

Chapter 1

Growing Up in a Society Practicing Ubuntu

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author looks back at his life as a child growing up among a Bantu-speaking society in which life is guided by Ubuntu values. Ubuntu refers to a philosophy that teaches the interconnectedness of humans and the need, therefore, for people to affirm the humanness in each other, to relate humanely with others, and to work harmoniously and cooperatively as brothers and sisters. The philosophy also teaches us to be responsible stewards of the natural and wildlife environment because human survival depends on its sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I look back at my life as a child growing up among a Bantu-speaking society in which life is guided by Ubuntu values. Ubuntu refers to a philosophy that teaches the interconnectedness of humans and the need, therefore, for people to affirm the humanness in each other, to relate humanely with others, and to work harmoniously and cooperatively as brothers and sisters. The philosophy also teaches us to be responsible stewards of the natural and wildlife environment because human survival depends on its sustainability. Socialization among the Bantu-speaking people includes learning and living the values of Ubuntu. In the chapter I share some of my experiences as a village boy among the Leya people of southern Zambia. To provide context to my story, I start by explaining who the Bantu-speaking peoples are, what Ubuntu is, and the relationship between the words Bantu and Ubuntu.

The Bantu-Speaking People

The philosophy of *Ubuntu* defines the way of life of Africa's Bantu-speaking peoples, who today number about 240 million (De Fillipo, Bostoen, & Pakendorf, 2012) and speak around 680 different languages (De Luna, 2015) derived from a common linguistic family called Bantu or -Ntu. They are found in

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7947-3.ch001

many countries south of the Sahara, from Cameroon to South Africa. The Bantu-speaking people began to migrate from the borders of present-day Nigeria and Cameroon from about 3,000 years ago, going southward for many reasons, including overpopulation and search for more fertile land and favorable climatic conditions (Grollemund, Branford, Bostoen, Meade, Venditti, & Pagel, 2015; Bostoen, 2018). To grow food crops such as sorghum and millet to feed a growing population and to have good pasture and water for livestock such as goats, they needed arable land and greener pastures (Cartwright, 2019; Rocha, Jorge & Fehn, Anne-Maria, 2016). The southern and central parts of Africa appealed to them, and it helped that the people they found as they trekked farther from the Sahara were hunters and gatherers (Liu, 2019) who did not seem to have much need for arable land for them to survive. The hunters and gatherers either got assimilated through intermarriages with the Bantu-speaking peoples or moved farther away from the new arrivals.

Bostoen (2018) has alphabetically listed the countries in which the Bantu-speaking people are found as follows: 'Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Kinshasa, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, Southern Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.'

Concept of Family among the Bantu-Speaking People

In traditional societies of the Bantu-speaking people, the primary organizational unit in a village is the family headed by a patriarch. However, some Chewa/Nyanja societies found in Malawi, Zambia, and Mozambique are headed by matriarchs since they are matrilineal (Tembo, 2018). Their concept of family is broader than that of most Western societies. Family includes father, mother, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins, in-laws, and everybody else related by blood or marriage. Furthermore, as Tembo (2018) has pointed out 'In this system, all brothers of the father are called "father", all sisters of the mother are called "mother", all their children "brother" and "sister". In male-speaking terms, father's sister's daughters (cross-cousins) are called cousins' (p.3). For this reason, some westerners refer to this concept as an "extended family system". To members of traditional societies, however, the system is not extended; it is simply what it is and has always been. All members of a family see themselves as one and everyone is expected to look out for everyone else, supporting one another and complementing their different talents for the good of society. The norm is that it is everyone's business to care for the elderly and the weak and to ensure that children are socialized according to the ways of the community. Every adult is duty-bound to exact discipline on all children because the children belong to the whole community, hence the popular saying 'It takes a village to raise a child'.

