16.03.19

The reply to my „I am living in Greece“, expressed in Germany is always (always!): “Oh. Nice! I am jealous.” I am now, after 1 ½ year used to that. Depending on the mood of the day I say “Yes.” Or “Why, what exactly do you know about Greece, I mean except your experience in a beach hotel in Crete?” – or something in between these two extremes…

“Are there still coming refugees?” is another classic.

“The economic crisis seems to be over, hmm?!” another.

Yesterday I met a young German guy, travelling with two friends to Thessaloniki and Athens, booking a cheap flat and being not only surprised but infinitely annoyed that the standards are so low: The shower is in the toilet, there are only the electric heater we use here in winter, not everyone appreciates his perfect English, but only speak Greek, and the food comes not in personal plates, but is shared with everyone.

Poor First world Boy.

I have to confess that I laughed so much afterwards.

“I also used to live as a student 1 ½ years in poor conditions”, he said. “I know about that kind of living”, he said. “I worked hard full-time the last months, I want to enjoy my holidays.”, he said. And: “I expected something different from my holidays in Greece.”

Poor First World boy.

I was glad that I did not speak about the refugees in the streets and in the camps. About tents and cold and Moria camp and Diavata camp and the new law and the snow on the tents I remember and the mud and the smell of people in the Refugee Day Center and people coming too late and saying “I am hungry” and holding their stomach… I was glad, because he never will mix up his world with another world in which people have to live every single day under worse conditions that he has for a few days in a bad-booked apartment in Thessaloniki.

…where by the way many people live in apartments like that.

Because no. The economic crisis is not over.

05.03.19

All the time there have been people with my Greek friends, and since I have been in Thessaloniki also with me. People who used to live in Idomeni camp, people who used to live in the streets. Many of them left 2017 with the EU relocation program, others decided to leave Greece by other ways, but some stayed – with asylum or applying for asylum.

As we know how difficult it is to get asylum as a Pakistani, we started to do whatever we can do for a friend who lives and works with us since more than one year. His first interview will take place in April, but before he will do it, we try to show the authorities how much we need him here in Thessaloniki. How much he is integrated, studying the language and the culture, finding again and again work, working with us, and first of all: Beeing a friend for many of us.

It shows me again why I hate it to read or to hear about the so called “refugee crisis” or the “flood”, because these words pretend an unknown mass and not a number of human beeings who are loved at least by anybody – in our case by many others.

One of the tracks we are following to get asylum for him is to write personal letters how much he is loved and needed in Thessaloniki. There are already a lot of letters full of love and hope and friendship and power… and we are waiting for more…

03.03.19

For a speech about refugees in Greece that I will hold in April in Germany, I was translating my blog. Weired enough to translate myself from English to German, but also it gave me a memory of the last year.

Yesterday I finished the period from last summer to winter, and it was good to remember all the situations and people and work and emotions and times... and I am looking forward to read these textes in front of an audience, because I feel that people can see through them a piece of the jigsaw of our work and our lives here.

(...and from now on I will translate. Immediately. And will not wait until there are horrific 50 pages!)

20.02.19

To live in the streets is already rough... If someone destroys your place, the tents and sleeping bags is even harder... if this happens again and again, I don't know how you can get the power for the next day...

The forecast for the next days says again low temperatures... we will try our best to support the people on the flee who have to live in the streets of our town.

Photo credits: Umer Sufyan

09.02.19

I am for some jobs in Germany and had to see from far how the police evicted the place where the people on the flee were staying. All the tents, blankets, belongings with which we tried to support them, are lost. The police is going around also during the night to make sure that no one will stay there again. Europe, is there any plan for these people??? Any place where they can stay??? ...meanwhile here are complaining people and newspapers about problems I cannot even see as such…

03.02.19

To all people in Europe who will ask me next week again „Are there still refugees arriving in Greece?“ - Yes. And they are living not only in Moria camp under inhuman conditions. But as well in many other camps and in our city. Ok. Ask me. But try to withstand the answer. #informingiscaring #defendhumanity

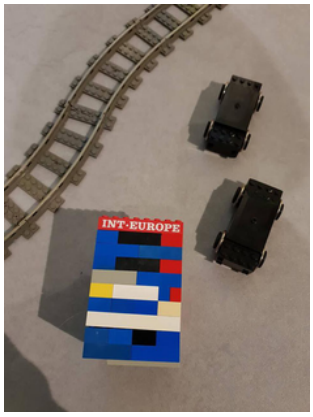
30.01.19

Every single day I am grateful that we can live in peace and I stand and live and work in solidarity with people on the flee. If all the people in the richer european countries would stand and live in solidarity with people on the flee, like many of my not very rich friends do, we would have other asylum laws and safe ways to Europe...

„2018 the daily average of those dying, attempting to cross the Mediterranean, has been 6 persons.“ (UNHCR)

29.01.19

There’s that afghan guy. I don’t know him. But I know a guy from Croatia from a european project. These two know each other from 2016 when they met in Lesvos, Moria camp. The project I have been involved in three meetings the last 12 months, called „The Route of Solidarity“ can sometimes really be a route of solidarity: „I am so happy, he will go from Lesvos tot he mainland. When he will be here, can you maybe support him a little bit?“, I got a message from Croatia. And today he made it. He got the official permission to leave Moria camp, and everyone who has been there get’s now – like I do – goosebumps.



We can communicate with voicemessages, he speaks but doesn’t write English. I hate voicemessages, but I sent him a welcome, asked him about his situation, where he is and offered him to help him with

whatever I can do for him. The immediate response has been „I wanna go to Italy where my friends are. Can you help me with that?“
Again... I did not make the Dublin III law, but I have to explain him now again – how my friend in Croatia already did – that he cannot go to Italy because the first european country in which he put his foot is the country in which he has to apply for asylum.
I hate it, but we have that f*** law. And the only winners in the game called european asylum policy are fascists and human traffickers. That guy will lose in that game. He will lose a lot of money or he will lose his hope.
Anyhow. He is one of the few lucky people who could leave Moria camp. This is already a victory.

28.01.19
Today I went with a syrian friend who has asylum here to an organisation that is supporting refugees. They are running out of money and I am thinking how to support them. The egyptian and the syrian guy who are running the project since more than a year in Thessaloniki are so nice people. So full of love and belief. We came during the three open hours: people are coming to take food donations, to have a coffee or a tea, the children can play in the playroom, some volunteers teach languages. We know each other from Idomeni and have been together in many situations like these and fitted into this chaos immediately. I was playing with some children, laughing with a baby, he spoke with some men and woman in arabic. So many needs in our city, in this country, at the european borders, where people are held by the Dublin III law.

When I came home I found the message of a friend in Munich with the today’s headline of a German tabloid: „That is how much the security of the refugees will cost“.

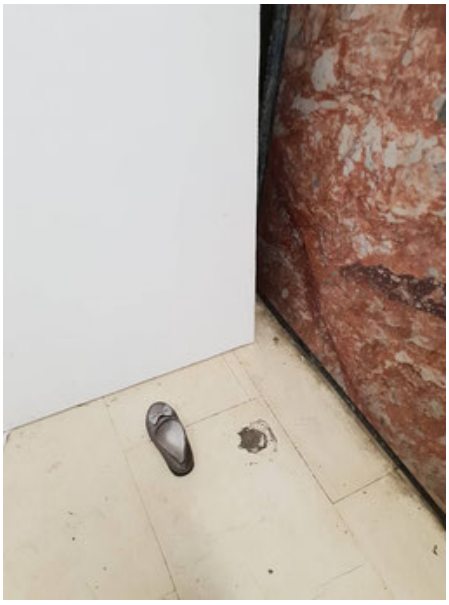
26.01.19
I said „Tell me, if you need me tonight.“ I said „I would love to help you and I would love to stay at home.“ – Later I got the message „We don’t need you.“
I did not feel superfluous at all. I did not feel offended at all. I just felt relieved and glad that there have been enough people to help so I could do other things that are important in my life.
It was good to experience and to understand this.

25.01.19
After half a year back in Diavata camp. We learned about the situation: from the 800 people in the containers are 370 children. In the „tents“ around in the mud, under the trees, along

the fence are 600 more people, most of them single men. It was a strange feeling. It was a bit like „coming home“, we know that place so well. And it was a bit like „I don’t wanna smell, hear and see that anymore“. It was a bit normal to see children without socks or jackets, people without proper shoes, without hope. It was good to have the information directly by the new and engaged camp manager, it was so difficult to walk through the heavy rain, knowing that we will go home in our houses and all these people will stay here.
It was good to be back in Diavata camp. And it was good to leave it again.

22.01.19

Since almost three years I am working with refugees in Thessaloniki. I am working with Greek organisations, I know about the international volunteers and I was so glad and surprised at the same time that I came today in an organisation that is just a few houses beside my apartment and that I never heard about it. I was asking myself during the – personal and professionel – empowering discussion why I never heard from them and why we never have been connected. We found some reasons but anyhow, we will cooperate in the future. One of our topics in the discussion was „What is a real need?“ The organisation is also struggling with money and has to give away all the furniture, supplies etc. because they cannot pay anymore the rented apartement. But the guy who came 1 ½ years ago to Greece to work with refugees and who doesn’t know how long he will be payed by the organisation to finance his family, feels at the right place and said he will find a way. Some practical things we discussed and some feelings we have and wanted to share.



When I left, the people already waited in the stairway to enter the place for coffee, tea and the children’s place. And there I saw the connection: The people in needs... The people!

18.01.19

The last week I have been working again with people with special needs. Actually their needs are not so special. They want to learn something as well as the men and women accompanying them want to. They have questions, ideas, comments, not more or less than the other people in the seminar. Sometimes we have to explain a little easier. Sometimes we have to read and write for them, but actually it‘s the same
like any other seminar I am doing.

I am again and again so thankful that I could grow up with children we called in the seventies „disabled“. My conception of the human beeing has been developed since that time: all human beeings are equal. It‘s not about skin or passport or IQ. It‘s about love and communication and solidarity and empathy and whatever helps to see each other as a unique and godmade and beloved person.

