

Chapter 1:

Italy-Rome June 23rd July 4th. 2015: "Dead season (sic)." **

Who still remembers the daily newsreels of hundreds of migrants arriving dead or alive at Lampedusa, Italy, in May/June 2015 and before (however it needs to be said that the reels have finished but not the continuing arrival of migrants in Italy)?

Not many I'm sure because that's how the media works today: what is hot today already turned cold the other day. It's called cucumber time because it's the time, June 'till August, where the majority of the people in the E.U. are on vacation and don't give a shit what happens back home and so the media adjusts its content to about half and choose what is in their opinion the most important.

So of course the media went to Lampedusa to get some more, preferably shocking, footage but after approx. 3 days they turned a page, it was cucumber time, next topic please.

That was the moment where I stepped in because I knew that the migrants had a reason why they fled and that after finally arriving in Lampedusa there would be other hurdles to take: where to from there and how and would they get papers and be able to settle?.

Rome:

And that was what I was interested in so on June 23rd. I left for Rome to meet and speak to as many migrants as I could. Now you may think that me writing this and publishing it in October 2015 I am running behind the facts. Well, this is a fact: the migrants never stopped coming to Lampedusa. In any case, I'll kind of write a kind of diary about my stay in Rome so here we go:

Day 1:

In the morning I arrived at the Fiumicino airport and since I read that migrants were by the hundreds to be found at the Tiburtina central train station that obviously was where I was heading for. But no migrants could be seen there so ok, I sprang into the deep and at random took a bus. And following my intuition and only after about 20 minutes I saw tens of them on the street so I got off.

Lucky me I don't have much problems making contact with people and yes, they were migrants. But I did not barge in immediately and just made some casual talk at first. After I told them why I was there they told me they stayed at the Baobab Center for illegal migrants and gave me directions how to get there and that the street was Via Cupa. It happened to be in walking distance.

I was not yet tired so I decided to go there immediately and indeed found the center but I was too late. Breakfast had been served already and the center was to open again at around 15.00 PM for lunch. So I decided to wait and mingle with the approx. 300 migrants outside and make first contacts.

Thing is that, in contrast to what the media wants us to believe, they didn't look like a pile of misery but quite strong and determined. And especially very in solidarity as if expressing: *'We were on one boat, we stay on that boat'*.

At 15.00 PM at least 400 people were waiting outside the gate already and I had no idea what to expect so I decided to wait for an hour or so and only then did I go to stand in line and see if I could get in. It took about half an hour and I introduced myself, showed my press pass and that I'd like to see the co-ordinator. They let me through and I was to ask for Patricia which I did but all they could say was that she was not there. It was a pandemonium inside, people standing in line to get a plate of food and I just trying to get some basic information.

I returned there every day and like putting a puzzle together I managed to get an overall insight on what Baobab was and how it worked. But I gained the trust of the people working there without having to flash my press pass all the time.

It was nearing 18.00 o'clock now and I had been programming me to stay at a bread and

breakfast but I did not find one. What I did find was a supermarket so I bought some things and went back to Baobab that was going to close again and to re-open at 22.00 PM to let people in who wanted to stay overnight. I decided to stay and see how that went. I mean, there were about 800 people outside now and I wondered if Baobab had enough capacity to house that many.

At 23.00 PM it became clear they did not and the gates closed. The rest of the people, about 250, collected carton to sleep on and sought themselves a place on the street which I did too. I mean, either you are in solidarity or not.

Day 2:

Very early morning, 06.00 AM I actually did not sleep too bad be it short. But I was kind of surprised that I had no problem at all sleeping in the rough again. I mean, it had been some years ago.

Anyways, we, about 150 people, slept on one street, kind of one next to the other so I had some neighbours and we did talk a bit although they found it awkward that I was sleeping among them. Still, we talked a bit like all others did and gradually one could hear the voices die down and everybody falling asleep.

