let's just quickly order some food" – that's what my Egyptian husband and I thought. But that 'just' took quite a while. Fortunately there were still some chairs available so we could sit down and watch life happen before our eyes. It certainly was not dull...

We were on a busy road, near an orthodox church. At a certain moment a couple of scooters and cars arrived using their claxons loudly: a wedding. The bride just left the nearby church. Being a newly-wed myself I was very interested in the bride's dress. It was not my taste ... to say the least. There was a big hoop under her dress that lifted up her dress in a way you could see her shoes and even her bare legs... The bride was being led by her bridegroom towards the white car. A man with a professional video camera was capturing it all, while many wedding guests swarmed around the married couple as bees, taking pictures and videos with their smart phones.

Suddenly I noticed how old the married couple was. The bridegroom's hair and beard had already turned greyish and also the bride was not a spring-chicken... My husband said: "Probably they are marrying for the second or even third time. Didn't you know that a Muslim man is allowed to have three or four wives here? And that a man sometimes marries a woman just for one night and after that night divorces her?" The last part I didn't really know. However in this situation neither scenario was applicable, assuming that the couple were Christians. In the meantime the married couple was seated in the car. The guests were still flocking around them and another car blocked their way. Eventually this car moved and finally the married couple was able to drive away.

Before this wedding-scene I also saw an almost accident. A young man arrived on a scooter driving very fast and he had to brake with all his might due to a reversing car. We heard the loud screech of brakes. The young man on the scooter hit the side of the car but he could keep his balance and the driver of the car was safe and sound. The young man stopped his scooter a few meters ahead. Some discussion followed about what exactly had happened. Not long afterwards the guy just continued on his way and the driver of the car did the same. There is never a dull moment in Cairo!

## Unexpected visitor during Eid Al-Adha

12 October 2015 | [Blog](#)

I was working behind my laptop when the doorbell rang. My Egyptian husband was also at home, he has a few days off due to the annual Islamic feast Eid Al-Adha. Because in Egypt it's not custom that women are walking around in tops, I didn't open the door but rushed into our bedroom to put on my bolero. The doorbell rang again.

When I was decent again, I seated myself behind my laptop and my husband opened the door. I only saw a hand and a plastic bag which was handed over, it contained meat. I realized what was happening. This was one of our Muslim neighbors who gave a piece of the meat of the recently slaughtered cow or sheep – looking at the meat it was likely a cow – to my husband.

During Eid Al-Adha Muslims remember how, according to the tradition, Abraham offered his son Ishmael in obedience to God. It is therefore a tradition during Eid Al-Adha to slaughter a cow or sheep and to divide the meat among the poor, your relatives and even also your neighbors. Our neighbor didn't say much, he gave the plastic bag with meat and in a second he left. What a nice surprise!

## Will we follow the Star?

24 December 2015 | [Blog](#)

### **Will we follow the star?**

by Salim J. Munayer, founder and director of Musalaha, Reconciliation movement

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas and the birth of our Savior, it is natural to think about how God intervenes in human history. The Bible is full of drastic examples, from armies defeated to miracles preformed. And yet, the most significant example of divine intervention – the incarnation of the Messiah – was also probably the least intrusive. God could have announced the arrival of Jesus with the blast of trumpets, or sent an army of angels to accompany him to earth, but instead Jesus came quietly, gently, as a baby in a modest town, born to modest parents. This is not how most of us would have chosen to make our arrival, but perhaps God was trying to teach us something through the way the Messiah was born. We should not separate God's method from his message, and in this instance, his method suggests humility.

Read more in [Will we follow the Star?](#)



### **Beat boxing in the metro**

After our work my husband and I decided to go to the metro station Nasser, to buy some light bulbs. After we purchased them, my husband suggested going outside on the streets to buy some more necessities for our apartment. We both decided however that we were tired and feeling hungry, so it was better to go home. How happy we were afterwards that we made this decision, otherwise we would have missed out on something very special. We took the metro back. Not long after we got on the metro five guys started spontaneously to beat box, while one of them was singing. It was a great spectacle!

The young men were really talented, they made beautiful music together and we and our fellow-travelers enjoyed the free live-performance. My husband recorded the mini-concert, as did the man next to me. In our metro carriage it was crowded as always, therefore the young men had to stand, as we had to in the first instance. After a certain time some seats were vacated, so I could take a seat. The leader of the music group also took a seat, there was just one person sitting between us, the other young men lined up in a circle in front of him. So I was sitting front row and my husband who was standing right beside me as well.

On occasion one of the band members played on his mouth harmonica, a beautiful melody. My husband and I were sorry to leave the metro when we reached our destination. While we were standing on the platform, the guys still continued, after they already had been applauded several times. I noticed while we were walking home that my mood was definitely improved, I didn't feel so tired anymore and I felt happy. I told my husband and he agreed with it happily. That's the power of good music. How special that you can experience something like this out of the blue on your way back home in an overcrowded metro. Cairo and her inhabitants continue to amaze me.