

# **Resilience in the Face of Unemployment and Corruption in Zambian Novels: A Textual Analysis of Joseph Sitali's *Woman of My Uncle***

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## **Abstract**

*This paper investigates nepotism in hiring as reflected in the Zambian novel Woman of My Uncle. The study also aims to determine the level of resilience displayed by the protagonist Muyunda in the face of a corrupt hiring process. Through the application of theoretical concepts of resilience and corruption, the paper showed that throughout his job-hunt journey, Muyunda encounters a lot of trials and strange happenings as most employers do not use a fair recruitment process. The employing officers only give jobs to their relatives and acquaintances, forgetting the effects of nepotistic hiring on their companies. However, due to his resilience, perseverance, and determination, Muyunda is finally offered a lucrative job at Mammoth Oil Company.*

**Keywords:** *Corruption, favouritism, sexual abuse, unemployment, Zambian novel.*

## **Introduction**

Millions of individuals engage in job searches every year. Employed individuals look for new jobs to improve their working conditions. Students engage in job searches after finishing their education. Unemployed individuals search for work after being terminated, laid off, or quitting. Most individuals engage in job searches multiple times in their life span (Direnzo and Greenhaus 2011).

As a middle-income African country, Zambia faces a unique set of challenges and opportunities vis-à-vis its growth and development policy. One of these challenges is to ensure that jobs are provided to the rapidly growing number of new job seekers entering the Zambian labour market (Bhorat et al. 2015). One study has shown that Zambia's unemployment rate is much higher than the global average of 6% (ILO 2013). Youth unemployment in Zambia is estimated at 10%, which is higher than the national average of 7.8%. Thus, due to rising unemployment, every school leaver or graduate wishes to join the public sector after graduation. However, due to a high number of young and often relatively well-educated men and women, and a smaller number of jobs in public and private sectors, there is a tough situation for a fresh graduate and he or she has to struggle hard to get a job (Mujenja 2014).

Research has indicated that in most developing countries, it is common that vacancies, both in public and private sector organisations are filled based on personal connection and preferences Pushkar (2015). In developed countries, private sector organizations are performing well because vacancies are filled on the basis of merit, whereas, in developing countries, vacancies are not filled based on qualification, experience, or skills. In developing countries "It's not what you know but who you know syndrome taking center stage in the job market," meaning that employers prefer hiring family members (nepots) rather than unrelated job applicants. Sometimes, managers give jobs to their friends or – in the case of male personnel managers – to female job seekers in exchange for sexual favours (Ibid).

In light of the above, the present paper aims at investigating the resilience of Muyunda in the face of corruption mainly nepotism, favoritism, and cronyism, as portrayed in *Woman of My Uncle* (2013). Using the critical lens of resilience theory and the concept of corruption, this paper attempts to critically investigate how Muyunda persists to fight for survival by showing resilience, despite an unfavourable social-economic environment deeply tinted by corruption. In short, we will attempt to investigate how the protagonist Muyunda displays positive adaptations despite experiencing significant adversity in his employment search, arising from nepotism, favoritism, and cronyism, which have been entrenched in the hiring process.

### **Synopsis of the novel**

Authored by Joseph Sitali, *Woman of My Uncle* (2013) is set in two geographical areas: Mongu and Lusaka. The novel tells the story of a senior secondary school student Muyunda, who strikes up a friendship with a schoolgirl named Namangolwa. A few months later, Namangolwa is pregnant and expelled from school. Infuriated, Namangolwa's father, Simasiku demands three cows from Muyunda as payment for damaging the future of his daughter. Realising that it is impossible to find three cows from his poor parents to pay for his misdemeanour, Muyunda leaves his village on the Barotse Flood Plain and travels to the City of Lusaka to seek work and earn money to pay Simasiku's heavy fine. He arrives in Lusaka, a city steeped in corruption and facing an economic downturn, where he lives with his Uncle Mubuka and Aunt Dora. Six months after coming to Lusaka, Muyunda is still jobless. Every prospective employer asks Muyunda who his parents are, or what his tribe is. However, after months of job-searching, Muyunda finally gets employed at Mammoth Oil Company; which angered Dora who thought that her husband Mubuka helped his nephew to find a job, yet he is not willing to assist her brother Peter to get employed. When Mubuka leaves for India on official duties, Dora finds a chance to send Mubuka out of the house. Muyunda finds accommodation in a slum called Mutengo, which he shares with two sisters, Longwe and Ndisela. Meanwhile, Muyunda impresses his boss with his dedication and hard work; consequently, he is rewarded with a scholarship to study in England.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

