

NATALIA MROWCA

SHARING IN THEIR DAILY ROUTINES, JOYS AND SORROWS: NOTES FROM ZAMBIA

Who would have guessed that revisiting some of life's greatest memories would be so demanding and difficult. It's been almost six months since I returned, and the sense of hardship associated with the simple act of sitting down, thinking and writing becomes increasingly burdensome and easily falls to the end of the to-do list. Yet perhaps it's not as simple and obvious as it might seem. To enter into memories, to relive them, to find what was never meant to be forgotten but melted into one colourful mass, from which the individual components can only be extracted through a scrupulous analysis of thoughts, photographs and fleeting notes, created in response to surprising experiences worth sealing.

Let's start from the beginning. In 2019 I started studying Applied Anthropology at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. The culmination of my three years of study was to go on a research internship somewhere outside of Europe of my choice. I felt that the dream-come-true was just on the pavement and all I had to do was bend down to make it a reality. It almost did. Almost—because a little more had to be done, plus the biggest monster devouring the travel dreams of many travellers, the coronavirus, stood in the way. Borders were opening and closing on a daily basis. It was impossible to predict what would happen tomorrow, let alone six months from now. Also, the wait for even an internship destination was fuelled by anxiety as to whether one would be found at all. First it was to be Papua New Guinea, then Cuba, then Argentina, then Kenya. Suddenly, it no longer mattered what you had been preparing for for almost two years. The culture you were studying and the issues you wanted to know and explore. But it was also a

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big lesson in humility—a sense that fate would take you where maybe you should go? I think in my case it definitely did. The choice fell on Zambia, a country that very quickly had to become the centre of my attention. A country that from now on was going to be the place I most wanted to explore. Contrary to the sense of randomness in this country's appearance, however, for most of my studies and personal experiences I had subconsciously been to some extent prepared for this journey, for this very place, which was to become apparent very quickly.

Documents are in, vaccinations are in, cash tucked away, everything packed. Time to fly Warsaw—Qatar—Zambia. About 14 hours. Warsaw bids us goodbye with January's mustiness, dousing the plane with farewell rain. Qatar welcomes with splendour, but is only a brief and hardly insignificant stop. At long last, one would like to say, the Promised Land. Time for the first challenge. The purchase of a visa, for which the Professor had painstakingly prepared us. A business visa costs 50 dollars. A pleasant surprise because it was 25. The gentleman let us through with a smile. However, after a while, the first collision was to take place. And I was looking forward to it with indescribable enthusiasm. Suddenly, the controller runs out of the window and looks for the lady who forgot the confirmation from the terminal. He runs up to me and happily hands me the slip. I explain that this is impossible because I paid cash. He insists that it is me. Suddenly, a small blonde woman (me a tall brunette) appears and turns out to be the woman he is looking for. The gentleman stated that we looked identical, in fact like every white person who comes here. We looked at each other, and seeing such a range of differences between us, we smiled and went our separate ways, and as it turned out later, there would be many more times like this.

Just as we received a warm welcome from Zambia, we were greeted warmly by a Salesian sister, who was the brain of the operation and became our first guide. The basic necessities such as buying a phone card and exchanging dollars for the local currency, the kwacha, began. It seems to me that day one is always the most memorable, which is why I go on and on about it. To conclude, human kindness, mixed with pushiness and curiosity. Embarrassment carries every conversation, the message of which is hidden in a bush of linguistic difficulties. There are 73 tribes in Zambia (72 according to other sources), almost each of which has its own distinct language. English is the official language, but in order to establish real relationships, gain trust and delve a little deeper into the local community, it is necessary

to familiarise oneself with and use the local languages. In the case of Kasama, our final destination, the Bemba language is indispensable, which is indeed spoken in the larger towns, but is unlikely to be found in nearby villages. Interestingly, many people are multilingual. You can meet children who speak five languages!

Going back to the first feeling that overwhelmed me—the embarrassment. In fact, I was very much looking forward to it. I was prepared to feel it. The anthropologist is aware that there will be a clash of beliefs, a clash with the reality so different from what you know well. Adventure has in its definition precisely those elements that make us step out of our comfortable mould and reveal a new perspective into which we enter with undying curiosity and excitement. And most importantly—by going to this study, by deciding on this course specifically, I chose a human being.

The first significant event that illustrates well the change that has taken place in my perception of Zambian reality was the journey from the capital to my final destination, Kasama. It takes about 16 hours to drive from the south alone to the northern part of the country. This journey showed me that despite being prepared for the new and different, fear takes over. In order to embark on the journey, tickets must first be purchased, ideally a few days in advance, so that you can choose a particular coach company (which later proved to be extremely important and everyone has their own preferences) and location. For this trip we were assisted by the sisters, also we were dependent on their help. At 3 a.m. we gathered at a designated place on the street from where the bus was leaving. What I remember the most was clinging to my belongings, looking around for my sisters, who every now and then disappeared somewhere. When it was time to open the doors of the bus, everyone rushed to the main door. It reminded me of an ant attack when you poke a stick into an anthill. Hubbub, shouts, baby cries, people's arguments. Is the luggage definitely tied with chitenga? Will nothing happen to it? Does someone want to charge me an extra fee because they know I don't know anything? Or is it really necessary? The first time you are confronted with something like this, you can't imagine having any positive attitude to it, free from judgement and comparison. And although I believe I started this journey with my head open to a different culture, behavioural conditioning and simply culture shock meant that frustration and anxiety were the dominant feelings. Additionally, as it later turned out—the presence of the sister "guides" was also an element that introduced feelings of threat by the environment. When we arrive in a new place, our first image is formed by the

first people we meet. Presenting reality as hostile and unsafe makes you experience tension and feelings of danger.