09.01.19

Die Kreuzkirche München begann vor fünf Jahren ein tägliches Friedensgebet. Auf dem Maidan in Kiew wurden Menschen, die friedlich demonstrierten, erschossen, und die deutsche evangelische Gemeinde, die Partnergemeinde Münchens, war mittendrin. Jeden Tag bekamen wir Neuigkeiten direkt vom Pastor dort und vor allem auch von dessen Frau. Aus den später wöchentlichen Gebeten wurde das monatliche Friedensgebet. Der Pastor zog mit seiner Familie aus Kiew nach Franken, über Facebook blieb eine Verbindung.

Als ich nach Thessaloniki zog, begann ich monatlich einen Text für das Friedensgebet zu schreiben: Informationen über die Situation hier, Gebetsanliegen, Gebete. So bin ich in Verbindung mit meiner Münchner Gemeinde. Manchmal sende ich die Texte auch an Freund*innen. Vor einigen Wochen hatte ich das Bedürfnis, den monatlichen Text mit meinen Menschen zu teilen, unter anderem sendete ich ihn an die Frau des Pastors in Franken. Es war der Beginn der Friedensdekade und die Gemeinde dort rief zum täglichen Friedensgebet auf. Am kommenden Tag schrieb sie mir, dass ihr Mann am Abend meinen Text vorgelesen hatte. Und am übernächsten dass in der Gemeinde der spontane Wunsch entstanden war, für die Menschen auf der Flucht in Thessaloniki Geld zu sammeln.

Ich weiß nicht, was mich froher und dankbarer macht: das gemeinsame Gebet oder die Spenden, die heute auf meinem Konto eingingen. Ich bin dankbar für all diese Verbindungen über alle Grenzen hinweg - München - Franken - Kiew, wo ich immer dachte ich lande mal - und Thessaloniki, wo ich nun hingestellt bin und wo ich es liebe zu leben. Trotz und mit allem.

08.01.19

A friend of us is struggling very much these days. He is helping us to distribute things for the homeless refugees. He speaks urdu and he is so helpful in the way how he is speaking to people. He is struggling, because one year ago, we met him also in the street, all his memories are coming back. Yesterday we talked about it. That he cannot sleep, that it doesn't help the people when he doesn't enjoy his warm bed,

that he can be an example that you can try to build a life in Greece etc.

Yesterday night he went alone again for two hours to the people and he did something great: they gathered around the fire and were singing Pakistan songs.

I don't believe how smart he is.

07.01.19

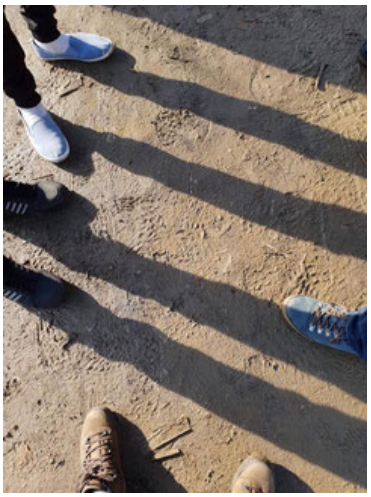
Yesterday I bought 20 chocolates in a small shop which is open also on Sundays. Since I am speaking Greek I love to explain the people why we are buying very expensive stuff on Sundays. Not only because many people give me things cheaper, but also to inform them about the situation with the refugees in town.

Today I did not find the time to go in the supermarket, but on my way was that shop where I wanted to buy some tissues.

When I entered the shop, the lady was very excited and said “here she is”, and gave me one of the New Years cakes we are eating these days. “For the guys in the street”, she said.
It was just accidental that I came along today. But both of us we did like we knew that we will meet again today. I took the vasilopita and could not stop to stutter “thank you, this is so kind.”
People care. I love this town.

06.01.19
With a backpack full of 18kg oranges, with bags full of socks and chocolate and Koulouria three of us went today with the bikes to three places to see if the people are ok. One get sick during the last night, but many guys told us that they could finally sleep the night before with all the blankets and the pallets on which the tents are standing since we could bring them yesterday. We have been very glad to hear that. In every chat we had the last days, we could see that the people understood that we come in our rare free time and with the bikes and donations we collected from friends and friends from friends. That we would be glad to bring more shoes and gloves and to host them in a proper way, but that we are not able. „Xronia polla“ a guy said, while he was eating the chocolate. „Today is a holiday.“
We have been glad to hear that and hope the new week will bring at least warmer temperatures and dry places...

05.01.19
"No... the cardboard is for inside the tents and not for the fire", the german volunteer from a grassroot organisation screamed.
The fourth winter in cold places with people on the flee and the third in Thessaloniki for me.
For the young guys the first winter in Greece. They can't sleep these nights. it's so cold. I don't know what smugglers told them about the life in Europe, but I guess it was without the words "wet feet for many days", "sleeping outside at sub-zero temperature” or "no support by the government.”



"Please." a guy said and showed me his hands. He needs gloves. Like everyone here. I hate that "we don't have", what I am saying now since 3 1/2 years.
A greek lady came along the street. "Ax, the poor people. Here in the snow, in the cold."
That people from Syria get everything, they said, but there is nothing for people from Pakistan, they said. That this is not true, we said.
When we came to the first place the last time, there have been so many people. The two tents we had with us on our bikes we took again with us. There have been too many people who started already to fight for them.

There was that very funny snowman at the corner. Then a street in Chinatown full of different snowmen. Then the already little sad snowman, melting very close to the place where homeless people on the flee are staying. And then there was that sad snowman, made by people in Diavata refugee camp, where many people also have to stay in tents...

04.01.19

It's snowing in Thessaloniki. If you are grown up in Germany it's not so much, it even doesn't remain in the streets. It looks nice, the trees are white and since it started today, all my greek friends are uploading one picture after the other in the social media, because they really like it.

Luckily we knew since some days that the cold will come – and will stay for the next 4-5 days how the forecast says. So we went today to some of the places where the homeless refugees use to stay and distribued blankets, tissues, tents and some jackets. And we asked them what is the most urgent for the weekend, when the Refugee Day Center will be closed. Well, the evergreens, weekend or not: shoes, underwear, socks, gloves. I am thankful that I could give again an amount to buy some stuff tomorrow morning, and I am glad that we have our beloved pakistan friend with us, who is just amazing when he is speaking with the people. It must be hard for him, who used to live in the streets until exactly one year ago. I am glad to see how we care in our rare free time, the people working fulltime in the Day Center or in other jobs. I am sad that we are in the 4th winter of refugees in the streets and fields and abandoned buildings in Europe and that we are so used to these pictures and situations.

It's really cold in Thessaloniki, these days I am in bed with socks and pullover the nights when I turn off my electric heater. I complained a lot about that. I cannot imagine how all these people will survive the next days. My third winter in Thessaloniki. Another winter during which I hope no one will freeze to death.

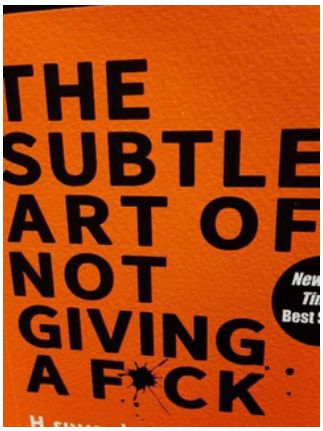
31.12.18

All the people I met this year... In my different circles. In different projects. On the flee or at home, in holidays, for some weeks to work here, in seminars. In my daily life. All the human beeings, beeing defined by their passports from

Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Bosnia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Catalunya, China, Colombia, Croatia, Denmark, Egypt, England, France, FYROM, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Irak, Iran, Jordan, Kurdistan, Marocco, Netherlands, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Pakistan, Palestine, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Scotland, Senegal, Serbia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, UK, USA, Usbekistan, Vietnam.

All you human beeings: thank you for this year, at least for some hours we could feel again and again ourselves like in a world without borders and in solidarity. Let‘s pray, hope and work on it that 2019 will be for all of you, fighting for a humane life, a better year. That 2019 will be for all of us a good one. Wherever we come from, wherever we are.

30.12.2018



„The NGOs that you work with are they only handling the refugees or are they doing something to fight against causes of fleeing?“, she asked in a very aggressive tone. I asked her about her experiences with NGOs, because I supposed that I was speaking about the legal form „NGO“, and she was speaking about the big organisations I never would like to work with, like UNHCR, IOM or others. „Hmm“, she said „I don’t remember the names. But I was with the children at some activities, and there have been some german women and some... a, I don‘t remember.“

I just could do what I always do: I agreed that it‘s a problem what we are doing: trying to make a bwrong situation a little bit better instead of changing the situation. But, how I said to her „I don‘t know, what YOU are doing to solve the political situation, we just try to do our best. In the daily life with people on the flee and in international projects to inform about the situation, hoping that one day everyone understands that we have to change the inhuman European asylum reality.“

To protect herself, one of her children had to sit now on her knees and she just continued to grumble a little bit. I am sad when people have no idea and don‘t differentiate. When people only accuse but don‘t act themselves. I am sad and tired of that superior attitude without any reason...

29.12.18

An email came yesterday, sent the night before by a woman in Germany, no idea about her background:

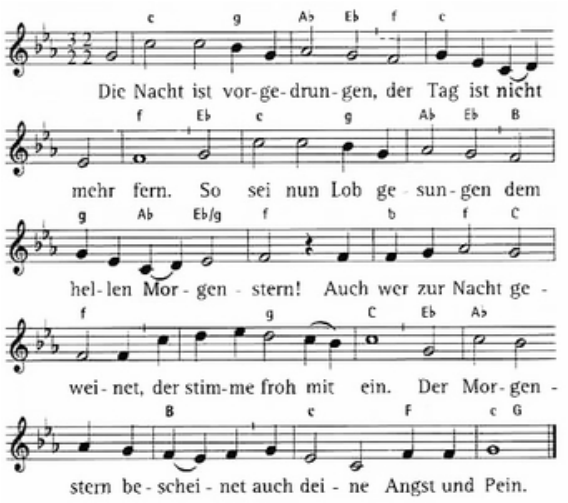
There is that Syrian family in Turkey. They wrote her, they will go tonight to Greece. So she (the German woman) organized that the family can stay the first days, how she wrote, in Athens at a friend's house, "to rest a bit after the night journey". Her plea for us was the following: "I guess they will be exhausted after the long trip from Turkey to Thessaloniki, so maybe you can help them to buy the bus or train ticket to reach Athens."
Well. We read the email and speculated about how they can be sure they will arrive from Konstantinopel to Thessaloniki and why they wanna go first to Athens and how they will make it in general to go from Turkey across the border to Europe.
Well now. The next email came yesterday morning, that the Turkish border police arrested them.
It's not nice. It's so difficult what people have to bear. But that's the reality we knew.
I am still perplexed that there are still people in Germany or anywhere in Europe who think that a family just makes it in one night from Turkey to Greece and then just take a bus or a train without papers. I am still speechless that they are so uninformed and still feel so helpful through emails like that. I am still bewilderedly that we have so different realities…
…maybe I only need from time to time to feel that way instead of feeling angry and helpless about the border situation...

