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South Africa – Land of my Youth

Even though I was born in Warsaw, Poland and spent the first ten years of my life there, the days of my youth and coming of age happened to be in the Union (today: Republic) of South Africa, land of unusual natural beauty and unusual social conflicts. This is the country that forever will be remembered for its inhumane system called apartheid, today only history. Apartheid in the Afrikaans language means separation. My awareness and my independent thinking in categories no longer childish, however not yet mature, were shaped by what I saw around me. And I can say that I saw a lot and learned a lot. This stage of my life had substantial bearing on all that happened later. First of all, as a child I learned to speak fluently in English which later gave me a privileged position on the job market. Besides that, I grew and learned in a non-communist country which gave me a totally different perspective after I went back to Poland. Last and this is the most important, as a young man I came to witness great social injustice directed against other people. Myself, having a white skin, I belonged to the privileged class, but I saw what was going on. This awareness weighed heavily on my way of seeing this world for the rest of my life.

I am considering all that is happening in the world today, as well as history and social relations in the southernmost country on the African continent, moreover, such as they were in the 1950s. That does not constitute breaking news. Yet hopefully my grandchildren may find it interesting to read about their grandfather - Dziadzio - when he was very young and how events around shaped him. It may be interesting to other readers, too. I hope it makes you tolerant to all people of all race.

When I was a small boy in post-war Poland, I had two great wishes. One was to see a real, black-skinned man, which then and there was total rarity and the other one - to fly on a real plane. True, I once did see one black man on the main street of Warsaw but only for a brief moment. I was expecting to see someone very exotic, but he was dressed in a winter overcoat like everyone else, carried a briefcase and he was walking with another man, who was white and spoke to him in some language that I didn't understand. I wanted to follow him, but my Mommy urged me in a different direction.

Very soon afterwards, I had both my two wishes come true almost at the same time. How did that happen? During the war which raged in Europe when I was very small, my father a reserve military officer, was killed, so I was brough up only by one parent and it was very hard for her. My father's relatives had emigrated to South Africa even before the war and after the war they began searching through agencies like the Red Cross for any surviving members of the family in Poland. They found us and began efforts to bring us to South Africa. It wasn't easy and it took four years to get permission from the then Communist government in Poland to emigrate. Two days prior to my tenth birthday we left Poland by train to Paris from where, some weeks later, we were put on a flight to Johannesburg in South Africa.

In those times passenger planes could not fly long distances non-stop and our plane landed en route in Leopoldville (today it's called Kinshasa). We were told that the journey could not be continued immediately because they found some technical fault which needed repair. These were times long before anyone attempted to hijack a plane, so there were none of the security checks we see at airports today. When we got off the plane, it was not through a jetway which was unknown at the time but down steps from the plane's door directly onto the airfield apron. There we saw several ebony-skinned boys coming up to us and helping passengers with their luggage. Mommy gave then some coins and I could see their very happy faces. All the passengers were put up for the night in a hotel where we had to sleep under a mosquito net. The next morning, we could resume out journey. When we were taken by bus to the airport, we saw the same boys. They were slightly older than me and thus I looked up to them. When they came near, I shook hands with each one to greet them.

They said something in a language I could not understand and smiled. When several hours later, at the end of our journey, we were hugging aunt and uncle and their daughter who was my age, I boasted that I had already seen black boys and made friends with them and even shook hands with them, which I considered to be a great honour, uncle gave me a more serious look and answered: "In this country, the white man does not shake hands with black people". This was my first lesson about racial discrimination which, as a child, I neither new nor understood.

Not that uncle should be considered a racist. As an architect, he built many schools for the black people and in my presence, he was very civil towards an African contractor. Saying the above quoted words to me at the airport upon our arrival, he simply expressed a certain obvious fact. I recall how once John, a servant, caused some small damage to a car while reversing it out of a narrow garage and when some people came from the insurance company, uncle was protecting John. John and Anna, faithful and likeable servants, lived in free-standing outside shacks in uncle's backyard. The law prevented them from sleeping in the same building as white inhabitants of the house.

My first becoming aware of the problem of apartheid came when I was talking to John, having mastered English to the point of being able to keep up a conversation. John told me that his people could not live as equals to whites, that they were treated badly by the authorities and that they had no rights in the country. I still remember one sentence that he said to this day: "We must say: public".

The fact that at school to which I was sent there were only white children, somehow did not arouse my attention or surprise at that time. Maybe I did not give it much thought because in Poland, where I began my schooling, there were only white children, so at least from this point of view, nothing changed. The school was situated in a neat building, the children received a small bottle of milk and a fruit each day. This was paid for by the government. It was only some years later that I went together with uncle to the site of some construction in one of the Black townships, composed of ramshackle corrugated iron shacks inhabited by the citizens of the same country. Of course, the government did not consider them citizens. I happened to see a school there. The children sat on long benches and not like we who had twin desks and they did not have books to write in (which we got free from the school). These kids only had small slates on which they wrote with pieces of chalk. The class had no walls except for one, the rest being blankets hung as separations on a construction of tall pipes stuck in the ground. One side was left open to let daylight in because there were no windows. We, in our school, wore neat uniforms, each school had its own school colours with the school's emblem on the front jacket pocket. These black children were dressed in very poor clothing. I could see with my own eyes the extreme poverty and how thin these kids were.

And there was one other thing I learned very quickly. In children's parks where I still liked to go and play, on every swing and slide one could read the sign in two languages (English and Afrikaans): "European children only - blanke kinders aleen", warning that only "European", meaning only White children may play here. The restriction also applied to "mixed race" children, as well as Indian and even Chinese.

When in 1952 I could speak English fluently, South Africa celebrated its Tricentenary (you will see later in this text that its history began in 1652). I was taking part, along with the entire school and many other schools in a huge celebration in a public stadium, and the kids were taught to sing a song, the words of which I still remember:

South Africa, South Africa
Thy children sing of thee.
Our lovely land, our fatherland
Where all is bright and free!

Already then, I began to observe and understand what was going on around me and I asked myself the question why this country in which I lived was so free only for White people.

But I also became aware of another truth. Those Europeans, as they were calling themselves, were neither English, nor Dutch, not even colonial authorities from any other land. South Africa was a racist country, but it was not a colony. When, some years later the African continent was beginning to shake off colonial rule, from the Belgian Congo (today: Zaire) Belgians could return to their

country and the same could be done by the Portuguese from Mozambique. The English colonists could leave Kenya and return to their homeland. White South Africans of Anglo-Saxon origin did not consider themselves English, although the British throne was still traditionally considered as sovereign, much the same as in Canada. White people of Dutch origin, the descendants of the Boers, who called themselves Afrikaners did not consider themselves Dutch either. They considered themselves to be white South Africans and this was their fatherland. They had nowhere to return to. This land was where their ancestors had been born, here was where they had fought, and here was where they felt at home. They had no other land which they could call their own. How was that possible?

To understand this, we must begin with a history lesson about South Africa. I learned this history many years ago in a South African school. It is both romantic, and heroic, full of great ideas and - as everywhere - with no shortage of human cruelty and meanness. But it helps to understand the mentality of people who live there. So, let's go back a few centuries in a time capsule.

