

The Netherlands: a country with a split personality i.e. Kafka at its best.

We all know this country for its tolerance; openness; generosity in case other countries are struck with natural disasters and also its pluralism. But the refugee crisis has revealed its real personality being the complete opposite of the above.

Now I told you in previous chapters about my experiences when I worked at a refugee camp in the Netherlands in the period 1997-1999 (a full total of 3 years) with and for children and because of that experience I was not surprised about all I, as media watcher, saw; heard and read about the situation about how the government and the Dutch in general are (not) dealing with this crisis. But before I give a kind of summary of all the media noise I want to tell you about my visit to a in haste erected tent camp near Heumensoord (near Nijmegen), a terrain where they dumped 3000 refugees.

But before this:

When a refugee arrives in the Netherlands and in this case Heumensoord he/she is for 5 months put on a waiting list before they can apply for asylum and at least another 5 months more, and I emphasize 5 months because my experience is that it can take up to 3 years or more, before a decision is made if they will get asylum. Until then they are dumped in temporary shelters and very often moved from one temporary shelter to another for between 3 to 5 days and are put on a ration of bed-bath-bread. Especially the last reminds me of how prisoners in the middle ages were treated.

Ok, I invite you to accompany me to a newly opened refugee tent camp Heumensoord November 3rd. – 7th. 2015:

First of all and despite my press pass I did not get allowance to enter the camp even if I before officially asked the correct authorities for it. Still, forbid me something and the anarchist in me is awakened so I did find ways in, of course. But in one word: the tent camp is erected on a **swamp** because it rains a lot in the Netherlands. But apart from that the living conditions are simply said in-human! Read above the bed-bath-bread regime but ... apart from that and I cannot describe/say it better than the Iraqi refugee Ibrahim: "When I sit here, day in, day out, without knowing what will be my near or far future, but also this forced in-acti-vity and immobility because leaving and re-entering the camp is over-controlled I feel like I'm freezing up inside."

His words threw me back 20 years ago when I worked at a refugee camp and the desperation 'my kids' and their parents, apart from the refugees in general felt.

I stayed in/around the camp November 22nd – 25th 2015 and of course I slept rough but I was not the only one because some refugees could not stand being locked up apart from having to be cramped up in tents with others. So we shared stories. And there is one story one cannot easily forget: I met Amena (Arabic meaning 'Safe'!!), a young female Afghani refugee in the camp but she said that she preferred to talk with me outside the camp so I invited her to a nearby city, about 10 kilometers from the camp and easy to get to with the bus, and to my surprise she accepted my invitation so off we went. We search for a nice place where we could have a cup of coffee and while we're at it I also ordered a delicious cake larded with fruits. Now she was the one being surprised and protested but I said: "Just enjoy. It comes from the heart." And while enjoying our coffee and cake I asked her: "Why did you want to speak outside of the camp?" And she said: "Because I'm afraid. I have books with me and Afghani/Pakistani men forbid women to go to school let alone to read and write. So when I was in Afghanistan I always had to hide and now also here I have to hide. Even this country does not protect me."

Men, that really hit me hard. But I asked Amena: "Have you heard of Malala?" Now she was the one as if stung and asked me how I heard about her. I answered that I know how she was attacked by the Taliban and almost died because they don't want girls/women to go to school and survived through heavy surgery in the UK. After she became the spokeswoman for free accessible education for everybody.

Amena looked at me with almost open mouth and wide open eyes and asked me: "Does this

person really exist?" I said: "You know what, let's go to an internet café and you'll see for yourself." Hesitantly she agreed because she said she knows what internet is but never used it but I said I'd be her guide and off we went again.

I think we spend about four hours in the internet café googling about Malala and once Amena knew how to work on the internet she could hardly be stopped which I didn't even try. Why would I? In-between I asked her if she had a USB stick but she had no clue what I was talking about so I got her one and explained the use of it and that she could store any information she wanted on it, and open and read it again later. So also here I guided her and created a Malala folder and showed her how to copy/paste texts in notepad and store it in her folder.

Then I asked her if she had an email address which was a stupid question really but I explained what it was and the benefits it could offer her so we created a folder on her stick named 'mail' and went online to google gmail to create an address and told her to carefully store the login name and password in her folder. Internet>notepad>folder: she really got a hang of it now!

In-between I asked her if she was hungry and she said she could only eat some-thing at the camp and I said: "I know what kind of 'food' they serve there. Let's go to have a good meal. But she protested and said she had no money. Who cares about money I said, let's just enjoy a good meal and each others company. So I 'abducted' her and we did exactly that. But you know that to all what is good comes an end and she said she had to return to the camp because it was getting dark. And I accompanied her to the camp and asked her if she wanted to meet again. She only said "Yes please" and agreed on when and at the bus stop the next day. I said: "Shukra Amena and aleikum salaam". She simply hugged me and said: "See you tomorrow."