28.12.18

„Liebe Verena, die Spende ist vor allem für dich!!! Dass es dir gut geht, ist die Voraussetzung, dass du weiterhin andere unterstützen kannst."
Es fällt mir wahnsinnig schwer, aber nachdem ich es bereits theoretisch einsehe und in diversen Seminaren an Sozialarbeiter*innen und Menschen die in der Flüchtlingshilfe arbeiten gepredigt habe, versuche ich es nun auch praktisch einzusehen. Das Geld, das mir eine Freundin aus München geschickt hat anzunehmen und damit Dinge zu bezahlen, die meinem Wohlergehen zuträglich sind. Oft schon haben mir Menschen Spenden zukommen lassen und darauf hingewiesen, dass ich es auch für mich nehmen könnte. Bisher habe ich mich gescheut es zu tun.... Zeit, zu lernen. Auch diesbezüglich. Mit großer Dankbarkeit nehme ich das Geld und das Lernen an.

27.12.18
These days when it's freakishly cold in my apartment and I shiver from the cold in the morning while making my coffee before it gets a little warmer in the room, I cannot imagine how people in the streets or in flimsy tents in a camp are feeling, in the cold, without protection and maybe without hope.
I am thankful for everyone who is helping to fight against that humanitarian disaster we can find end of 2018 in Europe. And I try hard not to give up my own hope that 2019 finally could change something...

21.12.18



A discussion at a service in the german Lutheran congregation of Thessaloniki:

„What makes me so sad is, that Jesus was born in that poorness. If I imagine what they are doing now in the hospitals for the mothers and the babies. But he was born there, in the cold stable.“

„Eehm... there are also today...“

„I mean, he was the saviour and he had to start his life under such hard conditions.“

„Ehm...“

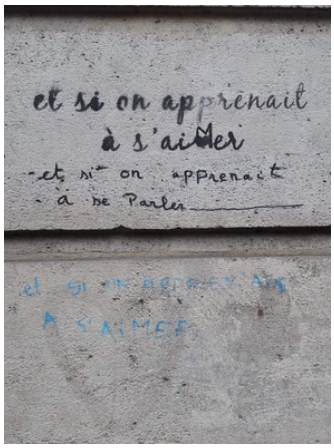
„Yes, also today in many countries of the world it‘s not easy.“

„Actually in most of the countries in the world.“

„Yes. But there are everywhere so many possibilities for women.“

[...]

... I saw so many newborn babies in Munich 2015 when the refugees arrived at the mainstation. In Idomeni. In camps in Munich. In refugee camps in Northern Greece. In the streets of Thessaloniki. I saw the mums. These tired and desperated and strong and overwhelmed women on the flee. And as a believer only the child in the manger, in the cold stable, in the poorness helps me to stand all these situations with people in needs.



20.12.18

We made a presentation for a group of turkish, greek, spanish and lebanese social worker about some organisations which are working in the refugee issue. I put it on a meta-level, speaking about beeing an example and inspiring people and ended up in a fiery speech about solidarity.

A young woman picked it up and told us about a non-formal education project in Gaza where she is working. She was an example. She inspired me. She is understanding and living solidarity.

Sometimes it is so easy to get really in touch with people.

19.12.18

Prejudices.

Yesterday I heard some... from a young german volunteer. From an algerian man. From an old greek man.

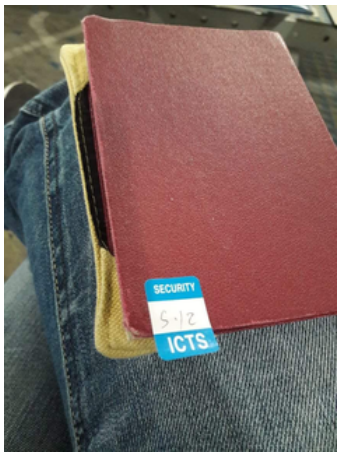
„Ah, you are from Munich, so Thessaloniki must be a big adjustment for you“, the 19year old girl said. „Why?“ I asked, waiting for her prejudices. And she came out with it, in the ordinariest way: „I only was there once, and I also met nice people, but, I mean, Munich is so... what you hear about it... and you could see it, the people in the streets, they look arrogant.“ pfff... I used to live there 25

years. I have to say a lot about the city, but you dfinitely cannot see arrogant people in the street... hmm...
The algerian guy did not get what he wanted. If there are no shoes, no scarfs, no gloves, no trousers, there are no shoes, scars, gloves, trousers. People are working really hard in the Day Center to do the best for the people on the flee. That guy saw a lot in his life, I guess. And he is desperated, living in the street, trying (I guess) to go further to Europe. It is cold, he is not well. „You are a rascist!“, he shouted. „You don‘t wanna give me something, because you are a rascist“ was his answer, because I guess he faced a lot of rascism in the countries he crossed while fleeing. The friend of mine who is working there is definitely full of patience and openess and... what‘s the opposite of racist? She is...
The greek old man said „Oh, so you are working also with refugees. It‘s a pitty, the poor families and the poor children. But you know, all these single men coming to our country, they are bad people.“ And he showed with the f8nger to a group of some young pakistan and afghan guys. „Look, all of them criminals.“ „Hmm, I don‘t know them, so I cannot say anything, but how do you know?“ I asked, again in that stress I feel everytime I am discussing that issue. „i know it.“ Hmm...
Prejudices... I also have. All of us we have them. We have to handle them consciously, we have to speak about it and to improve it!

12.12.18
There is that little boy. Recently he turned one year old. The boy can now stand on his own, he starts to walk, to speak, he had his first vaccinations, the first teething troubles. His fine motor skills are amazing, he is interested in new toys and loves to interact every week a little more. he loves my bike and the fan in the big room and he is freakishly afraid to get separated from his mother. His social behaviour is underdeveloped and I am torn between sadness and gratitude that he could nontheless develop that normal.
He is born on the flee in Turkey, just before he came with his desperate mother to Greece. Here they stuck, hoping to get reunited one day with the uncle of the boy who is since some years an austrian citizen. They are living in an apartment of the German protestant congregation of Thessaloniki and try to live a normal life. The boy doesn’t know the life of his parents in Syria. He only knows to be anywhere.
When I see him, I see the full picture of this unjust world.
And I see how easy it is to treat human beeings like human beeings.

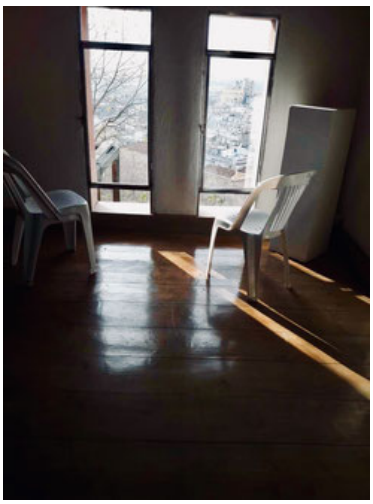
10.12.18
It‘s always worth it to take a taxi from the airport. Not only because the bus is a nightmare. But also because I always have interesting conversations.
„You like to help people“, the driver said. „No no“ I said, because in Germany it means you are a bit daft to do a lot of things without money and without an obvious benefit instead of working for money and the career. But then I understood: „You feel at home in Greece because you like

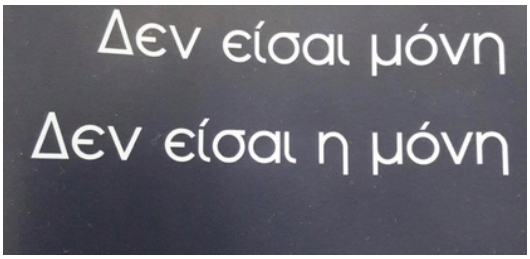
to help people, that‘s what we like to do. We like to share what we have if someone has less than us.“ - „Yes. I believe the only way to live is in solidarity.“
He said thanks when we arrived at my house. I was thankful too. And I was at home. I am.



05.12.18
The young guy had a passport from the Republic of Yemen in his hand. I could see it because they asked us for our passports even before get seated at the gate for boarding. Sure, they took the French guy with dark skin and made a lot of troubles, it took me a lot of power not to scream "that's so racist!!!", sure they let me easily with my German passport and yes, this is not my Europe. Anyhow. There was that yemeni guy, sitting there a bit lost. I gave him a smile. Thankful he smiled back. He went to the desk, I guess it was his first time at a European airport, he seemed to be a bit lost. The Greek lady wasn't polite, his English wasn't well, hers was greek. He only wanted to know if he was right here and if he has to do something else than to wait in the queue. No, nothing I confirmed to give him a little confidence. When he smiled again I saw how young he was. I don't know what he saw already in his life. I don't know if Paris is his final destination. And I don't know if he will be safe, if his family will be safe. I only know - and I am not getting tired to speak and write about it again and again - it is a privilege and it is accidentally where we are born and which passport we have. And also which useful languages we know and we are able to learn. What we can do is to use this privilege to help those who are in a worse situation.

04.12.18
Intercultural working is not always fun... when a guy comes 50 minutes too late to an important meeting, smiling to us and doesn‘t understand at all why we are stressed. When three members don’t come at all without telling something, and one comes accidentally along when we finish and says hello as if nothing has happened. And for him nothing has happend, he skipped a meeting, so what?! When the african english is sometimes ununderstandable. When after many messages again the message „where are you“ is the answer that doesn’t make sence. When studying english or greek seems to be too demanding and difficult, and when the „translation chain“ is three people and languages long (and who knows how the sence may have changed from the origin)... But it‘s still worth it. We are building trust and commitment with every day. And I still feel that we gain more than we invest!