Since the second half of the 15th century, Portuguese sailors have been trying to reach India and China using a route around the African continent. In the year 1488 Bartolomeo Diaz reaches the southernmost tip of Africa but turns back because of severe storms. Four years later Vasco da Gama sails around this peninsula and goes on, encircling Africa and eventually reaching India. Having successfully and safely surrounded this southernmost tip and convinced himself that the route from now on leads East, happily calls this place Cabo de Bona Esperanza. In English: Cape of Good Hope.

Trade with Asia at this stage becomes the main economical goal of European entrepreneurs. Wealthy tradesmen spend enormous sums on expeditions which could make this goal possible. Christopher Columbus, sailing westward, discovers America, thinking that he reached India. For this reason, he calls the red skinned inhabitants of this continent "Indians", and this erroneous term has survived several centuries. Finally. Ferdinand Magellan discovers the route to India by circumnavigating the earth and thus proving, against holy church teachings that the earth is a sphere. However, the route around Africa is the shortest and less dangerous because for the most past, the ships sail close to the shores of Africa.

With time, small Holland becomes a naval power, getting ahead of Portugal and Spain in the number of ships and frequency of undertaken voyages. By the beginning of the 16th century the Dutch East India Company is a prosperous enterprise, regularly sending out ships along the around Africa route. The ships come back with spices and other valuable imported goods, but with only half of the crew. The other half dies along the way of a disease called scurvy, caused by malnutrition and lack of fresh vitamins. The Dutch decide to organise a supply station on the way that would cultivate vegetables and supply them, as well as fresh water to crews of ships sailing to India. The natural choice is the Cape of Good Hope.

And thus, on April 6, 1652, a Dutch emissary Johann van Riebeeck lands there, having come on the flagship Dromedaris, at the head of a fleet of 6 ships carrying settlers who would work the supply station. The place where they came ashore was later named Kaapstad which translated to English means Cape Town. This date marks the beginning of the official history of South Africa. Today, Cape Town is a great centre of industry, learning and culture and is one of the most beautiful cities in the world, surrounded by lush greenery and set at the foot of Table Mountain which is accompanied by Devil's Peak to the left and Lion's head on the right.

The newcomers were watched with distrust from behind bushes by Hottentots - today a people practically almost extinct. They did not belong to the Negroid race; their skin was of a lighter colour, and they were of small stature. Since the European newcomers were much more advanced technically and in all other aspects than the primitive native tribes, very soon and with ease they subjugated the latter, establishing a form of slavery.

The supply station was expeditiously and efficiently organised, a defensive fort was built, cultivation of produce was begun. White workers were allotted land on which to grow the produce, and draconic laws were enacted, complying with the demands of the protestant Calvinist church. Not showing up for Sunday service was punished by severe fiscal fines. The attire had to look ascetic,

covering almost the entire body. The white people were the overseers while the Hottentots worked the fields and helped in tracking wild animals for meat, an activity in which they excelled.

The town expanded, streets were marked out, brick houses were built, and new generations were born. The whites used their European - acquired skills to create new life according to what had been developed over centuries back in Holland. New groups of immigrants arrived from the old country, sometimes people looking for adventure, others lured by well-paid contracts for work oversees. After some time, it was not only the Dutch who came, but also German protestants, which can be attested to even to this day by names such as Wentzel, Schwartz or Kopf. It may sound ironic, but the new settlement was also reinforced by the victims of intolerance. The French queen Catherine de Medici, a fanatic champion of Catholicism, ordered killing of French protestants, called Huguenots. Those who managed to remain alive after the cataclysm which came to be called the Night of St. Bartholomew, fled from persecution to protestant Holland. They were allowed in, but they were not over welcomed by the indigenous Dutch, just as today's refugees are usually not very welcome in the countries they manage to reach. The Dutch government gave the Huguenots asylum but strongly urged them to emigrate to the supply station set up on the Cape of Good Hope. And thus, a new group came with names like du Toit, Labuchagne, Marais, de Malherbe and de Villiers, as well as numerous other families. They brought with them a skill they were best in - cultivation of vineyards and production of wine. To this day, South African wines are considered among the best in the world. With time, these Huguenots lost their French language and began using Dutch. But their names remained to this day, although pronounced quite differently.

At that time nobody heard about or seen the African people living on that same continent. The Bantu tribes, some pastoral, other militant, lived a nomadic life, wandering from the North down to the South along the eastern part of the continent but another hundred years were to pass before the first encounters between European settlers and Africans were to happen.

Allow me for a brief digression. It is known from scientific research that the cradle of human civilisation is none other that South Africa. Hundreds of millions of years ago the first humas lived here, as homo erectus species. To this day one can see - and I saw myself - cave paintings portraying hunting scenes near Maseru, the capital city of Lesotho, formerly Basutoland. Over the next millions of years these people travelled northwards. Then, in still ancient but documented times, there were known to be black-skinned people serving in Persian courts, in Greece and even in Rome. These came mainly from northern Africa, predominantly from what is known today as Sudan. Only in times more or less same as European Renaissance there began a slow march of Bantu tribes from central Africa in the direction of the South in search of new pastures and hunting grounds. Their first meeting with white settlers took place in the eastern part of southern Africa, more or less where today's city of Port Elizabeth is today. After about a hundred years of settling of the Cape colony, there began exploratory excursions eastwards. Meeting between the whites and the Bantu tribe called Xhosa was not pleasant, to say the least.

The small settlement organised to supply trading ships grew both in numbers and in territory. New generations were born. These new people were no longer settlers, this was now their home. In keeping with traditions and customs of those times, white people kept slaves, Hottentots of both genders. It happened quite frequently that the master of the house wanted to have some additional fun, outside of his wedlock. Well, that happens not only in South Africa. If he fancied a young female slave, he, having all the authority over her life, had no great difficulty in convincing her to share his bed, while the severe authority of the Calvinist church somehow turned a blind eye. Thus, the first generation was born of people who, during my time in South Africa, were called "Cape Coloureds". They constituted a different class than black-skinned people of the Negroid race. Deprived of all rights and despised by both black and white inhabitants of the country (although in most cases having some admixture of the latter's' blood), they came to be termed "God's stepchildren". Theirs is a history of very unhappy people, despised for no reason at all.

In the times of apartheid of the fifties and sixties of the 20th century, some of them, after several generations of racial mixing, had a very light skin. These tried to pass off as whites, in order to enjoy normal civic and human rights. This reminds me of Jews in European countries occupied by Hitler's German armies, who, under false identity tried to survive as Gentiles outside ghettos where they were herded in unspeakable conditions. I remember a theatre play, produced by an avant-garde

company in Johannesburg when I was almost mature, about a young woman who tried to conceal her “shameful” ethnic and racial roots in order to be able to live in a dignified or at least a normal way. This play showed methods employed by the race police in picking out such “criminals”. The “suspect” was subjected to putting a pencil through her hair and told to bend her head down. If the pencil fell through, she was left free but if it stayed in the curly hair, besides depriving her of rights enjoyed by white people, she was severely punished for such a “crime”.