Before I met and spoke Amena I met with locals and other refugees and to be honest the locals were not what one could call friendly. I guess they felt I was not on their side. The refugees I met and spoke were another story and all with their own worrying stories because they knew about the hostility against them and were afraid. And like Amena they said: "We thought and expected to be safe here." And I asked them how they felt about other refugees who did not adapt to their views and often a deafening silence followed. And so I asked them how they thought they could integrate in their new country? They had no idea. But one of them said: "How can I integrate if I'm not accepted?" Touché!

The next day:

I met Amena again and we went to town and chit chatted as if we'd been friends for years. Still, I had to ask her how she saw her future in the Netherlands. And she said: "Of course I hope I'll be accepted as an asylant but I know the immigration authorities will take their time so I can only hope."

See, I answered, that's why I set up an email account for you so we can stay in touch and please take my card with my phone number. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need help. If need be I'll even return to visit you and help what- ever way I can.

She asked me: "Why are you doing this?" Simple, I said, I'm a human. Again we stayed together for hours but then the moment came to get on the bus again and upon arriving to say goodbye.

..... we'll see each other again I'm sure.

Before June 1st. 2016 the camp will be closed down. Also then and there a new wave of pushing and dumping refugees all around the Netherlands, then including all new refugees, will start (read below). Let's see if the responsible authorities learned a lesson or two.

And now to another and national reality:

Before and after I went to camp Heumensoord I kept a finger on the pulse of what the media had to say about the situation in the Netherlands and to summarize it in a few words:

hell broke loose among the Dutch and against the refugees. Demonstrations; incendiary bomb attacks on camps; cars of local politicians set ablaze and threatening letters wrapped in envelopes containing bullets addressed at mayors and councilors and all taking place throughout the country and in villages and smaller and bigger cities like Wezep; Oranje; Enschede; Montfoort; Crailo; Rotterdam and Steenberg just to name a few. In some places slogans and symbols such as 'our own people first' and swastikas can be seen. There were also far and wide, organized by the cities, public consultations and information evenings, but the locals were so angry and in some situations violent that they had to be cancelled.

After analyzing all the media information I realized that the truth of the matter is that all coins have a flip side and that both the refugees and the locals do not feel themselves either being accepted (the refugees) which is fact really, nor understood (the locals), which is fact too.

To start with the refugees are constantly dumped from one temporary camp to another, read they can stay for 3 to 5 days after which they are dumped in another temporary camp. And this without previous notice.

The latter counts too for the locals where they, from one day to another, get refugees dumped in their communities and are only informed afterwards (read above).

But there's something else going on: the Dutch feel abandoned by the national ruling government who since years have been raising costs for medical care, education and housing and cut backs on social care. The result is that the Dutch feel betrayed not only by the government but also threatened by the new wave of refugees because they believe that they'll benefit more than they will.

But truth of the matter is that the Dutch are wrong because it is to be seen if the refugees who'll finally be accepted by the gov. as asylant will get the same 'benefits'. Already now more and more politicians want to categorize them as a kind of second class citizen.

Je maintiendrai (I'll stand firm/Ik zal handhaven) coat of arms spell:

On October 28th. the Dutch King Willem-Alexander expressed his concerns about the coarsening of the refugee debate in his country. "In the Netherlands we talk and not fight things out. I can empathize with the concerns out there, I am also very concerned about what is currently happening in the Netherlands. But there are limits. If you proceed to intimidation and threats, it erodes the values for which the Netherlands State stands firm for."

Also the next day the chairman's of virtually all parties in the Dutch Parliament distanced themselves from the coarsening of the debate. In an open letter in a newspaper they called forward their voters for greater understanding for each other and more tolerance.

"Don't confuse threats and insults with arguments. Let each other speak, even if you disagree."they write. The letter is an initiative of greenleft leader Jesse Klaver. Other group chairmen who signed the letter are Halbe Zijlstra (VVD), Diederik Samsom (PvdA), Emile Roemer (SP), Sybrand Buma (CDA), Geert Wilders (PVV), Alexander Pechtold (D66), Arie Slob (CU), Kees van der Staaij (SGP), Marianne Thieme (PvdD) and Henk Krol (50Plus).

OPEN LETTER: Stop intimidating and threatening.

"One of us, the chairman of the PVV, knows what it is like to be threatened since years. The freedom is small if every hour of the day security is needed. We regret that this happens in Netherlands. It does not fit in our democratic constitutional State when in recent weeks there was one incident after the other. A Council meeting is discontinued because of the intimidating atmosphere. Public participation evenings for citizens are disrupted and shouted over by people with whom no decent conversation is possible. Concerned citizens are called racists.