Several discussion papers have contributed substantially to the study of resilience and its value to the advancement of knowledge on the topic. Studies in literature explain resilience in different ways, ranging from sociology to developmental psychology, and many others (Dagdeviren et al. 2016; Luthar et al. 2000; Masten et al. 1990; Mohdupt 2008). In this study, we base our reading of Joseph Sitali's *Woman of My Uncle* on the theoretical underpinning of resilience and corruption in its various forms and dimensions such as nepotism, favouritism, and cronyism.

According to Cloete and Mlambo (2014), resilience is explained as a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma. McAslan states that "Resilience embraces the concepts of awareness, detection, communication, reaction (and if possible, avoidance) and recovery [. . .] Resilience also suggests an ability and willingness to adapt over time to a changing and potentially

threatening environment” (2010: 1). Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) argue that resilience does not represent a personality trait or an attribute of the individual, rather, it is a two-dimensional construct that implies exposure to adversity and the manifestation of positive adjustment outcomes. According to Mlambo, “resilience, emphasizes the strengths that the people have, rather than their vulnerability, exploring the coping strategies that they exhibit” (2014: 39). Mlambo (2011) further opines that resilience is the capacity for strategically absorbing disturbance and challenges, and for coping with the complex uncertainties in life, to survive and move beyond survival. Here, the emphasis is on fortitude, how to survive amid adversity, and the subjectivity that emanates in a people to surmount adversity and meet the challenges in all their enormity and excesses. Ledesma (2014) adds that the resilience theory focuses on a person’s ability to go beyond his or her level of functioning despite repeated exposure to stressful experiences.

Resilience, therefore, has much to do with how a person copes with stress and aggressive adversities. It deals with how one comes out of a situation deemed as threatening and extremely stressful. There is nothing hereditary about resilience because it is a process that one passes through and in the process cultivates coping strategies as they repeatedly pass through stressful events. Each person reacts differently and bounces back in their own way, but the important factor is that the person continues to thrive and is determined to move forward unwaveringly.

From the foregoing, it can be argued that resilience has to do with some ample efforts that need to be put in, determination, self-esteem, optimism and hard work, and perseverance before one can recover from an adverse event. Additionally, a resilient individual possesses the quality of “stick-to-it-iveness,” meaning that such a person perseveres until the task is completed or the goal is achieved. He or she views obstacles as just one of the many hurdles of life to be jumped. In other words, resilience does not mean giving up; quite the opposite, it calls for more courage.

This study also draws its theoretical underpinnings from the concept of corruption. According to Ekiyor (2009), corruption is the unlawful use of official power or influence by an official of the government either to enrich himself or further his course and/or any other person at the expense of the public, in contravention of his oath of office and/or contrary to the conventions or laws that are in force. Similarly, Tanzi (1998) opines that corruption is intentional non-compliance with the arm’s-length principle aimed at depriving some advantage for oneself or for related individuals from this favour. And citing Heidenheimer and Johnson (1993), Ogbeidi, observes that political corruption can be viewed as “an unethical behaviour which violates the norms of the system of political order” (2012: 5). Additionally, commenting on the concept of corruption, Robinson (1998) apprises that by definition, corruption is dishonesty and irresponsible behaviour mainly by people in positions of power such as managers and government officials. Adding his voice to the concept of corruption, Ogundiya (2009: 282) aptly states that:

Corruption is a multidimensional concept that has legal, social, political, economic and ethical connotation. It comes in various forms and dimensions. It is simply conceived [...] as misuse or improper use of power influence, deliberately and consciously for personal aggrandizement or group advantage. In this sense, corruption connotes the abuse of public role or resources, or the use of illegitimate forms of political power and influence by public or private parties.