By the beginnings of the eighteenth century, the supply station, or “half-way house” as some termed the Cape Colony, was a well organised and thriving community and had its own governor. It is from these times that we can still see, if we come there as tourists, beautiful estates of the elite, such as Groot Constantia, a palace-built by Governor Simon van der Stel for his daughter Constantia. It is shown to visitors as one of the biggest tourist attractions near Cape Town. If you visit there you may taste some of the fine wines grown in the region.

In the mid eighteenth-century, voyages of exploration and expansion to the East and North began. The first people to be met were Bushmen, a dwarf-size tribe, slightly taller that Pygmies, living a wild existence near the desert know today as Kalahari, very primitive but unsurpassed when it came to tracking animals and survival in desert conditions. As you probably realise by now, Bushmen soon came to be enslaved by the white people.

And thus, the Cape Colony lived happily, hunted, cultivated food and wine, built estates, multiplied in numbers, and thrived. It is quite probable that its history could have taken a completely different look if not for events that shook the old and distant continent of Europe, of which the people living in the Cape could not know at the time. But then why should they care, even if they somehow knew that a certain corporal in the French army, born on the Mediterranean island of Corsica, after gaining support during the French Revolution, declared himself emperor of France and set out to fight against other European countries? Needing soldiers to fight his war, he offered hope to some countries under bondage as, for instance Poland of that time, but threatened England which was invincible as a naval power.

England was aware that Napoleon could be tempted to take command of such a strategic point on the world’s map as the Cape Colony. So, it convinced the Dutch king to allow English forces to take over temporary control of this place in order to protect its inhabitants against a possible invasion by the French fleet. But telegrams or TV had not yest been invented and the people living in the Cape Colony had no way of knowing about the agreement. When on January 8, 1806, people noticed British warships on the horizon, approaching the port, there ensued a short battle, known as the Battle of Blaauwberg Strand (Strand in Dutch and Afrikaans means beach) but the British military advantage was overwhelming. They easily took over the town and the entire land. It was to last only for the time of Napoleonic war hostilities but somehow it extended to much longer than a century.

The arrival of the British did not radically change lifestyles in the Cape at first. The English governor respected the customs and faith of the people who had settled this piece of earth 150 years earlier. With time, however, the authorities began to exert their influence in many political areas, as well as in the realm of culture which differed from that of Cape dwellers. These complained that the British authorities did not sufficiently care about the safety of the people and did not organise effective protection against raids by Xhosa warriors. The first encounters with the Bantu people, who came from the North happened already towards the end of the 18th century. Both sides mutually distrustful looked at each other across the Great Fish River (today’s name is a translation of the original Groot Visrivier). The black people pursued a pastoral life. They tended to great herds of cattle which were tempting to the white explorers. But in the same way, cattle belonging to them was not something to be overlooked by people of the Xhosa tribe. As I said, they were traditionally pastoral people but, if necessary, they could be warriors. Much more militant Zulus settled lands further to the North and at that time they did not encounter white people. Under the cover of the night there began two-way raids to steal cattle. The Xhosas crossed the river and in a stealthy way tried to return with cattle but if someone got in the way they helped him to end his life with a spear which was called assegaai. With time, the technology used in raids was raised to higher levels of sophistication.

White people gave the black people the derogatory name of “Kaffir” in English (“Kaffer” in Dutch). It meant “non-believer” but expressed with an air of intentional offense. This term survived to my time in South Africa and was in everyday use. The word “Kaffir” was, in my opinion, even more offensive that the American “Nigger”, used by the Ku-Klux-Klan and other racists. In the years 1818 and 1819 two major wars were fought and even these, as I was taught at school, were officially termed “Kaffir wars”. There were to be a total of nine of them.

The Boers (farmers) as the white Dutch and other people living in the Cape Colony called themselves, had a technical advantage over warriors who fought with spears, but without British support they were unable to fully control the regions they settled, as they moved further North and East. Militant strife to gain pastures and cattle continued for many years. Contrary to accusations by the Boers that sufficient protection was not ensured, the British authorities actually placed thousands of troops there, finally leading to a total driving out of the Xhosa people from the lands they claimed as theirs, and finally to subordination of the entire tribe to colonial rule. This part of South African history is very similar to that of American policy of colonisation in the 19th century and gradual taking over of lands of the indigenous, red-skinned peoples, as well as taking away their rights.

In the year 1820, a big wave of settlers arrived from England (so-called 1820 settlers) which within a short time was to completely change the lifestyle of Cape Colony, as it came to be called officially. At that time, it was indeed a colony, but South Africa in which I spent ten years of my life was not a colonial country, although colonial practices were law and applied on a daily basis. The British introduced new legal rules. With time they relaxed the severe church rules of the Dutch Reformed Church and admitted to the new country other churches like Anglican and even Roman Catholic. Moreover, they took Bushmen and Hottentots under official protection in the sense that they could no longer be whipped or hanged at the white master’s whim. This was not taken well by the original Boer population because slaves were considered not as people but as property. The situation was worsened when, as the result of the efforts of the English nobleman and great visionary of those times, William Wilberforce, British authorities everywhere abolished slavery in 1834. This fact and the feeling of total erosion of their “rights” was the straw that broke the camel’s back and hastened the decision of the people of Dutch-German-French roots (but all speaking Dutch and seeing themselves as a practically uniform nation) to leave the lands their ancestors had once settled and to travel to search for a new land to resettle somewhere else in the North and the possibility of free practice of their traditional lifestyle. Thus began the greatest epic event in the history of South Africa, called the Great Trek. The pioneers who set out to win the great unknown called themselves Voortrekkers, which translates to Travellers Ahead.

White Dutch speaking South Africans or Afrikaners, as they now called themselves, embarked on a voyage northward, filled with all kinds of dangers. We can see here many similarities to American pioneers traveling westward. Although this is only something purely visual, they rode in similar wagons covered with white linen, protecting from rain, and providing sunshade. The Afrikaners’ wagons were pulled by oxen, as opposed to horses in America. American pioneers on their westward quest met indigenous tribes whom they called “Indian” which, defending their own territory, attacked the pioneers. In the United States the term “Indian” is officially used to this day. The white pioneers killed the red-skinned people without mercy. To defend themselves against attacks, they called in the United States Cavalry which decimated the indigenous inhabitants. Sometimes terrible slaughters took place of innocent people from both sides. It is well-known that the United States broke all agreements ever made with the indigenous population, annexing their lands, and killing even peaceful tribes, including women and children. The South African pioneers, the Voortrekkers pushed on in the northeastern direction, in search of land which would be settled. On their way they had similar encounters with black tribes of which there were many more. The Basuto and Xhosa were traditionally pastoral tribes and went to war only if attacked. The Zulus, on the other hand, were primarily warriors, showing great courage. They were dangerous despite not having firearms. They fought with assegaais and usually were the first ones to attack. Their native territory was that part of South Africa, which is today called the Province of Natal, but the Zulu warriors reached places situated much further West.