The journey was very tough. Always, on every bus, someone gets up and starts a prayer. In this case it was a nun. About halfway through, a gentleman stood up and began his expressive speech. After about an hour, I really couldn't figure out what religion this man was. After a while, he started pulling things out of his bag. It turned out that the gentleman was not a cleric, but he was selling toothpaste and "magic healing" powders. Interestingly enough, there were actually many takers. The people travelling were mostly quiet, especially the children, who apparently should be the loudest. Unfortunately, as we found out later, the main tool for raising children in Zambia is a wooden spoon for mixing *nshima*. One can guess why the children were quiet. The passing hours meant that the bus would be filled with unpleasant smells. The infrequent stops, the opportunity to eat, no garbage bins—all encouraged smells that were heavy to bear, which, combined with the blocked window and holes in the road the size of craters, did not bode well.

I remember the first stop vividly. Especially comparing it to the stops on the return journey. Now I was mainly accompanied by embarrassment, a sense of otherness, separateness, fear of buying anything, clinging to my seat, keeping quiet. However, after three months of immersing myself in the culture, by establishing relationships with Zambians my journey back home looked very different. How profoundly my attitude changed on an emotional and behavioural level is remarkable, and shows that it is natural to feel fear when confronted with something completely different, unfamiliar, perhaps crossing certain barriers to which we are accustomed. But realising that this is normal and, despite this, persisting in openness is a treasure. I also realised that if I had spent less time in Zambia, those first, difficult experiences could have created false stereotypes for me and stopped me from being blocked. However, this was not the case, and despite the difficulties I encountered, I managed to make the most of every day after a month and a half, spending time from dawn to dusk with the locals, sharing in their daily routines, joys and sorrows. Sharing myself with them, giving as much as I have—and getting as much as I can.

A breakthrough followed. I wrote down a few words in my diary at the time: Our heads are increasingly turning outside the Laura Center. Kasama, so far a stranger, is becoming closer to us with every passing day. Gradual familiarisation with the city goes hand in hand with discovering Zambian culture. What we have already noticed is how important human relations are

here. In order to experience Zambia to the full, we need people who will be our guides—not only through the red roads of the city, but also through customs and traditions. It is they who will tell us about taboos that we will not find in guidebooks. It is thanks to them that we will be able to learn the language, which is not necessary if you want to come to Zambia, but is necessary if you want to understand it.

During my journey, one of the most important elements was research. From the very first day, I kept a short diary in which I noted more or less what happened on a particular day. I also kept a video diary—I recorded some of the more important private conversations with residents (with their permission) so that I didn't have to distract the interviewee and disrupt the conversation with note-taking. Most importantly I conducted a study entitled "Human Flourishing of Social Life Leaders" in Poland and Zambia. In this study I used the interview method. I recorded its audio track and kept photographic documentation. I used the Human Flourishing indicators proposed by Van der Weele (2017)¹ to develop the interview questions. I later asked the same question to community leaders in Poland. To gather the research group I used the snowball method. I myself found people among the local community who knew leaders matching my description and others suggested others.

Another study I conducted using an interview concerned Zambian culture. The questions were about faith, values, rituals, social structure (tribes, family) issues of beauty, ugliness etc. I used specific written questions, but conducted the study in the form of a recorded interview.

OUR CITY

For the first weeks I had a very positive feeling about the whole situation. Although, at the beginning of my stay in Kasama, an unpleasant situation occurred for me when I was assaulted in the street. A stranger started groping me without giving me a break despite shouting and asking for help from a friend and the sister who were present with me. Unfortunately, neither of them reacted out of fear for their own safety. It was only when I opened the car that I was able to escape from my abuser. This situation gave me a strong

¹ Tyler J. van der WEELE, "On the Promotion of Human Flourishing," *PNAS*, August 1, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1702996114>.

mental block and it would have been difficult for me to feel safe in the city. I started asking the women at the school if maybe these situations happen more often. It turned out that the psychiatric hospital lets sick people out a few times a month and they go begging on the street. The man I met is actually from this hospital. He bothers women and that's how he tries to get money. The only way not to be his victim is to avoid him on the street. I later met him several times, but I was never alone and followed the advice of the women.

Kasama is not a very large city, it has several districts. The main life is at the Shoprite shop and the Location Market. Everywhere along the street, women with children in chitange are sitting, selling fruits and vegetables. Chinese products can be encountered at every turn. Zambia is literally inundated with a Chinese wave of carcinogenic plastic and polyester clothing. Unfortunately, the Chinese are very much interfering in Zambia. Some of the locals see this as an opportunity, but the more educated ones see how much damage it is doing. Zambia is a country rich with copper deposits. However, instead of producing at least cables from it themselves—they send tonnes of sheets of pure copper straight to China. It is not an overstatement to say that the government is corrupt to the core. Workers are brought in from the China, but so are prisoners, much to the dismay of economically and politically aware Zambians.

Hospitals are also corrupt. If one wants to be vaccinated for yellow fever in Kasama, one can forget about it. The hospital says you have to wait at least six months to be vaccinated, but it is possible to buy a yellow booklet for such and such an amount. Also, it is easier to have a booklet than to actually be vaccinated. In addition, very often hospitals lack electricity and appropriate equipment, which is known to cause a lot of damage. Often hospitals refuse to admit a patient if they suspect that someone does not have a good chance of survival, so as not to spoil their statistics.