I decided to check out what Baobab offered concerning showers and again to see if I could get a hold of Patricia.

I knew already that Baobab had two entrances: one to administration and kitchen i.e. the handing out of meals and the other entrance to the daytime/sleeping part of the building. So I went to the second part and yes, I could see the toilet/shower possibilities but that was like for 8 people maximum at one time. I really had to speak to Patricia but she was nowhere to be seen!

Anyways, I decided to skip to see the handing out of breakfast and went to the street again to talk more with people. So by and by I found out that the migrants were from Jemen, Ethiopia, Ghana, Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, Mali, Burundi, Central African Republic and Eritrea.

And that Baobab was meant to house 500 people but actually housed 800 and hence everyday approx. 150 to 200 slept outside on the street. Still, Baobab did provide everybody with three meals a day. Imagine, that are approx. 9000 meals a day! And later I found out that they could only do so because of gifts: clothes, foods and money from the Romans (their building was from a couple who lend it to them). And here I could connect that with some background information because I already knew that Italy until now had taken up 50.000 migrants be it not the government because they made it very clear to the E.U. that they were unable to take up so many migrants free passage to the rest of the EU. I spend the rest of the day outside talking with as many people I could. Then at around 20.00 PM I again tried to get a hold of Patricia but no, not there. I was beginning to think that she was the ghost of Baobab. Anyways, by and by I also started to get a good contact with people working at the center (later it turned out that Baobab is run by approx. 35 volunteers!) and for the first time I decided to take a plate of food (I had not eaten since 2 days but more importantly it showed to the migrants that I was one of them concerning conditions of living).

Then later I went to the street again and by 23.00 pm. sought myself a piece of cardboard and a spot where I could lie down.

At around 03.00 AM my left neighbor woke me up and when one sleeps rough it means one always sleeps with half an eye open, on alert mode so I sat up immediately and asked kind of joking where the fire was. He apologized and said he could not sleep because he was worried. I said, ok, I'm listening. He said: "I know I'm in a country called Italy but that's about it. Where is Italy and do/can I stay here or what?"

I said man, I've been here 2 days now and the same question has been asked to me about at least 50 times. But listen, let's go back to sleep for a few hours and don't worry. I'll give you information the best way I can after.

Day 3:

Around 06.00 AM we woke up again and I said to my neighbor "Good morning, I'm Gino" He answered: "Good morning, I'm Ishmael from Mali. I apologize for having disturbed you." "No worries man, come, let's go grab a cup of coffee somewhere and then I'll answer your questions."

So we went to a nearby café and I ordered 2 café grande because these tiny little coffees the Italians drink really can give you an instant heart attack. They should call them café mort subite.

Anyways, Ishmael seemed at ease so I started to explain where he was and what to expect for example that Italy was part of the E.U. (European Union) consisting of 28 countries of which 18 so-called Euro countries meaning they had the same currency. However, the E.U. was not a political nor federal union like the United States meaning each country is a sovereign country. I ordered us another coffee because the worst was still to come.

I explained to him that since about 2 years at least 229.000 migrants came to the E.U. from Africa via Libya and the port of Zuwara to Italy of which at least 5000 drowned in the Mediterranean. Ishmael looked shocked. He obviously had no idea.

To shift to another topic for a while I asked if he would tell me about how he fled from Mali and ended up in Italy.

He looked at me with a shimmer of pain in his eyes but did answer me as best he could:

"One day my parents gathered all of us, my sisters and me and the rest of the family, to discuss something they said was very important. My parents looked to me and said:

'Ishmael, we are worried about your possibilities and future here so we decided it best when you would try to get to Europe to see if you can build up a future there.' I felt as if they were going to abandon me and simply send me away into nowhere but they assured me that that was not their intention and that they had thought over the idea very well and discussed it with the rest of the family who in the end agreed to their plan and to, all of them, put together money so I could travel from our village to Algeria and from there to Libya and the port of Zuwara of which they were told I could embark on a ship to Europe. I asked them, not knowing what to expect in Europe, what were the next steps for me to take? 'They had no idea they said but trusted on me as being a very intelligent kid, I was 17 then, and would find ways.'

