

*Utak, tájak, emberek*

TAMÁS ESZTER

A group of approximately ten people, including men and women of various ages, are posed for a photograph. They are standing in front of a light-colored building with a porch, partially obscured by the large, dark branches of a tree. The scene is set outdoors under a blue sky with some clouds. The people are dressed in casual to semi-formal attire, including patterned shirts, blouses, and trousers.

# Kolozsvártól Afrikáig

**Pallas-Akadémia**

**ESZTER TAMÁS**

**From Kolozsvár to Africa**

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## **KOLOZSVAR, ROMANIA**

I was born as a Hungarian in Kolozsvár, on a Hungarian land, in the Carpathian basin. My mother, grandmother and grand-grandmother and all my ancestors were Hungarians there. Then, suddenly our country left us alone. At that time, I couldn't understand the turn of events, and all seemed to be normal as it was.

In the primary and secondary schools, there wasn't any problem. I studied in a Hungarian school. I even started the university in Hungarian at the Bolyai University. I still didn't feel being in a minority. But I am part of the generation who lived the fusion of universities. That's when I realized the first time the naked truth, the reality that we were abandoned by our homeland.

University teachers and students were called to the Hungarian Theatre of Kolozsvár to announce them the fusion of the Babes and Bolyai universities.

That theatre was ours. With a university identity card we could go and watch opera or theatre productions. We knew all of its corners and felt at home there.

We went there, the theatre was almost full with Romanian speaking Babes university students. There was a long table on the stage, with the party and university persona behind it. They announced in Romanian the subject of the meeting, and time to time the Romanian students were cheering and applauding. Of course in Romanian.

Strangely, we felt like abandoned dogs. If all this happened in a Romanian theatre, perhaps it would have been easier.

There was nothing to do, we took notice of the situation, and after this, the classes were in either Romanian or Hungarian.

We took notes in class, and studied from them. Very few of us spoke Romanian. We took notes as robots, but could follow only half of what was said. Once I started crying because I couldn't do it, my Romanian colleagues were very nice and cheered me up saying that they would give me their notes.

Whether we wanted or not, we had to realize that we were not living in Hungary anymore. Hungary is further away. We were allowed to go there only rarely with a passport, and we started feeling homesick.

I still remember the thrill and the happy feeling when the grass and trees seemed to be nicer, softer and friendlier on our way to Hungary, looking out from the window of the train and realizing that it was already Hungary. What a happiness to live in a country where we can ask for bread in Hungarian in a shop, where can speak Hungarian with our doctor, can hear and sing the Hungarian *national anthem*, can admire the Hungarian national flag, in one word, we can live as Hungarians.

Unfortunately, this remained an illusion to the point that by the 70's we could get a passport to the next socialist country, Hungary, only every two years in Romania.

I finished the university, I started to teach first in Hungarian in an elementary school in a village. I was living there, far from Kolozsvár, I could go home only once in a week. I couldn't fit in. I didn't like living in a village. One of my life's happiest moments was when I was transferred to a technical secondary school in Torda.

Here I had to teach secondary and college students in Romanian. I was a little bit afraid, but the reception was nice and helpful, the colleagues, including the four directors, were encouraging and familiar. It was easy to get over the first difficulties.

The school was big. The staff of the faculty was over eighty. I had Romanian and Hungarian colleagues, and a lot of them became my friends.

This school remains great in my memories and my heart.

## **PREPARATION FOR AFRICA**

The big miracle that exceeded my wildest dreams happened in the spring of 1973. On a nice spring day, the schoolmaster, Mr Heller called together all the mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology teachers, and told us the content of a circular, according to which there was an opening for teacher positions in Africa in French language for the mentioned four subjects. Two out of twelve of us applied. I still don't understand why so few. Both of us were Hungarians.

They prepared our files, submitted them to the relevant authorities, and we were sent to a quick French course during the summer holidays.

In August, we were called for an interview with a representative of the Moroccan embassy, who chose only fifty out of four hundred applicants. Both of us failed.

In the spring of 1974, we started again the preparations. We submitted our files again, in the summer we attended a French language course, and in the middle of the summer we appeared for the interview. This time, a representative of the Zairian embassy heard four hundred teachers, with whom he could have some conversation in French. He accepted 300 of us.

This Zairian representative was a bohemian and joyful character. He was asking disconnectedly everything that just passed through his mind. It was strange for him, for example, that my husband's and my son's name were the same. He was laughing a lot. At that time I didn't understand what was special about it. During my stay there, I realized that even the use of names by them is different. The Zairian parents give names and surnames to their kids at will, and of course they are different.

We couldn't even guess how successful that interview was. The authorities didn't tell us anything until a representative of another country came. Those who were accepted somewhere else couldn't go for another interview. That's how three hundred of us became aware on a nice summer day that a country in

central Africa, called Zaire, is waiting for us, so in the autumn, we could start teaching there. They read out my name, too.

I went home with a weird feeling. One of my eye was crying, the other was smiling. I had a 3 year old little son, whom I couldn't take with me, but I had a possibility to escape and eventually to free my family also from Ceausescu's dictatorial world. With my husband support, I decided to go.

My parents were worried for me, my mother held me irresponsible. Familiars and friends were bombing me with different opinions, but these didn't influence me anymore.

In the beginning of September, they sent me a message that with a maximum 50 kg parcel I should appear at an address in Bucharest on a specific day, where I would get my service passport and from where I would be taken together with my colleagues to the airport on the next day and from there to Zaire.

I left for the long journey by a night train. My little boy was sleeping, I took one of his little socks as an amulet, and with a sinking heart I walked out of the door.

On the train, I couldn't sit down for a while, I was just looking out into the deep darkness, and was thinking that it would be so good if in Bucharest I was told not to go. But I was not told.

A passenger on the train asked me where I was going. Suddenly, I didn't know what to answer. It was strange to say Africa.

In the morning, when I arrived at the destination, there were another 300 teachers full of excitement.

I met my friends who were very happy about the trip. It was easy for them since all the family was going. They upheld me and that helped a lot. I felt that I couldn't be the one who gave up. Even my husband expected me to do it. So I went with the stream.

That afternoon, the gathering point was in the auditorium. They informed us about the Zairian political, economic, climatic and geographical situation, the ethnicity of its population and our tasks and obligations there.



Then all of us got our passports and we were taken by buses to the airport, where, like the lion painted on the side of the aircraft, dominant in the animal kingdom, the DC 10 of AIR Zaire looked mighty next to the other tiny aircrafts. That was our charter flight.

Sometimes after 9 p.m., we boarded the plane. At least 20 people didn't get seats but only passengers with seats were allowed on board, even at AIR Zaire. There was nothing to do, the parents took their kids on their laps, including 10 year old ones.

The group of teachers flew to such a far country for the first time, and we all lived this thrill in different ways. It was impossible not to notice the loud-mouthed, rousing, Balkan behaviour on some persons.

## **AFRICA, KANANGA**

We arrived in Kinshasa, the capital of Zaire, in the morning. It wasn't an everyday phenomenon to have such a big amount of white people arriving at a time. We were run off by porters. I don't think they have ever understood that there were white people who weren't able to pay them, and that this DC 10 was full of such people. So everybody carried his or her own parcel. That rarely happened at the Ndjili airport.

The black locals stared at this unusual invasion in surprise, we did the same at everything there.

Two or three representatives of the Romanian embassy and of the local educational department were waiting for us with buses and transported us to the university campus.

The campus was constituted by a lot of twin bungalows, a canteen for ca. 200 and administrative buildings on the huge area.

The enormous park-like yard was full of trees. We needed to hide in the shade out of the burning sun, as the students did probably during their academic year, because Kinshasa is a very hot city. There can be up to 30-35 degrees in the shade during the day, up to 20 in the morning, up to 25 after sundown.

The sun goes down at 7:30 p.m., and rises at 6:30 in the morning.

At lunch and dinner we didn't feel the change of continent. Bread, milk, butter, juices, soup, rice, potatoes, meat, vegetables, fruits were all on the table.

The next morning, they posted up the names of all the teachers with the cities of final destination. My name was next to Kananga with 13 others. I was the only one who came from Kolozsvár and was Hungarian.

In fact, that wasn't a matter of concern, I spoke Romanian. Later I could build up a good friendship with most of my Romanian colleagues. Sometimes they were quarrelling with each other, but were always nice to me.

At 11am we got our flight tickets and were transported by buses to the airport.

After 2 hours, we started our journey to Kananga, 2 hours later we arrived and nobody was waiting for us.

A catholic missionary priest together with some fellow passengers took us in their 4x4 cars in two groups to the director of the educational department. They took us to the waiting room of his office, and left us there as if we were found items.

The room was full of bags and us. Soon came the first man of the educational department. A Zairian, not very tall, nice but not cringing man with a straight look introduced himself with a name that was impossible to note, and added that everybody should call him Konji.

Poor Konji knew about our arrival but not about its time. He was very embarrassed because he failed his task. He immediately took measures. A few minutes later we were at our residences in an Italian owned hotel that was almost solely rented by the educational department for its teachers. Not only for Europeans but also for Zairians.

When he made sure that everybody had been accommodated, Konji took leave of us and promised that later at 6pm he would come back, bring us a salary advance and take us for dinner.

Exactly at that time he was back, gave all of us 50 Zaire (the currency name was Zaire), and invited us to the “Cercle Sportif” for dinner.

We didn't walk 100 meter to the terrace of a chic restaurant. Saying that he was very busy he left us there.

He didn't know that at that point he had thrown us at the deep end, we were sitting there, thirteen of us, barely speaking French with 50 Zaire in our wallets, and we didn't even know its value. We were sitting there shy and speechless.

Everybody there was very smart, mostly white people, and because of their very confident attitude we felt like nobodies there.

Never mind, we were sitting there, 13 of us, we weren't alone and even had some money.

There came a very gentle black waiter, brought us the menu, and we ordered drinks. There was everything, including soft drinks, beers, wines and lots of alcohols that we had never heard about in Romania. We had a very big choice but managed to choose. This wasn't the case for the food. There was an interesting dish on the menu: „Fillet American”. In Romania there wasn't any meat with such name, we didn't know what a “fillet” was. Two out of the men wanted to try that American thing, and so they ordered it.

The waiters brought them a plate of uncooked minced meat with some raw egg on top, spices and some toasts...and enjoy your meal!

The Romanian teacher was in a big dilemma because out of the 13 teachers nobody knew what to do with all that raw material. Probably they eat this, but how? One thing was sure, as it was there in front of them it was uneatable.

They called back the waiter and asked him to cook all that. He didn't understand it. But they insisted that he should cook it. Finally they decided, and told the waiter to mix the eggs into the meat, add some salt, and cook it like a meatball. Later we laughed a lot about it. Finally it was the raw meat known as “Tartar beefsteak” in Romania and Hungary that they asked the waiter to cook.

We spent a very nice evening. Out of the 50 Zaire we didn't even spend 1 Zaire for the dinner, and all this somewhere in a dream world.

After 9pm we walked home. Fireflies were shining in the grass, and a lot of night bugs were offering us a fantastic night concert. Sometimes we have it also at home, but here it was every day.

The city was still full of people and movement, but we didn't know what to do with the given opportunities.

In the hall of the hotel, we discussed about the next day programme, and all of us went to our rooms.

We all had some kind of indescribable anxiety, now all was new and unknown for all of us, who knew what mysterious turn of event all this would bring, in which direction would this life be influenced.

We looked ahead to a bit adventurous future, which seemed to

be pleasantly exciting at the moment.

Adventurous because we were standing in front of a blind spot. We didn't know anything about our working conditions, accommodation and travelling possibilities.

It was pleasantly exiting because Africa is beautiful and people are free in it like a bird and because so far we met only pleasant peoples, black or white. So I went to sleep with a peace of mind, we had nothing else to do anyway, next day we would know more. And now came our first African cold shower. I opened the door, switched on the light and got almost paralyzed with horror. On the white walls, 5-6 cm long giant cockroach like bugs started running all over the place. There were plenty of them. The walls were full of them. I made a 180 degree turn to the hallway, leaned against the wall, I was just standing there as a statue and my tears were falling. Few seconds later a young Zairian boy was coming my way. It wasn't hard for him to see my shock. He stopped and asked me what the matter was, I tried to explain that in my room there were 10 cm black animals running around. He opened the door to have a look, and I followed him, but there were no bugs at all. He smiled at me and said, don't worry, there is no problem, and explained me what happened.

What I saw on the wall were roaches. These are inoffensive, not ten but 5-6 cm long, very repugnant bugs. They are very common in houses day or night, they cannot be seen in the light, but they are on the move in the dark.

They are very sensitive to bug killers and are easy to kill.

My colleagues were quiet, probably because they left the light on so didn't have this experience.