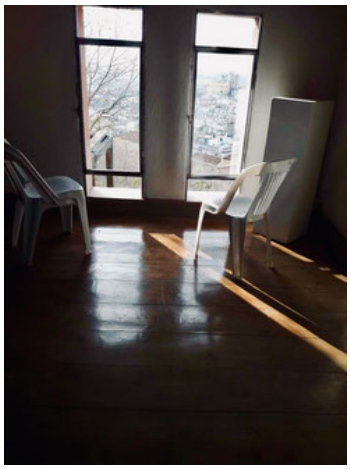


28.11.18
„What are you doing here? So many times when I come out of my office, I see you. Sometimes I feel that we are working together but I don‘t know it“, said the psychologist in the Refugee Day Center today. I laughed and wanted to explain why I was

here today, but she said „No, no, it‘s always a pleasure to see you and your smile.“ - „Well... that is what I am doing here.“

25.11.18

Some encounters the last days that encouraged me:

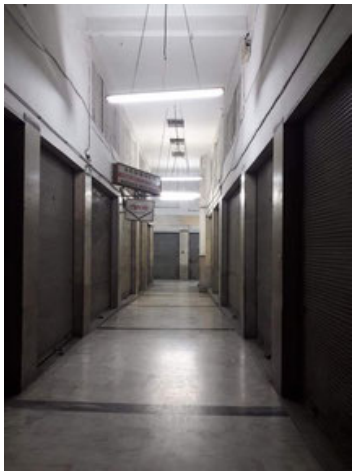


... a danish volunteer had a goodbye party after two months in Thessaloniki. When we said goodbye he did not stop thanking me. I was overwhelmed, because we did not work that much together. He also said that he learned a lot from me - that irritated me even more. He witnessed our efforts to start a social enterprise with some refugees and locals the last weeks, so he told me that he learned from me that it needs a lot of power and work and endurance to implement ideas and projects. That he learned how to work with groups and how to empower them as well as every single person in an individual way. That he understood that you need to love what you are doing to inspire people and that he feels inspired... my bike had wings when I went home...

... an old woman during an intercultural festival in which I was involved. I saw her, we had from the beginning a connection and for any reason it happened that I was sitting beside her in the room next to the concert. We talked a little bit about Salepi, a drink you could get in Thessaloniki, about some decades ago and at a certain point from where I am and what she used to work. That I am from Germany and she worked for the jewish community in Thessaloniki. And that she never uses the informally form of „you“ with Germans but that for any reason she feels connected with me and spoke with the you in singular. She told me the story of her family who get murdered in Auschwitz, from her mother who returned the only one. We talked. With words and with our eyes and our hearts... when her son wanted to go home and take her with him, we quickly get friends on facebook...

...two asylum seekers from Pakistan and Kurdistan made with us a small performance. They spoke about their lives. It was more difficult than they thought before to speak about their feelings in front of an audience. They made it great. I was so glad for them, because these stories have to be heard. They thanked me, because I organised and directed it a little bit. But actually it was me who was so thankful and blessed by their trust... I could feel them when all of us have been at home in the night...

... some encounters the last days that encouraged me.

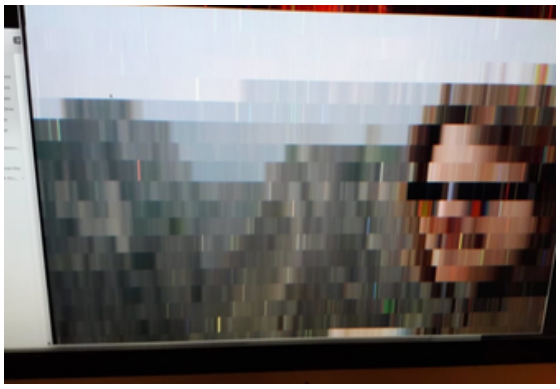


23.11.18

„Why don‘t they give all the empty houses for refugees?“ he asked me. And I did not find an answer. Stuttered something about offices, no heating, no bathrooms. But actually I knew that he knew that the only reason is: we don‘t wanna have refugees. Nowhere. Neither in Greece, where all the empty houses and places could be filled with people and life. I don‘t know anything about economics, but I guess it could work. Some places already proved it.

He is looking for a house. He has an interim solution since months. I am glad that he has not to live in the streets anymore.

22.11.18



A friend is sharing his story with us. He started to write his story and I loved it from the beginning how he is writing and how he is able to write about his feelings in a foreign language on a very low level.
For a festival we will tell and illustrate the story, and for our relationship it means we can now - after almost one year - speaking about his flee. About his feelings. About walking in the mountains, almost dying on the trip with the pick-up, hiding in the forest, getting arrested, blackmailed and having an accident with a van full of people.
People should listen his story and the stories of all the people who had to flee their country. Maybe they would think different than xenophobic and racist and non-solidary...

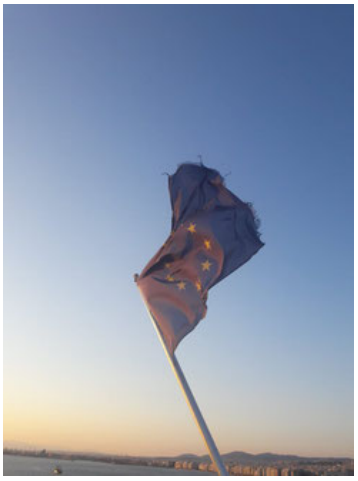
19.11.18

Yesterday we had an important discussion about apathy, indifference, about doing, taking action, and again about what apathy is and how to overcome it.
These questions I guess, all of us asked ourselves from time to time. These questions are never asked by people in indifference. These questions always mean that you are already on the way to act. One of the most important statements for me was, that raising awareness is already doing something.
A lack of concrete acting doesn't mean apathy. Maybe it means that right here right now I don't have the power, the ressources and the energy to do practical steps.
Maybe I have to protect myself and have to take the decision not to take action right here right now. Maybe I acted too often and too hard, that I have to make the decision or I do it unconsciously to react apathetic. Indifferent. It's just healthy. And it's not forever.

17.11.18

Went with a friend of mine to a restaurant. I am the only woman there, they speak in their language and I love the place, the food and the friend is a friend and not „a refugee". The food was great. My friend was a bit stressed and said „it's so loud here". It wasn't. I found out that he doesn't like the conversations. I felt relaxed because I did not understand a word. He was stressed and when we talked a bit I understood also why he did not like the conversations, the busy phone calls, the checking of messages and the short discussions between them. And then, on top, he had to defend himself, why he is still here. Why he did not go, like all the people who came with him, illegal to another country. „Because I have work", he said. The short version. I understood. He always has to defend himself. To the Greek authority why he is here. To the people in that restaurants who want his money, why he is still here. To his mother why he is not with her.
We discuss it often. I wish we would live in a world in which everyone can decide where to live. I wish he could have a life in his country. I wish we would not have these laws that will

bring all the people who left Greece in an illegal way in a few years of wasted time back again to Grece.
„Because I have work“, he said. The food was delicious. We spoke and laughed. Later he said „I am afraid what will happen next year when I will have my interview.“ Me too. But there are still 7 months. To learn the language. To find again payed work. To be a part of the community. Not to listen to the people who want to „help“ and to bring him on the dangerous way somewhere else. And to go again to that restaurant with the best food ever.



14.11.18
Today I saw again the full picture of European refugee policy. Today I understood again why it is always so difficult with German groups visiting us and comparing their work in Germany with ours here. Today I spent again some time listening to the problems of my tired friends working in the field.
The refugees – irrelevant where they come from – don't wanna stay in Thessaloniki. They want to move to Middle Europe. To their families, to their friends and to their dreams. We don't speak about integration or inclusion in Greece, no matter how much we believe that this would be a way. No matter how much we have ideas and the wish to live with the people. They don't want to learn Greek or English. They want to learn German. They want wifi and plugs and aircondition in summer, heating in winter. They want some food and clothes and money to pay the smugglers who are promising the paradise in other countries.
Most of them will not reach these countries? They will not get asylum in other european countries because of the Dublin II law? They only have this life and they spend it with waiting? – It does not matter. Greece is definitely not the country where they wanted to go when they left their home. They see that there is no work, there is no money, an uncertain future.
It's an awful situation in which all of us – refugees, migrants, locals – are. It's not about integration or inclusion. It's about first aid and surviving. No one likes that situation here.
...but Europe is not interested in other solutions...
#rightofmovement

13.11.18
I really would like to work with the children. The refugee children. The small ones. The children born on the flee. Beeing their whole lifetime 0-5 years somewhere as a refugee. Sometimes with the parents, sometimes with the mother or the father, with siblings and / or family members.

I would like to work with them, I mean not to play with them, but to help them with all their aggressiviness, their grief, their anger and their childish despair.
But maybe it's only kind of childish despair I am feeling when I see these children. Petrified. Kicking and hitting. Screaming. Crying. Mute.
And there is no time, no frame in which I could work with them. I could scream and cry and kick and hit and petrify.

03.11.18

Oh... this question I did not hear for a long time. (And I did not really miss it...): „You like Angela Merkel?“ - I use to reply that I don‘t know her personally, so I cannot say if I like her or not, neither (always the next question) if she is a „good person“ or not. „I always thought she is good, but now she is not. She has two faces.“ the young woman from Kurdistan said. I mean, I think that politicians are never good or bad. They are politicians and make decisions always in the context of their party as well as their whole environment and context. And if you are acting and deciding in that way, you never will be a „good person“ or a „bad person“ (no one is only one of it btw.)

For her, it’s about decisions of a politician with impacts of her personal life: she stucked in Greece, her family made it 2015 to Germany. The „good face“: the borders have been open. The „bad face“: the borders have been closed.

What can I say... „I think I cannot like in general politicians, because they act like I explained it. They never can only follow their hearts.“

I understood that we spoke on two different levels: I was speaking about a general thing. And she was speaking about a very personal situation.

At the end, she informed me about the announcement of retreat by Angela Merkel a few days ago. I nodded tired...