"When am I to leave I asked?" Take your time they said. We'll prepare a big feast for you and maybe you can talk with your friends about it and maybe some might want to go with you.

And so it happened. I left my family and , alone, village about 9 months ago and went on my way to Algeria not expecting to find on my way to Libya people demanding passage money from me and if I would not pay they'd beat me up or would even kill me. My parents had gotten together 5000 US dollars so fearing for my life and not wanting to disappoint my parents I payed. In the end I arrived at Zuwara with about 2000 US dollars left and there soon I found out that embarkation on a boat would cost me just that. I did not know what to do. Was I to return or to embark? Also, the port was really overcrowded with people and all with the same goal: to get a place on the next boat. I could not let my parents down so I payed and they told me to get on the ship immediately because it was to leave soon. But there was no place on the ship to sit. We all were standing very close to each other. A grueling experience if one does not know the people. The rest you know from what the media told you but really, I was convinced I was going to die and could only think of my family and felt so guilty.

Anyways, I did arrive at Lampedusa although I had no idea where that was. But it turned out I'd arrived in Italy. That was 3 months ago. A long story short: now I'm in Rome and I have no idea where to go from here."

Somehow I could understand that he was neither able nor willing to tell me the whole story (I mean, eyes often tell more than words) but still a story like that only deserves honest

answers to his questions so I told him that because of the fact that Italy was not able to handle so much migrants and could not count on the support of other E.U. countries to take up migrants in May they decided to refuse to fingerprint migrants and instead to give them a free transit to other countries. They did so to put them under pressure. Most of the other countries were outraged and it was only around mid June that they started to fingerprint again. But many migrants in the meantime had learned that being fingerprinted would mean they would always, whatever country they went to, be send back to Italy and be forced to apply for a refugee or asylum seeker status there.

I could see that Ishmael looked still very worried so I decided to give him some tips and that the countries he should try to get to and at least a chance are Sweden, Germany, Netherlands and the Uk although the latter was the hardest to get to. And to under any circumstance NOT to go to the C.I.E. (Centro identificazion e espulsia – Center of identification and eviction). The word and meaning speaks for itself. The rest of the day we continued to spend together and also with some of his friends and when the day closed we sought ourselves a piece of cardboard and a spot where we could lie down and sleep.

Day 4:

The next day and after awakening I explained Ishmael that I needed to find a way to wash myself because first of all I did not want to take the possibility for his fellow migrants to be able to take a shower at Baobab and secondly I could forget about the possibility to get a shower somewhere. Improvisation is everything when sleeping rough. Baobab is located at the Via Tiburtina and I already had seen there was a bus, the 545 and 163, with end station Verano. I had no idea what Verano meant but it triggered my imagination so I decided to go there. But before leaving I asked Ishmael if Baobab also offered some sort of medical care and he told that not they but the red cross did every morning between 09.00 and 11.00 AM and that, if need be, they took care of it that one's taken to the hospital. I said goodbye saying we'd certainly see each other later and hoped on bus 545. It was a short ride really, 5 stops, and when I got of it turned out to be a public square where one could take different buses and street-cars.

But on the left I saw there was a park of some sorts so I went there and bingo, almost immediately I saw an old stone tub where in the very old days people came to wash their clothes. It was perfect for me to wash myself! But man, the water was soooo cold because it came straight from the moun- tains. And where the overall temperature in Rome was 40 degrees centigrade in the sun ... well, I don't need to say more. Still, I was very happy having found a place to wash myself. After I lingered on in the park for an hour or two, kind of happy too I'd found a place where it was relatively quiet and giving me a chance to sort out my experiences of the past days and to re-charge myself.