After numerous hardships in their journey and after having lost many people in fights with Black tribes, as well as due to diseases, the Voortrekkers crossed a river which they called Oranje, to honour the Dutch kings who traditionally bore the Orange title, and settled there, founding the first republic in the land which they named Oranje Vrystaat (Orange Free State) with a capital in a town called Bloemfontein. Since the predominant majority of Afrikaners were farmers and the Dutch word for farmer is "boer", this term came to be used in history. One group of Boers travelled even further North under the leadership of their captain Andries Pretorius. They reached a river which had very cloudy, rather gray coloured water and they called it Vaal which means as much in the Dutch language. When they crossed that river, they called the land North of it Transvaal and they founded a second Boer republic of that same name. They also started a town as the capital and called it Pretoria, to honour their leader.

Allow me a short digression. The Dutch language, by this time was still the official language in both republics but the everyday spoken version had by now strayed from the original. There came influences from German, some Hottentot words came to be used, even some words heard and repeated after Black tribes, as well as not surprisingly - English. Even before the Great Trek began, some Boers married English women and these wives loyally accompanied their husbands on this great quest, at the same time bringing some linguistic influence.

Both Boer republics thrived in the beginning and the diligence and entrepreneurship of the people led, within a relatively short time, to the founding of several towns, schools, and other infrastructure, modern for the time. But the borders had to be guarded against any attack by the Zulus. The African tribes did not inhabit these two republics within their borders, except for a few individual people who travelled there and were hired to work as physical labourers. Obviously, they were never regarded as citizens.

In the meantime, the British embarked on a massive expansion to the East. They established a new province which they called Natal with a port city on the Indian Ocean coast, named Durban, named after a general and administrator, Sir Benjamin D'Urban. The British also had to fight their way forward against Zulu warriors. The Zulus were at that time ruled by a cruel and even brutal king Dingaan, who ascended the Zulu throne after murdering his brother Chaka. Chaka was also brutal and found satisfaction in listening to the cries of own people thrown from a high rock into the shark-ridden ocean. The place where it happened, Chaka's Rock, is shown to tourists today. I was there as an 11-year-old boy, while on a boy scout camp in what was then called Umtentweni, on the shores of the Indian Ocean, South of Durban.

Dingaan, with whom the British authorities in Natal had to deal, invited the white officers for negotiations but when they arrived and sat down, he called on his warriors to "kill the white wizards". This happened on December 16, 1838, and at the time when I lived in South Africa, this date was commemorated each year. Finally, Dingaan fled to Swaziland (today called Eswatini) and was himself murdered by someone else from the family. In many ways it resembled what was often "normal" in the tsarist Russian court.

So, we see how relations between British authorities and the Zulus were far from good and many battles had to fought in which both sides displayed unheard of bravery. One of the most famous of these was that fought by British soldiers on 22nd January 1879 in Rorke's Drift. In the entire history of British military, there never was a time when as many Victoria Crosses - the highest distinction - were awarded as in that single battle. But the British with their technological superiority finally got to ruling the whole territory of Natal. For several years they did not meddle with the Boer republics, and they did not even display any interest in them. Only for some time, though.

In the year 1877 the British governor Shepstone annexed Transvaal in the name of Queen Victoria. The Boers responded with a revolt which history recorded as the First Boer War. This was, in modern history, the first guerilla war. Her Majesty's soldiers were shot like sitting ducks. The Boers, dressed in denim, camouflaging them in the field, took easy shots at the English soldiers still dressed in their traditional red uniforms, contrasting with everything that could be expected in an African landscape. Not even the overwhelming technological or economical superiority of the British might could help. In 1881, Great Britain, following a terrible military defeat at Majuba Hill, on the border between Natal and Transvaal, agreed to grant the Boer republic its autonomy. In the protocol of the peace treaty there was a clause about British supervision, but this remained purely theoretical.

But soon after, a seemingly insignificant incident happened which changed the course of history. In the year 1886, George Harrison, an Australian visitor, stumbled upon small pieces of gold incrusted on the slopes of the Ridge of White Water (Witwatersrand) near the small village of Johannesburg. George Harrison did not know that he was standing on the richest gold deposits in the world. A Jewish travelling salesman who happened to be there at the time and heard about it, told the English officials and this immediately spawned a gold rush. Almost overnight, thousands of prospectors descended upon Johannesburg from all over the world with hopes of getting rich quickly. In no time the little village became a town, then a city, hastily built and thus not too pretty, with narrow streets, while Transvaal was on everybody's lips around the globe. Although Dutch was the official language, the streets of Johannesburg reverberated with many foreign tongues but mainly English. Within a short time, the number of newcomers exceeded the population of Boers - the citizens of the republic.

The foreigners - uitlanders as they were called - were obviously not very welcome. Let's for a brief moment move forward to much later times in history and even the present. In France - Arab newcomers from former colonies in northern Africa, in the United Kingdom - immigrants from India, Pakistan and Africa, and recent refugees from Africa trying to reach the Italian island of Lampedusa, all create tensions in the community. Very seldom are they welcomed with joy. Poland is coping not only with refugees from war-torn Ukraine but also with people escaping strife in the Middle East, the Caucasian republics, Asia, and Belarus. An atmosphere of reluctance caused by influx of new people speaking foreign tongues is nothing new to history. Not all countries are as hospitable as Canada.

Coming back to our history lesson, in the vicinity of mines surrounding Johannesburg social unrest began very soon and any pretext was good enough to state official demands. Britain was demanding equal rights for their citizens who lived in Transvaal. It would be naïve to imagine that the British would show disinterest in such a treasure as rich gold deposits. It didn't take long. Very soon they suggested to the authorities of the republic that Queen Victoria would take them under her protection and defend Transvaal from possible attacks by the Zulus. The Boer leaders responded with a resounding "No!" But the British decided to make them happy against their will. They brought in numerous reinforcements from other colonies and from the European homeland and simply invaded the Boer republic, of course, as it was stated, for the good of the Boers. In 1899 the Second Boer War broke out. This was also the first war in which the expedition corps from Canada fought, as well as units from other colonies, like Australia.

During that war English soldiers began to wear khaki and had a significant superiority. The Boers created an army of guerillas to which practically all men signed up. The eyes of the world were focussed on South Africa and sympathies of the majority were on the side of the Boers who defended their own country and their independence. Great popularity in the world of that time was enjoyed by the President of Transvaal, Paul Kruger. It is from his name that the name of the gold coin Krugerrand is derived. At the same time the world first heard of a very young, talented war correspondent, sending in reports from South Africa. His name was Winston Spencer Churchill. Another young man, a general aged 43, Robert Baden-Powell was the hero of the town of Mafeking, under siege for 217 days. He was known for sending out young boys on difficult and responsible scouting missions, thus beginning the movement, which is known worldwide as boy scouts, of which he was the founder.

I am writing all this to show that the history of this country was not solely a history of white people fighting against black inhabitants of Africa, nor is it solely a history of racial oppression. It is, as we can see, a history much richer with numerous and varied plots.