The concept of kinship plays an important part in Bantu-speaking African families (Opie, Shultz, Atkinson, Currie, & Mace, 2014; Lowes, 2016). Kinship determines how people trace their membership to an ethnic group and their right to inheritance. There are two dominant kinship systems in sub-Saharan Africa, i.e. patrilineal and matrilineal. In a patrilineal system, people trace their group membership to their fathers' lineage. They have a right to inherit their fathers' property or political positions. Married women are incorporated into their husbands' lineages and are no longer considered as 'belonging' to their families of origin. Marriage in a patrilineal system usually involves the relocation of the bride to join her husband's village. In matrilineal systems, on the other hand, people trace their group membership through their mothers. Children 'belong' to their mothers' people. In this system, a woman's brothers have more parental obligations to her children than the children's father. In a matrilineal system, a mar-

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ried woman continues to ‘belong’ to her family of origin. Usually, in this kinship pattern, when a woman marries, her husband relocates to join the village of her family.

Today, the concept of family in most parts of Africa is being impacted by globalization and socio-economic challenges. The traditional concept of family worked well when African societies were rural-based and depended on agriculture for sustenance. Families lived together within easy reach and members supported each other. Now, however, resulting from globalization, urbanization, and dependence on money for survival, people have tended to adopt a patrilineal nuclear family system.

Ubuntu as a Bantu Conceptual Framework

The code of conduct among Bantu-speaking peoples is governed by *Ubuntu*. Both words *Ubuntu* and *Bantu* share the root *-ntu* or *-tu* from which the word for human being or person is derived. In most Bantu-speaking languages, with variations in spelling but general uniformity phonetically, the word for human being is *muntu* or *motho* or *munthu* or *omuntu* (singular) and *bantu* or *botho* or *anthu* or *abantu* (plural). The word for the state of being human is *Ubuntu*, or *Buntu* or *Botho* or *Umunthu*, or *Obuntu*, etc. The term *Ubuntu* has a deeper meaning than just ‘humanness’. A person is said to embody *Ubuntu* only if that person has behavioral characteristics of what a good person must have in order to get along with other members of society. Some of the characteristics of *Ubuntu* are

- recognizing and respecting the dignity of the humanness in others regardless of their station in life or physical or mental impairment;
- being generous and helpful to those needing help;
- cooperating with other community members in endeavors that are for the good of society;
- being a hardworking and responsible person;
- being honest and well-mannered;
- Caring for the infirm;
- respecting the aged and those in authority;
- being loving, friendly, and at peace with all;
- being hospitable;
- exercising wisdom;
- being a good steward of the natural and wildlife environment.

Many of these qualities reflect the possession of empathy (the capacity for sensitivity to the feelings of others) to be able to imagine feelings one does not himself or herself have. If a person chooses to display the opposite of any of these attributes despite repeated counsel and admonishing, for example being ill-mannered, mean, uncooperative, unwise, or lazy, then that person will not be considered a *muntu*. To celebrate *Ubuntu* is to celebrate the best behavioral qualities as can be seen from how a person relates to other people and to the environment.

Up-Bringing in Two Bantu-Speaking Villages

I was born and raised in a royal household of a Bantu-speaking society in a southern African country that at the time of my birth was known as Northern Rhodesia. Today, the country is called Zambia. My village of birth is called Mukuni, one of the largest villages in southern Africa. Discounting the

people who have moved to cities, the village has a population of about 7,000 Leya people. According to archeological evidence, the village, which was originally called Gundu, has existed since the thirteenth century (Vogel, 1975). According to oral tradition, the Leya people were led by a queen who was a descendant of the royal house of the Great Zimbabwe kingdom. In the eighteenth century, the queen, Bedyango Munyama, married a stranger, a warrior *Mwami* (or King), Mukuni Mulopwe, who arrived in the Leya country from the Congo region. Munokalya-Mukuni (2013) explains that the two monarchs consolidated their powers and became one royal establishment which today is known as the Mukuni Royal Establishment (MRE) with two hereditary rulers, a male and female ruler. The present-day co-rulers are cousins, not a married couple. When *Mwami* Mukuni and *Bedyango* founded the MRE they agreed that from their male descendants the MRE would choose male rulers, to assume the title *Mwami Mukuni*, and from female descendants would choose female rulers, to assume the title *Bedyango*, and the two shall be hereditary heads of the MRE. To this day, the kingdom is ruled by *Mwami Mukuni* and *Bedyango* (Munokalya-Mukuni, 2013). My father (Munokalya Mukuni Siloka II) was the seventeenth *Mwami Mukuni* to reign since the establishment of the dual governance structure. He reigned from 1943 up until 1971 when he died.