On my way back I decided to pass by at Habesha. Somebody had told me that it was a meeting place for Eritrean migrants and very close to Baobab. And indeed it was a meeting place owned by an Eritrean who ran a snackbar and where people could sit in- and outside to meet and talk. It was about 125 square meters. Outside there was a terrace of about 50 square meters. At first I sat outside and talked with a number of people, trying to find out what Habesha stood for and did. But since I was new there and looking just like any other white guy I realized it would take me some time, just like with Baoab. Anyways, before leaving I wanted to go to the bathroom but immediately the owner came to me and kind of ordered me to leave. Man, I only want to go to the bathroom. "LEAVE!!!"

Ok, maybe it was a good idea to introduce myself to him when I come back. And was to return. It takes more than to raise your voice to get rid of me! Still, when I thought I got myself 'a cold shower' in Verona park I certainly got one at Habesha.

Anyways, I returned to Baobab and from a distance I could already see the line-up for the evening meal. So I decided to skip and to go to the Las Vegas coffee bar, the one nearby where I was with Ishmael before. I knew I could sit there on the terrace without them wanting me to consume something. Sometimes I really need to reflect in a kind of silence,

to go inwards. I mean, I knew I was not going to have a holiday in Italy and that what I should prepare for was a kind of inferno but even so what I saw and heard 'till now really got to me.

Anyways, at around 22.00 PM I returned to Baobab to mix with my fellow 'travelers' again. Who knows, maybe and also I would see Ishmael again. I sat on the street after already having collected some cardboard and all of a sudden a young woman approached me. She said: "My name is Fadime from Congo and I've heard of you and why you're here. I'd like to speak to you in the name of two of my female friends from the Central African Republic. Would you have some time?" I answered that my name was Gino and that it would be an honour and asked when we could meet. She said that best would be tomorrow very early because she was to go inside Baobab now to go to sleep.

I said, ok, let's meet here and I'll invite you for a coffee in a coffee café nearby.

She said: "Thank you and until tomorrow." I said, no, thank you for your and your friends trust. See you tomorrow and goodnight. "Thank you. See you tomorrow."

Let me first explain something before I continue: all migrants in Rome came from Africa of which approx. 90 % male, 5 % female and all aged approx. 16 to 25 years, and the remaining children aged approx. 2 to 5 years.

I did try to talk to the women but failed because they had a kind of wall around them. I cannot blame them for that given the situations they came from. Still, there was one thing I saw: many were always hand in hand with another as if they had a bond for life.

And so Fadimes' request caught me by surprise. Also, word must have gotten around about me and why I was here. Still, I could hardly wait 'till tomorrow.

Day 5:

I got up very early because I couldn't wait to see Fadime again and very soon there she was. Good morning Fadime! I hope you slept well? She answered: "Well, given my and our situation it was ok. It's good I have friends here. We give each other strength to go through this hell." Believe me or not but I can imagine it out of my experience having worked at a refugee camp in the Netherlands in the nineties, with and for kids, and for three years. Can I take some of your burden by offering you a nice cup of coffee? Yes please she said, I need that. Ok, let's go then. It's not far away from here, about three minutes walking. And off we went be it without talking. Could it be a silence before the storm? We arrived at the coffee café and went inside to order and said to her she was my guest and could order freely. Then we sought ourselves a nice place on the **terrace**. I did not wait really for her to start to talk. When she was ready she was ready. And indeed, after some time she said: "Ok, this is the story of two of my dearest friends here and why they fled their homeland. But first this: because of what they had to go through they do not trust men anymore. That is why they choose me as their spokeswoman. Anyways, as you may know and during a war it are always the civilians who pay a high price but the highest price is payed by women because rape becomes a weapon and women a trophy. And so my friends were a trophy several times and sometimes also gang raped."

She felt quiet and I could see she was really shaken so I said: "Please Fadime, take your time and if you need something else to drink, or maybe to eat, please order. You're my guest."