Unable to draw the guerrillas out of the bush and to force them do fight an open battle along some front line, the British began to arrest masses of civilian population as "collaborators", at the same time requisitioning all food supplies, as well as other material goods needed for everyday life. They were the first to introduce an invention of modern war, which came to be called concentration camps for civilians. Of course, these cannot in any way be comparable with Nazi extermination camps but nevertheless, the civilian population suffered in no small way. The superiority of the British army was by now so overwhelming that after three years of fighting, Boer leaders realised that further resistance would not gain anything, while the civilian population, already tormented by

war, would only suffer more. The last pockets of Boer resistance capitulated, and the war ended on 31 May 1902 by signing of the peace treaty, called Vereeniging. The word means “unification” in Dutch and in the place where the treaty was signed, a town was erected bearing the same name on the banks of the Vaal River.

According to the treaty, the province of Natal, along with the Boer republics, Transvaal, and Orange Free State, were to unite as provinces with the British-ruled Cape Colony to form a dominion of the British Empire with broad autonomy. All people living with its borders were to have equal status and equal rights. Obviously, this applied only to white people, since the indigenous African people were still considered to be wild and were not even taken into consideration. Neither were Asians given the status of equal citizens.

Eight years later, on the day of anniversary of the Vereeniging Treaty, the Union of South Africa was declared as an independent country belonging to the British Commonwealth. Its first Prime Minister was Louis Botha, a former Boer general. The Union became the homeland of both people of Dutch-German-French descent, as well as of English-speaking people living in South Africa. The new country had two flags - the Union Jack and a flag consisting of miniature flags of ten four provinces on a white background between an orange and blue horizontal field. There were two official languages: English and Dutch. Some years later the Afrikaans language was officially recognised and replaced Dutch and from that moment on, postage stamps, bore, besides the words South Africa also Suid Afrika in place of Zuid Afrika. The Union fought on the side of the Entente against the German Empire during the First World War. When, in 1939 the Second World War broke out, Prime Minister Jan Smuts (also a former Boer general) was one of the first to enter the war on the side of the Allies, against Hitler. South African soldiers will always be remembered for their gallantry at the battle of El Alamein.

Black inhabitants of South Africa had no rights, nor were they considered citizens, although it was not a question of any special doctrine. They were simply not considered as being sufficiently mature for citizenship, but such was colonial mentality in all oversea territories, along with the “pearl in the Crown” as India was called. The overwhelming majority of African tribes still lived in their villages, their life was organised by primitive tribal rules, and they were illiterate. Their life existed aside from the white people but not together. Some missionaries organised schools in which Africans could receive education. With time, economy forced many inhabitants of villages to seek employment among the White people. They were accepted but only for the least qualified and least paid jobs as servants. You will notice that from this moment on, I am writing always “White” and “Black” with capital letters, as the two races are often referred to.

It should also be stressed that there were Black nannies working for Boer families, closely knit with them, who had suffered together with those families during the war against the British. This was a situation just the same as what is known from “Gone with the Wind” in the 19th century in America, to those who read the book or saw the film. And remember that people from the Confederate states were against the abolition of slavery! In the Boer families these Black nannies shared all the hardships and were loved by the children and even treated in a friendly way but not to the extent of eating at the same table. And this attitude continued for many generations.

It was only during World War II that a great influx of Black people to towns and cities took place, which changed the social and political circumstances in the Union of South Africa for all. During the war many Boer descendants, who no longer called themselves Boers but Afrikaners, (because, after all, they were not all farmers) did not hide their sympathies for Hitler, similarly to some Quebecois in Canada of that time. According to their way of thinking, the enemy of our not-so-long-ago enemy had to be our friend. But by no means could we say that about all.

After World War II, the elections brought a major change. The up to now ruling United Party lost the elections and for the first time, the Nationalist Party, headed by pastor Daniel François Malan came to power. This party raised the practice of racial separation and white supremacy to the “dignity” of national doctrine and policy.

This was the country to which I came in February of 1949.

This short history lesson was necessary to give a perspective of those social processes which shaped the attitude of all inhabitants of South Africa, both Black and White and other races. I lived there for ten years, and many experiences enriched my awareness of what was going on around me, and the process of growing up, with natural mental development allowed me to better understand.

In order to make this account a fuller picture I am giving here the approximate ethnic makeup of this country, as it was in the fifties of the past century. There were close to 6 million people of European descent, and this constituted about 25% of the total population of the country. This could be divided into those of Afrikaners (60% of the white population) and English-speaking, which made up the remaining 40%. This last group was composed not only of the Anglo-Saxon majority but consisted also of numerous new immigrants, especially after World War II. The greatest ethnic group living in this country were the indigenous Africans of many nations and speaking different languages. Next, there were people of mixed blood, the "Cape Coloureds" whose ancestors could be traced to Hottentots. There were also sizeable minorities formed by Indian and Chinese people. The last two groups had been brought to South Africa during the time of the world-embracing industrial revolution to work as coolies and to perform other menial physical work. It was obvious to the English of that time that people from the colonies were not equal under law with White masters and thus Asians could not enjoy the same status or normal rights as citizens, whether in China or India. Let's remember that in early 20th century Britain maintained an occupational army in China and helped quash the so-called boxer revolution.

Thus, Asians who were brought to South Africa, although treated somewhat better than the indigenous population, did not get to be equal under law with Whites. This was similar in all lands administered by other colonial and post-colonial powers in the world. South Africa by that time was no longer a colony. Black people were not given the right to have any say in any matters concerning themselves whether they were ruled by the British, Germans, French or Belgians. Portugal gave Mozambique the status of "Overseas Territory of Portugal" and gave the black people living there at least the theoretical status of Portuguese citizens. Nevertheless, their social status was determined by their financial means which meant that in this Portuguese territory there were citizens who were equal, but some were "more equal" than others. Obviously, citizens whose skins were black belonged to the first of these categories. It was similar in other colonial countries, although this policy was more traditional and not "dignified" by any ideology or some special code of law. To put it simply, the local population was often treated by colonial authorities as cattle, without any special laws or restrictions written as formal law. There were exceptions, of course. In India, the very wealthy Maharajas, who collaborated with the British crown, were treated with respect "due to moguls". Such were the times and the world looked on, accepting this as the natural order of things. In the United States, the status of Afro-Americans differed from state to state. In the infamous South, racial segregation was still mandated by state law and Ku Klux Klan had moles in all state offices. Segregation involving all walks of life lasted until late 1960s.

The one and only country in which racial segregation rose to be an ideology which touched all races, including White people, called "European", where segregation laws, when broken, were severely punished, was the Union of South Africa, following access to power of Daniel Malan's Nationalist Party.

When the Union began to exist, the indigenous people were mostly totally uneducated, lived in primitive villages and were not even fully aware of their political or social inequality. As more and more pasture lands were taken away from them by the White man, they were forced to migrate to cities in search of paid employment in order to survive. They became servants or menial labourers. Other jobs were reserved for whites only. Very rarely, Africans who were educated in mission schools and the very few with university degrees could take up positions in keeping with their level of expertise but working only within their own community. One such person was Nelson Mandela. As for the rest, it was only when more and more Africans came to urban communities looking for jobs and when some of them began to receive basic education, that they became aware of social inequality and that something was not as it should be. These people began to see the huge disproportions in wealth and standard of living, to notice homes and cars that the White people had and the comfort they enjoyed. But they also saw and appreciated the entrepreneurship of the White man who built these houses, developed factories, opened schools and was able to do a thousand things that they

had never seen before and could not do. They could not because they had no education. All this time this White man was getting richer thanks to the hard, practically slave labour by the African.