I ran to tell my colleagues that they should sleep with the lights on and tomorrow we should have a general pest control. I went to sleep at a colleague for the night.

The next morning for our first day, we all went to look around in the city. In a walking distance from our residence we found the post office, the pharmacy and several shops.

We bought insecticides, bread, milk powder, fruits and vegetables out of what was available there.

That afternoon the schoolmasters appeared to get familiar with the future teachers, and to discuss our tasks.

My schoolmaster was a tall Zairian black man, around 35 years old, he was joyful and friendly. He was in charge of the protestant secondary school in “Katoka 2” region.

He got two teachers from the group. Unluckily, the second one was also a chemistry teacher. Poor Ntumba was begging us to accept to teach mathematics since there were not enough chemistry classes.

He was happy to have us there and didn’t want us to go to another school.

My little plump colleague said that she could perform quality work only in her field, and since she wanted to be a good teacher she accepted to teach only chemistry.

I felt sorry for Ntumba. I asked him to bring me some mathematics school-books, I would read them, and if I could manage the subject I would accept to teach mathematics.

That’s how I became a math teacher for a year in a protestant secondary school, in a city called Kananga, in “katoka 2 “ area, the middle of Africa.

“Katoka 2” was a suburban area. Far from the city centre and from our residence.

We used a taxi daily but it was cheap, it wasn’t affecting our financial resources, and that was the only way of transport until we bought our own cars.

One way to the school costed us 50 makuta (1 Zaire is 100 makuta), so one Zaire was our daily cost for transport to the school and back.

The apartment was free, and the rest of our local salary was enough for everything else, and that was just our local salary. A few days later our Belgian colleagues told us that some of them also had ATG contracts (as we did), and a major part of their salaries was paid in a foreign currency, so we didn't know our real salary yet. The financial aspect became exiting.

Joyful Ntumba reassured us not to hurry with work, told us to come to work a week later, first to get comfortable in our apartment, read through our books and get familiar with our environment.

On our first day of work, Ntumba came for us, showed us the school, our colleagues and the terms of our work.

Everything was a new experience. The school building didn't have any windows, the bricks were laid with gaps between them above the window height on the side of the yard to ensure enough light and air.

Each classroom had at least seventy students.

Each lesson was 50 minutes without a break between them.

After ten hours we had half an hour break.

It was strange to work in such crowded classes, but the students were not noisy and undisciplined, they stared at me with attention, I was different, "white", young, blond and relatively tidy and knew more than them.

They liked that very much.

I could see that they were happy to have me there and didn't want to disturb my class, but there was something I didn't understand.

Time to time one of them stood up quietly and left the room without saying a word to anyone. In the same way he or she came back without notice and that was normal to all of them, except me.

I didn't say a word, accepted it as a local habit, but during a pause I asked Ntumba what to do in situations like those.

If it disturbs you, he answered with the most natural face expression, tell them to ask you for an authorization if they want to go out, get to know who is the head of the class and let him deal the case with discipline, he will help you if needed, he said.

It happened as he said.

In each class the tallest and eldest boy was responsible, and took the job very seriously. If he noticed that someone was misbehaving, because a kid is a kid also in Africa, and not all can behave perfectly all the time, quietly he took them out of the classroom.

They didn't like to be seen outside the classroom because they were punished by having to cut the grass with a "kup-kup" under the burning sun. The "kup-kup" is a 60-70cm long, 4cm wide metal knife-like instrument with its end sharpened and bent in right angle. They were swinging this tool left and right to cut the grass. Disgraceful and hard job. It wasn't worth for the misbehaving in class.

I reached that they asked to go out if needed. They stood up and announced that they were not feeling well and went out.

The first time I heard that I felt like asking them if they thought that I was always chased by motivation...I still do my job, but seeing them speeding out I realized it wasn't what I thought.

The rating was made not by means of marks from 1 to 5 or 10. All teachers chose maximum points at will, and rated the results with 20, 40, 60 or 100 points. If a teacher wanted to pluck a student so that he or she wouldn't have any chance of getting through regardless how much he or she was studying, he or she was given 2/100. It was an ugly system, I had to get used to this too.



Once a Belgian inspector was supposed to attend one of my classes. He reached the door and froze seeing the amount of people, then he turned around saying that is impossible to teach in such conditions.

He was wrong, but nobody paid attention to him, not even Ntumba. This wasn't the Belgian Congo anymore.

I have to note, I still don't know what a Belgian inspector would have done there.

I liked my students, I was almost overcome by emotion when I first saw some of them studying under street lights at night outside the town. At home some of them didn't even have a paraffin lamp. After 7pm it's getting dark, but there were the street lights.

It wasn't easy to teach them to learn logically. During the colonisation, it wasn't the goal. There was no interest in creating intelligent men. On the other hand, scientific explanations of physics were known to contradict their beliefs. They studied, but didn't understand and believe it. That was for the majority, but there were some good students in mathematics and physics.

In Zaire not only the students but the teachers are also superstitious. They believe that the thunder is sent on order by witches or demons. At midnight they change a gourd into a goat that will destroy the enemy's productions. The "fetish" is a carved wooden statue that has supernatural powers, or if a man touches a dead dog he will be impotent, and these are the minor superstitions.

I spoke often with higher classes students about their traditions and there were very interested in our habits. The superiority of the male was the boy's favourite topic. For a while I let them be with their cock attitude, later I compared their knowledge with that of some more able-minded women, mine in particular, and they enjoyed that a lot.

A Zairian man may have officially one wife, but traditionally as many as they want or can buy.

More educated women don't agree with this polygamy,

unfortunately they rarely win on this subject.

The birth of a girl is a bigger joy than a boy because in case of a marriage the parents receive a "dot" dowry, this can be money, animals or any kind of payment. A cow or a goat is often a part of the dowry. They don't use the milk of these animals. Milk is mostly known from tins or powder.

On one occasion, while travelling from Kananga to Europe, we made a stop for few days in Kinshasa.

We stayed in a hotel called "Memling" in the city centre, I wanted to buy some milk in a close-by shop, of course imported boxed milk. There were two types but I couldn't figure out the difference between them. A black storekeeper was packing goods onto the shelves, so I went to ask him if he knew the difference between those two types of milk. He took both boxes, he noticed that one of them had three cows drawn on it, the other one at least eight smaller cows. He took a serious face expression and lectured me: Madam: you don't see? This here is cow milk and this one is pig milk!

At the time we arrived in Zaire, in 1974, there was peace. There were a lot of intellectual and professional expatriates and the locals also lived in acceptable conditions. The educational department provided free accommodation for all teachers regardless of their origins. Property owners were pleased to rent their place to foreigners saying that they would look after it, therefore we had some advantages.

After four or five weeks we were all moved from the hotel room into studios on the ground floor where we had a bedroom, a living room, a bathroom and a hallway that could be converted into a kitchen.

All studios had a small yard through which we had to pass to get to the main road. We liked it. It was comfortable, we near each other, but had privacy. We didn't realize how accessible it was.

Around the mid of November, one of our male colleagues returned from school, found his door open and his apartment empty, someone stole his clothes, medicines and other belongings, he remained only with what he was wearing.

He took off his shirt, washed it and laid it to dry in the bathroom for the next day in school, and he sat outside in the garden. We all went to see him and to discuss about measures to take to avoid such incidents, and while we were trying to find solutions his washed shirt also disappeared through an open window. Our colleague remained there without shirt, it was like a cabaret. Incredibly disgraceful, but funny at the same time.

The news spread quickly among the expatriates there and very soon there were lots of shirts, trousers, shoes, and even more people inquired if anything else was needed.

Slowly we learned about the local habits, our colleagues and the expatriate community.

Our local colleagues were very helpful and we got to know also the expatriate community within two or three month, but the locals' habits never completely.

Their moral norms are specific, just as their culture and general habits.

Stealing is a daily occurrence. They don't steal, just take it if the possibility is given. None of them are aggressive, they wouldn't hurt anyone, they just steal if possible, but murder and robbery aren't common. For the victim, of course, a theft is always annoying. We had to be careful but were not afraid of thieves. We had to keep the car doors closed, not to leave our bags unattended, to close doors and gates, and at home also to lock up our food supplies even if our daily maid was there. We had to lock up all our money and valuables, and employ guards day and night at home.

All the expatriates and locals were doing so, and even so, they were often deceived. As soon as someone didn't pay attention to his or her own belongings for a little while, as if they had got a secret sign from somewhere, they immediately broke in. How horrible is that an outsider would think, but it is far less outrageous than the European aggressiveness,

where they knock you down, beat you up or kill you and only after that they will have a look if there is anything to steal.

The Zairian people are blessed, they were peaceful, kind, helpful, and lovable. Even the street girls and thieves are nicer than in Europe. It was so in those peaceful days.

At school Ntumba, a protestant priest "Wakuteka" and Konji, the head of the educational department lectured us about Africa's mysteries, they told and showed us their traditions.

In the first weeks and months, we were the poorest group of the expatriate community. They gave us our money in local currency exactly in time, what was copiously enough for our daily needs, but not for purchasing a car, therefore we became the pedestrian expatriate group of Kananga.

Wakuteka was the first who noticed how new and different everything we saw there was for us, and took us with his car to show us the savannah outside the town. About two kilometres from the town we stopped to admire the nature, we walked around, talked and took pictures with fervour. Time to time a jeep passed by not paying attention at us until came a friend of Wakuteka. He stopped. With the usual ovation he greeted his friend, introduced himself to us and invited us to his pub on the way back.

At the end of town, in the garden of his house there were 4-5 guest huts, they looked like big umbrellas covered with banana leaves, under each of them a table and about 8-10 chairs. We sat down, the owner came to sit with us and requested us to take of a photo of his new-born daughter, he spoke about her with so much love and excitement as if she was his first born, but soon we discovered that she was the twenty-fourth one.

He spoke to us apologetically. Twenty-four children aren't usual in Europe, but he had four wives.

In Zaire a man may have as many wives as he can buy and support.

This was a different world, an unknown, interesting and beautiful world.

After the duty was finished, everyone lived carelessly regardless the skin colour. It wasn't only the appearance, it wasn't far from reality at all.

Got provided everything for the locals, to eat they just had to collect the food. A workplace and money were, however, needed for everyone to buy those things that didn't grow on trees and couldn't be fished.

Few days later, Wakuteka came again with an invitation to a concert in the protestant church of Katoka.

The churches looked like simple big brick houses. There were benches on both sides, a desk similar to a teacher's desk in front, and slightly elevated, about 5m x 5m platforms similar to stages to the right and left. That is where the performances took place. Choirs and band appeared one after the other with religious songs, wonderful melodic songs which were similar neither to European or African spiritual music and or to African folk songs. They were beautiful. The bands were accompanied by piano or guitar, wind instruments and a tam-tam (local drum).

This concert was a unique life experience, I've never again heard anything like it.

Wakuteka, the protestant priest, Ntumba, the schoolmaster and Konji, the head of the educational department quickly noticed that we were different from expatriates with colonialist manners. We didn't pretend to be more superior, they were welcome any time in our homes, and that was highly appreciated.

All the teachers from Romania were staying in Plasa Hotel so it was easy for the schoolmasters to meet everybody and for the head of the educational department also to pay a visit to everybody. He visited us weekly. Sometimes we went with him

to a multicultural garden pub, these tropical evenings were nice, the atmosphere was good and it was relaxing.

Slowly we were accepted also by the western world's expatriate community. It wasn't easy. Mostly the educational department's workers were worried for their positions. Several members of the Belgian community were considering not to allow Romanian kids into the Belgian school, so that lots of us might not want to stay any longer there.

When Konji heard about that he called the Belgian schoolmaster and announced him that their license would be withdrawn if he heard that he wouldn't take in Romanian kids. He understood that, Zaire wasn't a Belgian colony anymore.

There were 13 of us in Kananga, including 3 in Katoka 2, with local schoolmaster (Ntumba), 4 at IPC with its local schoolmaster (Mwamba), 2 at IK institute of Kananga with a Belgian headmaster (Thellier) and 2 at the catholic school "Athene" with Belgian priests.

Thellier became good friend with the Popa family and shortly with the entire Romanian community. His wife was an active member of the "Alliance Franco-Zairois", a French Zairian club like cultural centre. They invited us to their events and shortly we met the majority of the expatriate community.

Three months later 3 mathematician colleagues and myself were called to a college (ISP- Institut Supérieur Pédagogique). Now the ice was broken, they accepted us, started to respect us and even liked us.

I worked a lot, in the morning in the secondary school and twice a week in the afternoon in the college. It was exhausting, but it was money and a possibility to improve my French.

Christmas was approaching.

The Zairian people are Christians: Catholics and Protestants. In the schools there were Christmas holidays, but already 2 weeks before it we could see Christmas trees in the homes of expatriates and wealthier locals.