This dual governance structure of the Leya people is very interesting, as Munokalya_Mukuni (2013) points out. For instance, it is interesting that they incorporated gender equity in the governmental structure of the ethnic group.

The Bedyango whom I found in my early childhood was called Malala Muzamba. She was my father's aunt, a sister to his father. She was a daughter of my great grandfather King Mupotola Mukuni. Bedyango is selected from princesses (a daughter, granddaughter, or great-granddaughter of a King or Queen) of the Leya royal family. She is primarily responsible for matters to do with land. For a farming community, land is a very important asset because without it there is no survival for an individual or the community. Being responsible for matters of land distribution is, therefore, a very important function bestowed on the Bedyango. In my opinion, it is befitting that this function was given to a woman, the mother figure of the Leya nation because, from my personal experience of motherly love and from watching my wife's love for our children, there is something special about a mother's heart. I think that a mother's heart is an embodiment of all the traits of *Ubuntu*, particularly patience, empathy, love, kindness, protectiveness, and sacrifice. Just like mother hen goes out of her way to provide for, and protect, her chicks, so does the human mother. The Leya people have a saying describing motherly love: "*Chibi kubantu, kulibanyina mafuta*", meaning that a person may be considered a rogue by others, but to his mother he is special. To emphasize the motherly nature of Bedyango, her palace is called *Nanjina* (a place of lice), meaning a home where even the poor are most welcome. She has no favorites among the people. She is *Ubuntu* personified: loving, hospitable, empathetic, and just.

In addition to her responsibility of overseeing land distribution, she coordinates traditional ceremonies, receives reports of births and deaths, and oversees the selection and coronation of a new King. Because of the important role she plays in maintaining customs and traditions of the Leya, she is the King's principal adviser (Mukuni-Siloka II, 1957; McGregor, J. (2003).

I remember Bedyango Malala Muzamba as a humorous, wise, and strict enforcer of the cultural rules and norms of our people. One of her wise sayings about the malleability of human behavior was that even a piece of wood from the forest could be chiseled and out of it a beautiful bust of a person could emerge. According to her, every wayward person could become a good person. That is how much she believed in the learnability of *Ubuntu*. Every person has the capacity to learn *Ubuntu*. Probably that is why she never tired of teaching us children of the palace how to behave. Each time she visited the palace, she

would admonish us for any unbecoming behavior that she noticed. She taught us to respect the palace by not running around the house or shouting. The palace was a sacred place with strict rules of behavior about what to say to whom and what to touch or leave alone. It was not hard for me to listen to her and obey her orders because I saw her as possessing mystical powers. This perception of her began when at age 4 I fell very sick and conventional medicine did not seem to help. My mother was away, and so my father called for her. Despite medicine and motherly tender loving care, I was not getting better. My father went to call Bedyango Malala Muzamba to seek her advice. Bedyango came, lifted me up from my bed, held me in her arms and rebuked the sickness as if she were talking to a person. The sickness obeyed. I was miraculously healed.

According to Munokalya-Mukuni (2013), this feature of having a matriarch and a patriarch in the leadership of the ethnic group is replicated in all the villages and regions of the kingdom. Villages and regions have patriarchs and matriarchs. Patriarchs at the village level are called *Basimiinzi* and those at regional level are called Basimitwe *babasimiinzi*. The village matriarchs are called *Basimise* and those serving at the regional level are known as *Banabedyango*. In addition to the *Mwami* and *Bedyango*, there is a prime minister who is appointed by the king on recommendations from the council of elders. The prime minister does not have to be from the royal family. Apart from being a representative of the people in the Leya government, the prime minister (or *Mwendambeli*) heads the judiciary.

