

## **LUKA NEVER ARRIVED IN THE PROMISED LAND**

Once upon a time, many years ago, a young man, called Luka, lived in a country whose name I don't want to remember. There wasn't any future there, more than eleven years in a civil war, the Ebola virus and floods had decimated the population considerably. There was a strong economic inequality: power and wealth were concentrated in the hands of a few families. The rest of the people barely survived by farming or extracting mineral resources.

His father passed away with the gun in his hand in the trenches. Shortly, his mother contracted malaria. She arranged his sister Hana's marriage, a nine-year-old, to a man in the capital under the promise that her husband would pay for the medicines needed to cure the disease. Within a few months, however, the sick woman died. Years later, Hana would be repudiated.

After working on his family's fields for a lustrum, Luka, along with a friend, decided to go into diamond mining. He thought that if he kept mining at a high level for two years, and saved a great amount of his wages, he could try to leave the country in search for something better.

The journey took two months. The goal was to reach a country washed by the waters of the Kind Sea and from there cross to the Promised Land. A good part of the route was done at night, so as not to fall into the hands of the police and bring his attempt to an abrupt end. Along the way, he met people from other countries who, like him, were escaping violence and poverty looking for something better. Some spoke French, English or German, others only their own dialect, some had already travelled and crossed borders, other ones had never left their hamlet... But all bore the marks of fear and hope on their faces. In their long conversations, they often complained that their siblings had nothing to eat, that there was no medicine in their countries, that many children, especially girls, never attended school, that life expectancy was barely 35 years. Some said that their family had sold many possessions to pay for their journey and they could not disappoint them. It was complicated to endure all that time. He had to cross desert areas, going for up

to two days without drinking, where he came across corpses half-buried in the sand. Sometimes, he had to hide on wooded areas.

All that effort had paid off. Luka had managed to reach the shore of the Kind Sea and board one of the rafts used by the mafias to transport migrants to the Promised Land. But he wasn't lucky. The boat capsized and the soldiers working as coastguards, pointing their guns at them, forced them out. Luka could never shake off the image of a young woman with a child in her arms who was left to drown even though she kept screaming.

They were taken to a detention centre in a town at war with nearby towns. The guards beat them inside. He could not believe his eyes: people piled on the floor, sick people, children, women, men, grandparents, all of them skinny and an unbearable smell to faeces, urine and sweat permeating the grotesque scene. He was still confused by the situation when Fatma, a young woman from his village, appeared in front of him. She was so deteriorated that he didn't recognize her at first, but she insisted reminding him of the events they had both experienced. The girl told him that women who travelled by themselves were harassed and sexually abused day after day.

As night fell, two guards called Fatma. She got up to accompany them, but Luka, wanting to protect her, hit one of them. Five more arrived and, with their truncheons, left her defender unconscious on the floor and she was dragged behind the metal door, screaming loudly, until she disappeared.

The next day, a van took Luka and other migrants to a desert town. There they were sold at broad daylight. Luka was sold into slavery in a house where more than thirty other people were also being held. As he had no family, his new owner could not ransom him, so he forced him to do hard labour to get a return on his investment. After six months, Luka died of exhaustion and starvation.

At the time, the following reports appeared in the print media:

“The researchers of a detailed study financed with funds from the Promised Land Union stated that: “Union leaders had been patching up to provide immediate responses to the nervousness of their electorates who allegedly perceive the growing migratory flows ... as an existential threat” (Daily A, March 17<sup>th</sup> 2018)

“The president of the Parliament of the Promised Land Union wants a migration agreement with country X similar to that reached with country Y to establish refugee camps on the Desolate Continent” (Daily ZZ, August 17<sup>th</sup> 2017)

“Migrant Deaths drop in 2018, but the Kind Sea is still lethal: 4503 people died or went missing this year while trying to migrate, 35,9% down from 2017 (TTT Television Network, December 30<sup>th</sup> 2018)

And bunting, bunting, this tale is over.

**“Stories without Mufflers” (2006 - )**