People swearing, ranting and wish each other the worst things if they face each other in demonstrations. Anonymous threats via email and social media are on the rise, so it seems.

People in general who stand up for tolerance and freedom are, on a daily basis, being threatened. We are concerned about this climate of threats and intimidation. The debate on refugees and the reception in Netherlands is being fought on the razor's edge. But we have to understand that we all have emotions concerning this crisis. The differences between us are sometimes big. In the political debate, we make those differences clear. That can sometimes be very strong. But we can handle that. Our democratic rule of law can handle that. Our call to anyone who wants to hear his voice: do not confuse threats and insults with arguments. Let each other the word, even if you disagree. In The Netherlands, we conduct a debate without threats, intimidation and violence."

But despite all these I'd say diplomatic words they do not or hardly directly speak about the refugees nor about their failure dealing with the crisis.

The most extreme opponents of the refugees are the jews or neo-nazi zionists as I call them because of their anti-Palestinian politics and terror in israel and proves that also they have amnesia and are Moslimophobic, and the Dutch extreme right political party PVV and their chairman Wilders who also is vehemently against refugees and especially the Muslims among them and in my opinion is also 'suffering' from Moslimophobia. But my point really is that they are trying to spread fear for the refugees among the Dutch and that includes the national co-ordinator for terrorism and security Dirk Schoof who especially emphasizes that among the refugees there might be Jihadists and Salafists (in both cases read Islamic fundamentalists).

NEWSFLASH: today, November 20th. is the UN international day of the children and 15 Dutch organizations have published an advertisement in all national newspapers to call on the gov. to better take care of refugee children who complain they are too often being dumped from one camp to another, cannot have stable friendships with other children and are too often having to miss classes and are afraid they'll run be-hind on education.

The gov. is about to decide to not give young male refugees shelter anymore meaning also no roof over their heads nor bed-bath-bread but just a small allowance of about 5 Euro a day to survive on the streets. It has not officially been decided yet but can you image how it feels to be on the streets in temperatures approx. 0 or below celcius?

Also, if there is one method to drive non-extremist Muslims to join the IS the gov. will have a bullseye!

There is another thing I don't understand: after the Lehman brothers bank went bankrupt in 2008 causing a wave of bankruptcies in the US and the E.U. from smaller and bigger businesses, today in the west of the E.U. including the Netherlands there are hundreds if not thousands office buildings and often 5 to 20 floors high abandoned. Sometimes, in some Dutch cities, the local gov. buys them for peanuts and renovate them so that students can live there. My question is: why not also for refugees? Food for thought.

And then all hell really broke loose ...

Paris, November 13th. – IS terror attacks:

This kind of violence is just the shouting of the most stupid. Now, I'm not a political analyst but 'simply' writing about and in support of the refugees coming to the E.U. to seek a safe haven. And when I was talking with a refugee at the Heumensoord camp about an extreme right politician who was trying to scare the hell out of the Dutch by saying that the E.U. had to prepare themselves to withstand an Islamic invasion read by Al Qaida and the IS he said: "Does the E.U. really think they will come as a refugee with rickety boats?"

And I can only agree because no terrorist would choose that route. But what really frightens me is that the E.U.'s Islamophobia will use the Paris attacks as an argument to further

criminalize refugees and also to demand the closing of mosques. I'd say that would be the easiest way to drive non-fundamentalist Muslims to join the Al Qaida and the IS. Anyways, I'll prepare now to leave for Athens (GR) and Berlin (BRD) to do fieldwork for "Life is a bitch".

And when I'm back I'll write chapter 4 and Epilogue #2 with, as far as possible, an overview about what the hell is going on in the E.U. and beyond.

I want to close with this:

**You can plant something
but we will not water it

with our tears.**



This is a poster created shortly after the attacks in Paris by Loesje, a Dutch group of activists who try to create social awareness.

UPDATE
do 26/11

The Council of State ruled that the gov. may set conditions in providing basic care (the "bed-bath-bread"-principle) for people without a residence permit. The Council of State did this rule in a case filed by an Iranian. The man was offered shelter in a "freedom-restricting location", in which he was not allowed to leave the municipality. At the same time he had to co-operate to his departure from the Netherlands. The Iranian in an earlier case and referring to the European Social Charter, the European Convention on human rights (ECHR) and a decision of the European Committee for social rights (ECSR) had a ruling in his favor. However, the Council of State ruled that "If the refugee refuses to co-operate to his departure from the Netherlands, the Secretary can deny him shelter." But the Council of State added that there are "special circumstances" which are not required can be possible for refugees. That may have to do with the psychological state of the refugee.

The gov. has decided to fine municipalities and cities who refuse to give shelter to refugees.

20% of the Dutch Red cross volunteers refuse to aid refugees.