During my stay in the village, we had three people who, at different times, occupied the office of prime minister. All three of them distinguished themselves well as administrators during my father's reign. People respected them and my father seemed well-pleased with them. I have fond memories of one of them. Whenever I was free, I used to attend the court sessions which he presided. He suffered from sleeping sickness. He would usually fall asleep during a court hearing and be awakened in time for passing judgement. One day, an accused person protested when the prime minister declared him guilty. "How can you say I am guilty when you fell asleep halfway through my testimony?"

"Listen young man," the prime minister retorted. "A testimony which is bad is bad from the beginning to the end. I do not have to hear all of it for me to make up my mind. Whether I hear the beginning, the middle, or the end, I can tell when a testimony is bad. You are guilty." The rest of the court assessors on the bench, who were twelve in number, agreed with the prime minister that the accused person was guilty.

When a local court passed judgement, an aggrieved person had the right to appeal to the king, who never took part in court trials because he was regarded as the father of everyone including 'bad' people. The king would sit with Bedyango and hereditary councilors to hear appeals. I have no recollection of any appeal brought to the king. Even the person that complained that it was not fair for the prime minister to find him guilty after sleeping during a hearing did not appeal. In my opinion at the time, not all cases were handled well. There were instances when I was certain that a court verdict was unfair. I would brief my father about it. However, he took no action because he needed to hear from an appellant. My assessment of a case as an observer did not count. After all, I was just a child.

Another interesting feature of the Leya administration system is a tradition called *Tuntumana*. Every year, some selected old women would hold a secret meeting with the king. At the meeting, the old women would tell the king to momentarily lay down his crown and see the women not as his subjects but mothers. They would then list all the bad things he had done during the year and tell him to stop. After the lectures and warnings, they would then tell him that whatever was shared during the meeting remained at the venue of the meeting. In closing the meeting, they would restore his crown and worship him as if nothing had happened at the meeting. It was in his interest to take the lectures and warnings seriously because the consequences of being a wayward king are serious. A Leya king cannot be removed from

the throne. Neither can he resign. According to Leya customs, the only way to end a king's reign is to force him to die. Before ascending to the throne, a prince is made aware of this provision. To accept the throne is to accept all the terms and conditions of the office of king, including the exit clause which stipulates that a wayward king must accept death as a consequence of his bad behavior. Along with the *Tuntumana* tradition, the exit clause is a means of ensuring that a king does not abuse his power. He must remember that his office depends on the grace of ordinary people represented by the old women selected to perform the *Tuntumana* rites as a way of ensuring that *Ubuntu* tenets are upheld even by a king in his execution of his kingly responsibilities.

As a child, I was a boy of two villages. For the most part, I lived in Mukuni Royal Village (the headquarters of the Leya people) about nine miles from the Victoria Falls, one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World, and about seven miles from the city of Livingstone, which was founded in 1905 by British settlers. Growing up in a village that held the seat of power of an ethnic group exposed me to some of the nuances of *Ubuntu*. Born and raised in the palace, I witnessed some governing practices influenced by *Ubuntu*. For instance, in accordance with the *Ubuntu* principle of communalism, the king never made important decisions without consulting his council of elders. Furthermore, he delegated the administration of all villages, including the Royal Village itself to elders. The Royal Village was divided into sections, each headed by an elder. Membership to the Council of Elders was hereditary through either the patrilineal or the matrilineal line. Members could also be appointed by the Royal Establishment. The elders administered village sections in consultation with the people in the section and briefed the king on important developments in the sections. Sometimes he held meetings in the palace with elders to discuss matters of common interest. On other occasions he called general meetings under a giant acacia tree outside the palace to inform all the villagers about certain developments. It was under that same tree that *Mwami Mukuni* met with David Livingstone, the Scottish missionary, in 1885.