But she just sat quiet for some time longer and then continued:

"One of the other problems in the C.A.R. and other African countries is that if a woman is raped she often is banned by her family and so were my friends, leaving them with nothing. Still, they d heard of some kind of network helping rape victims and after some time they found a kind of contact person and talked to her. That woman told them they had one chance and one only to get out of the misery: to flee the country and how. Long story short, somehow they managed to get money together and fled to Libya and the Zuwara port. They went through hell, not only to get there, but also to get themselves a place on board of a ship and the boat trying to reach Europe. It was only the fact that they never let each loose

that they kind of safely arrived. Kind of, because now they are here and have no idea not only where to go nor what to do next."

Oh man, Fadime was right. She didn't have to make me drawings of neither situations but still, the story hit me hard. So I said to her that maybe it was a good idea if we had breakfast together, also because Baobab was to serve it soon but I wanted to stay longer at the café and would try to give some advice and tips. She agreed and we ordered and sat outside again.

And during having our breakfast I told her: "I take it that they heard of other countries that might be better for them and to start a new life and maybe also you maybe think so. But it has become very hard to get asylum in the E.U. but hard does not mean impossible. Your friends' stories sound plausible enough, at least to me, for them to have a chance. I'd say the best countries to go to are either Germany, the Netherlands or Sweden. And the best way to try and get there is simply by taking trains without a ticket. If they are caught and thrown off the train they just take the next train. There is one problem: immigration law in most E.U. countries demand from a refugee to apply for asylum in the country where one arrived, in your friends' case Italy. Still, once having arrived in the country of their choice and if caught by immigration there they'll be brought to an asylum seekers camp and still can apply there. And if their application is turned down chances are small that they are send back to a country at war. So I'd say it's worth a try. Your friends have nothing to lose anyway. Sounds hard but really, it's worth a try.

Also, as hard it may be, and I can imagine that it will be very hard, but tell them their best chances to get asylum is to tell their story as truthful and with as much details possible. I know that sounds cruel but the chances of getting asylum will be bigger and most likely based on post-traumatic stress disorder.

That's the end of my story Fadime. I hope it will help your friends, and maybe you, to find the right ways to a new life. By the way, you're from Congo right. So you could seek asylum in Belgium, the former colonist, because there is a big community of people from Congo in the capital Brussels, legal and illegal and if the latter they help each other to get papers. If you want I can give you my phone number so you can call me. I'd help you anyway I can to bring you in contact with them."

"Thank you so much Gino for listening and for the tips. I'll talk with my friends and when needed we know where to find you." Showing a big grin. "And if I go to Belgium I'll give you a call."

Together we walked back to Baobab and with pain in my heart I said goodbye to her, wishing her and her friends the best of luck. She gave me a hug and gone she was. Sometimes I really could hate myself for being a E.U. citizen.

"Rome ...
and its refugees
when I went there
I wanted to meet
as many as I could
not an easy task
if one knows
that there are about 50.000
and as if numbers
could put value to the poems
I wanted to write
but of course
it doesn't work that way
at least not for me
so I stopped bashing my head
and opened my eyes and mind

and there they were
the magic words:
War Torned Faces
and War Fearing Eyes
old and young
and that is the moment
when I was really lost
because I cannot
save anyone
DAMN THE E.U. and me!!!”

In silence I stayed outside, not seeking other conversations. I really needed to let what Fadima had told me sink in.

At around 17.00 PM I decided to go to Habesha again and I introduced myself to the owner, including flashing my press card. And now he was even more aggressive than the other day including trying to grab my bag and shoving me outside. With a loud voice I asked him if he ever heard of freedom of the press. He shoved harder. I asked if he ever heard of freedom of speech. And more and more he now really became aggressive. There were about 30 people watching the scene but did not interfere. Anyways, I went outside again to sit on the terrace and to try to get contact with people there. I could but without much information and now I was really wondering what was the hidden agenda of Habesha. But what I noticed before was that many Eritreans are wearing some kind of Christian cross which I never saw before. I did some investigation and found out that they belonged to the pentecostalistic movement, originating in west Europe but nowadays with hundreds of thousands followers and with different sects in Africa. So maybe that was the hidden agenda of Habesha.