When shortly after arriving in Johannesburg I was sent to school, in the beginning I didn't even give it a thought that my class and, indeed, the entire school consists only of White children. All clean, well cared for, all in school uniforms. In most cases parents brought their kids in by car and picked them up after school which was different to conditions in war-impoverished Poland. All teachers were White too. They were not bad people. Brought up from childhood with the view that the White man is master and the Black is only a servant, they probably did not give much thought to social issues or to the ethics of racial policy and the idea of social and racial equality did not yet begin to sprout in their minds. These were still the beginnings of Nationalist Party rule, thus beginnings of doctrinal apartheid. To put it simply, the segregation of Whites and Blacks was accepted without any deep thought, as something natural and thus not questioned.

But I also noticed something that I explained to myself as "solidarity among white people", manifesting itself by a very broad ethnic and religious tolerance. White South Africa was not, by this time, an ethnical, linguistic, or religious monolith. Afrikaners spoke Afrikaans and all the rest used English to communicate. Afrikaners usually belonged to the Dutch Reformed church (Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk). English speaking Whites were of diverse denominations: Anglican, Catholic, various nonconformist Christian, e.g., Methodist, Baptist etc. and there was quite a sizeable group of people of the Mosaic faith. From the ethnic point of view the English-speaking community was reinforced, especially after World War II, by large groups of immigrants from various European countries. There was no visible antagonism among these people of different religions. The newcomers could choose between an Afrikaans school or an English one for their children. There was no pressure to choose the Afrikaans option and practically all new immigrants sent their children to schools with English as the language of education. Both languages were treated equally. In English schools, Afrikaans was taught as a second language and vice versa. In the school, to which I was sent, we had a school meeting once a week. When a Jewish holiday was nearing, the school principal would say: "And now I want to see all Gentile children stand up and wish their Jewish friends happy holidays!" After school, kids from different homes pursued different extracurricular activities, sometimes connected with national or religious traditions, but during school hours on breaks, they played all together, and no difference in attitude or thinking could be noticed between kids of different religions. It simply felt natural that there was a diversity. When slightly older, I began going to boy scout meetings with a troop from YMCA. Sometimes I met on the streets my school friends wearing the unforms of Jewish scouts. There was never any animosity between any children coming from homes with a different religious tradition.

The author in Parktown Boys' High School School uniform

What, on the other hand, could be felt was a certain feeling of superiority of English-speaking people over those who spoke Afrikaans and resultant slight animosity in the opposite direction. As said before, in English schools, Afrikaans was taught as a second language, but it was always treated by students with a pinch of contempt. I heard some ladies from rich and elegant houses express their views on the other official language as "kitchen Dutch". No Bantu language (the most popular were Zulu and Basuto) were ever taught in any White school.

When I reached high school, I went to Parktown Boys' High, where, besides various clubs grouping boys with diverse interests, one could join the Students' Christian Association or Students' Jewish Association. At everyday school assemblies before classes began, representatives of various clubs and associations made announcements about their activities of the day to be held during long break. I remember how once the Jewish group invited all who wanted to come during long break

to hear a recording of a programme about the annihilation of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto. Many non-Jewish boys came to that meeting.

Every year on November 11 - the anniversary of the end of World War I and celebrated as Veteran's Day, there were solemn services held at schools to commemorate the fallen in World War II who had attended that school. Each year there was a different clergyman invited to lead the service. Once there was a Roman Catholic priest, another time a rabbi, then next year an Anglican priest or a Methodist minister. The clergyman conducted the service according to his liturgy, while everyone prayed silently in his own way. There was never any feeling of religious prejudice to be felt. However, it was a completely different matter when it came to talking or even thinking of Black people. Whites showed that they were superior in all aspects. Even if they treated their servants humanely, there was still a wall between the races, even if not enmity, but just feeling of superior civilisation, never to be crossed. I once witnessed a young White girl speaking with an air of superiority, criticizing a mature Black servant woman for bringing the wrong type of coffee to the table.

Apartheid, meaning separation, meant separate schools and benches in the park, but that by no means was all. There were separate buses, streetcars, separate bus stops, separate trains and train platforms, separate cinemas and offices, separate sports along with all sport facilities. Non-whites were not allowed to shop in elegant departmental stores. Of course, it worked both ways. Whites were not allowed in places and facilities reserved for Blacks, although no White person would ever want to, because facilities for Blacks were always cheaply built and of a very low standard. Blacks were not allowed to live in White areas, except for servants and cleaners of apartments who had to have special permission.

To be allowed in areas for "Europeans" after a certain late hour, the Africans had to carry special permits and present them to every demand by the police. In every walk of life, one could see signs barring anyone other that "Europeans" from using whatever it was - even sitting on lawns in a park.

It may sound unbelievable, but health care was also separated. There were separate hospitals and separate ambulances, with different colour coding for instant recognition. I once witnessed a scene across the street in which a White man lay on the grass next to a street, probably after experiencing some extreme pain or maybe even heart attack. A "Black" ambulance happened to be passing right there. It stopped and the driver came out, but he could not take a White man into his ambulance. He only called from his car radio for a "White" ambulance to come. I don't know if this delay in bringing first aid caused any serious effects to the sick man.

When in my last year before returning to Poland I worked as a technician in an institute carrying out physiological research for the gold mines, I learned a bit of "Fanagalo". Fanagalo was a mine jargon, a mixture of various Bantu languages with additions of both English and Afrikaans, used as the vernacular of workers from various African tribes. While working there I had the opportunity to see that Black mine workers were treated practically as slaves. Each one had a plastic wrist band with a number which could not be taken off. They lived in appalling conditions in what was called "compounds" in a guarded and sealed barracks, from which they were transported by buses to work and back every day but were not permitted to leave for any reason.

With my Black colleagues in Applied Physiology Laboratory

Working with me were several educated Black technicians who were employed by the institute and not by the mine. They worked as translators and laboratory assistants. We were on a very friendly footing, but they were not permitted to eat in the same canteen with Whites because that was forbidden by "law". Among the employees of the institute there were quite a few White people who

were open-minded and without racial prejudice, but no one was brave enough to overstep the line and be prosecuted for it.

Some Polish people whom I knew in South Africa expressed the view that “Blacks have not yet come down from trees” and they should not be given any rights because if such rights were given to them, Rissik street - one of the main streets of Johannesburg - would be a patch of grass within several months. It is quite obvious that, given the catastrophic state of education of Africans, as needed for creative or organisational work, such capable and professionally qualified people were very few. On the other hand, it is difficult to dispute the claim that similarly to any other country, less acceptable and even downright disgusting behaviour is mostly associated with a community poorly educated and impoverished. Poverty breeds crime everywhere. This, unfortunately, could be said about the Black community inn South Africa and the same about any poverty-stricken community in the world. As usual, there were stereotypes which functioned in South Africa and thus, in the eyes of most Whites, all Africans were looked upon as uncivilised, backward, and even wild. Somehow, only few Whites were able to connect this state with the social and economic situation and the rest, in a simplistic way, attributed any wrong observed to some innate properties of the African race. Those in power, who clearly did understand the real cause of the problem, intentionally kept the education of Blacks on as low a level as possible and tried in every way they could to make access to higher education as difficult as possible, knowing that uneducated, cheap, almost slave labour constituted great value for the White community, not to be lost through politics with human sentiments.