The communal approach to life was very evident in the village. For instance, whenever there was a death in the village, before family members of the deceased were heard wailing, a village crier would go to report the death to the queen and then the king. After which he would go around the village announcing the death. All adults would go to the home of the deceased to mourn, console the family, and support the bereaved family with whatever they needed, including supplying food, digging the grave, carrying the deceased to the graveyard and conducting the burial. Mourning the dead was never solely a family affair, but something in which all able-bodied villagers participated.

I saw the same cooperation in agricultural activities. If a family was overwhelmed by the amount of work in ploughing or harvesting, they would invite people to come and help. All the family needed to do was provide beer or a non-alcoholic brew to quench the thirst of the people. Another example of people coming together to work cooperatively was joint herding of livestock. Boys, who usually were the ones charged with the responsibility of herding cattle for their families, would put their herds of cattle together in the morning after milking the cows and take the cattle to the river and to the grazing areas until evening. They carried packed meals which they ate together. In the evening towards sunset, it was a marvel to see cattle return to the kraals and the boys identify and separate the cattle according to ownership and lead the animals to their specific kraals. The joint herding of cattle was an enjoyable activity because boys did a lot of fun things together. They were able to combine playing and watching over cattle because, being many, they took turns minding the animals. I did not participate fully in cattle herding because the palace did not keep cattle. My father's cows were managed by someone else. I only made occasional visits to the place where my father's animals were.

Behavior in the palace was heavily regulated to ensure that the princes and princesses grew up into respectable citizens and potential candidates for the throne. Even when playing with other children at school, I was constantly reminded by adults to behave in accordance with *Ubuntu* tenets. I was expected to be polite, kind, slow to anger, and be at peace with everyone. Members of the royal household were expected to model *Ubuntu* and be an example to other people. I must confess, though, that there were times when at primary school I ignored the *Ubuntu* exhortations and followed the youthful mischievous instinct within me. When I felt moved to do so, I made noise in class, much to the annoyance of my teacher. I was lucky that news of my misbehavior in class was never reported to my parents. The teacher punished me, and it ended there. I would have received a more severe punishment at home if my parents had heard about my conduct at school. Now as I reflect on my misbehavior in primary school, I regret the trouble I caused my teacher. He must have felt that the reason for my behavior had to do with my being a prince. The truth was that I was just being a boy, and school was the only place where I thought I had the opportunity to be an ordinary boy without the watchful eyes of village people.

I regret my occasional classroom interruptive behavior. However, there were occasions when I felt that the teacher was unfair to me and did not act according to principles of *Ubuntu*. For instance, one day he decided to have the class outside under a huge acacia tree because it was a hot day. During the lesson, some birds flew around the tree before they momentarily perched on one of the branches not far from where we sat. The teacher saw me looking at the birds as they flew away. He thought I was not paying attention to the lesson. The truth, however, was that I was following the lesson. As punishment for supposedly being inattentive, he ordered me to follow the birds wherever they went. As far as he was concerned, I was more interested in the birds than in the lesson. I left the class and began to follow the birds from tree to tree. I was very sure I was not the only one who had looked at the birds during that class. I was probably singled out because in his mind I was a troublesome student. The punishment was unfair on two counts. First, I was not the only one who had looked at the birds. Second, by making me follow the birds into the forest around the school, I missed an entire lesson and the rest of the lessons that day. The idea of following birds was not in itself a punishment to me because hunting birds was my favorite pastime. I was very good at hunting birds with my catapult. Many other boys in my class were equally good hunters of birds. The teacher should have known that holding a class under a tree would inevitably tempt some of his students to gaze at passing birds. Our school was in the outskirts of the village and was surrounded by trees and the area had many birds.