Day 6:

I had a very weird night when I every now and then kind of woke up in the middle of hallucinations and having no idea where I was. All I knew and saw were these big threatening figures and shadows hovering above me. Again and again it frightened the hell out of me! So around 05.00 AM I decided to stop trying to sleep more and got up. Looking around me I saw, but knew already, that the Via Tiburtina was a three lane street with on each side quite beautiful trees really and lying at the foot of them and in a normal state of mind one looked at the leaf roofs. But during my hallucinations it were these leaf roofs forming the threatening figures and shadows. And thinking about it I realized I was getting under the skin of the refugees maybe a little bit too much sometimes. But then again, I did not want any distance between them and me so if the hallucinations were the price to pay I'd be more than willing to pay. Anyways, I thought about how my day could look like today and decided to first go to the café and from there to take the bus to Tiburtina central station where, so I heard, was a Red cross refugee tent camp. Naïve as I sometimes can be I thought that that would be place where refugees could find safe shelter. So after my coffee break I hoped on the bus and very soon after arrived there. But to my surprise I could not enter the camp freely and only after a lot of hassles and flashing my press card they let me in. But what shocked me was that entrance was guarded by men in military uniform and also on the terrain itself men in uniform were kind of guarding/patrolling. I thought this could not be true and happening. I mean, the red cross is a humanitarian organization and not part of the military. I stayed there for a few hours talking with refugees and apart from asking about their general situation, their reasons why they fled, the fleeing itself, both horrible enough to write a book by itself, I asked them what they thought about the military being so present. And in unisono they said that it felt as if back in the warzones where they came come and in some cases the jails they've been into. So before leaving the camp I tried to confront some people from the red cross with this and

all I got was "No comment."

Well, so much for a humanitarian organization. It looked I was in again for another night full of hallucinations.

Day 7:

Yesterday I for the rest of the day decided to kind of lie low. I mean, how much one can get? But man, I more than ever had it coming today! As said before word must have gone around about me and early morning I was approached by about 10 people, men and woman, who asked if I could advice them. They really looked very desperate but whether desperate or not of course I was more than willing to lend my ear. But for what they were to tell me hit me like a sledgehammer. This is their story: "We, including our children, tried to go to France by taking trains crossing the border but at the border French police entered and searched the trains for illegals and when found forced us with a lot of violence not only out of the trains but also forced us to cross the borders with Italy again. But they withheld our children to accompany us and now we don't know what to do to get our children back!" I was silent already but now I was dumbfounded to the bone and it took me some time to re-collect myself so I asked to please give me some time to see if I could come up with some kind of plan and/or solutions. But that was easier said than done because I was not familiar with Italian law. Still, a plan gradually was coming up in my head but I asked the parents to give me at least `till tomorrow to work it out and investigate. They tried to get more information but I said that I did not want to give them false hope and to please meet me again tomorrow. We parted be it all of heart broken, the parents of course more than me.

Very soon after I went inside Baobab, it being breakfast time, and now more than ever tried to talk with one of the volunteers whom I hoped could give me so urgently needed info. But as before in this case she said she could not help me because she was only a volunteer, but after I explained what kind of info I needed she said: "Wait here." After about 15 minutes a woman came to me and introduced herself as Patricia. WOW, the ghost lives! But of course I didn't say that but told her what a number of parents had just told me and if she could direct me, with addresses or phone numbers of pro deo/public defender/pro bono lawyers specialized in migration problems.