The city is surrounded by villages. Some are hidden in the bush, while others emerge seamlessly out of the city. During my research, I was taken to one near the town of Tazara. The houses were, yes, modest, and there was often a problem with sanitation, but the people were working, feeding their families. Some might say that this is a picture of misery and despair, but this would be a rather naive observation. The closer countries get to the equator, the less time is spent at home. Most of life happens outdoors. There, one cooks, eats, braids hair, works. The house often serves as a shelter from the rain and a place to stay overnight. This can be particularly seen in Living-

stone, where residents live in beautiful villas that have long forgotten their glory. The houses are in a deplorable state, with people burning fires with the mahogany planks that were once the floor of the villa. Of course, this can be judged from the perspective of a European, who for centuries has had to sit in a house that had to be adapted to adverse weather conditions for a half a lifetime. But in a country where such a lifestyle has been imposed, one cannot expect something unnatural to take naturally. Of course, there is no shortage of wealthy homes in Zambia, very well-kept and full of modernity. But a large proportion of people live in inconspicuous houses, sometimes empty inside, sometimes full. And from a southerner's perspective, these houses cannot be compared to their own. Because their purpose is very different.

Back to the story of the village. I met people there who illegally produce the famous alcohol, *kachasu*. The whole village subsists only on this; however, if the police found out, the inhabitants would immediately go to jail. However, the state does not give them the prospect of any other income either. The men in the village drink, the women make alcohol. The vicious circle continues. The local leaders are well aware of the situation, but they are helpless because they know that it is difficult to re-industrialise the entire community.

The vice-chief of the village pointed out an interesting thing to me. There was a street of churches in the centre—three buildings stood wall to wall—each belonging to a different church. However, everyone celebrated together, there were no conflicts or divisions. Because a woman always has to accept her husband's faith after marriage, it would be difficult if religions did not coexist. Here, they are treated equally and one can belong to a religion in which one finds oneself. Mostly it is about the course of the liturgy. Pentecostal Church is very popular in Zambia. A church so filled with singing and dancing, whose services can be compared to a trance. However, this kind of prayer is very appealing to Zambians.

Another place in the village is a settlement near the small market. I have heard from stories that witches live there. The theme of witchcraft is very entrenched in Zambia. The first advice I got from my novice sister was not to let the back of my head be touched by anyone, not even the girls at school. Apparently, if someone touches the back of your head, it takes away all your wisdom. The nun said this extremely seriously. Mrs T. described to me many times people's encounters with witches. I have also heard from other people how they fly around on lawnmowers, exactly how many people

fit on such a means of transport. Apparently, witches derive their power from the blood of people, with which they are able to kill. After the outbreak of war in Ukraine, a lot of people, even the nuns wished Putin dead. In that case, I asked if it would be possible to ask a witch to kill Putin with her power. However, I got the answer that the range of magic is too small and here one would have to ask a satanist for help, but they are more difficult to reach. At the beginning I treated the subject rather frivolously, but after some time, when I was told so often about witchcraft, I was already starting to get lost in my own thoughts. Additionally, the animal most connected to this subject is the cat. It just so happened to be my favourite animal. There was one cat, Miecia, on our doorstep. We became friends instantly. Every day at two o'clock in the morning, she would climb onto my window, walk through the open pane and wedge himself between the mosquito netting with a shrill meow. Then I would get up, pull the cat out, open the mosquito net over the bed and we would fall asleep. There was a time that I fed him, then stopped so as not to make him lazy. The cat, thinking that I had lost my ability to hunt, would toss me a half-killed rat every day. Unfortunately, the cat ran away from any person with a darker skin colour. It turned out that cats are hated, associated with black magic, treated as the embodiment of evil. They are chased away and beaten (and in houses full of rats, cockroaches, spiders and lizards...). My fondness for this animal was therefore treated with suspicion. During my classes I explained the attitude we have towards cats in Poland, how we treat them and how much benefit they bring. By the end of my stay, several girls wanted to stroke the cat, and many of them also said that I had disenchanted them with the animal. Sometimes in the evening one of the nuns would turn up and be happy that there was someone who didn't treat the cat like Satan and play with it.

Witchcraft is certainly present in museums, you can see dolls, wands and other items. I also heard some stories that were downright chilling. Nowadays, black magic is officially forbidden, but everyone knows that there is someone out there somewhere and you can go to them. For help, but mostly for the wrong things. Nowadays, the intensity of the subject of magic in Zambia is heavily influenced by films from Nigeria, in which the subject comes up very often. Zambians are very susceptible to such content. Many internet chain letters are circulating, and people send each other WhatsUp pictures of women who ask for a glass of water and then turn into a lion and eat the whole family (traditional faith, mixed with Christianity). When Zambians are asked what their ancestors believed in, the most common answer is

Christianity. When I explained that they must have had other beliefs before colonialism, people were often embarrassed to realise this. But when you start asking deeper, “Are there any spirits, can you cast a bad spell?” Suddenly people list a range of spirits that deal with specific things, ways to deal with them, etc. Similarly in the church.

Another different place from the one I am familiar with is the cemetery and the subject of burial. There were two cemntaries in Kasama and both absolutely did not resemble it. They were simply bushes. In most cases, you enter the cemetery, bury the deceased and never return. The burial site becomes overgrown and it is impossible to find it again. One time we had a conversation with Mrs T. about the burial of children who had died in hospital. I said that in Poland we have small graves. Often parents give a funeral to an unborn child who has died of complications before or just after birth. The lady was very amazed. It turned out that in Zambia, such babies are usually put in a cardboard box or wrapped in a sling, a shallow hole is dug and the child is put there. It is gruesome that some dogs can dig out the remains and run around the villages with them. Of course, in some places we may come across tombs. Even on a bush road I happened to spot one. However, these are rather rare cases. Mrs T. buried her mother in Lusaka and made her a tombstone, which is rather unusual.

