

Covid-19 and Me

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I was one of the earliest persons who witnessed the appearance of Covid-19 in Egypt in March 2020. I was a guest of the International African Film Festival in Luxor. One day, the policemen refused to let us go out of the hotel to view the movies in the film theatres. They told us that all workplaces will be closed including the places of the film theatres, because a case of Covid-19 was detected among the residents of a Nile cruise. They told us that we should stay in our rooms waiting to be examined, and that the minister of health herself arrived at our hotel. No one examined me, and I knew that a random sample only was examined, and that the cabinet ordered that the festival should be precociously closed, without even a closing ceremony. I was invited as the translator of a book about African filmmaking, and the author was also invited, and we were supposed to have a press conference about the book. Because of the curfew, no official press conference was allowed, so, the director of the festival arranged a casual tea gathering in one of the wide verandas of the hotel, where we introduced the book to the guests and press. I was very eager to watch the Sudanese movie “You Will Die at Twenty,” but its screening was canceled because of Covid-19. So, as soon as I arrived at Cairo, I went to Zawya movie theatre to watch it. The next day, all the public places, including movie theatres, were closed.

In fact, I never stayed home during that time. I had two cats with renal failure, and I had to take them to the vet clinic daily for infusion. During my stay in Luxor, my friend Dalia El Nagger stayed with my cats and took them to the vet. When I came back, she offered to stay more with me and that we share the trips to the vet. Dalia and I used to feed the stray cats who starved after all of the

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restaurants and coffee shops were closed. Each of us fed the strays in the day she goes to the vet with my cats. I used to go by bus, but Dalia used the cab for fear of Covid-19 infection. Ironically, Dalia contracted the infection, and I did not, but not for too long. Being a close contact with Dalia, I contracted the infection. Fortunately, it was not a severe type of the disease. It started with loss of smell, two days later I had fever and body aches, which resolved in a week or so. Fortunately, also Dalia recovered before I got sick, and started to take the cats to the vet.

Because of the universal closure of all activities, I became almost idle. No theatre or film projects as a performer, the Film Critics Association was closed, the story telling group meetings stopped, I was not even asked to translate anything. I started to share Dalia in TV watching, which I usually consider as a boring activity. To tolerate it, I started to resume my hobby of sewing. I made a lot of masks of cotton fabric. When I was working as a medical doctor, I had an experience in making surgical masks. We, the nurses and doctors, used to make them as a pass time activity in our night shifts when we did not receive a lot of casualties. I know that to be effective, a mask should be composed of three layers of gauze. But the cotton fabric is thicker than the gauze, and three layers will not allow easy respiration. So, I made them of two layers, with a pocket to accommodate two layers of paper tissues, so that they become effective. I gave them to friends, and they liked them.

One day my late friend Eman Salah told me that we were asked, as a story telling group (Ana El- Hekaya), to be filmed while we tell two of our stories, Eman, in participation with our drummer Ahmed, played the music. I told one story and my friend Aya Sami told another. The filming took place in the Supreme Council of Culture, and the stories were included in the ministry of culture's canal online, which had the title "Stay at Home."

The curfew was not a nice experience for a person who likes mobility, like me, nevertheless, it was tolerable, thanks to Dalia's company and the alternative activities that we did. At last, the curfew came to an end, though covid-19 is still there. 2021 came with better circumstances for me. I performed in a graduation project of one of Aly Badrakhan's students, and he liked my performance. I am offered a part in a play theatre directed by Tarek El-Dewiry, and I enjoy the rehearsals. I am still trying to find a translation project. In fact, a friend contacted a publisher and recommended me as a translator. He offered a very low rate, assuming that this is because of covid, and I refused. This happened also with a

performance project in a TV series, and again the Covid-19 was the producer's justification for paying peanuts, and I also refused. So, I am now focusing on my volunteer work, where I spend a lot of time arranging the male and female circumcision resource center which I established, and I contacted my friends Sarah Enany and Maher Sabry, and we are co-authoring a book titled "Circumcision of Atrees and Fouada Should Stop" (Khitan Atrees we Fouada Batel). So, the idle situation of 2020 changed, and this proves that change is the only constant.