The Tellier family invited all the Romanian group to their house for Christmas, for us also to have some Christmas cheer, it was nice, very pleasant, almost a real Christmas. There were plenty of foods and drinks. We left only after 1am.

At that time we were still staying at the Plaza hotel studios. There were 5 of them, and each had a 7x10 meter small yard. It was provided with an iron grille fence and a gate, but there was no lock on my gate. The studio had also a big metallic door on the side of the hotel, but we couldn't open it.

That's where all the Romanian teachers lived: Constantin, Mrs. Dinca, the Palanciuc family, Suciu and myself.

In 1974, at Christmas night all of us went to sleep around 1:30am in our studios. In less than an hour I got alarmed by some broken glass noises. I thought a bottle had fallen off the table. I woke up, put on the light, couldn't find any bottle but I noticed that the entrance door's glass next to the door handle was broken. I got very scared. I started shouting for help, but nobody reacted. I ran to the back to bang on the metallic door, but there was no reaction again. I was banging on the neighbour's wall, but nobody woke up. Nobody was to be seen but I was afraid to go to the yard. So I stood in my bedroom's door and was staring outside. Suddenly I saw a big black man walking into my yard through the gate. I started shouting "thief", and luckily a car was passing by, fearing that the driver would hear my screaming in the quiet night, my potential thief calmly walked out from my yard.

I was standing in the door of my bedroom, looking outside until 6 in the morning. That night was a never-ending night. After 6am all my neighbours started moving, so I got brave enough to run to my colleagues, and to tell them what had happened, and wondered how they couldn't hear my screaming and bumping on the big metallic door. They said they had not heard the screaming, but heard the knocking and thought some locals were doing the noise.

The Italian hotel owner changed the broken glass and the locks,

and fired the guards on the same day. He fixed new locks on the yard door and with that our security was solved.

This was the first and last time that I got so scared by local peoples.

In the school-year of 1975, all of us got a house or apartment in place of the studio. I got a house, considering that my family would soon arrive.

Sometimes in January, Konji planned to go into the bush at about 100km from Kananga to pay a visit to a mission where there was a boarding school, mostly run by American missionaries. He invited Constantin and me to this visit. We were happy about the trip, and he wasn't alone for the long drive. On this trip, for the first time ever, I saw grass higher than our 4wd car, the Lulua river falls and a white man in the mission who ate flying ants. The mission was beautiful, there was a huge park, and it was provided with all buildings necessary for its operation. There were a school and a boarding school, a big canteen and a kitchen, a church, apartments for the missionaries, houses for the teachers, guest rooms, administrative buildings, a theatre, a clinic and several sports courts and guest lounges.

They grew most of their vegetables and fruits locally, and had also livestock.

They knew Konji, so he had a proper reception according to his rank. After half an hour conversation, we had our dinner. It was incredible that in the middle of nowhere there was such a huge, well organized place with power, cold drinks and a very big diversity of food. As a side dish for our meat or fish we had fufu (polenta like meal made from cassava) or bread.



We spent the night there, and the next morning the bells called us for breakfast. This was a protestant mission, but before a meal we all had to pray here, too. All teachers and students were eating in a big canteen, everyone was very disciplined.

On the way back we stopped at a catholic seminary. This was also in the bush, this is where I saw for the first time a crocodile skeleton and an elephant foot in their biology laboratory.

We stopped at the bank of the Lulua River, and bought fresh fish from the fishers who prepared it for us right there, and served it in banana leaves. It was a royal lunch and how exotic.

In Zaire (ex-Belgian Congo), the rainy season lasts from September till the end of May. In those days, big tropical storms lasting for few hours, 2-3 day long rains or 3 to 4 shorter rains in a day are possible, but two or three days without any rain may also happen. From the end of May to September there is no rain, but the sky is cloudy and it was cooler than in the rainy period. God loved this country. There is a big variety of fruits such as banana, mango, avocado, pineapple, papaya, Japanese plum, soursop, orange, maracuya, guava, palm nut.

Most of the European known vegetables are grown on higher lands. The animal kingdom is very huge and colourful. The evenings are filled with the chirp of bugs, and millions of firefly like lights can be seen in the grass. There are a lot of butterflies and various birds of different colours and sizes. I had my favourite, similar to the European wagtail, it was beautifully singing, especially at night and liked to be around people. Once I saw one of them nesting at a border crossing in Rwanda, in the officer's office next to his files, and it was flying in and out through the openings in the wall, not disturbing the workers there.

In the morning the bird singing is so loud that it is hard to have long sleeps.

The main nutrition of the local people includes the manioc, beans, corn, sweet potatoes, plantain, and palm oil. Their alcoholic drink is the "kasix", a fermented banana

juice. On some areas, they eat even rats, and they eat snakes, worms, locusts and flying ants everywhere. Kananga city, where I started my African career, is the capital of the Kasai region. It is a savanna like region. It does not have a seashore or a lake. The Lulua river passes through, but it is impossible to swim because of the crocodiles.

The Munkamba Lake is at one hundred kilometres, which was a favourite holiday resort for the expatriates. It has a slowly deepening and sandy bottom, the water is clear and cures fungal skin diseases. We experienced that when some white patches about 2 cm in diameter appeared on my son's hand. According to doctors he attracted some fungal infection, probably at the beach. After few unsuccessful trials, an American acquaintance, a doctor advised us to go to the Mukamba lake, where these would disappear. This was the solution. Around the lake there were 25 houses fully furnished and provided with an equipped kitchen for rent. A house boy was provided with the house, if requested, who cleans and cooks. Around the lake they were a lots of orange, mango, papaya and palm trees, the nut of which is used to extract the palm oil and this is the main ingredient in the Mwamba, one of the most loved Zairian food specialities.

At 150 km from Kananga there is the Fwa Lake, in which we couldn't really swim because of its very cold water and depths, but it is one of the wonders of the world. Its bottom is malachite crystal, the water is clear, and all this is surrounded by green tropical vegetation. There are no weekend houses here. Just boats for rent for the tourists. Somewhere in the middle of Zaire there is one of the world most amazing places which very few people saw, but I did. 20cm long dark coloured fishes are swimming in it, but all this is so pretty that even the locals aren't fishing there.

The city is very wide. In the centre, there are the administrative offices, luxurious hotels, shops, the "cercle sportif" (which has a big pool, tables and chairs under the trees,

four tennis courts, a garden and indoor restaurant and a beer house), a post office, pharmacy, a cinema and an open air cinema in the yard of a fancy hotel. There were areas where mostly white people lived in luxurious conditions. The property owners were local Zairians, but were pleased to rent the houses to white people. They looked better after their properties and paid in time. Almost only locals were living in the suburbs, in small houses with or without electricity, in green zones. My students, but also the local teachers, came from there to the school, sometimes several kilometres by foot. When in the morning at 8 we had a tropical storm, we knew that on that day there wouldn't be any teaching.

In Zaire the foreign teachers had two types of contract. Most of the Belgians were paid by their own country, others had a so called ATG contract, and they were paid by the Zairian government. We were part of this group.

In the first months, we had a visit from a representative of the Romanian embassy, he told us what we should do or not. We knew from him that a part of our salary was paid in the local currency and we had to cover all our local expenses from it. It was more than enough for that. The second part of our salary was paid in US dollars, but we had to forget about that money, it had to be sent back to Romania and the equivalent would be paid to us at home in leu.

The educational department asked us to give our bank details after a few months, but by then we all had our bank accounts in Belgium. The ATG contracts were signed personally, and the Romanian state had no say in that matter. In the mid of the first year, the vice principal of the ISP (Institut Supérieur Pédagogique) asked me to take over physics classes for 3 different levels, I accepted it. In the first year, the class started with 180 students, less than half reached the second academic year, and there were only 30 students in the third year.

Deep inside me I knew that this reduction was not the result of insufficient intellectual capacities. There were very intelligent and motivated students.

Africa brought a huge change into my life. Here too I worked a lot, the secondary school and college kept me very busy, but after 4 or 5 months I bought a car, and after I finished my work I could go out. In Romania after such a short period of time I wouldn't have been able to buy even a Trabant. Here the grumpy rush, the grey autumn-winter days were over, just as the envy, the lack of money, the constant run after buses and the hatred between nations.

We got slowly very good friends with most of my Romanian colleagues. It wasn't the case with a married couple. One of them was the Romanian chemistry teacher who was posted to the same school with me and on account of what I got to teach mathematics. That woman was full of complexes because of her puffy shape, her illiberality or her countryside origin, or all this together, and had intolerable hatred, especially against me, even though she took away all my chemistry hours, but didn't count with the turn of events that after all happened. Around the end of that year, one of the mathematician married couples told me that at the IPK (Institutue Pedagogique de Kananga) there was an opening for the chemistry professorship for the next year, and if I was interested, probably their headmaster would be happy if I accepted the position. I was interested. This school was in the town, and each class had only 40 students to teach instead of

70.

Their schoolmaster, Mwamba, was often a guest to them, and therefore an old acquaintance also to me. I got a certification from him regarding the position opening, I went to the head of the educational department, and since in Katoka 2 I didn't have a proper position for my qualification, my transfer was accepted right away.

In less than a week, Konji called me in his office. He wasn't a nervous man. but this time I could see his indignation. He was the head of the educational department for an area as big as Hungary. He announced to me the finality of my transfer, and told me that he had a visit from my colleague from Katoka2 who requested the opening in IPK. When she discovered that from the next year it would be given to me, she threatened Konji that she would lodge a complaint to the

governor. She forgot that in Zaire there was no communism and nobody cared about the fact that she was Romanian and I was Hungarian. Konji was so surprised that he couldn't find words, but promised that if he saw her in the governor's office she would be on the next plane to Bucharest.

He did all this quietly and with lots of diplomacy, but probably it wasn't the first time he had to deal with expatriate teachers attitudes.

As July was approaching, all teachers were getting ready to travel home. The educational department gave tickets every 2 years but if someone wished to go home he or she could do so on his or her own account. This is what I did. I flew by Air Zaire to Rome where I spent 3 days, and continued my route to Budapest to visit my sister, and then took a train to Kolozsvár.

The possibility for this trip was also marvellous, as in normal circumstances we could get a passport to travel from Romania to Hungary only every 2 years.

My little son whom I left when he was 3 years old didn't jump around my neck, didn't ask me what I brought him, he was just looking strangely, then he spoke to me and showed me his toys and couldn't get enough of my presence, and myself with his presence. He was 4 year old already and appeared to be such a big boy. I felt very emotional and overjoyed. It was so wonderful to see my beautiful big son again.

In September I returned to Africa alone, but I was less worried this time, for the next holidays the educational system would give tickets to all my family, and then we can travel all together. My husband understood it, and so did my son, then the days countdown started. Unfortunately, the educational department paid tickets for all the family if the male member of the family worked with them, so this benefit was not granted to my family. I had to pay for my family's tickets, and my husband had to fight to get the travel authorizations. In 1976, I returned again home, and that time we could go back together.

Nobody knew what happened but at the end of august the teachers didn't get their passports. We went 5 times to Bucharest,

with several colleagues from Kolozsvar, either myself or my husband but without success. The Zairian embassy gave an ultimatum to the ministry, but still nothing happened. Somewhere around mid of September my husband travelled to Bucharest and called me the following day, the passports were in his hand. He did not return home. asked me to pack up and join him there with my son. My parents were very sad knowing that we were leaving the following day. Their grandson leaving them was heart-breaking. That afternoon we went to say farewell and at 7pm my father came over with a water melon. That was the alibi to see his grandson once again. He didn't stay long. He couldn't handle the situation without crying, but he didn't want that in front of the child. I saw his tears when he turned around before leaving.

When we left my mother said that she would never see us again. This is what happened. We couldn't even go to her funeral. This is how it was in that damned communist world.

We arrived in Kananga, and we started the daily work. My son was allowed to go to the Belgian school at 5, I went to teach and my husband was studying French.

Less than a month after we arrived back, when I was just going into the town, a 4wd passed my car from which someone yelled "good morning" in Hungarian. Of course I pulled over and stopped, so they did behind my car . I knew the owner of the 4wd, he worked there. His passenger, a Hungarian-born but Belgian citizen was his friend, introduced himself as Sputnik. He was a cheerful Hungarian pilot who left Hungary for Belgium in 1956. The same evening we had dinner at the "cercle sportif". He asked my husband to go with him 2 days later to Kinshasa (Zaire's capital), where he worked as Mobutu's private pilot, to find him also some work.

My husband came back to Kananga after 10 days, and he told me with some anxiety but satisfaction that he was going to work as a veterinary manager on an animal farm in Lombo situated at 1000 km from Kananga. And so he left.

We went to visit him with my son for the winter holidays. We flew to Libenge for 600-700 km, where my husband was waiting

for us in a 4wd, the only way to do the remaining 300 km.