On another occasion when we had a class under the same acacia tree, I saw a man and his wife walking along a footpath that connected our village and other villages beyond our school. A classmate and I looked at the couple as they passed by and when the teacher caught our gaze, he told us to follow them and ask them who they were, where they were going, where they were coming from, and what the purpose of their trip was. He asked us to bring back a report to him. We followed the couple as commanded and carried out the interview. This punishment was hard because children were not supposed to interview adults that were strangers. According to *Ubuntu* etiquette among the Leya people, it was all right for a child to greet adults, but it was impolite for a child to ask strangers the kind of questions that the teacher told us to ask.

Apart from school, the only other place where I was free from the palace restrictions was when I went to the other village of my upbringing. My second home, where I usually spent my school holidays, was a small village called Muchonkwa Village in Mwami Sekute's area, about twenty-one miles from Mukuni Royal Village. Muchonkwa Village, where my mother's people lived, had about twenty people. Muchonkwa Mapanda, the patriarch of the village was my maternal grandmother's brother. At a tender

age of less than five years, my mother lost her mother. She was raised by her mother's sister Namasiku, with the support of my grandmother's brothers (Siamapanda, Muchonkwa, and Thomas). In line with the customs and traditions of the Bantu-speaking people, the tragedy of losing a parent at an early age was mitigated by the family system in which the role of a mother is shared equally by sisters. My mother, therefore, had Namasiku, my grandmother's sister, as her mother, not an aunt. I, in turn, had Namasiku as a caring and loving grandmother in whose house I was as free and as loved as her other grandchildren. My grandmother's brothers were all my grandfathers in whose company I felt as loved and cared for as their other grandchildren.

Grandpa Muchonkwa and his younger brother Thomas were self-reliant subsistence farmers keeping cattle for milk and for ploughing. They grew maize, millet, sorghum, sweet sorghum, groundnuts, watermelons, sweet potatoes, and pumpkins. The food barns were always well-stocked, and we never ran out of food. From my grandfathers, I learned hard work, which sometimes meant waking up early in the morning at daybreak to go to the fields to plough when it was planting season, or to go harvesting when it was that season. Evenings were my favorite times for two reasons. Women of the village would bring food to the center of the village where men and boys would sit by the fireside under a shelter called '*chikuta*' to eat the food from different homes. I loved this not only because of the different dishes but also because it was time for elderly men to share events of the day and impart wisdom to boys and young men. At the '*chikuta*' I always looked forward to hearing stories and news about the community and faraway places where some of our relatives had migrated for work. The '*chikuta*' was also a place for discussing and resolving village problems and conflicts.

The other reason I loved evenings was that after '*chikuta*' we would take back our mothers' plates to our homes and then have fun in the center of the village, playing various games. There were no streetlights. We relied on the moonlight and when there was none we played in the dark. In one of the games, we would form two groups, each representing a village. One group, larger than the other, would sing a song that said 'Our village is good. It is better than yours.' The smaller group would sing in reply 'We shall quickly destroy your village. Please give us so-and-so (mentioning a name of one member of the larger group).' The named person would then move to the other group. The first group would again boast that their village is good, whereupon the second group would again ask for another member from the boasting village. This would go on until the boasting group lost all its members. Moral of the game: 'Celebrate the life of your family and friends while you can. Be loving, caring, and supportive of everyone in your circle. You will not always have them all.'

Another of the many games we played was called 'smearing or contaminating'. One person would pretend to have something infectious in her hand, and we would all run away from her. She would run after us and whomever she touched became contaminated and the contaminator would be clean. We would then run away from the one to whom the infection had been transferred. The game would end when every player shouted, 'I am out!' The one who would be still contaminated at the end of the game was the loser.