02.11.18

„Do you know that Turkey attacked Idlib yesterday?“, she asked me. I already knew. She still smiled while she told me about her aunt, living there. „When I called her today to ask if she is ok, I also asked her „why didn‘t you tell me when we spoke yesterday on the phone?“ . And you know, in Afrin it was the same. I also have family there, but they didn‘t tell me. I saw it online what happened there. Why didn‘t they tell me?“

„Because they don‘t want to worry you“, I replied. She is waiting since a long time to follow her sister who made it to Europe, stucked in Greece and is doing the best to bild her future from here on. „Your aunt did not tell you for the same reason you don‘t tell them how sad and disappointed you sometimes are. You don‘t say „It‘s so difficult, I would like to give up.“ I guess you always say „Everything is fine“, don‘t you?“

„Yes...“, she said, her look directed to an indefinied distance.

We hugged each other and in that hug after that conversation there has been all the sadness about the consequences of war and fleeing and escape from a homeland.

31.10.18

Whoever doesn’t understand that people don’t leave their country without any reason... Whoever doesn’t understand how difficult their lifes on the flee are... Whoever will ask me again in Germany „Are there still refugees in Greece? I thought it stopped“ or „I read in the newspaper that the economic crisis in Greece is over“...

I really invite everone of them to come only for five minutes to one of the places where I am going to bring donations, to speak with

people or to do some work. Just stand some minutes at the Doctors of the World and see all these people in needs and the people in solidarity who are working there. Go to the Day Center and see all the people in needs, waiting for food, clothes or any support.
Your life changes when you see all these people in needs and so many people in solidarity. You understand more about humanity, dignity and human beeings. You see that it's up to us to stand together as human beeings. Although it is sometimes hard work. Even though sometimes you would like to give up, because your own life seems to be to full of unsolved things. Even if you feel it is too much.
For them it's worse.

23.10.18

I learned a lot about solidarity, love, compassion and - again - solidarity the last days. I really will try hard to remember all these great international participants of a project we were running for 6 days, whenever I feel lonely and weak and overwhelmed by all the challenges we are facing every day in Greece, in Thessaloniki. Whenever I will feel too small, too weak, too insufficient and too „what the f*** am I doing here?“ I will try to remember these young people who showed each other that they care, that they learn every day to defend, to guarantee and to work as much as they can for humanity.

20.10.18

These days we have another international meeting with participants from Italy, Spain, Croatia, France, Serbia and Greece. We had the chance to watch a documentary and to speak afterwards with one of the producers. Asked, how he had the idea to make a movie about migrants in Greece 1922 and 2015, he mentioned that he also has a refugee background from father's and mother's side.
If he could feel that he has that background, someone of the group wanted to know. And he answered that it was more an unconscious and hidden feeling, that made him sensitive for that issue.
I didn't think about it for a long time. But today I understood again that it is over generations that we are linked to a migrant issue in our families. I always knew just very few about my grandparents from Ukraine and Russia, I met them hardly when I was a child, and not many people know about that fact in my life, as well as I never felt like with a „migration background“.
The last years I was thinking sometimes about it, because I always thought that one day I will live in East Europe, and now it is Greece. I started many years ago to study Russian, vicariously for my mother who lost in the age of three her mother's tongue and spoke since then only German. In our family the origin of my grandparents wasn't a big issue, but – like the movie maker said – it's more under the surface.
Maybe that's why I always knew that it's not about nationalities and passports, not about beeing a „local“, a „migrant“, a „refugee“ or whatever, but about human beeings.

In the movie in the moment when a migrant, living since more then 20 years in Greece, spoke exactly about that, I felt tears in my eyes. And that's what I am feeling every time when I see people acting in solidarity and in humanity and far away from these categories you cannot see when you look down on our little planet that we are sharing.

16.10.18

"Can you please check, how much sleeping bags cost in Greece?", asked me a friend from an organisation that supports my organisations here. Yesterday I was too tired. Today in the morning I was in a bad mood, because everything went wrong. I felt better when a friend asked me in the afternoon to go for a bike ride. When we met, I remembered the sleeping bags. "Can we...?!", I asked, and he replied cheerful: "To the China market". We cycled in that part of the city where many abandoned buildings and parks in which refugees are living. Ironically. We found a sleeping bag together with all camping and fishing and leisure stuff... Not anymore irony, but just sad that we don't need them for camping. 20€ they said. Cheap, but definitely too expensive for us. My friend discussed with the salesman in Urdu, both of them are from Pakistan. And after some sentences, in which I only understood "homeless", he murmured: "9€ per piece". I only wanted to check the price today, but I knew, I had to jump in the chance... 30 sleeping bags we bought. And found a solution to bring them to our place for the distribution (what I can tell you is that we did not take the three big boxes by bike...).
Next week we will take more. They promised us, they still have. I am only arranging the donations. And I think, camping will be for me in the future (and already for a while) other than it was before I used to see so many people on the flee in the streets and in the camps of Greece.

12.10.2018
Every three days we have 100 new registrations, said the interpreter at the Refugee Day Center.
Today we had 140 meals, but sometimes we also cook 200, said my friend who is working in the kitchen.
At the beginning I really try to fix everything here, but then I saw that it doesn't make sense because there are so many people every day and such a mess when they checked the clothes, admited the volunteer in the clothing store.
So many people, so many people, said the social worker.
The guy was so angry, because I could not give him what he needed, said a friend. From the three boxes of jackets we already distributed one to the people. It's great what we found in the donations you organised, but we need so much more more bagpacks, sleeping bags, clothes, shoes, underwear and actually everything.
...All I could do this afternoon, was to listen to these stories, these feelings, these problems. So many people in this city are doing a great work. It's never enough, that racks their nerves. I was glad that I could say today „have a nice weekend". I know, they need it.

11.10.18

Sitting on my balcony with a coffee in the morning is sometimes difficult and full of thoughts.
So many people (visitors, but also lovals, living not in the city center) say „But I don´t see refugees in the city. Where are they?“ I can tell them: they are living not far from my house in abandoned buildings and in parks. They are running in the morning to find a place for breakfast and later for lunch in the Day center, very close to my house. Come to my balcony and see them passing by.
While drinking my coffee on my balcony I don‘t feel guilty for these differences. But I feel so sad and angry (depending on my personal mood and schedule of the day) that there are so many differences and that so many people don‘t even realise how much they are living on the sunny side of life... it‘s always worth to compare our life not only with the lack of things, but also with the things we take for granted. A bed. A plug to load your phone in the night. A coffee in the morning. For many people in this city it‘s hard to reach it.

08.10.18
„We are registrating the people, but we don‘t have enough to give them.“ I heard this morning in the Refugee Day Center.
More people, much more people are coming. Much more people on the flee are in Thessaloniki. Somewhere in between the smell of unwashed people, the organising of donations, more people sleeping in the streets, seminars, workshops and meetings about refugees in Europe, and our own little and tired lifes we are going on, while they are waiting...

07.10.18

Erntedank Gottesdienst der Deutschen Evangelischen Gemeinde auf einem Biohof am Rande Thessalonikis. Dort habe ich schöne Erinnerungen an einen herrlichen Augusttag 2017 mit Spiel, Spaß, Tieren und Zusammensein mit zwei syrischen Frauen und ihren insgesamt 5 Kindern, in den Wohnungen der Gemeinde, auf die Familienzusammenführung wartend.
Heute lernte ich gleich zu Beginn einen älteren Mann kennen, der - ich weiß gar nicht wie - ziemlich schnell von sich aus auf das Thema Flucht kam, eingeleitet mit der gern genommenen Plattitüde "Das ist ein Problem mit den Flüchtlingen in Deutschland." gefolgt von "Es sind einfach zu viele, wir können ja nicht alle aufnehmen." sowie "Es gibt auch arme Deutsche und die bekommen nichts." Und auf meine relativ zügig vorgebrachte Unterbrechung, ich hätte heute morgen weniger Interesse an rassistischen Gesprächen denn überhaupt, kam das klassische "Ich bin ja kein Rassist, aber..."
Ich bat ihn, sich irgendwann mit der Fragestellung zu befassen, was er sich wünschte, wenn er fliehen müsste. Und auf kontinuierliches renitentes Stammtischgerede blieb mir nur die

Christ*innenkeule: Wir sind gehalten zu teilen, nicht uns zu bereichern und die anderen verhungern zu lassen - der alte Mann konterte gönnerhaft: er hätte in der Gemeinde bereits angekündigt, "eine arme griechische Familie unterstützen zu wollen".
Später wollte er wie ein Dreijähriger für seinen Beitrag am Buffet von mir gelobt werden. Ich lobte ihn.

10.10.18
Heute erfuhr ich dass er auf die Frage, ob er sich vorstellen könne eine der syrischen Frauen finanziell zu unterstützen, antwortete: „Um Himmels willen... nein. Nur eine griechische Familie."

04.10.18
When people are asking me, what I am doing here the whole day, I don't have good answers... I try to list the small things I am doing and always feel a bit ashamed. It is so little...
Yesterday and today I had German visitors, we spent some sightseeing and dinner together. In that time they saw me speaking in four languages with so many different people, organising on the phone donations and meetings, could see one of the projects where I am working... they have been impressed by Greek solidarity and hospitality... and gave me the feedback that even listening to my activities has been too much for them...
It helped me a bit not to feel very lazy and without greater tasks...

03.10.18
When I was writing a text on facebook about one year in Thessaloniki, 365 days full of... everything... when I was writing about difficulties I had, about knowing that it's the best place for me, that I was wondering why I decided something so tough, that nevertheless I never regreted my decision...
...then a friend from Syria replied... We know each other from the after-Idomeni time in Thessaloniki, last year he came with the relocation program of the EU to France, he started to work there recently, we can decide now to write in English or French, his French is already amazing... he replied:

„Really Thank you Verena. Once after another when you write posts like this, it gives me more 'push up' to keep going forward no matter how difficult it will be. Keep going my friend so can I."
Last week at an international meeting a young man from Hungary, origin from Afghanistan enriched our group, because he knows „both sides". And we mentioned that it is very helpul if we are working with minorities or people in needs to have them in our teams.
I could feel that the last year: I got closer to many refugees who applied here for asylum or already have, because sometimes we are struggling with the same issues.
„Keep going my friend, so can I." – we agreed.

And there is my syrian friend in Munich who made it already so much better with the language than I did here. He keeps going on, so can I. I keep going on, so my friend in France can. And I am sure, because he is going on, someone else can...