This was the end of the world. I felt that there was nowhere to go further from here. It was an endless territory, and there was hardly anybody to see. My husband was living in a huge house. Everything was enormous there. The farm was few thousand square km wide, he was taking care of 2-3 thousand cows and 2-3 hundred horses, their health and well beings. He had a few Zairian colleagues but the only expatriate working on the same farm lived at 6 km from his place.

Transportation was made with jeeps or on horse backs.

Every month a special charter from England brought their supplies of drinks, cigarettes, food stuffs and, in general, all that was needed. From England since this huge farm belonged to British.

My poor husband worked there for a year but he said that a normal person couldn't endure more than that or would become alcoholic there.

I asked Konji to request a position for him as a teacher. And he got an ATG contract in a farming school next to Bukavu, in the Kivu region, in Majuza.

This was again not Kananga, but in Bukavu he had a normal civilized life, where there were a lot of expatriates and he was teaching in a school. Every day he went to Majuza at 40 km from Bukavu with his German colleagues since the agricultural school was a German project.

After a year the Germans offered him a house in Majuza where the German colony stayed but he kept also the house in the town.

Meanwhile, he bought a car and so he felt more comfortable.

My son was staying with me in Kananga. He went to a nursery school there, he acquired perfect French, and as he started his first school-year, he didn't have any language difficulties. He had a lots of friends, everyday we went to the pool as other parents with their children.

Every weekend there was a party either for us or the kids, nobody was bored or left alone.

The first problem started when my son got some kind of spots on his palms and knees. I tried to help with some creams and antiseptic lotions but without success. The doctor of the Belgian community returned to Europe and the new one didn't arrive. I went with my kid to the American doctor. He gave him a cream that helped even less than the ones I used. My son's spots spread from his knees to his ankle and from his palms to his elbows. And it was itchy and painful.

When this situation started to be unbearable, the new Belgian doctor arrived. He was very young and never worked on tropical areas. A Belgian military officer's wife, the mother of one of my son's friends took an appointment with him and she rushed with us to see the doctor. The poor doctor had never seen such a thing in his life. He called in his Zairian colleague, and asked him what it was. His assistant was also young but knew the local diseases. He explained him that this was a microscopic parasite that lives under the skin and it's incurable unless the parasite is localized and frozen. It was difficult to localize the parasite. The Doctor applied some ointment on my son's diseased limbs to mitigate the infection, and left it for the following day.

Instead of healing that night my son got a fever. By the morning he had already a 40 degree temperature, he hardly could open his eyes. I ran to the doctor. He jumped into his 4wd and I followed him to the clinic. With his assistant he cut of the visible paths on the legs and the hands where the parasite left traces, he gave also some injection, and from then on for a month he was cleaning those wounds and replaced his bandages daily. He did all that with much love and dedication. The thought to charge me for all this didn't even occur.



*In front of the Plasa Hotel  
in Kananga*



*Hotel Plasa in Kananga, studios*



My first photo near Kananga, on the bank of the Lulua



*Első fényképem Kananga közelében, a Lulua partján.*



*Protestant church*



*First houses in Kananga*



*Road between the villages from Kananga to the mission*



*On way to the mission: Konji, the driver and me*



*Waterfall on the Lulua river*



School-girls in the missionary



*The greatest building on the main street of Kananga, the Imocassai*





*Main street of Kananga*



*Mukambai-tó*

Mukambai Lake





*Fwa Lake*



*Fwa Lake*



*Fwa Lake*



*With my college students*



*Mwamba, his wife and their daughter, the Palanciuc family and me*



*The family in Kananga*



*Road to Majuza*



*Vegetation of Majuza*





*Sanyi and Sanyika go to swim in the Kivu Lake in Majuza*



*With Sanyika in Kananga*



*Sanyika and his friends in Kananga*



*Sanyika and me with the Tellier family*

The atmosphere was familiar between expatriates in this city. Slowly everybody knew everyone. One night on the terrace of the “cercle hippique” we counted fourteen different nationalities in our group. Everybody spoke French and the origin didn’t matter. There were between us construction workers and entrepreneurs, mostly Italians; traders: Portuguese and Israelis; protestant priests: Americans; teachers: Belgians, French, Americans, Haitians, Dutchmen, Finnish, Romanians; airport workers: English; managers of the brewery:

Belgians and Greeks; the electricity line builders: Yugoslavs...and myself the only Hungarian. My circle of friends quickly grew in large numbers. The family of Temmerman, the Belgian officer took me and my son almost as family members. Our kids went to school together, for Maggy, the wife of the house I was the daily recreation, as soon as we let the children play. She spent her days at home with her new born baby. She could move out only at night when the kids were sleeping. She could leave the baby with the bigger one, outside they had a watchman.

Thanks to Maggy I wasn’t missing any foodstuff. The military officers had a monthly charter providing from Belgium all their needs in supplies; food, cigarettes, drinks, and others. Maggy always ordered for both of us.

In Kananga we didn’t have TV or a videoplayer but because in every household the maid was doing the work, the house ladies who had no job were bored. I probably never saw elsewhere such an active and big social life as there. In the afternoons everyone went to the pool, played tennis, had a beer, in the evening we visited each other and went out to eat.

There was in Kananga a so called “Aliance Franco-Zairoise” cultural club where every Saturday a movie combined with a party was organised. I never danced as much in my life as in Kananga. The Tellier family were organizing the Aliance’s activity, for free but with a lot of passion.

The Belgian officers usually were sent to Zaire for 2 years but most of them tried to have a prolongation.

It was always summer here, their salaries was higher than in Europe, their life stress free, houses bigger and comfortable, the cleaning, washing and household were done by their maids and had watchmen to look after them.

It is so in African countries for foreigners with a working contract and peace in the country.

If there is no peace in Africa it can relate to several different factors. In most countries an internal issue can lead to a civil war, but in Zaire something else happened in 1978. The country was attacked from the outside. From Angola armed soldiers and civilians came barefooted and off their faces, and invaded the city of Kolwezi in the Shaba region, and they killed whoever they could. The weapons were from eastern Germany and the officers from Cuba.

In Kolwezi there were a lot of foreigners, mostly French citizens working for the Gecamin mine. There were huge copper mines all around Kolwezi. The Shaba region is one of the country's richest region. The rumour was that the communists had an eye on the region.

The Belgian soldiers based in Kananga were informed from Brussels and we listened to the French programs in the South African radio.

The Belgian community meant our security in Kananga. We knew that in case of trouble they would organize an evacuation for all foreigners.

During the day the armed civilians mixed with the local population and at night as if they had come out of the ground, they infested the city and killed and stole everything in their path. Mobutu, the country's president, desperately asked for help from Europe and the big nations, but in vain. They were discussing if it was possible to interfere in the country's internal affairs while the killing machine was moving on. Two days later Zaire dropped 350 sky-troopers over Kolwezi, these man



were all killed already in the air by the invaders. And the foreign help didn't come.

This horrible situation lasted for a week. The French and world leaders had enough. They sent 300 soldiers from the French foreign legion to Zaire. These men were highly trained soldiers. As the invaders saw the French planes they started running everywhere they could but the legionnaires started firing as soon as they dived out of the plane, unfortunately 5 of them died.

Very soon the battles started on the ground. They captured some officers and shot lots of rebels, which was followed by the identification of the remaining of them between the local populations.

More army planes arrived with reinforcement.

They found plenty of dead bodies, foreigners and Zairian civilians. Most of the expatriates were evacuated alive or in coffins to Europe.

Few days later Mobutu had the east-German, Russian and Cuban embassies as well as the Russian airline office closed.

## **BELGIUM AND AGAIN KANANGA**

Zaire is a very big country. Kolwezi was far from Kananga. The other parts of the country were peaceful.

When we finally we were joyful and excited to get prepared for our summer holidays, as a cold shower a notice came from the Romanian Embassy, saying that our contracts with the Zairian government were terminated and that all Romanian teachers had to go home.

We had no choice. We sold all our belongings and travelled to Kinshasa, the capital, where we received our plane tickets.

The Romanian Embassy gave us a one way ticket.

I met my husband in Kinshasa and flew to Brussels with Air Zaire. We were supposed to change plane to go home.

All our colleagues and us went out for a few days in town. Where my husband told me that I could go home if I wanted to but he would not go back to the Ceausescu dictatorship.

The communism wasn't appealing for me neither, but my parents were there, my sick mother, and I knew that if I didn't go back now maybe I would never see them again. I understood my husband and knew he would stay. But what was going to happen if I went back with my son? A torture, because my husband fled. They will never let me go anywhere, my son will grow up and obviously will go after his father, and I will stay alone at Ceausescu's. I had no choice, we stayed.

The decision was hard. I knew how much my parents would suffer. I left them for good. We stepped into nothing, and now we faced one of our life's biggest challenges.

We applied for an asylum status in Belgium, rented an apartment in Brussels and waited.

After 3 months, we got a rejection letter. They wrote that Belgium was not the first country of reception, in 1974

from Romania we flew to Kinshasa, therefore our first host country was Zaire where we could submit this request.

We had less and less money, the Belgians asked us to leave the country, and we couldn't work. What to do now?

In my passport the Zairian visa was valid until March of the following year, but my husband's visa expired. No problem, we thought, he would go to the Zairian Embassy, ask for a visa and we would go back to Africa. It would have been too easy. The Romanian government asked the Zairian Embassy not to issue any visa to Romanian teachers.

We didn't have much choice. I went back with my son to Africa, my husband submitted immigration applications to several French speaking countries, hoping that they would accept him somewhere.

We bought our tickets and started our journey back to Kinshasa on a Belgian plane, a Sabena. I didn't know how hard the task waiting for me would be, but my son was next to me and for his future life I had to take this fight.

No Romanian agents were waiting for me at the airport in Kinshasa, my visa was valid and we went to the town without any problem. We went to a Belgian family that took us in for few days.

The next day I went to the UN with my rejection letter from Belgium to ask for an asylum status. The United Nation offices were in a big 10-storey building in the town. I showed my papers at the secretary, a blond secretary with a knot of hair asked me to sit down, and after a few minutes she took me to the commissioner in charge, a high, blond arrogant Norwegian man.

I showed him again my papers, told him the reason I was there, and that I would like to go back to Kananga to work but for that I needed an asylum status from him. Here and nowhere else because this is the first host country.

For half an hour he was mumbling a lot of nothing, and at the end he told me that he would not take my application, but he advised me to go to the African refugee office, saying that with them I could settle

everything. He gave me their address and so I went.

I took a taxi and arrived in a bungalow including four or five rooms, with doors opening on the yard. One of the doors in the middle had a board saying Refugee Office. There was no guard, not to speak of a crowd.

I knocked and went where I was sent. In an about 20 m<sup>2</sup> room I was received by Diamana, the black director of the refugee office. He was not Mr. Commissionaire but a “citoyen Diamana”. I explained him in which situation I was. He was surprised that a white person didn’t want to go back in the white people’s world, but he respected my decision. He didn’t tell me that he only dealt with black refugees, but asked me kindly to go back to that Mr. commissionaire and ask him for a letter stating that he passed this case to him. It’s not a big thing but he needed this letter to start a refugee procedure for a European person.

So I went back to the United Nation. On the 9th floor, I didn’t get passed the blond secretary. She stated that Mr. Commissionaire didn’t have time to deal with me, and anyway, he wouldn’t give me such a letter.

On that moment I felt lost and couldn’t see the end of the tunnel. I couldn’t go back to Europe, even less to Romania. I had no visa to anywhere, and in Romania maybe I would even go to jail. What was going to happen tom me and my son if we couldn’t stay here?

I took the elevator, put my sunglasses on and cried all the 9 floors. I was very nervous. I hated all this hypocritical civilized world. The communism that we could only escape like this and also the Norwegian worker.

I went back to Diamana, I stopped in the door and couldn’t say a word. I was just using my hands to show that I failed to get his letter.

What happened Madame, you didn’t get that letter ? he asked me, and again I just waved my head to say no. Take a sit and don’t worry, we will manage without him. It was not the first time that this Norwegian did that to me, and he cheered me up that he would

do his best, and told me not to worry. He looked for a form, the same as the one we completed in Belgium. There was a question asking why I wanted an asylum status and why in this country? I knew that here I shouldn't give spontaneous reasons, a well-thought-out autocratically accepted sentence was needed, but how a common person should know that. I had the courage to ask the very honest looking and helpful Diamana what to write here. He stepped to his library, took out a kind of dictionary, opened it somewhere, and underlined a few sentences: there you are, write this, he said.

When I gave him the form he asked me if I had money to live on until I would find a job, he could transfer me some subsidy that they gave to the Africans in need but it was very little. This blessed African governmental officer had a great soul.

I told him what I planned to do. I would go to the educational centre, I would try to get a new work contract, go back to Kananga and hopefully I would be able to keep on teaching. I would find a place to stay and still had money to live on.