On days when we could not play in the play field because of rain or other inclement weather, we remained in our kitchens around the fireplace listening to stories and puzzling out answers to riddles. As Boateng (1983:323) pointed out 'One area that has served both traditionally and currently as an important educational vehicle for youth in Africa is that of oral literature. Oral literature encompasses fables, folktales, legends, myths, and proverbs'

Some stories that I recall listening to as a child were scary. One that used to scare me most was about a huge creature known as *Domba-Mulilo* (fire seeker) that would visit homes very late at night in search

of children that do not want to sleep. The creature would say in a deep voice, ‘You that are asleep, continue sleeping. You that are not sleeping, give me fire!’ That story of the fire seeker was told at the end of storytelling and riddles. I made sure I went to sleep before the fire seeker came.

There were stories that were not scary but taught us about what happened to people who behaved badly or people who thought when they were alone in the forest there was no one who would tell the village the things they did in the forest, or things that happened to them when they were alone. We were taught to be good stewards of trees, animals, and other natural resources because everything around was able to tell on you if you did something wrong even when you were alone. One story was that of a goat herder who fell from a wild fruit tree in the forest and did not want the village to know he was distracted from the duty of looking after goats by spending time climbing fruit trees. The herder was reported by the goats that came home singing ‘The herder has fallen! The herder has fallen! He wanted to collect wild fruits and fell from the tree! Meh meh meh!’ Every story had a song which the storyteller would teach the listeners. At different points of a story, we would sing a chorus, presumably to keep us engaged in the story. In the story of the goat herder, the storyteller would sing ‘The herder, the herder, has fallen!’ And we would respond by singing ‘Meh, meh, meh, meh!’ This story also teaches one to be studious in the absence of public view.

One of the stories which taught about punishment for people that break *Ubuntu* code of conduct is about a family that went on a long trip and left their little daughter, Mwiza, under the care of a close relative that lived in the same village. Mwiza’s parents took a long time in their travels, and the relative grew tired of looking after Mwiza and started treating her cruelly. When it appeared as though the couple were not going to come back from their trip, the relative killed Mwiza and hid the body in a barn. When the parents finally returned, they were told that Mwiza had disappeared. The father was suspicious. He searched everywhere until he discovered the remains in the barn. He ordered the relative to put the remains in a basket and carry the basket on her head and walk with him to a mighty river north of the village for burial. The river was far away. After a long walk in the woods, the relative became tired and asked if she could put the basket on the ground and rest. Mwiza’s father replied that his daughter was not to be put on the ground but would be buried in a river up north. At this point in the story, the storyteller would sing the relative’s request and the audience would sing the reply from Mwiza’s father. The song went like this:

Storyteller: *Siamwiza nditule awa* (Mwiza’s father, can I lay down the basket here)?

Audience: *Tatulwa, tatulwa mwana’nguMwiza uyotulwa kuyooma kumbo, tatulwa*(My daughter Mwiza will only be laid down in the great river up north).

They soon got to the river and the relative asked whether she could lay down the basket as soon as they got into the river and the water was knee-deep. She was told to continue walking until the water was waist deep. But when she was waist-deep into the river, she was told to continue walking...shoulder-deep...neck deep...mouth-deep...At each of these stages we would sing the chorus. Mwiza’s father and the relative continued walking in the river until the relative drowned and received her dues for being cruel and wicked.

I loved riddles as much as I loved stories. One of the riddles I remember was a question. ‘Who is it that is in the river and keeps clapping? He claps in the river, who is it?’ We would take turns guessing the answer until it was clear that we had no idea. Then we would be told that the answer is a tongue.

In addition to evening fun time, we had day-time games. For instance, after harvesting maize and clearing the maize fields, children would build some structures in the maize fields and pretend that the structures were houses. Each house would have a ‘family’ and simulate life in a family and do some

house chores such as cooking food using the leftovers from the fields. Adults would come to the make-believe houses to taste the food and judge the simulations to determine the best ‘homes.’ We called the home simulations ‘*mantombwa*.’ The winning homes in the *mantombwa* had good houses made of maize stocks and prepared good food. *Mantombwa* was a very entertaining post-harvest show.