30.09.18

Young people, coming from Italy, Spain, Hungary and Greece. Sharing experiences, hopes and ideas in a project called „Cross the borders“. Are crossing the borders of their thinking every day while listening to each other, to new projects, to best practises.

I am horrified to face again and so concentrated the political situation, the situation of refugees and other minorities in our countries.

I remain hopeful and convinced that it‘s worth fighting to make things better, that we can overcome the borders in people‘s minds.

I always felt and viewed myself like an European. I really admire these young Europeans for their power to counter the political reality in our countries with their conviction of freedom, love, solidarity and humanity.

21.09.18

Διεθνής Ημέρα Ειρήνης. International Day of Peace.

There is no peace. People are still fleeing from war. People are still crossing the Mediterranean in flimsy boats, only to arrive in the European "hotspots".

2000 people should come from Moria camp to the mainland, they say. No one has an idea where they can stay. No one is speaking about the situation after that "feat": still about 8000 people in Moria camp. Still about 20.000 people on the Greek islands, still thousands of people on the flee in Greece. Because they are looking for what all of us we are looking for and all of us deserve...

BECAUSE THEY ARE LOOKING FOR A LIFE IN PEACE.

20.09.18

Slowly slowly we can speak with each other. His Greek is much more better than mine, he studied at the university every day, the whole winter long.

Today I met him with a sleeping boy on his arms. „Your baby?“ I asked very surprised. I did not know about kids. But what do I know about him? Not much. That he has asylum in Greece, that he’s from Palestine and that he is studying Greek. This. Not more. His nephew, I got to know. The son of his brother – and then I saw the pregnant woman with the boy on her hand. His brother came two weeks ago with his family.

„From Turkey?“ – „Yes.“ – „So, Evros?“ – „Yes.“ – „Where are they staying?“ – „In my house.“ – „How are you?“ – „It’s OK. Yes... well... it’s OK.“ – „Be brave!“ – „Thank you. You too.“

So many stories, we are so used to that. We know the questions, we know the answers. We don't know the feelings, we only can try to catch them. To catch the people with their concrete needs, but also – and not as a last resort – their feelings, their emotions and their fears.
I saw that the boy got heavy in his arms. We said goodbye. They are strong. They made it all to a safe country. They are brave. They have to be. May the children quickly learn the language of the country where they will grow up.

19.09.2018

I met her in the street and we had a short chat. „Everywhere they are stealing bikes. Even in the Netherlands. That's because there are so many foreigners."
She is a very simple person, she only speaks Greek, she cannot speak with the „foreigners" she met in the Refugee Day Center where she is helping as a volunteer.
I was so tired. But I was strong enough to say that it's not about the „foreigners". That there are good and bad people everywhere. I am so tired. Racism wherever you look. Explanation and adjustment needed wherever you listen. What I try to explain whenever I get into a similar situation or discussion is to see and to show how much these people already lost in their lives.
I went further, where a lot of these „foreigners" are sitting day by day in the street. They don't even have the power to do anything, definitely not to steal bikes. They are waiting. For whatever.

18.09.2018
I had a lot of pointless chats the last days. I wouldn't say they have been useless, because communication is always a good thing. But senseless have these chats definitely been. „You really should go to an English class", I said / wrote two times to people I really like. The first answered with a smiley, the other answered „No wifi home."
As long as I met the people every day, as long as we worked and lived together, it was OK - in a way. But to organise with difficulties a simple meeting for a coffee, can be exhausting.
My inbox is full of answers I don't understand. I understand the words, but not the meaning. Two of these people told me the other day, they have been English teachers in their home countries. What can I say... Maybe I have to overthink my standarts. Maybe I need more patience. Or maybe I have to study some more languages (what I did not wanted to do btw. Greek is the last language I will study).

15.09.18
Yesterday I had a picknick outside the airport of Thessaloniki. A friend of mine has been for a few days in Lesvos to identify a little better the needs on the island. He was accompagnied by a friend who was the first time in touch with that hudge needs of those refugees in Greece. So I asked him about his feelings (well, that's what trauma therapists are doing, hehe). After

struggling to find words, he told me about one situation in Moria camp that pointed out the whole situation and his feelings. He spoke about a desk in the camp, where volunteers try to help the people with their needs. How they went behind that desk, where the office of the organisation is. How he observed the situation, the chaos, the languages, the refugees an the volunteers. And how he recognized suddenly in this desk the world in which we are living: People on the one, and people on the other side of the desk. And there is no (easy) way to change the side.
He said that it was an eye-opener. And when he said it, I saw in his eyes all the pictures he had seen the days before. I saw the sadness, the helplessness, the anger and the shame that many people can live a good life, based on the fact that they are born in another country, in another life.
There was nothing I could add. That's how I have seen many times the situation while working and living with people on the flee.
Many more things we were talking about while having our picknick outside the airport of Thessaloniki, where they took some hours later a plane to Germany. Showing their german passport. Leaving all the people on the island, in Greece, in the streets and camps of Thessaloniki.
And I took the bus back to the city. Glad that I have the opportunity to be at least sometimes on the other side of the desk, to be together with the people in needs. And to be also on this side of the desk to be together with the people who are tired from the work with people in needs.

12.09.18
Another summer in Thessaloniki
Sometimes in the evenings, I am wondering „did we really speak about all this in Greek" – and we did:
About the tiredness many people are feeling after three years of crisis situation in Idomeni, the camps, the streets, the work in the organisations, the work with international volunteers, who don't understand that it's not only a game, but the reality here in Greece.
About the neverending needs of sleeping bags, backpacks, underwear, men's clothes and shoes... always shoes...
About the health problems, all the refugees have. And that it will cost Europe a lot of money that they allow this situation, in which refugees are, living under inhuman and unhealthy conditions for years.
About the tiredness again...
One conversation I remember in English: a young woman asked me „You did not work here for a while, where have you been?" – from all the organisations where I am working, I know an incredible number of people that I wasn't sure when and where I met her... But just before

she left I remembered that it was her second day in the camp, my only day in the womens safe space, one year ago. We could speak a bit about her life, her despair and lost hopes. Maybe she is also asking herself in that moment about what she spoke today in Urdu and what in English.

11.09.18

The staircase is always full of people. Mostly young men, waiting for the lunch. But more and more also waiting for the entrance to the floor with the clothes. Because the elevator is too small and slowly for all the 7 floors and there are too many people, I am usually walking - along all these people... the last months I could not look anymore at all their faces. It's too much, too long time. Sometimes there's someone who recognizes me, we have a short chat, there in the stairwell. Sometimes I can help with information. Sometimes I can listen their stories, but more and more I am so tired about bad English and all the "not enough". There are not enough sleeping bags, not enough underwear, not enough showers, not enough washing mashines. Not enough shoes, not enough time, not enough... anyway, there is at least humanity and dignity as much as possible in that situation which we are in...

I forgot my sunglasses in the fifth floor. The elevator was again somewhere between 5th and 7th. I went on foot up. And down. Again and again along all these people. Feeling so sad for them. So angry about the situation. So tired after these years. Feeling also guilty that I can go some streets further in my own apartment with shower and washing mashine, full fridge, Greek course book, and my own life. But first of all so sad for them - who had hopes before they left their homes. Hopes, that end in the streets of this city, and in that staircase.

02.09.18

„Do you know someone in Croatia?“

He wrote.

I know people there, and weeks ago, when he started his way to Europe, I told him to write me if he is in trouble.

„I am back in Bosnia. I went to Croatia, but police police catch us.“

He wrote.

Pushback to Bosnia, that’s how border police calls it.

I have solidarity friends in Croatia, but how can they help him? How can we help him? We are no traffickers, we have no idea which border crossing is the best, if to take a train, a taxi, to walk.

„Yeah, here smugglers ask minimum 2000 euro. I ask from many, they ask same money, but I don't have that much.“

He wrote.

I know that. I wrote him again, that this is the reason why we advise to stay in Greece and to start the future here, nevertheless it’s so difficult in this country.

„Yeah, I know, but its very difficult for me to make documents in Greece I tried many time so that's why I came here.“
He wrote.

...

Today I understood once again how desperate people on the flee are, who stuck in Greece - or worse who fled a „hotspot“ on the islands. How little they understood about the European asylum laws.
I understood how human traffickers are making wrong promises and how the new European Union agreements only help them to get rich at the expense of desperated people.
Today I was helpless again and understood again that we cannot do so much. That we are doomed to accept that our work for humanity is always only a drop in the ocean.
Today I was glad that we have a „route of solidarity“ all over Europe, so I did not have to cope alone with it.

30.08.18

Sometimes these days in the evening I fall into bed and think „Wow, I spoke the whole day Greek. Wow, it’s exhausting. When will this stop? When can I relax?“ – and then I realise: it will not stop, this is my life now.
It’s exhausting, but great. It’s great, because it is my life. My only little life here. My invaluable life.
Yesterday when I was cycling to another part of town to meet a friend, I came along the train station. In the park behind I saw some of the guys we met last winter. Sitting, smoking cigarettes, waiting that the day will pass. Waiting what? That a smuggler will bring them to Europe? To go to Germany? To waste their time there also?
I am getting so unbelievable sad when I see people wasting their time instead of starting their future. Μία ζωή την έχουμε, we only have one life, we say.
Let’s use this life. Let’s not only sit around, let’s start to study, start with the language... so many contacts could be better, if people would start to study at least English to have a common language.
It’s exhausting. But it’s worth it.

28.08.18
Die Welt ist aus den Fugen...
denken wir und fühlen wir in diesen Zeiten...
Und doch, wenn wir in die Geschichte schauen, stellen wir fest, dass Menschen immer Kriege gegeneinander geführt haben und dass Menschen schon immer gezwungen waren, aus ihrer Heimat zu fliehen.
Wir sind nun eben mittendrin und nach 70 Jahren Frieden in weiten Teilen Europas, nach Beendigung des Kalten Krieges und dem Fall der Berliner Mauer sowie des Eisernen Vorhangs in Osteuropa, sind wir irritiert.
Wir haben uns gemütlich eingerichtet in Deutschland mit dem „bergauf“, bei dem alles immer besser wurde nach Beendigung des durch Deutschland begonnenen 2. Weltkrieges.