Before I left he asked me to come back in a month, until then he would try to get that asylum status for me, but he advised me to write to Geneva and explain all the torture that I had to do here with the UN. To Geneva, to what address? Again he looked for some books, wrote out the UN centre address for me.

The same day I went to the educational department centre to apply for a new contract or have a prolongation. The ATG contracts were handled by a Belgian man. He comforted me that there was no problem in having a prolongation of my contract. He asked me to complete the application form, and come back the following day to have it signed by his director and I could go back to Kananga to work. All this happened exactly like that, the following day we signed my work contract, but joy mingled with pain, the Belgian employee told me that not long ago the Romanian cultural attaché had been there and had been very surprised to know that I wished to work again in Kananga.

I did not need that confrontation with him. . I went to the Air Zaire airline' office, bought tickets for both of us, and the following day I was travelling with my son to Kananga.

Here I was home already. We went first to an Italian family, then to educational department. When Konji, the head of the education department saw me, he was overjoyed and almost jumped out of his chair. He didn't expect to lose so many teachers at the end of the year and he thought we all came back. I had to disappoint him but he was happy that at least one came back.

My apartment was already given to another teacher but I got the promise that within two-three days I would have it back. During that time we were staying with the Italians.

I reported my son to school and for few days the Belgian neighbours took my son with their children to school and back.

I did not have a car, and at that point no money either for one. One solution remained: to buy a motor scooter to have a transport for myself and my son.

Unfortunately only the Zairians had used scooters and those were unusable.

The third day when I came back from school I saw a brand new scooter in the garden that the Italian family bought for me so I could move around. It was brand new and they knew I could not paid for it, at that moment but said I could pay for it after I got my salary.

I learned to drive that scooter and we were mobile with my son and finally there, where everyone was welcoming us with open arms.

After a month I went to Diamana. He immediately recognized me. He took a A4 paper out of his desk that he raised up with both hands and proudly said: It's here, I got your refugee status, from that moment I can stay with my son in the country as long as I wish to do so, here no one will hurt us, feel at home in the recipient Zaire.

I was very happy and just as he was because he could help.

I told him all I had gone through so far, he was listening smiling and just said that all would be all right. But if we wanted to go to Europe he couldn't give us a travel document for that we had to go to the UN and ask for a travel document there as refugees. He can give us a stamped document with which I can apply for a visa too, but probably no country will issue one.

The summer holidays were still ahead, the travel document was not so important, my husband situation was a priority. He couldn't come with us, and could not stay in Belgium either. The police came to him every week to ask him to leave or go to jail. I was unable to call even from Kinshasa, we communicated only by letters. Every day felt very long, but we finally we could see a future.

He bought an ink eraser, modified the date of the Zairian visa in his passport and came back, that was the last time he used his Romanian passport.

He spent three days in Kinshasa. He went to the UN office and the person in charge there wasn't rude with him anymore, it appeared that in the meantime he got a copy of my letter I wrote to Geneva and was asked to deal with our case, I received myself a copy of this letter back from Geneva.

He didn't send my husband to Diamana. He gave him some documents to complete, requesting a refugee status from the UN for all three of us.

For this status we had to wait over a year, but we did patiently. .

My husband got back his previous job also and we lived as before.

During the summer holidays all the European teachers went back home. Already one or two months before departure the preparations are big and everyone is excited about the holidays in Europe even if at the end of the summer all were happy to get back to Africa. We couldn't go home, we didn't have one, but we didn't really felt like going to Europe.

My twin sister who lived in Hungary applied for a passport and we decided that I and my son would go somewhere where I would get a visa on the travel document issued by Diamana. No one gave us a visa but the Italians, so we went to Rome.

Laura, my sister took her son also with her, we met at the train station, and we went to a nearby guest-house and started our common holidays.

For a holiday money is needed, my bank was in Brussels where I wouldn't get a visa. Those days we didn't have credit cards therefore there was no option to get my money. I had to call an Italian friend who worked in Kananga and had cashed some bank checks for me earlier when needed money, and I asked the same from him here. No problem he said, just go to X street to a certain bank, show your documents and within half an hour you would get the requested amount. I went with my sister, she spoke Italian, so we could manage. I gave them my documents on which I had the Italian visa with my name on it and said that I was waiting for money from Milan. They asked me to sit down and wait. I waited half an hour, one hour, two and still nobody came and my papers were with them.

After I got tired of waiting, I called Paul hoping he knew something. He did. The bank informed him that the lady didn't have a passport, what to do with this case? Paul got hot under the collar, and told them that this woman got somehow in this country, that's her name, the money is mine and you give it to whom I asked you. Within fifteen minutes they took care of it.

Our holidays lasted for two weeks. We went to the sea every day. The children loved swimming. We had lots to talk about.

Spiritually energized, and without fear after two weeks we went back to Kananga.

In September, we started our work routine.

And that was good so. After my husband came back, we applied for a UN travel document "Titre de Voyage" and we got it. It is like a passport but without nationality.



Finally we had a document and we hoped that we would get visa anywhere and can travel anywhere, except for Romania. That's what was written in this little book that signified freedom for us.

In the first days of December, a Belgian colleague of mine asked me to go to the Catholic Church, there would be a mass held for the memory of a common colleague, who died in Belgium several days before. On my way to the church I stopped at the post office. I received a letter from Kolozsvár, with a black stripe in its corner.

My mother died, she was buried two weeks before.

I went home, closed the door and cried out loud.

They couldn't inform me in time, but no way I could have been with her on her last journey because of the hateful communist system.

A bit later I went to the church and listened to the event who could have been for my own mother also.

## **HEADING TO BUKAVU**

We were in 1979. My husband was living in the Kivu region in a city called Bukavu. He was teaching in an agronomic school and in part time he was healing and looking after the German project's animals. Both my son and I were living in Kananga. The schoolmaster was a gruff Belgian person. Konji got transferred somewhere else already six month before, still as a head of the educational department. Mobutu made a law stipulating that persons with high ranking status shouldn't stay more than four years working in the same province to avoid corruption. Konji wasn't an exception either.

My son got a new teacher, a young Belgian who took pleasure in smacking his students, but wouldn't allow anybody to beat my little blond boy. One more reason why I did not want to stay in Kananga anymore. I planned to move to Bukavu, but I did not know the difficulties involved.

I went to the head of the educational department to ask him how to get transferred. Nothing special was required. He gave me a certificate, showing that I am working with an ATG contract and he would request a position in a school in Bukavu as soon as possible.

I sold all my belongings that I wouldn't be able to carry with me in a week, I bought tickets and left Kananga for Bukavu. From 35 degrees to 25. At the airport in Bukavu I had to put on a jumper on my sleeveless shirt, because I felt cold.

The environment was quite different already here. At the airport of Goma, where we changed planes to Bukavu, there were mountains, including the huge volcano, Nyiragongo on the one side, and the beautiful Kivu Lake on the other side.

At the airport in Bukavu my husband was waiting for us.

Bukavu city is a peninsula on the Kivu Lake. Here we didn't have a different variety of palm trees, but lots of different colourful trees. In Kananga, apart of manioc, peanuts, sweet potatoes, and

some leafy vegetables nothing could be grown, but they had palm nuts out of which they prepared one of the best African dishes, the “Mwanba”.

In the vicinity of Bukavu, the local people were planting lots of different vegetables and known and unknown plants. They had carrots, onions, potatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, corn, beans, tomato, paprika, aubergines, sweet potatoes, peanuts, but there were no European fruits. But we didn't miss anything, all year long we had pesticide free bananas, pineapples, mangoes, passion fruits, Japanese plums, avocados, oranges, mandarins and lemons at any time on the market.

The city had a main road from one end to the other and side streets to the left and right. At the lake side there were beautiful big houses with well-maintained green gardens reminding you a little bit the colonial days. Those houses were owned mostly by locals but rented out to expatriates.

In the seventies Mobutu nationalized everything that was owned by foreigners and gave those to locals. These were the tenements for expatriates.

The system was similar to the communist one, but Mobutu needed just two years to correct it. He gave the local population shops, those were emptied, afterwards they couldn't run them. The plantations were cut, the animal farms were all consumed and within two years the country was paralyzed. Mobutu realized this quickly enough. He promised to give back the seized wealth to foreigners that were already mostly destroyed, but even so lots of them returned and started over.

. There was no reason to feel sorry for them, for long years they accumulated a lot of money using cheap labour and collecting their wealth in European banks.

In Africa the end of the colonization was a necessity at the end of the twentieth century as much as the slave trade at the end of nineteenth century, but the presence of expatriates in several domains is still a necessity today.

Bukavu had three huge secondary schools and a university.

The next week, I signed in with my transfer document to the head of the local educational department. After a short waiting time I was called in and couldn't believe my eyes, Konji was sitting behind the desk.

He got transferred from Kananga but we never knew where and there he was in front of me, again as a head of the education department, I was very happy to see him there, it was a very pleasant surprise. .

As two old acquaintances would do, we told each other what had happened in the last several months, then he asked me where I stayed and if I wanted to work in the school nearest to my home, the "Athene" secondary school. I accepted the offer obviously.

He warned me that the schoolmaster was a Belgian man and he was insufferable and a teaser, but I shouldn't worry, I was at the right place. .

I went with my son to the schoolmaster of the Belgian school, whom my husband already knew personally. It was no problem for him, he asked us to go the following day to the school and he would introduce us to the teachers and my son could go to his classroom.

We were there in time, the introductions to the teacher were done, an approximately 55 year old single lady who started being hysterical saying that she didn't want any more child in her classroom. I could see that the kind, younger schoolmaster did not expect that. He was very ashamed of that reaction. He explained to her that this child had been in a Belgian school before and he would continue here, if she liked it or not. We were very surprised, as these schools were private and normally they accepted anyone who could afford the fees. My little boy with his blue eyes and blond hair was just staring at the situation, didn't understand what was happening and had tears in his eyes. There were his first steps in the Belgian school of Bukava.

My husband had a car in the town and a service car at his work place in Majuza. I was using our private car to work and to take my son to school. .

After a week my son told me that the teacher wanted to talk to

me. I went to school, waited until all the kids left, and I went in, took my son too, and guessed that she had a problem with him.

I called you in, she said, because I was wondering how active your son was in Kananga, because here he is attentive and does everything he is told to do, but never asks anything and doesn't play with other kids.

My little boy wasn't like that . I knew this was a psychological issue and he had to get used to the place. . I told her that, and asked her to let me know if my son had any difficulties in studying so I could help him with that being a teacher myself, and let's talk in a week.

The week passed, just as the teacher's anger. When I went to see her, she was smiling, as if someone had changed her. She said that there was nothing wrong with this kid, he was very kind and sweet, a very good student.

. The ice was broken, my son was now her favourite. She asked him to tell about the school in Kananga, his friends, the city, the nature, what language the local population spoke there. All the students had to write a description of the place they were coming from. With all this my son got back his confidence and finally felt good in the school in Bukavu.

After my son it was my turn. I reported to work, obviously with Konji's letter. It was a very official meeting, but the Belgian schoolmaster wasn't antipathetic. He was happy to have one more European teacher. He called in the Zairian vice schoolmaster and asked him to prepare my timetable for physics and chemistry classes and we kept talking. He didn't look antipathetic. and I never had problems with him.

In the single 20 minute break he introduced me to my colleagues. They were expatriates and locals, males and females from different nationalities and ages and, what we didn't have in Kananga, a teacher from the communist block, a Russian woman. She was tall, blond and friendly and communicable. She told me straightaway the local gossips and we became friends. Her name was Tatiana, she was from Leningrad and officially got there

through her marriage, she hasn't been home for the last ten years.

Her husband was Zairian and she had three obviously half-blood children. She got to Zaire with her husband and luckily got an ATG contract that the Zairian government gave to foreigners, just as to me.

She had her salary in local currency and US dollars too, she was able to support her children. Her husband was never in Bukavu and anytime he came to visit that was costly for Tatiana. In Zaire a foreigner who marries a local isn't allowed to request for the nationality, that's the reason Tatiana was entitled to an expatriate contract. That was lucky for her.

She told me lots of stories about her hometown and that she didn't wish to go back.

Sometimes she cooked Russian specialities, and invited me for lunch, but she took over the African culture and habits. She loved the Zairian food, and even ate flying ants alive. She said that the best to drink a beer with are peanuts and flying ants.

It's from Tatiana that I find out which doctor to go to. In Bukavu, only the Zairian-German "Pharmakina" company had a European doctor from the Czechoslovakia, Mme Lokinga. She got also to Zaire through her marriage to a Zairian man who was mostly also away, in Kinshasa.

I contacted Anne Lokinga. We found out that her son and mine were in the same class in the school and from there on we meet with our children daily.