COMMON TIME

The thing that has stayed with me as the most meaningful for me is the relationships I have experienced, despite the living conditions, which were far from ideal—large cockroaches, no water and electricity, etc. That said, I recall this time as the most mentally beneficial for me. Of course, in addition to daily inconveniences, I often found it difficult to get to grips with the rules the tribe had in place, but I was never angry about this, but open-minded and curious. The Bemba tribe is one of the most numerous in Zambia and they are the ones who mainly live in Kasama. My first exposure to the rules of this tribe was at a small Christian community meeting. Together with two novice sisters, we went to the parishioners’ house. We sat together with the women on the sofa. Suddenly, when men entered the flat, the women immediately got up and sat on the floor and the men took their places. After the meeting, I asked the sisters why this had happened. Sister M., who belongs to this tribe, said that the men have a physique that does not allow

them to sit on the floor. During our trips to the location, when she was accosted by men on the street, Sister M. never interrupted a conversation, even if it was terribly embarrassing for her. It turned out that in the Bemba tribe, the man is the head of the family. When a girl becomes a woman and begins to wear the chitenge she should not engage in conversation with her father, and certainly never contradict him or her brothers. Sometimes I was admonished by the boys working in the garden that I should not contradict my Polish colleague. They reminded me that I should show him respect and always agree. A similar rule prevailed in riding in the car, where I always had to take the seat in the back (if there was a male passenger besides me). In Kasama, many women worked, whether at school, as nurses or at least running small businesses. However, even if they were the only ones feeding the family, they always said that the man was the head of the family and belittled themselves a lot.

During my time in Zambia, a large part of my time was spent with women. I found myself opening up more and more to conversations not only with those from school, but with the seamstresses I met, the fruit sellers. Something that often came through in conversations was the theme of love. Women often pointed out that they envied European women true love. They said: if you have a guy who says he loves you, he is really saying it and not lying. Here, men often walk away from their families. They go out and don't come back leaving the woman alone with the children. You can get married to someone and find out a year later that he has four children, with two different women, one of whom is his wife. I heard such stories almost every day. The nuns were helping needy women by giving them rice—and there were really a lot of them. Of course, I explained that infidelity happens in Europe too, life is not perfect, but indeed the problem of men cheating and lying to women was widespread. Sometimes the boys who helped out in the garden did not understand why I or my colleague with whom we were stationed in Kasma had not found Zambian second halves. After all, who cared that we had someone back in Poland. The longing for devoted, sincere and respectful love was present in conversations with Zambian women. However, these women very rarely decided against a cheating man in their choices. "Natalia, if you marry someone, you consciously agree to those children he has on the side, those lovers you are likely to find out about. That's what love is all about. You forgive and that's it." The seamstress who sewed the girls' uniforms was visited every morning by a boy of a few years old. She would hand him a roll and a drink and he would go on to school. It turned out to be

the son of her sister, who had been abandoned by her husband. Currently, the woman found another man who said he would be with her if she got rid of her son. And so she did. The boy went to live with his grandmother, who has no money and no strength to support him. Although my seamstress wanted to take care of the boy, the grandmother thought it belonged to her. So every morning the boy visited his aunt, because it was only thanks to her help that he had something to eat throughout the day.

Despite these hardships, what I received above all from the Zambian women was an ocean of love. Mrs T. (the school nurse) became my African Mommy, who, with her warmth, wisdom and attitude, made every meeting and conversation one of my most anticipated moments of the day. The joy and strength radiating from the women around me, despite the many burdens they carry on their shoulders, was extraordinary. In addition, I was able to experience a highly developed emotional sensitivity from these women. They always sensed that someone was feeling worse, that someone needed to be helped. One day I was in a rather sad mood, but I was smiling, not showing it my real feeling. It was a kind of inner sadness that I covered up with a smile. I didn't manage to get within 20 metres of Madame T. and Madame N., and they already sensed that something was wrong. They took me aside and said, "We look at you and we feel that you are different today, you look bad, there is sadness emanating from you." It was shocking to me, because I'm sure even an eminent psychologist wouldn't have seen it as quickly as they did. Or not at all. The touch, the closeness, the joy of being together, manifested from the constant making of occasions to celebrate was for me a witness to the good that comes from a collectivist culture. In Europe, being in a crowd can feel lonely. Here in Zambia, if you open yourself up to the culture, it is much harder to feel lonely. Especially the emotional one.

Making friends with the women resulted in a number of conversations, confidences and the opportunity to talk about our cultures. My colleagues found it shocking that Polish women use tanning beds, because in Zambia skin whitening is in fashion. Shop shelves are overflowing with such products. One of the nicest compliments I received was when I burnt myself after attending a women's day event in the city. The women laughed that my Polish skin was coming off and Zambian skin was coming out.

Women in Zambia took incredible care of themselves. They usually had carefully arranged wigs on their heads, wore make-up and beautifully sewn dresses. I myself wondered whether I should also have my hair braided. However, after researching articles on the Internet I found out that if a white

woman braids her hair, it is a cultural borrowing. So I gave up on the idea. How surprised I was when one day, while going to Sick Bay, I met the lady that Madame T. and Madame N. had ordered to do my braids. They said I would be beautiful wearing them and it would be very sad if I didn't get my hair done like them. I must admit that I was extremely pleased, but I started a conversation about articles I had come across on the Internet. Madame T. was outraged. She stated that such a narrative leads to hatred and intolerance. She wants to share her culture and it is a joy when a stranger wears their traditional clothes or sports a traditional hairstyle. After all, it means that the cougars like it and that is beautiful. And life is to be enjoyed—isn't that what it's all about?