In early fifties of the past century there was a widely known issue of a certain young talented Black boy from South Africa who was offered a scholarship by the United States government to continue studies in a liberally minded institution in the US. He was not granted a passport by the South African government to leave the country. Since the case was publicised in the English-language press, someone asked about it in class. I remember my teacher replying that this decision by the government was very correct because, as she put it: “A Kaffir is only a Kaffir. He will come back one day, educated, and start agitation, seeing himself as someone important”.

I have already written that Blacks were not permitted to live in districts reserved for Whites, except for servants who lived in deplorably looking annexes to homes of Whites, or sweepers and cleaners of apartments (there called flats). These had their single room dwellings set up on roofs of apartment blocks, usually without any windows. All such employees had to always carry on them a special pass to be shown to policemen whenever ordered to. The usual way for a Black to address a White policeman was “baas”, which was the Afrikaans word for boss. The popular saying addressed to Blacks was: “Carry your pass and say ‹Ja baas’!›” (Yes boss).

Those Africans who did not work as servants but in other capacities, lived in shanty towns, in other words slums, which could only be compared to Brazilian favelas. These were shacks made of corrugated iron, tiny and reeking of poverty. White people had no access to it without permission from the police. Interracial sexual relations were strictly forbidden under the so-called Immorality Act. Interracial marriage was also forbidden. The nationalist government explained publicly that this was for the good of both Whites and Blacks, that it was something natural to have a separate development of culture and society.

The Dutch Reformed Church did its bit in strengthening the basis of theory of separate development. It interpreted the passage from the Bible which told about how Noah got drunk and his son Ham mocked him. God said unto Ham: “Thou shalt be a servant unto thine brothers and thy descendants unto their descendants”. The church explained that Black people were Hamites, the descendant of Noah’s son who mocked his father and thus earned God’s punishment, so, therefore, everything was in keeping with God’s divine will. When I think of it today, it is hard for me to resist the thought that this was not the only denomination that used biblical interpretations by cynical people to “justify” politics.

I cannot say what the official rules were regarding the participation in church service attendance. Definitely, no Black Christians entered Dutch Reformed Churches, but I have serious doubts as to whether this Church ever tried to convert Africans to Christianity. I did see sometimes a group of Black people taking part in Mass in the Roman Catholic church. No one chased them out.

Generally, though, Africans attended their own churches. Once, when the apartheid issue began to be disputed in the press, "The Star", a popular afternoon daily, printed a political joke. A policeman enters the church building and sees a Black man there. He scolds him and demands an answer why he was trespassing in a place reserved for White people. The poor man begins to explain that he works for the pastor and washes the church floor. The policeman lets him go but adds: "All right, you can continue but God help you if I catch you praying!" When in Cape Town, I saw a sign outside the Anglican cathedral stating that this church was open to all people of all races at all times.

The Indians were treated slightly better because they had the right to maintain small service shops in the White sector of the cities. There were many Indian tailors. To keep a service shop in a White city centre was one thing, but to live in a White neighbourhood was something completely different and impossible. Equally impossible was riding in the same public transport vehicles, eating in same restaurants, attending same schools, etc.

I once went with my uncle to visit an Indian customer for whom he was building a house and there we ate at the same table with the host but the police was not interested in searching this part of town. The Chinese were another such social group. They were also deprived of the right to vote and could not live in places reserved for Whites only. Their children could not attend the same schools. But… there was one known exception. Among the many boys' high schools in Johannesburg, there was one private Catholic school run by the Marist brothers which accepted Chinese students. The Chinese boys wore the same school uniforms and attended classes together with their White colleagues. I don't have to add that even in that school they could not participate in any common sports activity or use any stadiums, tennis courts, running fields or swimming pools because the "law" forbade that. I know of a situation when one Chinese student was asked to leave a restaurant when a group of university students went there together to celebrate their newly achieved degrees. Most people with whom I had anything to do, regarded all this as quite natural and did not see the injustice a surrounding them. There were a few Chinese restaurants serving White people.

Typical racial restriction in a public facility (Beach in Durban)

When I was about 14 years old, I was playing in a certain guest farm run by a group of Catholic nuns which accepted people for a short paid rest. With me were two boys who had slightly darker skins but there they were accepted as Whites. Someone told my mother to pass on to me not to play with them because everybody was whispering that they were "coloured". My mother repeated this to me but neither she nor I myself cared. By that time, racist arguments did not make any impression on me. So, I continued to play with them. One of them, probably getting the feel that I was not racially prejudiced, tried to feel me out and permitted himself the remark that "coloureds" were, after all, also human beings and "he had nothing against them". He was not careful because I could have been a completely different person, with completely different views. Of course, I agreed with him in full, but I did not approach him about his own identity. On another occasion, several years later, when I was a university student, another Polish student asked me aside to speak to me in private. He began to warn me that people were seeing that I talk and socialize with some Black students and already I was seen as "kafferboetie". This Afrikaans word could be translated as "Kaffir brother" an offensive and derogatory term do describe with contempt liberally minded people who did not believe in racism.

At that time the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, a school respected even outside of South Africa, accepted all students, regardless of race, and in lecture halls, laboratories, tuition classes and in the library

everyone could sit together. The government authorities tolerated this because of the university's autonomy on campus. Most open-minded students integrated willingly, others remained aloof and felt superior thanks to their white skins. Unfortunately, the Poles in many cases, belonged to the latter group. Obviously, dormitories and sporting facilities were separate, because "law" demanded it.

During the one year when I attended this university, the nationalist government announced their new project of creating separate, what they called "university-colleges" for each Bantu tribe in their homelands, at the same time closing off "White" universities (there was another integrated one in Cape Town) to Africans. It can easily be imagined that the standard of education in such colleges would be pitifully lower and soon would be in dire need of financial help to even exist. In response to this, there was a series of big protests in which I also took part, outside of the campus on the streets. My once revered teacher who for some years was my mother's close friend, happened to see me during such a protest through the window of a passing bus. When she met me, she told me in no uncertain terms that this was not the way a South African behaved. And thus, our friendship and, indeed, our acquaintance came to an abrupt end.

I said earlier that many Poles living in Johannesburg at the time either supported apartheid policies or remained indifferent to it. But by no means not all. I was privileged to know a young Polish girl who lived in Johannesburg, the daughter of a university professor, very sensitive to human fate. Both found themselves in South Africa after numerous displacements during the war. Her mother had died on the way. She took part in all anti-apartheid protests. Irena was a few years older than me, a great idealist. She was, in many ways my mentor in all discussions about racial tolerance and equality, teaching me about the necessity to oppose it. She and her father returned to Poland at about the same time as I did. Several years later she lost her life in an accident.