We stayed in Bukavu in an apartment that the educational department rented for the teachers. There were two apartments on each level. Our direct neighbours were from Tunisia where the man had an ATG contract, his wife was taking care of their first born son, Jacin.

Our circle of friends became larger, and we started to feel good in Bukavu. I had a car, our apartment seemed to be safe, we both had work, the only thing we didn't have was a home country.

But because in life everything is relative, security can be also. On one weekend, my husband came to the town from Majuza, he

came in with two bags and forgot to lock the door behind himself. He left his bag in the entrance hall, came in the living room, we talked, he had a drink, after twenty minutes he looked for something from his bag.



*Our arrival from Kananga at the airport of Goma*



*The Nyiragongo volcano near the airport of Goma*





*View of Bukavu*

He knew where he left it, but it disappeared. Someone stole it. He had his identity card, driving licence, photos, car insurance and money in it. He went to the police to report it, where he was reassured that they would turn up. They would not search them for a week, as they surely would turn up, otherwise they would start inquiring.

In less than a week, a missionary priest knocked the door with the photos and all documents. They were thrown onto the back seat of his car while he was buying vegetables on the market. The money and the bag were retained by the thief, and all things that were not needed were returned.

It happened as usual. The Zairians didn't miss any opportunity. Any open door, an open car, a bag put down somewhere, a wallet showing from the pocket were excellent opportunities for theft, but only if any violence could be avoided. How different it is in Europe.

## **WHEN I FOUND EUPHORIA HIRTA**

Around October 1979, my health condition started deteriorating. Sometimes I had acute pains in the head. I was injected with analgesic in the hospital of Majuza, and that was all. After 2 or 3 occasions, one of our physician friends gave a box of vials to my husband for the case I would need it. But later I had pains not only in my head, but also in my stomach and my whole belly. I felt as if my intestine stopped working, and I had to use suppositories. All European physicians living there were our friends. They didn't know what to do to me. They treated me against malaria, thinking it was a malaria complication. But it wasn't. They treated me against amoebiasis, then with antibiotics against any inflammatory infection, but all in vain. This lasted for six months... and then came the egg of Columbus.

In April 1980, we went to Majuza, because the missionary nuns invited my husband to examine their rabbits and sterilize some of them. He was a free veterinary for them. Shortly after our arrival, sister Margarita, a Spanish nun asked me about my health, and as I couldn't tell her anything good, she offered me to try one of the local healing methods in the last resort.

She took me to the yard, and showed me a small weed, and recommended me to drink the tea of five stems every day. It was a herb very frequently used by the locals, and even though she did not know against what, but its tea was drunk if they had some gynaecological problems, prostate complaints, gastrointestinal disorders, respiratory disease or amoebiasis, pains of inner organs or tumours.

The juice of the plant was used to cure conjunctivitis, wounds, burns and insect-bites. The leaves of the plant were used to swathe the infected and inflammatory skin.

Drink it, said sister Margarita. I had nothing to lose, it would not hurt me, but I would give myself a chance of healing.

I collected five stems right on the spot, and drank its tea already that evening. I drank the same volume on the next day, and again on the third day. On the fourth day, my bowels started moving normally, and some unpleasant symptoms disappeared or alleviated.

I taught physics and chemistry in the school. Biology and botany are exact sciences, but somehow I was never interested in them. When I was a child, my mother surely made herbal infusions for us, but we simply drank it just as we ate our meals. If someone had tried to persuade me, a healthy woman, of the benefits of alternative healing methods, I would have heard him or her only out of politeness, but now I was ill.

Sister Margarita wanted to help, and I was afraid of the incurable disease. I was ready to eat or drink even more disgusting things. I hoped that it was effective, but I was surprised at the sudden effect. I didn't know what had been healed, but I felt better, and that was important for me. I drank my tea every day as I was afraid to stop it

The summer holidays were approaching, and we had already received the travel documents issued by the UN, and we applied for a Belgian visa. From Africa we flight to Brussels, where we tried to apply for visa to Hungary at the Hungarian embassy. They answered with some aversion: it is not a passport, they may not grant a visa.

We were disappointed to learn that Hungary was also a link in the communist chain.

My sister was less ready to accept this situation. She went to the competent ministry in Budapest to ask why I was not allowed to visit my twin with my refugee passport.

They were afraid I wanted to stay for good. They were afraid that a Hungarian would want to stay for good.

My system signed a declaration, stating that she agreed we would leave the country on expiry of the visa. Then we went to Balaton Lake during the summer holidays for years.

On the first summer, my father was happy to join us. He could see his grandson finally. Ironically, children grow up. He recognised his daughter in me, but Sanyika was not the same child who was so deeply attached to them when he last saw him. My big-hearted father couldn't get enough of us. He was not angry anymore. He was interested in and loved anything we told about our life. He was happy to learn we felt well, and got in the car of Sanyi bought in Germany to go with him to Balaton Lake for one day. He had a seizure there. He had to be immediately transported to Kolozsvár,

and after two months he died. I couldn't be present at his funeral, and I even couldn't go home when he was ill, because of the communist regime.

## **PHARMAKINA**

In the autumn of 1980, my husband learnt that a German-Zairian company, Pharmakina wanted to employ foreigners as plant managers. He happened to heal a dog of one of the directors, and they agreed that he would leave the education department and work as a plant manager at Pharmakina.

He had to move to Nyanja, a cinchona plantation. He received a service 4wd, a beautiful furnished house with ten workers merely appointed to meet his personal needs. There was an enormous park around the house, full with flowers and fruit trees.

Pharmakina had cinchona and tea plantations. After seven years the cinchona trees were cut, their bark was removed and powdered in a plant in Bukavu, where an extract named "totaquina" was made, serving as a basis for the quinine manufactured in Germany as a drug for malaria.

My husband supervised the cinchona plantations near Walungu. He had to go several 10 km from his house, sometimes via the jungle.

The Kivu Lake is at an altitude of 1500 m, Nyanja is at 1800 m, and these altitudes and the temperature of maximum 25-28 degrees are the most optimal for the cinchona trees. The quinine contents of the cinchona trees still varied between 5 and 10 percent according to the relief. This is where I first experienced live, how the active substance contents of the plants depend on the location.

Sany enjoyed his new working place. He spent 10 years in Nyanja, and he admitted that it was the best period in his life.

Every Monday he went to the plant of Bukavu to discuss the weekly tasks, and once he found a collection of African herbs in the library of Pharmakina, including the photo of my plant with its scientific name, *Euphorbia hirta*.

There was no internet at that time, and there was no phone in Bukavun. I asked the Zairians, and they looked surprised as they had never heard of a "muzungu" collecting a plant that they knew had a healing effect, but the white people did not believe in such things. Whenever I got off to pick a nice piece they asked me what I was going to do with it.

They felt some self-confidence as I recognised their ancient experiences. If I had been interested in their herbs only as a researcher, they might have been snore at me, assuming that I wanted to steal their knowledge. But that was not the case. I had to get healed, and they were helpful. They taught me everything that herbalists knew about *Euphorbia hirta*.

Literature was available for me only during the summer holidays in the libraries of Brussels and Munich. I couldn't get rid of the thought that this plant healed me from an illness that couldn't be alleviated with the plenty of drugs that had been tried on me. I didn't go to a doctor. What for? I had been healed.

One night, my Belgian friend, Alisé visited me and asked me to go with her to Lokingane, the physician of Pharmakina, because she had strong pains in her breast from which a tumour had been dissected out five years earlier. She was afraid of the recurrence of tumour.

So we went to Anne, who naturally referred her to a physician in Belgium. She was the first one I recommended my tea just as sister Margarita had done. It was useful for me, it wouldn't hurt her, so I told her to drink as much as I had drunk until she received the air ticket, which was at least ten days.

She did so, and then she returned home after two weeks, and it was found she wasn't ill.

She might not have been ill, but who knows?

I couldn't get rid of the thought that I had to understand the effects of the plant.

During the summer holidays, I told a Belgian friend of mine, who had taught in Congo several years before me, what I had found in Bukavun and the case of Alice. She had a natural reaction, and asked me to send her some leaves which she would give to X.Y.

In September, I sent the leaves to her, and the next summer I was told that the tea had been drunk by herself due to her nut sized myoma, which then disappeared.

It was an advance. Something existed, and then disappeared.

I gave some also to my sister. I told her what I knew, and left 200 to 300 g with her.

Then she told about it to her teacher colleagues. One or two weeks later, one of the teachers asked me if I was able to help the two and half year old son of the friends of one of his acquaintances, who had a brain tumour and was, in fact, sentenced to death, because even though the tumour might not have been malignant, but it was not operable to stop its growth.

They sent the leaves to the parents. As it was an unknown plant, first the mother<sup>50</sup> was drinking it, and then she gave it to her son. The effect was a miracle. The child's condition rapidly improved.

This event urged me to continue my research.

In 1984, I had a spasm on the plane heading to Europe. We applied for a visa at the Hungarian Embassy in Brussels, and we received it on our

stateless passport issued by the UN.

We went to my sister to spend the holidays. I went to a physician in Hungary. A tumour was detected. We went to another physician, who found the tumour in my abdomen. There was no doubt, I had a tumour.

I went to a private clinic, as the Hungarian physicians seemed to be too rough and unfriendly, and I was afraid to stay there. I called Mimi, my Belgian friend, whose myoma had been removed by my plant, and asked her to find a gynaecologist because I had problems. After one week, I travelled to Brussels.

A very nice and young physician examined me. He found that I really had a tumour. He could not identify its stage, but said that it had to be removed because it might have slightly twisted on the plane, and this is why I had had a spasm. He could not refer me to the hospital where he worked, but he would find another one, and he would operate me himself.

Mimi said that though he was young he was an excellent gynaecologist, and I should trust him. I did so.

After the operation, the physician told me that I had a necrotic ovarian tumour larger than the size of my womb. He could insect it without any risk, and no further treatment was needed.

The first person I saw when I woke up after the operation was my physician. He told me what he had done and found, and what I should do

I stayed in the hospital for eight days, and my physician visited me everyday. When I left the hospital, knowing that I would leave for Africa, he gave me sterile bandages and syringes.

I must note that the physician in Brussels was not familiar with the idea of tips. Both the physician and the patient are saved from humiliation.

I continued drinking the tea of the plant, and even now, this is the tea for me.

The plantation and the area around my husband's house were crowded with workers. They worked in the landscaped yard, the vegetable garden, cooked meals, cleaned the house, and night and day guards kept the peace in the house. I loved to visit that place on weekends, because there were always plenty of guests from the town. I was saved from cooking and serving, so it was easy and pleasant to receive guests.

My husband enjoyed his new working place. He got in his 4wd car, and drove on the plantation until the evening. There was no phone or mobile phone, but he had a radio connection with the centre and the planters. His office was a five room building two km from his house. The cinchona bark was dried and stored on in an enormous yard.

My husband worked in Nyanja for ten years, and this was the most

beautiful period in his life.

Pharmakina had a German general director, an annoying man, who didn't care about his work, a Swiss agronomic director, who was the same age as my husband and was a very good friend,



The road leads through a tea plantation to the house in Njanja



*The house in Nyanja*





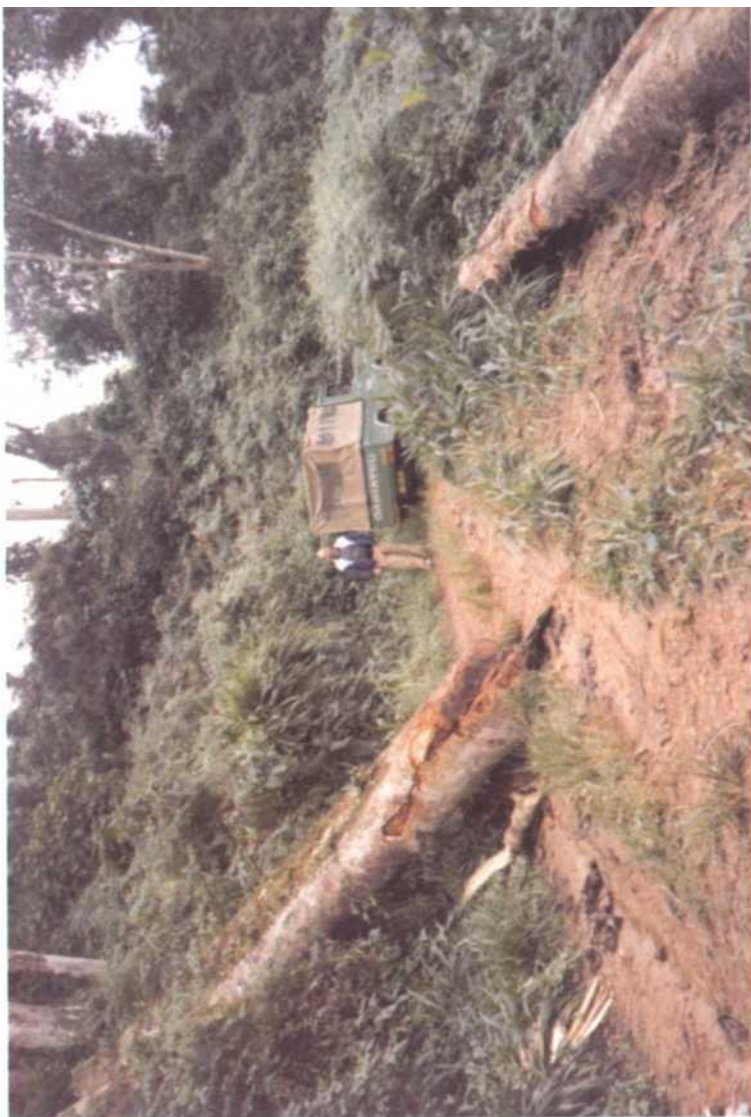
*Nyanja*



*The house and the ground in Nyanja*



*Cinchona plantation*



*Sanyi in the jungle*



*Cinchona and tea plantation*



*Sanyi and Okita*





*Sanyi and Okita's family*



*Cinchona plantation*



an Austrian administration director, who was also a good friend, and a Zairian deputy general director, who was merely there to receive his salary, because this was required by the law.