She said she'd be right back. And indeed she came back with an A4 with different names; addresses and phone numbers saying: "I'm not sure if this will help you or the families but if not and when I can do more please do come back but better you come at around 21.00 PM." I was about to hug her but thought, ok, don't push it and heartedly thanked her and said goodbye. She waved and off she was.

Ok, I had some phone calls to make and maybe some visits to do. Somehow and by intuition I called the female lawyers first. I mean, if there was somebody who could understand what a mother has to through in these circumstances it was a female. But getting direct contact with a lawyer was not an easy task. Busy as they always are with full agendas but I did manage to get one on line and after I'd explained what the situation was I asked if she'd have some time today to talk more about it in detail. She said she could meet me at 18.00 PM at her office and if I knew where that was. I read the address from the paper and she confirmed it was there so we agreed to meet.

I still had time to get there so I had some coffee somewhere to prepare the case and sort out the info I had. At 17.00 PM I was at her office (better arriving too soon than too late) and at 18.00 PM sharp I entered her office, introduced myself and said I had an appointment. And lo and behold, she was there and asked me to come inside her office where we talked for about 45 minutes. At the end I of course had to ask if she was willing to take the case and when she could meet the parents. She said she'd take the case and, after checking her agenda, said she could meet them in two days at 16.00 PM and that they should have all the necessary ID papers including birth certificates with them because without there was nothing she could do. I assured her they would be there with all that was

necessary and thanked her full heartedly. And in good spirits I left. Still, the good spirits did not last long because I knew the parents would have to go to the C.I.E. to register and get fingerprinted but at least a lawyer would accompany them and the choice was theirs: either their children first or staying illegally in Italy risking not to see their children again or at least not for a very long time. But that was not my call because I was just a traveler observing/registering the wrongs of the E.U. against refugees.

Day 8:

Almost to the minute the parents were there again at the location where we met yesterday. I looked around to see if there was a place of some kind where we could talk a bit away from the crowd and invited them to go there. Once there I said I had some good news but also not so good news and started with the good news by asking them if they knew what a pro deo/public defender/pro bono lawyer was. As expected they had no idea but then again, what do you expect from people mostly having fled from a war torn country or at least one ruled by a dictator and where also corruption ruled. So I explained what it meant and that I found a lawyer for them willing to take their case and when they were to meet with her.

That was the good news but then I told them about the C.I.E. and to register themselves and get fingerprinted because only then could they get a by the government paid lawyer. However, it did not mean they would be put in a closed asylum seekers center but they did have to stay in Italy. After having given them the news I told them I'd be quiet for a while so they could talk among each other what they wanted to do.

After about 20 minutes one father came to me and said: "Ok, we understood what you told us and want to thank you very much for your efforts. Our question is if you can come with us to meet the lawyer?"

Well, I should have seen that coming but I said that I would accompany them but that I would be a one time intermediary and that they had to be at Baobab at 12 noon sharp. He agreed and I said goodbye to all parents be it a bit worried about what was tomorrow to bring. But then again, my worry cannot be compared with their worries and also grief.

Day 9:

And at noon we were all together again and I asked if they had all papers necessary with them including some kind of ID; birth certificates etc.. They said they had but checked just to make sure and as was to be expected some forgot some papers and went to get them. In the meantime I talked with the others and again explained that I was only an intermediate and that it was up to the lawyer whether she was to represent them. When we were complete I asked who had public transport tickets. Now I knew most refugees never had but just to make sure we avoid any trouble and after all said they didn't have I went to the coffee café to buy them. And off we went to the lawyer where we arrived an hour too early. But we waited outside 'till it was time. The lawyer came and invited us inside a kind of conference room and told the parents what I had told her. Then she asked some questions after which they were talking for about one hour. At the end the lawyer said she would represent them and made copies of all papers but ... that they didn't need to go to the C.I.E.! One could really feel a sigh of relief of all parents. No fingerprinting, no incarcerating etc.. The lawyer simply said she'd take care of that.

Then she asked for the cell phone info from all and gave each her card and that she would call if she had any information about the situation of their children.