SCHOOL, WORK, VOLUNTEERING

The purpose of my coming to Zambia was twofold. Firstly, it involved volunteer help, which consisted of working in a public school as an English and computer teacher and working and playing with children from the poorest parts of the city and a nearby village. In addition, I was to assist the school nurse. The second objective was to do research on culture and art, and to conduct my research for my bachelor's thesis "Human Flourishing of Social Life Leaders". My residence for these three months was a small flat located at the back of the school. The entire premises contained a convent, a chapel, a boarding house, a school, two gardens and a chicken pen.

I remember being asked by my professor to describe how I felt after 2–3 weeks. I was delighted. The sisters seemed so kind and warm, and the sisters in the novitiate full of commitment, the teachers were open and cheerful, the social workers always smiling broadly. Everything beautifully decorated, trees with fruit, chickens running around. I managed to go to the village once, and the only difficulty I had was that before I left, when doing research on what I should take, I deduced that comfortable trousers alone were the best. It turned out that the school had a rule that women could only go in skirts and dresses. One of my sisters gave me a chitenge so that I could gird myself with it, then a dress was given to me, and in the following weeks I sewed and designed new outfits myself with a seamstress. But apart from that, a genuine paradise. You could say the mission is working brilliantly. After about three weeks, this picture started to break down on many levels. It is possible to go through the mission without noticing the real problems that

surround us, but they only come out when we start to talk to people, spend time with him, celebrate together, cry together, ask while sitting up until the evening and drinking mkoyo.

The next few days passed, the day starting with morning singing in class, getting to know the particular value assigned for each day. As it happens in any school, some teachers fulfilled this task with commitment, others with less. The girls, however, always sang beautifully. Extremely rhythmic and dynamic, clapping and dancing. My stiff and embarrassed body, day by day, thanks to the help of the schoolgirls, relaxed more and more and clumsily tried to tap into the rhythm—not necessarily fit in, because I don't think that's what this musical freedom was about. Later, the class took place. The class counted about 55 pupils. It was extremely difficult for a person from outside the culture to control such a number. At first, I attended a few lessons as an observer. I was able to hear how marriages are conducted in Zambia, who has to give a goat to whom and how much they have to pay. Later on, I was able to teach the classes myself. Trying to go with the core curriculum, one could come across examples in books. Lyrics to songs by Michael Jackson came up repeatedly. But what caught my attention most were these examples.

1. An example from a reading about a boy whose dad went out and never came back. Suddenly his uncle started to come to his mother. He was very kind to the boy. He even sometimes stayed overnight. One time the uncle said to the boy: If you need anything tell me. I will always help you. One day the boy saw his uncle in town. He started to follow him to greet him. He entered a large building where a man was working. The boy ran up to him and started to greet him—but the man in front of the workers shouted at him, said he didn't know him and hit him. That was the end of the reading.

2. Another example was sentences from a grammar book. The chief has two wives. The younger is prettier than the older.

3. And many sentences from the grammar book: We have to be polite or the teacher will hit us. Let's be quiet! Mum will hit us. Dad hit me because I was crying.

I was able to see for myself that what was scrolling through the English books were the real problems of my pupils and other children in the country. Even though my students come from the richest families (mostly). I found out directly from one of the novice sisters that the adults had been brought up in a violent way. When we were cooking together she took out a wooden spoon to stir the nshima. She started hitting her hand with it and said joking-

ly, "If you don't cook a good dinner I will punish you like mum." She made a serious face and then laughed. Slightly embarrassed, I asked what she meant, as I didn't quite understand. Sister Anastasia said that this was the main object for raising children in Zambia and was surprised that I didn't know anything about it.

I found out a little later that the use of force is a daily practice. During one lesson, the girls were very tired, which in this case did not mean lying on the bench and sleeping, but increasingly active conversations. During my requests for silence, one of the girls could not stand it. She said, "Madame. Why don't you hit her?" I opened my eyes wide: "What do you mean by 'you will hit her?' Do you want me to hit your friend?" Well, the girl said, "Yes, that's the only thing that works on us." Horrified by the suggestion, I explained to the students that I would not use violence in my lessons. I know they are tired because the lessons are long and there is only one longer break in the day. However, even if they are very loud, I will not hit them. I started to explain what respect, mutual understanding, conversation is. I said that when I see they are tired we will take a break in class so they can laugh for a while, we will play a short game. But I want them to know that they are just as valuable as adults, and that violence will have a detrimental effect on their lives, and their future children. The conversation continued until the end of the lesson. A few of the girls came in afterwards for a hug, to thank me. Of course, the lessons could still be loud, sometimes difficult, and on the one hand, it was hard for me to "interfere with the culture", because I really didn't want to, and as an anthropologist I know I shouldn't. But in this situation I couldn't stand by the subject if there is a big banner on the school: a school without violence.

I raised the subject with the headmistress. Unfortunately, she told me that, these practices are difficult to remove because children in Africa are brought up in this way on a daily basis.