Und nun? Es stagniert, es geht nicht mehr bergauf.
Es wird von uns verlangt, dass wir teilen. Dass wir Verantwortung übernehmen.
„Wir“?
Wir ist nicht nur „Deutschland“, oder „Die Deutschen“. Es ist jede*r einzelne von uns.
„Wenn mehr Leute dazukommen, bau eine längere Tafel und nicht einen Zaun“, ist ein Satz, der seit einiger Zeit schon durch die sozialen Netzwerke kursiert. „Wenn jeder gibt was er hat, dann werden alle satt“ ist das Lied meiner Kindheit dazu.
In Griechenland funktioniert es in weiten Teilen so.
Gerade erst hat Europa begeistert verkündet, dass die Krise in Griechenland vorbei ist. Davon merken wir hier nichts. Wir bauen weiterhin an längeren Tafeln hier in Thessaloniki. Wir teilen weiterhin, wir unterstützen einander.
Ich habe zum Glück auch weiterhin Spenden aus Deutschland und kann unterstützen: Die Gemeinde mit Lebensmitteln für die Menschen, die gar nichts haben. Geflüchtete Menschen und Griech*innen. Ich kann die Projekte unterstützen, die mit geflüchteten Menschen arbeiten. Einzelne Menschen, die hier auf der Straße leben und hoffen, irgendwann weiterziehen zu können. Nach Deutschland wollen viele, weil 2015 in der Zeit der offenen Grenzen viele Menschen aus Syrien, dem Irak, Afghanistan oder anderen Kriegsregionen genutzt hatten, um in ein sicheres Land zu ziehen. Sie wollen wieder als Familie zusammen leben, sie wollen versuchen, sich eine Zukunft aufzubauen.
Ich lese von großen Zahlen junger Menschen die nach Deutschland geflüchtet sind, die in Ausbildung sind. Meine syrischen Freunde in München sprechen inzwischen C1 Deutsch, werden nun beginnen zu studieren.
Ich sehe in Griechenland einen pakistanischen Freund, der Arbeit gefunden hat und nun seinen Lebensunterhalt verdient, während er auf das Ergebnis seines Asylantrags wartet.
Alle zusammen hatten genau das: Eine längere Tafel an die sie sich setzen konnten. Menschen, die ihnen das Ankommen und das Zusammenleben erleichtert haben. Menschen, die Zäune und Mauern abgebaut haben.
Das wünsche ich mir, das erbitte ich wenn ich bete:
Dass wir unsere Mauern im Kopf abbauen und die Zäune um unsere Herzen zerschneiden. Dass wir eine längere Tafel bauen und Menschen um uns herum anregen, teilzuhaben. Sie einladen und ihnen zeigen, dass es das Leben bereichert, wenn wir teilen.
Dass die griechische Bevölkerung weiterhin die Kraft und letzte (finanzielle und materielle) Reserven zur Verfügung hat, um weiterhin teilen zu können.
Dass sich immer mehr Menschen gegen die erstarkende Rechte stellen.
Dass wir uns gegen die erstarkende Rechte stellen.
Wir. Dass wir für Frieden beten in unseren Kirchen und auf die Straße gehen für Menschenrechte - die für alle Menschen gelten.

19.08.18

Fortress Europe: so many borders. So many ways. And no way...

There is that young guy. I met him in winter when he stranded with a lot of other pakistan guys in Thessaloniki. He was the one who could not go to the asylum office to get his white card, because he came from the island of Lesvos, where he had given his fingerprints and where he had to stay in the „hotspot“ camp of Moria.

Then he went to Athens, where he knew people, where he could stay and find some black work that a friend organised for him.

During my time in Germany some weeks ago, he wanted to go back to Thessaloniki and the next I heard was tonight, when he wrote me from Bosnia. „I have plan for germany need your prayers.“

European asylum law is awful: he crossed already all these boarders and gave a lot of money to people, helping him with that. He is since weeks in fears and stress and on the flee...

If - if - he will make it to Germany, he will stay there for a while in a camp, will wait some years, only to be sent back to Greece, where he first gave his fingerprints.

From my experience I know that an illegal life in Germany, work and living and daily life, is much more stressful than illegal life in Greece.

What I am praying? That he always will find people who will help him to stand this difficulties. And that the moment when he will understand, that for him there is no way to get asylum in Germany will not be too hard for him.

He is such a smart guy. But in Greece there is no future for all these people who arrived here and have - by law - applied for asylum in this country, where they put their first step into Europe. And where is no way.

18.08.18

„The private is political“

We are living in times where we have to be political. We cannot withdraw into our private spheres in times like these. We have to say what we are thinking. We have to be loud against them who say inhuman and racist slogans. We have to stand together. In families, groups, communities, in congregations and in our neighborhood. We have to speak against far right slogans. And against every single little begin of any racism. Nip this in the bud!

Be clear.
Be loud.
Be human.
Love.
Don‘t be afraid.
Don‘t think you are not heard.

Don‘t say „it‘s private“.
The private is political.

17.08.18

Such a nice group... 20 young people who have been part of a project called #bisansmittelmeer („tillthemediteranean“) http://bisansmittelmeer.de. They came from the north of Germany by bus, following the Balkan route in the opposite direction. On their way they met people who are working with refugees, crossed borders, met refugees and saw some organisations. And then they arrived at the sea, in Thessaloniki, before going back via Italy with the ferry.
We hosted them for some hours and had kind of a workshop together to speak about people on the flee in Greece, a country in an economic crisis.
They are amazing girls and boys, beeing so much interested and involved in the topic. Full of questions and full of their own thoughts and reflections. Full of emotions and of concrete ideas, full of personal and political questions.
I really enjoyed that encounter so much. They inspired me. I love it to meet people, and I am glad everytime when I can give information about our situation. It was another gift in my work here.

16.08.18

Foreigners amongst themselves

Today I met a friend, one I have not seen since more than one year. He is with the EU relocation program in the Netherlands since then, and now on holiday in Thessaloniki. We have been glad to meet each other and spent some time with coffee on my balcony. He also got half a year ago an apartment in Amsterdam and started to study dutch language. We talked about that: houses and home. Language, foreign language and beeing a foreigner. Feeling at home where you are coming from or where you stay now.
It was so nice and beneficial for me to speak with someone who can understand a bit some of my efforts. It was so good for him to speak about his problems and tell me about his life in the Netherlands, his feelings here back in Thessaloniki, where he used to live more than one year, and about his family in Syria. We spoke about plans, about life, about joy and difficulties. And actually we spoke about how we can stand the challenges that we face as foreigners in a country.
And the most beautiful sentence he said to me after having the random encounter at the Refugee Day Center, where we celebrated together the birthday of a greek fried, this most beautiful sentence for me was: „I saw a Greek and not a German when I saw you today“. And I promised to come in a year or so when he speaks dutch to see him „as a Dutch“.
I needed that so much. And I guess he also. It’s so important to share thoughts and feelings with someone who understands you...

08.08.2018

I am tired.

After three years work with refugees in Germany and Greece, after so many camps, after 1 1/2 years with Greek people who are working with refugees... after studying trauma therapy, after speaking about trauma and fleeing and about refugees in Greece, after more than two years trying to write about the situation in Greece in order to inform as good as possible... after sorting so many stupid donations, so many „but we don't listen about refugees in Greece, must be ok, hmm?!", after so many explanations, so many people, so many stories, so many men, women, children, families, nationalities, languages, destinies, sadness, grief, problems...

After going since one year every two months for a few days to Germany to work for money to finance my work and my life here... after one week beeing at home and trying to find out why I cannot leave the house and cannot speak or listen or do anything... after so many feelings and emotions of other people...

I start to feel myself:

I am tired.

26.07.18

Meine Kollegin wusste zunächst nicht, warum ich dieses Photo gemacht habe als wir gemeinsam im Zug von Seminar zu Seminar reisten...

In Griechenland sind die Menschen froh, wenn sie in einem Container schlafen können, so viele leben in Zelten oder ohne jeden Schutz. Diese Zelte werden manchmal größer, wenn plötzlich jemand realisiert, dass die kleinen Campingzelte inadäquat sind. Die großen Zelte sind es auch, aber sie sind besser.

Ein Container ist auch nicht das, was ich mir für die Menschen wünsche. Aber selbst wenn... was auch immer ich füttere, es wird nie zu einem Container oder sogar zu einem adäquaten Haus für die Menschen, die geflüchtet sind um einen guten Platz zum Leben zu finden... alles was mir zu nähren bleibt, ist die Hoffnung. Für mich und für andere.

17.07.18

That's where it started. In this hall and around in Munich at the main station I know every square meter, every place where to throw away left water. Where a plug is. Where whatever is.

It's three years ago, that thousands of people on the flee arrived here. Until today I did not find the courage to look at that place.

It was good to come back today for some minutes while I was waiting for my train, bringing me away from Munich, where I only landed by airplane. I will not come back until

next March. I am now at home in Thessaloniki, where nothing stopped. Where the places where refugees arrive are not empty. Where the work goes on for all the people who care...
Hier hat es angefangen. In dieser Halle am Münchner Hauptbahnhof kenne ich jeden Quadratmeter, jede Möglichkeit Wasser wegzugießen, jede Steckdose, jedes alles.
Es ist drei Jahre her, dass tausende von Menschen auf der Flucht hier ankamen. Bis jetzt hatte ich nicht den Mut gefunden, hier wieder herzukommen.
Es war gut, für einige Minuten hier zu sein, während ich auf meinen Zug wartete, der mich wieder weg von München, wo ich nur gelandet war, bringen würde. Ich werde erst wieder im kommenden März in München sein. Zuhause bin ich jetzt in Thessaloniki, wo noch nichts geendet hat. Wo die Plätze mit geflüchteten Menschen nicht leer sind. Wo die Arbeit für die, die sich um Menschen auf der Flucht bemühen, nicht zuende ist.

15.07.18

„You know, I like to have a good life. I need money for cigarettes, I don't wanna wear any clothes, but good ones. I want to work, but I also want a life".