And having said that she said goodbye to all and guided us to the door. Once back on the street we went back to Baobab where also I said goodbye to them, wishing they'd be reunited with their children soon.

Day 10:

I went through a night full of hallucinations again. I have worked with and for refugee

children in a camp in the Netherlands for three years (I had 35 kids) and I assure you that I cried every evening after having gone with them again and again (and in-between also the parents) through their fears; nightmares; dreams and hopes.

Those years came back to me when I met and talked with the parents in Rome. I really hope I was of any help to them. And I decided to go back to the Verano park and give myself a good wash. Not to clean my consciousness but to clean myself from the E.U. politics and in-humanity concerning refugees because that was what made me feel dirty. Whenever a E.U. politician goes to for example Russia; China or any other country ruled by a dictator they always say talks about human rights will be an important issue but in the end economical talks were/are more important.

And as a media watcher I of course know what happens not only in Italy but in the E.U. in general concerning refugees and the last worry of the E.U. is the human rights of refugees but their own interest both economically as well as to keep their voters satisfied. Voters of which the majority are against the refugees.

I'm especially disappointed in the western part of the E.U. which was the cradle of humanism and 'till this day brag about it as being one of its anchors of their culture. I'd like to make an exception for Italy (and also Greece) where the locals have not or are not turning themselves against the refugees and I applaud them for that given the fact that the majority of the refugees, of which a minority (+-5000) arrive dead and the remaining, (+- 270.000) alive, are washed up at their beaches. To give you an example of what other E.U. do or better said don't do to give refugees refuge: European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker proposed on July 20th. a "mandatory migrant quota system" under which the 28 EU member states will share responsibility for migrants during times of emergency.

"To ensure fair and balanced participation of all member states in this common effort, the EU needs a permanent system for sharing the responsibility for large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers among member states," the proposal reads.

The number of refugees sent to each country would be decided according to a "redistribution key" based on GDP, population size, unemployment rate and past numbers of asylum seekers admitted.

The proposal was rejected by close to half of the E.U. countries and since each country has a veto right it had no chance. Some countries do give refuge be it overall not more than to +- 2000 refugees from the +270.000. To give you an example: Belgium has accepted 2.744 refugees from Syria be it ... **Christians only!!** as if there are no Muslim refugees!

Day 11-12:

My time is running out in Rome and I decided to spend the remaining days together with my friends at Baobab and also to reflect on the past 10 turbulent days. There was enough to write about and yet still to do. Maybe "Life is a bitch!"* will not be a book on paper but it will be published, no matter what!

Post Scriptum 1: Before and during my stay in Rome I considered to make a serial of photo portraits of migrants but halfway I decided against it. As the native American Indians say: "If you take my picture you take my soul."

Post Scriptum 2: I must have met about approx. 80 migrants in person of which many shared there personal story with me of which I'm very grateful even if each story devastated me. But I cannot tell them all here and so I chose 2 individual and 1 group story to share with you.

Post Scriptum 3: I still have a long way to go and to different trouble spots/countries where to this day and every day new refugees arrive without a welcoming committee. One thing is

clear to me: I will not let go because the migrants and wherever they come from or why deserve our sincere attention and support.

One tip: make your family tree and I bet you that you stem from migrants.

Closing for now: only at the end of writing "Life is a bitch" I'll write some kind of afterword.

Chapter 1 was written in the period July 10th 'till August 20th. 2015 and is to be continued with Chapter 2: Calais, France: "The eye of the storm."

*When I was working at the refugee camp in the Netherlands among one of the refugees was Hamid from Iran and one day I asked him how he was. He answered: "Life is a bitch!!!" I'll never forget that moment and the pain he expressed by those words.

** "Dead seaon (sic).": there is no accurate translation for the Dutch word 'komkommer tijd' but dead season comes, given the situation of thousands of boat refugees, horrifying close.