One day I was sitting in the library. Suddenly, screams started coming from the corridor. I walked quietly to the door and looked out. A string of girls stood in the corridor one after the other. The angry teacher was calling each one in turn, and pushing them into the classroom. I stood up as if I had been caught off guard. I did nothing. I involuntarily watched what was happening. The girls made the sign of the cross as they stood in line, and then, terrified, went up to the teacher to receive their punishment. I felt sorry for myself for not being able to do anything about the situation. A few days later I decided to bring up the subject at the weekly teachers' meeting. As always,

we discussed the values that this school teaches. Everyone was allowed to say how they were implementing a chosen value. I said, "I implement respect because I don't beat girls like some students and teachers do." I wanted to say that that the girls, in my opinion, were mistreated. I said that saying this in the teachers' forum might have more effect than another attempt to talk to the headmistress individually. The headmistress just nodded her head. A colleague who was also a Polish volunteer at this school whispered to me that I had just passed a sentence on myself. Unfortunately I later had a computer class with this teacher. We were just handing in the classes. Suddenly the teacher stood up and started his speech. "We have just checked your tests. Some of you did well, but most of you did badly. I also want to let you know that Madame Natalia does not want me to beat you. However, she made a mistake and forgot that she is in Zambia and not in Poland." He handed me a sheet of paper and told me to read out the names and the percentage. I felt like I was passing judgment. Again, I had a feeling that there was nothing I could do, plus I was to become part of the process. I read out a few names, but I couldn't stand what was happening. I told the girls that I didn't agree with what was happening here, but I really didn't know what to do. A few minutes later I left the room unable to bear what was happening. I went to the only person I could talk to in this state, Mrs. T., to whom I described the whole situation. The woman listened to me, said that unfortunately there are bad people, which she doesn't understand either, but that I shouldn't blame myself. A few hours later, it turned out that after our conversation, she went to scold the teacher, and because she is very respected in the school, he admitted what he was doing, said he didn't know it was not allowed to hit children in school and didn't notice the banner. He later apologised to me and said that he wanted our continued cooperation to be in a good atmosphere and that he would not hit the girls anymore. I thanked him for these words. Of course I would like to believe this, but I think I would be very naive.

Relations at work, between the manager and the subordinate or between the employees themselves, are also different than in Europe. As I managed to find out "lower-ranking" employees such as gardeners, cleaners and cooks had no idea what the applicable working hours were or how much they should earn. The most smiling, Mr Mwowa, who was both a gardener, a porter and a handyman, used to go to town every day to collect kilos of sugar, bread and avocados to distribute later to the teachers. I really enjoyed talking to him. A little bit in English, a little bit in Bemba, a little bit by gestures.

One day we started talking because it was past 5 pm and he still hadn't left work. It turned out that he doesn't have set hours. But most of the time he is from about 4 or 5 in the morning until the evening, until he has completed all his instructions. The time of African people is measured differently and they measure it differently. The pay for the work they do is very low. I heard about a situation where employees needed a bicycle as a tool for work, because it's not just Mr Mwowa who goes into town to do his shopping. But every day, Mrs Frida, a bent woman of several decades, who works in the shop and makes meals, has to carry several tens of kilos of products to the shop on her own back. Unfortunately, they were shouted down for such an idea. So that was the end of the bicycle dream.

One day we went to one of the nearby farms. I noticed the farm is huge. There are pigs, chickens, huge fields of maize, bananas, oranges. They produce flour. It is a compulsory excursion for the twelfth grade. At one point I got separated from the group in order to have to make a phone call. I approached one of the workers asking if he could show me a place with phone coverage. He said there was such a spot, but you had to go through a bush. A little apprehensive, but compelled by the need to call a doctor at a given hour, I decided to go. The gentleman proved to be very helpful. After the talk, we started to walk back to the farm. The route took about 15 minutes, so we started talking. The man opened up. It turned out that he has a degree in agriculture and his dream is to start his own farm. He thought it would be best to start on the best developed, most successful farm in the whole Northern District. However, he found that although this farm supplies not only his region, but also Congo and Tanzania, it unfortunately does not offer prospects to its workers. They mostly live on the farm, are paid enough to feed themselves and pay the bills, and can forget about putting money aside.

The school calendar is divided into three terms. Each term is three months, then there is a one-month break. Each term ends with examinations. In addition, in each term there are routine medical check-ups for girls, during which they have checking eyesight, teeth, blood pressure, stomach and pregnancy tests are done. I, as a nurse's aide, also took part in this (as a tester). I sat in the toilet with one of the clinic ladies and handed out urine cups and pregnancy tests. The girls had to pee with the door open so that the doctors could be sure that it was their urine in the cup. Testing took several days, and the results were mostly negative.

I walk into the nurse's room in the morning, Mrs Tuamalo tells me to put the kettle on for tea, as usual. I sprinkle granulated tea into a mug, pour in

the water, add three big spoonfuls of sugar, squeeze half a lemon and add the zest. We get to chatting. A difficult thing lies ahead. One girl is pregnant. Now what? The procedure is simple: guardians are called, papers are signed and the girl is expelled from school. End of story. This usually to one person or more every term. Do men suffer the consequences? No. We decided to find out why this situation was happening. It turned out that the girl had met a man in town who told her that he knew how to help her. She would no longer have to go to school. Because she was living with her aunt, who was a manager, she had many responsibilities. We do not know whether she actually wanted this or not. The school did not offer any help.

When I went to Livingstone after the end of the year, I stayed with nuns, one of whom is Polish. We had a number of conversations about things I had experienced, things I had observed. She works in a three-person organisation that helps young people psychologically. During one project, which was organised in schools and children could come to a special tent during lessons and talk in an atmosphere of trust and respect with people not connected to the school, it was discovered that there is a sign (when shaking hands, a man touches the middle finger of the child's hand with his middle finger) that means he wants to have sex with her. Pregnancy cases in schools are common, violence is present and help is scarce.

Of course, there were more difficult situations, incomprehensible even to the local population. For example, the arrest of an eight-year-old boy who had stolen a wheelbarrow from the yard and only one sister thought that the orphan, who after all had no means to support himself, should be taken care of...

For a European volunteer, the African reality is difficult to understand and accept. Slowly, however, I believe that the African world will uphold the values of dignity and respect for every human being, and one day peace will come to small places and across the continent.