I know. I guess, it's not very rarely. I guess, most of the people would like to have a good life. I mean everyone deserves a good life.
Unfortunately he is from Algeria and is living now in Greece – both countries in which a good life with material prosperity is not really capitalesed...
I wish him that he does not try it again to go to Germany. Last time the police took him in Serbia and sent him back to Greece.
Here he has a place to live and some money. On the flee, there is no way for a good life. Only for survive...

12.07.18

Who am I to say „Maybe they don't need it"? – I don't know enough about the people popping up and asking for diapers, baby milk or food. Most of them are nice anyhow, only a few demandingly. But actually all of them are in needs. All of them need more than they have for their daily life. Many times I feel bad, when we cannot give them what they need. Many times I feel sorry, like a few days ago, when the translating son almost cried when I had to tell him that we don't have diapers. And sometimes I feel stressed, because I have a strange feeling and I am wondering if they really have a baby – but who am I to say „maybe they don't need it"?
... maybe it's only to make me feel better in a bad situation. In a situation, where people have to ask for the normal needs, and we cannot fullfill them...

11.07.18

As more and more international volunteers from a grassroot organisation are showing up at the social space, the more I am wondering why they are here. Or no, wait, why they are HERE. Some of them are interested enough to ask a few things – about the place, about the refugees here... and slowly slowly I have to face that they have not at all any idea about European refugee policy, especially about the situation of refugees in Greece, no

idea about the economic and politic situation here, no idea about the borders, the laws and agreements and everything, that is the basis and the reason for our work... They came accidental to Greece... so did I... and I am always glad if they are asking, it means, they start to be interested in the place where they are cutting vegetables and filling up meals for the refugees in the streets of Thessaloniki...

07.07.18

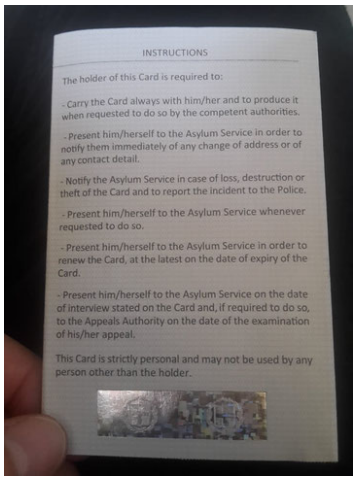
This afternoon my both worlds came together in another way. „We have been together in the camp in Munich 2 3/4 years ago, you remember me?", he wrote, a young man from Syria. When I saw his profile pic, I remembered him. He still lives in a camp. In the „paradise Germany" from which so many people are dreaming, there are no houses. There is no time to study the language while working to pay it, because after getting asylum in Germany in many parts of the country you have to pay for your place in the refugee camp.
Anyhow, he asked me for a friend, speaking now C1 German, waiting since 2 years for his wife and the children who are still in Greece. In Thessaloniki. His idea is to
come to Greece and work here, to be together with them, because he realises that the family reunification is too difficult and can take more time.
It showed me again that we are talking about individuals and individual stories behind the discussions, european politicians and right-wing people are having. I guess I will meet that woman and the children the next days, bringing again my two worlds together, my work in the camps in Munich and my work with refugees here. I guess we, simple people have to do that. We, european citizens have to bring people and worlds together. Because for politics individuals don‘t matter...

06.07.18
Yesterday about 200 people left Diavata camp and have been transfered to camp Nea Kavala. Although they are bigger, they still have to live in tents...
If the calculation of the camp management is right, there are now about 1800 peole in Diavata. Still 1000 more than the camp is made for.
New arrivals will find a field where the people that left lived for some months. How to put the new tents here?
We really believe that all human beeings deserve dignity and humanity. Here around Thessaloniki it‘s difficult for refugees to find these days...

05.07.18
For the children in the camp it was a normal day. Like the day before and the next day. For us it was a special day: the last day together in the camp.
After two years and some months, the project ends. For the employees and for the volunteers.

I really appreciated how we, 7 people from Antigone, made that normal day to some special moments with the kids, without beeing too selfish and „sad for us“, but to make them some really good moments.
Maybe for me it was the most easy: I already had to say goodbye three times in Diavata, everytime when I had to go back to Germany the last years. I mean, you don‘t get used to goodbyes. But you know you will survive them.
So do the children.
We went back to the city. Relieved that we made it well. Sad that we have to let the children now. And all alone, to cope with it, scattered in different directions like the balloons with the wishes of the children we let fly before...

02.07.18



INSTRUCTIONS

The holder of this Card is required to:

- Carry the Card always with him/her and to produce it when requested to do so by the competent authorities.

- Present him/herself to the Asylum Service in order to notify them immediately of any change of address or of any contact detail.

- Notify the Asylum Service in case of loss, destruction or theft of the Card and to report the incident to the Police.

- Present him/herself to the Asylum Service whenever requested to do so.

- Present him/herself to the Asylum Service in order to renew the Card, at the latest on the date of expiry of the Card.

- Present him/herself to the Asylum Service on the date of interview stated on the Card and, if required to do so, to the Appeals Authority on the date of the examination of his/her appeal.

This Card is strictly personal and may not be used by any person other than the holder.

„You house?“ - „No.“ - „Camp?“ - „No.“ - „Ooo ooo...“
A dialogue between an old lebanese and a young pakistan guy this morning.
The one sorting his backpack and appearing to study some Greek. The other with a lot of medication, he does not know for or against what, but every morning he is going to the Doctors of the world.
Both beeing as early as possible in the social space, ringing the bell at excactly 10 when there is the officially opening.
„Efcharisto shoukran. Parakalo afwan“ the old guy says. I teach him since a few weeks four words. The first two he got – most of the time: Thank you and please. We are still working on the words in greek for hot and cold.
The young guy is doing now for what he really came so early: „I cook pasta“, he says to me when I come in the kitchen.
Two of many many people, living in this city, living with us and trying to survive.

27.06.18
Fleeing and childhood
There was that girl... maybe 13 years old. Maybe arabic, maybe kurdish... I already saw her on the 5th floor of the Day Center at the clothes, where she was carrying a newborn on her arms. When I came down later, she was sitting on the sidewalk. Still with the baby on her arms. The bottle with milk empty. Her eyes also. Her mother beside her with a pram and a maybe 4 or 5 year old boy.
I don‘t know what to wish: that she has to do her mother‘s job, because she is too tired, or that it‘s her own baby. The face of the newborn was still crumbled... and astonished... Both faces - the one of the young girl and of the mother have been dead and far away.
I am not proud of it, but I have to confess that this is what I did: going quick far away... away from these eyes and that ended childhood.

...some minutes after writing that text I checked my bank account... and found not only a huge donation from one of the bravest and strongest people I know, but also a message included that encouraged me...

Buchung	Wertstellung	Verwendungszweck	Betrag
27.06.2018	27.06.2018	GUTSCHRIFT [redacted] Danke, dass du die Kraft und Liebe aufbringst. Und weiter machst und es immer wieder schaffst ein Gluck fur einzelne Menschen zu sein	500,00 EUR

21.06.18

He was drawing like half an hour on the small A5 paper. I was impressed from the beginning, because I could see HOW he was drawing, which intensity his face and his hand showed. So I asked him if I can take a picture, and he came to me when he was ready and I took a photo from the final paper that shows his little - maybe 7 years old - world. I asked him, and in Greek and English and with sounds and hands I understood that the red thing at the left is a sheep, a greek sheep. The tents, one under water, the rain, the sun and the moon was easy. The banana, the apple and the tomato also. The boat he was drawing wasn't his boat, but one he saw on the sea when he came to Greece. From whom and where the cars are I could not find out, but one of them is carying the boxes and bags they packed at home. In Syria, in Irak, I did not ask him, I already wanted to know that much in that short and quiet and slow conversation. Beside the red sheep there is a book. I guess he misses school. In the camp there is no school anymore, and if there will be again, only for the „old" residents, not the new ones, he belongs to. The slider from the playground where we do our activities, surrounded by tents, he also put on the paper. What I could not find out at all has been this: who are the two people... you? No! Mama? No. Baba? No. Family? No. - I never will know... he smiled shy and took the paper and went away... somewhere to his tent in that small place with more than 2000 people, they call „accommodation center", where children grow up in the smell of burned plastic and with no education and not enough everything, but with their little world in their minds and hearts - and this one on a small paper...

21.06.18

At a certain point in my life I learned that there is no „should, would, could"... But sometimes I am still thinking „The children shouldn't grow up in a place like that. I would like that we could change the situation."

There is no subjunktive in real life, so I try to do what could be done in real life: be with them some hours and make their real world for some minutes a little bit more nice...

16.06.18

Gestern nachmittag einen Workshop gehalten: "Flüchtlinge an Europas Außengrenze". Dazwischen Spenden zwischen Deutschland und Griechenland organisiert. Eine Bekannte, wir kennen uns kaum, mochten uns aber, nach dem Kennenlernen in Thessaloniki nun also in der Schweiz getroffen gelernt und bereichernde Gespräche gehabt, unerwartet eine Geldspende und schweizer Schokolade in die Hand gedrückt bekommen. Abends bei einer Podiumsdiskussion zu Flucht und Migration teilgenommen. Mein Bild zur Schweizer Migrationspolitik verbessert, eine kluge und wunderbar humorvolle Nigerianerin kennen gelernt. Leider zu wenig Zeit für mehr Gespäche, die wohlwollende Diskussion aber weiterhin im Kopf. Auf dem Weg zum Bahnhof von zwei Teilnehmerinnen der Veranstaltung begleitet worden. "Ich zahle das Ticket. Das hab ich schon entschieden", sagte die junge Frau, auf dem Weg zur couchsurfing Übernachtung, und zog wieselflink das Ticket am Bahnautomaten, so dass ich gar nicht anders konnte, als es fassungslos und dankbar entgegen zu nehmen. Die wunderschönen Blumen, die ich geschenkt bekommen hatte, habe ich an dann an eine Frau im Zug hinter mir verschenkt, aus pragmatischen, radl- und flugtechnischen Gründen. Im kurzen Gespräch stellte sich heraus, dass ihr Sohn heute für ein Jahr auf Weltreise geht und sie etwas Aufmunterung gut gebrauchen konnte. Angekommen, das geliehene Rad im Fahrradschuppen abgestellt.
"Solidarity rocks", steht auf meiner Trinkflasche. Jep. Aber sowas von!
Lasst uns einfach teilen, was wir haben!