I didn't know this latter, but knew Okita, the HR director very well. He was a Zairian local, a good friend to all white employees of Pharmakina, an intelligent, well-balanced and always cheerful man who found solutions to any problems. He had two wives, he was found here or there, but it was acknowledged by everyone.

The children of both women called both women their mothers. His second, younger wife also worked at Pharmakina, her name was Ivone, and she was the secretary of the agronomic director, Landolt. Due to her position, we knew her better than the first wife. She often visited us in our home, she was an intelligent, reliable woman, and was a partner of my husband almost in all cases. Africa is a place of corruption, but this must be accepted as it is. But everything can be arranged with some money. In the same as with tips in Hungary, but then they smile there. Once I rushed to him with a matter of great importance. When I paid the car insurance, the official warned me that the insurance was taken out in the name of my husband, but the owner of the car was not changed, and I should re-register it, otherwise the car could be seized by the police. He told me where to go, and so I did. After a while, I was told that the car could not be re-registered as the previous owner had not had it cleared for use, and it was still registered as a transit car, and as we had used it already for four years, I would be even punished.

I surely would not have been able to cope with this problem. My husband was on the plantation, but he could not solve the problem either. Okita was the only chance. I desperately explained him my great trouble. He calmly listened to me, without playing the role of a hero trying to help me, but saying that it would be difficult,

but he reassured me, asked me to take it easy and to go home, we would solve it. It would surely cost some money, but not too much, so we could solve it. And he solved it. After two days, he asked some money, one tenth of the part of my monthly salary paid in Zaire, and it was so “much”, because they simply destroyed the document certifying that the previous owner of the car had not had it cleared for use.

I used that car for additional seven years.

Pharmakina had enormous cinchona and tea plantations, with nine white plantation managers, including my husband.

Two of them lived in Nyanja, a Hollander responsible for the tea plantation, and my husband for the cinchona plantations. There was minimum one and half km between their houses. They had to travel 2.5 km to the hospital of Valungu, and the nearest white neighbour, a Tunisian friend lived at 1 km. He worked for a Belgian tea plantation company.



## **RWANDA AND BURUNDI**

Bukava is situated on the beach of Kivu Lake, and it is separated by a bridge from Rwanda. The nearest city of Rwanda is Shangugu over the border: we used to go there to fuel up when there were problems with the fuel supply.

Our plane departed from Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, when we travelled to Europe. We had to travel through beautiful mountains full with serpentine paths, 100 km by a 4wd car or by a small plane from Shangugu to Kigali.

On our way back, the plane arrived usually late at night, and the airline company accommodated us at one of the most best hotels of Kigali, the Mille Collines.

The wall of the restaurant, the hallway and the reception desk of the hotel were decorated with beautiful, exotic pictures that looked as if they were paintings, but most of them were embroideries. I couldn't resist the temptation, and bought one at the Catholic mission station. It still hangs on the wall of my drawing-room.

All rooms of one of the storeys of the hotel were at the disposal of the Belgian airline company, Sabena, and the crew and the transit passengers were accommodated there.

In this hotel, many Tutsi were afforded asylum during the Rwandan genocide in 1994.

Rwanda is a very small but beautiful country. This small country is peculiar for its mountain range of eleven volcanoes and the national parks of the Kivu Lake.

One or other of the volcanoes erupted every two or three years while I lived in Zaire, mainly the Nyiragongo, neighbouring Zaire, the lava of which flowed to the edge of the Goma Airport. Goma is separated by the Kivu Lake from Bukavu. Large airplanes can land only here. The airport of Bukavu was too small for them. Goma is a significant commercial centre of Kivu province.

Rwanda is inhabited by two tribes: the Hutu and the Tutsi. The Hutu tend to be short, and have broad noses. The Tutsi are taller, and have long noses. But there are exceptions. I met tall Hutu and short Tutsi, but I didn't see any Tutsi with a broad nose.

The area of the country is less than one third of Hungary (26 338 km Rwanda, 93 032 km<sup>2</sup> Hungary, 2 345 409 km<sup>2</sup> Zaire).

The other small country neighbouring both Rwanda and Zaire

was Burundi, which was also a favourite and frequently visited land. Its area is 27 834 km<sup>2</sup>. We used to go to the capital, Bujumbura, to buy imported goods and various fishes. There were hardly any fish in the Kivu Lake situated near Bukavu, while Tanganyika situated near Bujumba was full with various types and sizes of fish.

It was easy to travel 150 km on the paved road from Bukavu situated at 1500 m to Bujumbura situated at 790 m, and we went from a subtropical land to a tropical one. There was very hot there.

As a capital, Bujumbura was full with foreigners, excellent hotels, foreign schools and shops meeting all demands.

Not too far from Bujumbura, there is a huge stone monument marking a location where Africa explorers Livingstone and Stanley met in Ujiji.

Livingstone wanted to discover the sources of the River Nile in Africa until the end of his life, and meanwhile he got familiar with and took a liking to the population of Africa, and fiercely fought to end the slave trade. He came close the source of the Nile, if it is not the Lake Victoria, without knowing it. He died in Hala on 4 May 1873. His heart was buried under a Mvula tree according to the will of his most favoured loyal attendants, Susi and Chuma, saying that “his heart was ours”.

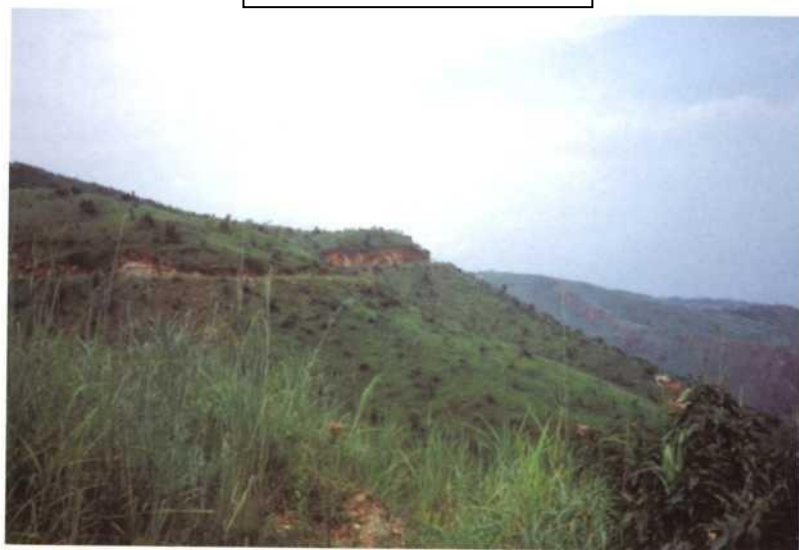
Jacob, his only literate attendant, carved the inscription “LIVINGSTONE MAY 4 1873” on the tree.

Susi, Chuma, Jacob and Manuasere carried the body of Livingston to England at the cost of great self-sacrifice. We owe them so much.

A 70 cm long wooden cross made from a branch of the tree standing above the heart of Livingstone is kept in the only Anglican church of Zanzibar Island. The church was built in the place of the former slave market, and a red marble disk standing in front of the altar



Kivu Lake full with islands



*Road to Kigali*



*Road to Goma*



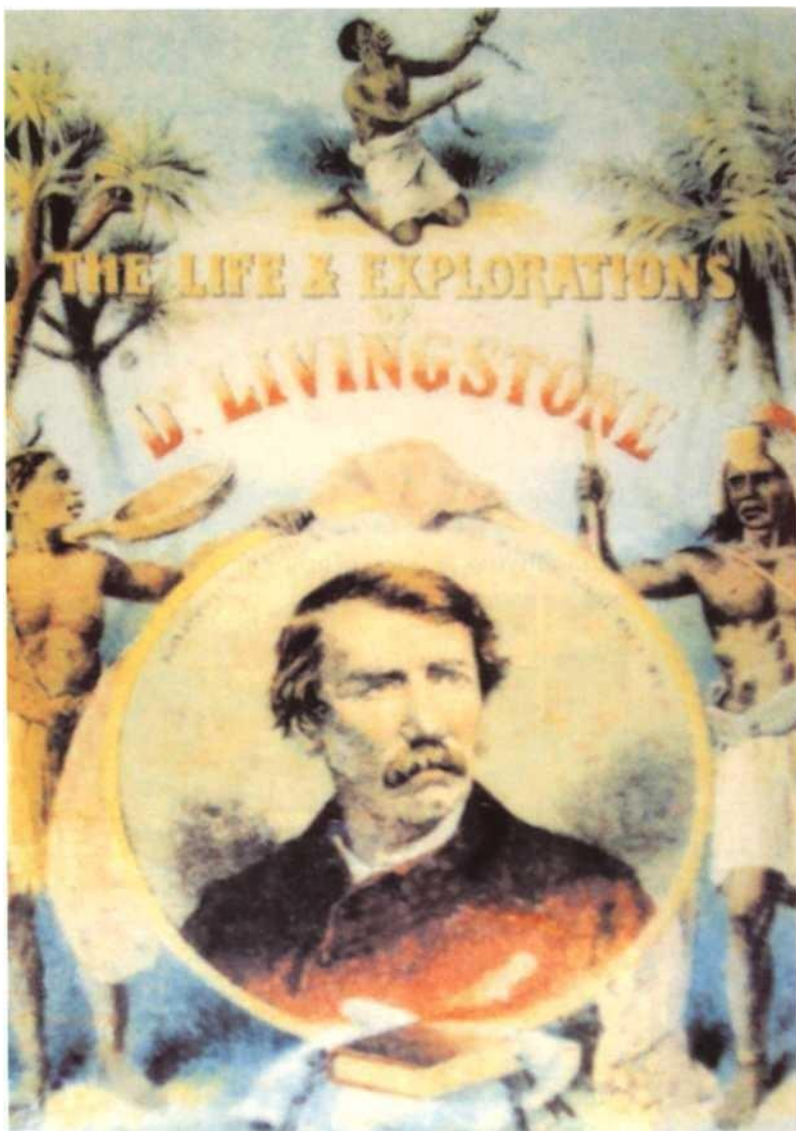
*Road through the cooled lava after the eruption of the  
Nyiragongo Volcano*



The shore of Tanganyika Lake at Bujumbura



*Hotel Source du Nil Bujumburán*



*Dr. David Livingstone*

marks the place of the pole to which the slaves offered for sale were tied, and where the blood of so much innocent people was shed.

According to the Burundi people, the Nile rises in Burundi, and flows into the Lake Victoria as river Kagera. Its length is 6700 km from Burundi, and 5600 from the Lake Victoria.

The name of one of the most imposing hotels in the centre of Bujumbura is Source du Nil, that is the source of the Nil.

## **MOUNTAINS OF KIVU PROVINCE**

Bukavu is the capital of Kivu province. The Lake Kivu is already at an altitude of 1500 m, and the mountains of the province are obviously even higher. Mounts Kahuzia and Biega are located 100 km from the city. This is where the mountain gorillas live. They are huge animals. If one wants to see them, he or she has to climb up to the jungle of the mountain. It is a reserve, and is accessible only by foot, under guidance. The guide carries a gun and has two or three attendants equipped with brush hooks, who cut a path in the exuberant vegetation. They have to walk several kilometres before they can find a gorilla family of 10 to 15.

Anyone visiting in Kivu province must go there. I also went there, when I was visited by my sister.

The gorilla babies are just like bear cubs, they can amazingly jump from tree to tree, and then they stop and beat their chest with their hands.

The male head of the family has a very large white stripe on the back. He is able to tear a man with his long and thick hands into pieces in a moment.