RESEARCH

I was not just a volunteer here. After all, I was supposed to do my research. And that gave meaning to my continued stay. The cognitive dissonance that I was feeling more and more was slowly dying down as I became involved in the research. At first, it was very difficult for me to find community leaders due to the fact that, according to someones, no such people existed. There are no people here who help the local community and come

from the community. As expected, Mrs T., referred to as my African Mommy for a long time, came to help. As her husband is a pastor and she herself is a well-known nurse in the town, she knows the locals. I asked her if indeed the situation was so hopeless and there was not a single socially engaged person in Kasama and the surrounding area. Mrs T. stood up, she just said, "Get your backpack, let's go." And she went to order a taxi. We went to the nearby hospital, specifically to the psychiatric support section. There I met first leader, Mathylda. And as it turned out, the snowball method did a great job. Through this research I was able to really delve into the local community. To go to places I would never have been shown.

We managed to talk with a representative of the YMCA organisation, with community activists involved in village development, and with some wonderful women: Mildred, who had returned to Kasama after studying business and started working with women living on the edge of poverty, trying to help them find work; with Doreen, who despite having never been out of Owl village and being uneducated and unable to speak English is a leader of the village women, encouraging them to send their children to school, supporting them, teaching women self-respect and, above all, independence. My research consisted of interviews that involved questions about the purpose of the action, about motivations and values. What affected me the most was how much importance each woman interviewed attached to education, which she placed as a supreme value. Above family, faith and work. A strong conviction ran through their statements that only through education would women be able to be a good mother, or a wife not dependent on her husband. Only education is able to free them from dependency. It will enable them to break the taboo barrier. Mildred cited situations that have influenced women's current illiteracy. Thirty, forty years ago, there was a belief that if parents wanted to send a girl to school and she wanted to learn, it meant that she wanted to take care of herself and be a secretary in the future, for example. It meant to society that the girl wanted to be a prostitute. Therefore, people, despite the availability of education for girls, did not send them to school, with drastic consequences. She also cited one taboo that has been largely eradicated. Until a decade or so ago, a woman could not be touched by her husband after becoming pregnant. Even more so when the due date was approaching. Women themselves had to go to the hospital if necessary, handle the birth themselves and hold the baby themselves. For a man, this was taboo area. Nowadays you see fathers on the street with their daughters, maybe not so often, but it is not a surprising view.

Another problem faced by the people of the Northern District is the issue of agriculture. For it turns out that this area is very fertile, there is plenty of water and good soil. However, this area is inhabited by the Bemba tribe, for whom working the land is a disgrace. A lot of people who are thinking of farming one day are ashamed to do so in front of their families and would rather sell someone else's produce than start farming themselves. This is also linked to a lack of skills in fertilising the soil or processing fruit and vegetables. Leader Amos was mainly concerned with this area. For people to start appreciating and noticing the opportunities that their location offers them. An additional very important element that the leaders talked about is charities. The first question I heard from the leaders was whether I was perhaps from an organisation. Unfortunately, they have a very bad reputation. Why can one village be rich and another, 30 km away, extremely poor? The problem is the aid campaigns. Unfortunately, but they mostly bring the opposite results.

Firstly, more often than not, these are money laundries where the organisers make money and the beneficiaries only get a handout. Secondly, it teaches people that they have to be poor to get something. So they prefer not to learn a trade, not to undertake hardship, only to persist in poverty, because they know that only then will they get something for nothing. Thirdly, African countries have become the garbage dump of the southern countries. All sorts of collections of clothes, shoes and equipment result in the dumping of thousands of tons of unnecessary rubbish in African countries where waste management is not developed on the same scale as in Europe. In Zambia, rubbish bins do not function. In Kasami, everything is burnt everywhere. Under my window there was a container set on fire every day. Plastic bottles and chemical packaging were smouldering under my window all day long. Previously, I had taken part in campaigns to send clothes to Africa on several occasions. When I was in Zambia, I found out that there is an abundance of beautiful fabrics, a lot of talented tailors who sew anything you can think of. All the locals use their services all the time, but there is a growing wave of Chinese clothes seeping into the market. However, it is the beautiful, original and hand-sewn outfits that reign supreme on the streets of the smaller towns. Zambians have leaders who know best what problems affect their society, and how to remedy them. Unfortunately, the aid offered by European or American countries is often misguided, doing more harm than good. Sometimes it takes jobs away from people who could be earning something.

And in return, volunteers arrive, whose work does not match the expenses an organisation incurs in sending a volunteer.

The ubiquitous volunteerism is evident in the stories of Zambians. Often volunteers are not adequately prepared, do not fulfil their assigned duties, are not interested in the relationship with the people, their culture. They come to save, but it turns out that nobody needs saving. In particular, the Kasama teachers from the school where I taught said at the end of my stay that I was the first volunteer who really took an interest and befriended them by entering the community, rather than treating them as people who were not equal. And this is not about bragging, but about noticing a real problem where you assume that you are coming to a “poor country” that you necessarily need to help. It turns out that this is not necessarily the case. Of course there are organisations whose work is invaluable. But the work of organisations should not take away the opportunity for people to work honestly for money and for the country to have a chance to develop.

CONCLUSION

The summary written on my last day in Zambia:

I am grateful to have met such wonderful people on my Zambian path. That I was able to feel like a member of one big family, that I actually experienced this collectivist culture which, on the one hand, repeatedly pierced with a pin my soap bubble around a given topic and showered me with its unpleasant and unexpected content, which I was not ready for, and on the other hand, gifted me with beautiful memories and unforgettable experiences, where I was able to feel on my own skin a caring touch, a friendly hug, or simply, care.