Storytelling has served Africa as a key pedagogical tool for passing down cultural values from one generation to the next (Utlely, 2008). As an adult, I realized that the fireside stories and games, along with observing and imitating adults, were the main pedagogy for teaching children the values and social skills characteristic of the Bantu-speaking people. Riddles were a way of exercising thinking skills. I also realized that it was through our evening games and the day-time games that as children we bonded as members of a village and learned how to work together for the good of the community.

FIRSTHAND EXPERIENCE OF THE KINDNESS OF STRANGERS IN ZAMBIA

I have had a deep personal appreciation of the spirit of *Ubuntu*, which in addition to the impact of growing up in a society practicing *Ubuntu*, I treasure in my reflections. A few years ago, I was involved in a road traffic accident in which I nearly lost my life after my car overturned several times following a tire burst on Zambia’s Great East Road. This happened near a village many miles away from Lusaka where I worked. As soon as my car had come to a stop after flipping over several times, villagers, who were total strangers, helped me out of the wreck. My right arm had a serious compound fracture. I had broken my arm so badly that it was just being held together by the skin of my arm. My collar bone was sore. My ribs were broken. One of the village ladies took her head-wrap and made an arm sling which she used to support my broken wobbly arm. Another person brought a mat from her house and laid it down for me to lie down. I was feeling very sleepy. They took off my shoes, probably to ensure good circulation of blood and assisted me to lie down while waiting for transport to the hospital. I must have passed out because I had no recollection of everything else happening around me after I lay on the mat.

When I regained consciousness, I was aware that one of the villagers stood by the roadside, flagging down cars and requesting the drivers to take me and my three passengers to the nearest hospital. Two cars finally pulled up and one of the drivers agreed to take us to the hospital, accompanied by one of the villagers who knew the way to the mission hospital. One of the drivers took our details and drove to the city to take the news of the accident. At the hospital, all the staff on duty were very helpful. So was the villager that led us to the hospital. He stayed on at the hospital to assist staff in taking care of us. When late in the night I felt thirsty, it was the villager who brought me some water to drink.

Meanwhile, I had no way of communicating with my family to let them know what had happened to me. I was therefore pleasantly surprised when my wife came to my bedside around midnight. I later learned that a pastor who had found me at the scene of the accident and arranged for me to be taken to the hospital had telephoned my workmates, who in turn informed my wife. So, she and two of my children came looking for me in the night, disregarding the advice of my workmates who had counseled her to wait for daybreak. When my wife reached the scene of the accident late in the night, she found someone guarding the wreck to protect the car parts such as the battery and all the things that we carried in the car. She was told that the occupants of the car were injured and were in the hospital. She was told that the man driving the car (that was me) was the most badly hurt. The villagers arranged for one of them to lead my wife and my children to the hospital.

During all this ordeal, I was touched by the outpouring of kindness that I received from all around me. These were strangers treating me as if they knew me personally. Their compassion and helpfulness made me experience firsthand the meaning of *Ubuntu*.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have shared my experience of growing up in a society whose way of life is guided by the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*. Drawing on my experiential knowledge of *Ubuntu* as a member of a Bantu-speaking people that trekked southward from the borders of present-day Nigeria and Cameroon several centuries ago and settled in a land that today is called Zambia, I have discussed some key values of *Ubuntu*. These values include empathy, love, reciprocity, care, compassion, wisdom, honesty, communalism, respect for the dignity of man, hard work, and responsible stewardship of the environment. I have shared how the values of *Ubuntu* are passed on from one generation to another through modeling, storytelling, and children's games, among other pedagogies. It is my hope that others that grew up in Bantu-speaking communities will also reflect on their upbringing and see how they were influenced by *Ubuntu*, and how even today they are influenced by this African philosophy. My account of life in a Bantu-speaking society is based on experiences in a rural setting. I have not reflected on *Ubuntu* in urban settings. Today, millions of Bantu-speaking people live in cities. I am curious to hear their perspectives of *Ubuntu* in city life.

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