But he does not do so, though it is not recommended to fondle him.

People come from all over the world to Zaire to admire these animals, the population of which is unfortunately not high.

They are one of my favourite wild animals. They feed on green plants, are relatively peaceful, and demand only tranquillity and their mountain.

The movie *Gorillas in the Mist* beautifully presents their hard life.

The other huge mountain of the country is Ruwenzori, the second highest mountain in Africa after Kilimanjaro with its height of 5119 m between Zaire and Uganda. I did not climb this mountain, but our friends told that it is a miracle to see the variation of the vegetation from departure to the peak.



## RETURNING HOME

We really felt well in Bukavu, Majuza or Nyanja, but we had no home in Europe. We went there only to spend our holidays, so we started to think on some solution and to obtain real passports instead of the Titre de Voyage granted to refugees. We couldn't go to Romania, but the communist system was disgusting also in Hungary, so we chose the French speaking area. We submitted our application for immigration to Canada at the Canadian Embassy in Kinshasa. After a year, we were called for a hearing, but we got sick of it. The officials of these civilised countries seem to be trained to humiliate people. They are disgusting.

We were disappointed and left. And then we waited. It was not difficult as we loved Africa.

On a Sunday in 1989, my husband became sick in Bukavu. He had pains in the back, the chest and the left arm. We visited the next Zairian physician, who gave him aspirin. At that time, Pharmakina had no physician, and Lokingane returned to Czechoslovakia for good. I went to a German colleague, who accompanied me to a cardiologist. Heart attack was diagnosed. The management of Pharmakina took immediate measures, and my husband was transferred to Kigali by a small plane the next day, where a physician waited for him on a plane. They improvised a bed, and transported him to a hospital in Brussels. He was sent on leave for three months, and we came to Hungary.

He returned to Zaire, but as the events were turning into the collapse of the communism, I stayed to look after the possibilities of settling there. I started the disgusting procedure all over again, and as it did not seem impossible, we decided to move to this country.

In 1990, we left Africa for good. We did it in the last 24 hours. Firstly, because as regards his health my husband did not feel safe there, and also because the peace of the country disturbed. Mobutu became ill, and "the mice" started to dance.

After his death, the country ceased to be Zaire. Now it is the Democratic Republic of Congo, and is left alone in this world.

In Hungary, we bought an old house with the intention to renovate and expand it.

One day, before my husband came home, I had to go to the railway station to pay and take over the gravel necessary for the building. The driver of the truck transporting the gravel asked if we lived there, or where we came from. When he got to know we came from Africa, he was really surprised. He even asked if we hadn't been able to find a better place in the world. Why here?

Because we are Hungarian.

He shrugged his shoulder, indicating he found my answer rather stupid, and left with a freight.

When he returned, while his truck was loaded, he asked again why we had come here when we were free to move in the whole world.

I couldn't say anything else but that we wanted to talk to our friends and neighbours, to buy bread in the shop in Hungarian, to live where we weren't considered strangers. To live finally in our own house. From there we could go anywhere, but it was good to know that I had a home country and a nation to which I belonged. I had a very pleasant working place in Romania, we got accustomed to our environment, and the use of the Romanian language was natural outside our home, but deep in our souls, we envied the Hungarians.

In Zaire, we didn't have to suffer from the communist ideology, we lived in total freedom and under much better financial circumstances. There we spoke French outside the house.

It didn't matter either, but if I was asked about my nationality, I told that I was Hungarian, but I didn't belong anywhere.

The driver looked in front of himself, and confessed almost remorsefully: you see, now I feel ashamed, I wouldn't believe such thing can exist.

Unfortunately, many don't know but the world is full with people suffering from homesickness.

We received the permit for settlement, and then the citizenship. A dream became true.

## **TAFEDIM AND ZANZIBAR**

Somehow I didn't wish to work at the education department, but I had an African herb in my hand, in which I was much more interested. Based on my experiences I felt that it shouldn't be disposed of. If it helped me, it could help others, too.

I had no idea what to do and where, but my life goal was to import it to Hungary in some form.

It is not easy to cope with bureaucracy and also get rid of false "helpful" people. But I could. If I hadn't seen so many colours of the world in my life, and hadn't learnt to persistently fight for a goal, I would have given up.

When I got to know where to submit my applications for the production and distribution permits, I needed the plant to make a sample.

I couldn't go to Zaire as there was a great chaos there. My husband bought an air ticket for my son and sent him to Burundi for the plant.

My son bought four kg of dried plant.

Meanwhile, the president of the county was killed.

He couldn't stay there anymore, and came home.

Then things slowly calmed down, a new president was elected, and life became normalized.

After six months, my son returned to Bujumba to buy some plant, but he could hardly stay for two weeks, the new president was also killed.

By that time, fights had become fierce.

My son lived at one of his friends in the centre of the city, and saw through the window how people were killed by each other on the street.

When he came home next time, he didn't want to go back anymore.

We were glad to have him back, but after a while we had to face the fact that we would need the plant. But from where?

One of his friends known from Africa advised him to go to Tanzania next time, there was peace there, and Euphorbia hirta surely grew also there.

I got what I wanted. I obtained a permit for the distribution of the Afedim tea. I needed the plant, and my son departed again for Africa.

My husband gave him money to travel to Tanzania.

He could speak some English. He finished his studies in French, however, English was the official language in Tanzania.

My son went to the unknown country.

The parents of one of his German friends worked in Dar Es Salaam, and he hoped to receive the first advices.

But this was not the case.

He stayed in a hotel room.

The other day he asked at the reception desk how to rent a flat and at what cost. He told what he wanted to do, and that he surely had to stay for several months.

The receptionist directed him to Zanzibar Island. We would surely find the plant, and the rentals were cheaper there.

On the third day, my son travelled to Zanzibar by ship.

There he found a hotel room, and started to inquire at the receptionist, and what a small world!

When the hotel owner got to know where he came, he happily told him that there was somebody in Zanzibar, who had studied in Hungary, and he would arrange for a meeting if my son wanted.

This is how my Sanyika got acquainted with Jusuf, who spoke very little Hungarian, but was really happy to meet a Hungarian.

The plant had to be obtained obviously here. It grows everywhere, in much larger volumes than on the continent.

After one month, the registered company of Jusuf could export the dried plant to us.

As the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce of Zanzibar, he knew the well-trodden paths.

Jusuf was happy, as he hoped to earn money, and my son was also happy as he reached the goal, and the supply of some kg of the green plant was an immediate source of income for the locals.

The ground plant was released under name Afedim, just as the balsam and the gel used as skin-care preparations.

I loved this job. I was really happy to receive the positive feedbacks. I had satisfied myself how wonderful this small plant, the *Euphorbia hirta* was. When it is able to help, it has immediate effects. Anyone may drink its tea as it has no negative effects.

In Zanzibar, Sharifus, the healer offers it to those with digestive problems, tumours, to man with prostate complaints, to women with myoma and gynaecological problems, rectal polyps, hypertension, respiratory disorders, ameobiasis and also as an antiphlogistic and an analgesic. He heals wounds, insect-bites and dermal melanoma with the fresh plant.

He heals herpes, conjunctivitis and haemorrhoids with the juice of the plant.

I was and still happy to have the chance to present this botanic miracle to the Hungarian inhabitants, to allow anyone to use it.

When I managed to get through the labyrinth of red tape, get to know the terms of distribution and create the impossible, on a day I received a letter from a Hungarian representative of a French company calling me to withdraw my trademark granted by the Hungarian Patent Office, as they had a drug named Alfetim, easily mistakable for my Afedim tea.

I did not and still do not know the strategic methods of the competitors, but I didn't take the claim seriously. The Alfetim is tablets for prostate complaints available on prescription, while the Afedim is a freely available tea for gastrointestinal problems.

I didn't withdraw my trademark, and I didn't believe it would happen.

Their next step was to initiate legal proceedings against me, and I lost the case, and the Patent Office withdrew my trademark.

I was disappointed to learn this, and asked to myself whether the French Patent Office had also withdrawn a French trademark if it was asked by a Hungarian.

I had no choice but to change the name, otherwise I would be excluded from the market.

I requested the authority to let me add letter T before Afedim, and this is how Afedim became Tafedim.

I applied for another trademark at the European Patent Office, and I received it.

This is how I became an entrepreneur from a teacher, and I don't know which one I would like if I start my career now.

But now I love this latter. There are more challenges, I have to fight for advance, but the results are more satisfactory, and it connects me to Africa.

The memory of staying in Africa for sixteen years cannot be erased. From the communist and dictatorial Romania we could go to a free country where we felt well.

We were stateless in Africa, but we didn't have to live in a refugee camp, and I still understand why the Kurds, the Kosovars, the Palestinians and any other stateless people need a homeland.

I can understand the refugees transported sometimes by smugglers to a country, and I feel with them. They are treated as criminals, when they only want to live in dignity. In dignity. They want to work, to have a roof over their heads, and to feel safe and free. It is a dream for many, while the world is full with real criminals, drug dealers, thief billionaires and graceless frauds.

I still feel thick when around 1989 Hungarians escaping from Romania were returned to the border, even though they knew that they would be beaten or jailed, and they handed them over to the

Romanian authorities. Yes, it was lawful, but was it the only way?

We were protected by Africa from a similar treatment.

We found our home without any hardship. We became the citizens of our own country within two years, and we have been able to feel really free since then.

We appreciate and love this country.

We hate anyone who would be able to sell this nation and the country for a plate of lentils.

We were born to be Hungarian, but Africa became a part of our life.

Now we have business connection with Tanzania and its island, Zanzibar.

Zanzibar is a wonderful island, full with coco palms, huge mango, papaya, banana and plenty of other fruit trees. It has a green and exuberant vegetation, coloured by red, purple, yellow and white blossoming bushes and trees and wild flowers.

This colourful island in the Indian Ocean is like a pearl in the sea.

Its shores are covered by white sand and they gradually deepen. The coastal fishing villages have not been yet wiped off by the collectors of the civilized world.

The ocean's water is crystal clear, salty and warm. The coastal section of Zanzibar city is an exception, where the water of the harbour is clean, but not so crystal clear as elsewhere.

The fresh water is taken from drilled wells on the yards of larger family houses in the city.

This island is a wonderful Paradise on the Earth. It has drinking water, the ocean provides plenty of fish, the soil provides fruits and vegetables everywhere, and no heating is necessary.

The day temperature is 30-35 °C.

There is a constant breeze, particularly on the ocean shore.

The majority of its population are Muslims. Women wear long black clothes in the city, but they wear colourful kanga in the villages. Kanga is a thin cotton-cloth with colourful patterns, from which they make a blouse and a 1.5 m long piece to wind around



their wastes.

They make a fold on their wastes, and it does not fall. It would surely fall from me.

There is Anglican church in the city centre, which was built in the place of the slave market, and it is the church of the small Christian population.

The old city with its narrow back-streets is a part of the world heritage. There are a bank, a post-office, an internet café, elegant hotels, plenty of shops and restaurants. It is full with tourists day and night.

Now the palace of the sultan is a monument. Two enormous paintings of Franz Josef and Sissi hang on the two opposite walls after the entry, in the first great hall. The rooms of the family members of the sultan, the parliamentary hall, their personal belongings and paintings of them are found on the second storey.

As far as I am concerned, I am always astonished by the basement used for the “storage” of slaves on the yard of the Christian church and the slave house outside the city where the sold slaves were taken to. There were chained just like some cattle and transported to their destination by ship.

The slave traders were Arabs. This is why Islamic religion prevails on the island.

The locals are nice and courteous just as in Black Africa.

In the spice park located ca. 20 to 30 km from the city, spices (vanilla, pepper, ginger, turmeric, saffron and many other ones) and fruits are presented to the tourists, and then a coconut gatherer known as the “butterfly” climbs up the coconut tree and is throwing coconuts to the tourists. While he is climbing up, he stops several times to ask if everything is OK. And he sings the Jambo song to welcome the white visitors.

When he climbs down, he opens a coconut with a razor sharp knife and offers the coconut to his guests, saying that it is the Coca-Cola of Zanzibar, but it is healthy.

If anyone asks him for something, and he is able to perform the request, he immediately answers: “hakuna matata” (no worries).

Not everybody loves Africa. Their culture is different from ours. Their habits, outlook upon the life are different, but their merits are not less significant than ours.

God was graceful to me to allow me to get familiar with this world, which became attached to me, and to have the chance to present a really useful thing coming from there to my fellow-countrymen.

I have a Székely gate with an inscription: "TRANSYLVANIA IS MY MOTHERLAND, HUNGARY IS MY HOMELAND, AND AFRICA IS MY LIFE".



*Vegetation of Zanzibar*



*Zanzibar, Indian Ocean*



*The group of statues erected in the place of the slave market in Zanzibar*

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