This point is related to the above, but deserves a separate paragraph. Joy. I have hidden mine many times and prefer to experience it in solitude. To dance when no one can see or hear, to sway to the melody only in my own thoughts, to smile broadly only under my mask. Here I saw that joy can be present all the time, in spite of truly enormous obstacles and inconveniences. Despite the fact that business is falling apart, despite the fact that employers treat you like a pushover, despite the fact that the country is drowning in corruption and there is a lot of evil around. Despite this, I have the right to be happy, to smile, to laugh and to dance. And I can express it. I can take a friend by the hand and start dancing, I can laugh out loud while telling a silly

story, I can thank someone for being there and say bye-bye that I miss them already, just to make me and that person happy. I can give compliments and I can gratefully accept them. I can have fun and enjoy myself with my outfit and make-up, without considering whether it is vain, correct and acceptable. Mrs Tumelo said, “God wants to see you happy, enjoy life and make the most of it!”

In hindsight, I know that three months is the minimum to be able to at least have a taste of a particular culture, but I know that sometimes, despite spending ten years in a place, one may not enter a society at all, looking through the prism of one’s home culture, judging and comparing. Getting bitter inside and pushing people away. So I think what mainly allows us to fully enjoy what surrounds us in a place is to have an open attitude, ready to experience the shock, accepting it and understanding it. I would like to go back to my return trip from Kasama to the Capital. This time I knew that the coach from Jordan was the wrong choice and I had to aim for Likili. I knew I didn’t have to pay anyone to put my suitcase in the luggage compartment. I knew which seats to take to be the most comfortable and to enjoy the Zambian music videos from the 90s that were playing for the whole 16-hour journey. At every stop I went outside, chatted, sat next to the ladies selling bananas and peanuts, asked how they were, what the child’s name was, admired how polite they were. All the anxiety that accompanied me on my trip to Kasama was gone. Thanks to daily lessons in Bemba basics from Madame Tuamlo, I knew how to ask the real price of a product, that haggling is part of the pleasant game between seller and buyer. After spending three months living with Zambians on a daily basis, smiling and openness had become such a natural part of my behaviour that I couldn’t believe what my journey was like those three months ago. And this is what I remember best. Not the safaris, the off-colour outfits, not the food, not even the stench of burnt rubbish. But the sense that the meaning of the journey is the other person. In this description of the journey, I have omitted so many elements that might interest someone, but I think I have at least been able to describe my subjective impressions and share the joy that accompanied me at that time and, now that I recall that time.

Everyone has some idea of Africa. However, I think that going away, coming into contact with another person, talking, observing and trying to understand can only open a person up and allow him or her not to judge and to treat Africa differently than in their own imagination. Why are the houses round? Everything is well thought out—so that the snake can quickly leave

the house and not nest in a corner. Why do the houses look so poor? And have you been inside? Have you asked anyone? You may find that life in a place is mainly outside and not, as in cold Norway, most of the time spent indoors, but cooking, playing, living outside. And you invest in things other than the house. But it may also be that the house is very well equipped, but from the outside it should not attract attention, so as not to attract thieves. And it's obvious that we can have this impression when encountering an unfamiliar culture, but the key is to ask, to think. You have to talk both to people who are native to the place and those who live there and are from outside Africa like missionaries, etc. Both thanks to the locals, but also thanks to many missionaries, I was able to deepen my knowledge, at least to try to clarify the questions I had. A lot of stories and examples have not been mentioned here, but I leave it to you to explore for yourself and maybe in this way encourage someone else to go on their own journey.

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SHARING IN THEIR DAILY ROUTINES, JOYS AND SORROWS: NOTES FROM ZAMBIA

Summary

This article is a subjective account of a three-month stay in northern Zambia to carry out research and do volunteer assistance. Written from the perspective of a Polish student of Applied Anthropology, the text shows a gradual change in the Author's perception of the surrounding new reality, the difficulty of avoiding culture shock, and facing cultural obstacles that, despite preparation, are difficult to be ready for. The main objective, however, is to try to enter the local environment, understand the behaviour, beliefs of Zambians and establish a relationship with the locals. By conducting research on Zambian culture and research on the human flourishing of

social life leads, observations are enriched by real conversations with Zambians who open up to the interviewee and enter into a cross-cultural dialogue.

Keywords: volunteering in Zambia; business and charity; education in Zambia; students intership in Zambia; local leaders in Zambia; anthropological research in Zambia

NAUKA CODZIENNOŚCI. DROGA PRZEZ RADOŚCI I TROSKI.
ZAPISKI Z ZAMBII

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł jest subiektywnym podsumowaniem trzymiesięcznej wyprawy do północnej części Zambii, której celem było przeprowadzenie badań antropologicznych oraz niesienie pomocy w roli wolontariusza. Tekst napisany z perspektywy polskiej studentki Antropologii Stosowanej ukazuje stopniową zmianę w postrzeganiu nowej rzeczywistości, borykanie się z codziennymi trudnościami, aby nie przeżyć szoku kulturowego, i stawianie czoła przeszkodom, na które trudno jest być gotowym pomimo przygotowania. Głównym celem jest jednak próba wejścia do lokalnej społeczności, zrozumienie zachowań, przekonań, tradycji oraz przede wszystkim nawiązanie relacji z mieszkańcami. Przeprowadzone badania nad zambijską kulturą oraz postawą zambijskich liderów społecznych zostały wzbogacone o obserwacje i wnioski z wielogodzinnych rozmów z mieszkańcami, którzy w zaufaniu otworzyli się na rozmówcę i dzięki nawiązanej relacji w szczerości weszli w międzykulturowy dialog.

Słowa kluczowe: wolontariat w Zambii; biznes i działalność charytatywna; lokalni liderzy w Zambii; staż studencki w Zambii; badania antropologiczne w Zambii