Africans living in the ramshackle shanty town called Alexandra Township, situated several kilometres from Johannesburg had to commute to work in the White city by buses run by PUTCO (Public Utility Transport Corporation). In 1957 PUTCO raised the price of tickets and commuters responded by a boycott which lasted several weeks. Throngs of people walked close to 15 kilometres each way every day while buses stood empty and idle. This moved many White people with social awareness to help by offering rides in their cars. At that time, I had a motorcycle, and it happened that one day I was going from the university along that same route. I told a young black student to jump on the saddle behind me which she did, and I took her almost to her destination. Almost and not right to the end, because I was not allowed by the police to pass a certain point. However, considering the growing public sympathy and support for the boycotters, the police did not react in any way when someone helped by giving a ride to the boycotters who covered the distance on foot.

My mother gave private Latin lessons and one day a young, elegant, and educated young man with a slightly darker skin responded to an ad and began coming to us for lessons. At that time, we were living in a guest house and people saw who comes in and goes out. Within a very short time, the caretaker told us politely but firmly that she did not wish to see that person on the premises.

The first event to shake the conscience of many White people was a book written by Alan Paton, an already then well-known writer. Its title was "Cry the beloved country", translated to many languages, and it treated the social and racial relations in South Africa, showing the absurdities and cruelty of apartheid. The book was adapted for a film and one of the main roles was played by a budding Hollywood actor Sidney Poitier. We happened to know well Nancy Paton, the wife of David, the author's son. Nancy told us many things about which she knew, and we had no clue, for example, how cruelly people were treated in prisons for trying to resist apartheid. But these were only the beginnings. The emancipation movement began taking shape two years before our return to Poland. One year before we left, I saw with my own eyes demonstrations and unrest in Johannesburg following the mass arrest of close to 90 freedom fighters. Every day the English press wrote reports from what was termed "treason trial". A few days into the trial, the lawyer who defended the arrested group was arrested himself. The Black community was incensed. I saw some street violence with my own eyes.

Some years after my return to Poland, when the Union of South Africa left the British Commonwealth and proclaimed itself as a republic, I read about bloody racial violence in a town

called Sharpeville. What later transpired after Nelson Mandela was released is everyone's knowledge.

My reflexions: The Africans were oppressed and mistreated in every possible way, they had no civic rights and no chances in any dispute with any White person or institution. The Whites, on the other hand, were brought up from the cradle with the conviction that all Africans were primitive and inferior in mind and that they could not be allowed anything above humane treatment, as good servants. If someone is conditioned in that way since birth, it's no wonder that such a person does not see reality. A change in the way of seeing and thinking requires reading, travelling to other places with different customs and laws where a different system is seen to work. And, of course, there is the self-run intellectual process. Not all South Africans of European descent were convinced racists. The majority were racists by upbringing and simply accepted without any deep thought that what they saw was right. Many slowly began to realize that something was not as it should be. Much good in promoting tolerance and understanding could be attributed to the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. But then, how many people reach university studies? The way to full understanding was still very long and the worst was yet to come.

In the final year of my stay in that country I became a member of the Liberal Party of South Africa. Its logo showed a Black hand shaking a White one and I carried a badge with it in my lapel. This was the only party which was legally and officially against apartheid and the only party to which I ever belonged. About that time the authorities began to introduce programmes for improvement of education and welfare of Blacks but on condition of total political submission, which meant resignation from all clams of rights. This created a paradox. Across the African continent, new countries, after liberation, were rising to independent existence and in most of them there was extreme poverty, left by the recent colonialists, but there were rights given to citizens of the new Black states. In some cases, these rights were so far advanced that the newly won freedom degenerated into fratricidal civil wars between rival political factions, not used to peaceful settling of differences in a democratic manner. In South Africa, on the other hand, Black people had no rights, but by now the standard of living of an increasing number was significantly higher than in burgeoning countries on the same continent. Except that without basic civil rights it is impossible to maintain any nation.

Thinking of South Africa, which was my home for ten years, I never forget that airmen of the South African Air Force lost their lives over Poland, flying missions to drop supplies to the Warsaw insurgents in 1944 and that South African soldiers played a significant part in the Allied victory at El Alamein. Many people I met while living in Johannesburg were nice, honest, and exhibited high personal culture. Only in the sphere of race did they exhibit behaviour which they had learned since they were very small. Not all of them were brutal. Some simply would not mix with Blacks because it couldn't dawn on them that something like that was even possible.

The Soviet Union, as long as it existed, supported the emancipation of Black people in South Africa and other countries on the African continent. It secretly supplied money and arms to African insurgents and provided training. The African National Congress, a secret (at the time) organisation grouping those Blacks who fought for freedom, were thus on very good terms with the Communists whom they saw as their allies and true friends. But the Soviets helped only because they looked to the future and envisioned bases on South African territory once the ANC overthrows the oppressive and racist government by force and sets up a Communist government. And then, they would submit all races living in South Africa, regardless of colour, to the kind of life known to Eastern Europeans until the Berlin wall fell. As we know, that did not happen. The Soviet Union ceased to exist in 1991 and apartheid was abolished some years later after Nelson Mandela was released from his many years' imprisonment and it finally reached the mind of the Nationalist Party president de Klerk that further life with racial segregation and oppression did not make sense for the country. I read Mandela's gripping book "The Long Walk to Freedom" and I recommend it to everyone.

At the time of writing this (January 2023) I know that in present day Africa there is no apartheid but there is still economic and financial inequality as a residue of the old days. It takes many years for people who were poor and downtrodden to catch up with those who had been well educated and in good financial standing for generations by amassing wealth. From news reports it can be ascertained that there is a high crime rate in today's Republic of South Africa and even some

corruption in today's government. It probably will take some more years for a country that is still in social transition to settle down and become a model run state. I have a high regard and respect for Nelson Mandela for the fact that after having undergone such dehumanising treatment, he did not allow any reprisals against the White population which would most probably be a natural need for at least some Black people.

In the beginning days of February 1959, I stood on the deck of the Athlone Castle liner which, after leaving the port of Cape Town, steered full steam ahead northwards. It was a moment when the second stage of my as yet young life was ending, a stage which shaped me and exerted its influence on everything that was to become my life to come. I was leaving South Africa from the same place where, over three hundred years earlier began the romantic and stormy history of this country. For ten years it was my home, where I grew up, received education, and learned about life. I met many interesting, noble people, but at the same time I saw terrible human suffering, injustice and inequality which placed me among those privileged. I also saw the indifference of "my side" to the fate of the other. But at that moment I wasn't even thinking about this. I was only excited about the fact that I was returning to my native Poland. I did not feel any typical emotions that go along with leaving the country I had lived in, but regarded the situation rather as a tourist, as I looked at the coastline shrinking and receding in the distance, with the silhouette of Table Mountain with its white tablecloth made of clouds. After an hour even that disappeared.

Table Mountain dominating Cape Town with Devil's Peak (left) and Lion's Head (right)