Considering that corruption is multi-dimensional, we now briefly dwell on the traits of corruption found in Joseph Sitali's *Woman of My Uncle*, which include nepotism, cronyism, and favoritism. According to Padget and Morris (2005), nepotism refers to the practice of showing favoritism during the hiring process toward relatives or spouses of current employees in an organisation. Gyimah-Boadi (2000) asserts that nepotism is a particular type of conflict of interest. Although the expression tends to be used more widely, it strictly applies to a situation in which a person uses his or her public power to obtain a favour – very often a job – for a member of his or her family. Specifically, nepotism is seen as a form of privilege and favoritism based on family connection. Padget et al. (2019) further state that nepotism is a form of preferential selection in which family members of those who are employed in an organization are given preference in the hiring process. In the same breath, Bellow (2003) posits that nepotism is an owner's or manager's preference for hiring family members (nepots) rather than unrelated job applicants. Cronyism, its close relative, involves actual and perceived preferences given by one friend to another (Jones 2012). According to the *Oxford Advanced Dictionary*, cronyism is “the situation in which people in power give jobs to their friends” (2015: 356). It always involves favours of public service jobs among friends with no regard to professional qualifications. Cronyism is broader than nepotism because it covers preference in job appointments given to friends or colleagues. In addition, Aktan (1999), as quoted by Karakose, defines cronyism as “being appointed to a public service job or obtaining a concession in the profession based on friendship or citizenship relations” (2014: 245). It does not consider the general moral duty of employing the most qualified candidate in job preferences; it is rather based on friendship. These preferences are referred to collectively as social connection preference (SCP). One popular example of SCP is when preferences are given by an organization's decision-makers to fellow members of the group that the decision-maker belongs to outside the organization such as family, friends, club members, etc. Finally, one other important concept used in this paper is favoritism. According to Ozler et al. (2007), favoritism means to favour someone over others who are more efficient and competent because of personal involvement. In the same breath, Arasli and Tumer posit that “Favoritism means the provision of special privilege to friends, colleagues, and acquaintances, in the areas of employment, career and personnel decisions” 2008: 1239).

### **Textual Analysis and Discussion**

In one of his articles on masculinity, professor Ratele (2008: 529) states that occupational attainment and income afford a person [particularly a man] choices, including the choice on how to participate in the world, eating what one desires rather than what is available, and living in conditions of one's choosing. In addition, Barker remarks: “Work and producing income” are “key requisites for being a man in most cultures” (2005: 102). Furthermore, in traditional African society, as head of the family, “man is the only breadwinner and it is incumbent upon him to provide his wife and underage children with a roof, food and clothing. Therefore, failure to fulfil this duty means to be unmanly, emasculated, effeminate or unconscious” (Loum 2010 cited by Mutunda 2018: 32). This would mean that having a job, earning a salary, or “getting” money by other means may even be the “chef socially recognised functions” for adult males and “key components of men's identities” (Barker 2005: 104). In other words, to have a job and an income is the structure and the condition of

one's life; it can affect and shape almost every aspect of your life, starting from your personality, mentality, or even physical health.

Searching for employment is a taxing experience for working-age adults, as unemployment denies individuals access to financial resources, social connections, and a sense of workplace identity (Moorhouse and Caltabiano 2007). Unemployment also has pervasive adverse consequences for the individual, their families, and society at large (McKee-Ryan et al. 2005; Saunders 2002). Thus, it is valuable to examine how resilience is accomplished by the protagonist Muyunda during his job search process.

In *Woman of My Uncle*, we learn that when Muyunda completed his secondary school education with a Division One Cambridge School Certificate; he also impregnated his girlfriend Namangolwa, who had one more year remaining before she could also finish her secondary education. The school expelled Namangolwa for the serious offence of getting pregnant while schooling. Infuriated, Namangolwa's father Simasiku demanded to be paid three cows for damaging the future of his daughter. This prompted Muyunda to leave his village and go to Lusaka to live with his uncle, in the hope of seeking gainful employment so that he could pay the required fine. He also hopes to earn money, start a family and enjoy life in general. Indeed, for Muyunda, having work is necessary for his survival in a crucial economic environment, particularly in a developing country like Zambia, where the government does not support common social programmes, public health, and unemployment relief. Currently, the majority of people are only able to afford living costs, accommodation, and health insurance through salaries and pensions.

It has been established that fair recruitment requires full transparency and integrity for the selection of the most qualified candidate among competitors. The entire operation of recruitment should be completely systematic, based on a correct standard, and devoid of emotion and favoritism. Fair and adequate selection and promotion procedures should be in place and respected. Only merit, qualification, and efficiency must govern all decisions relating to human resources (Daban 2022).

However, in Sitali's novel, recruitment is more often based on corruption and lacks some legitimate standards such as vacancy announcements, transparent recruitment processes, independent interview panels, and merit-based selection of the applicants. Moreover, nepotism and favouritism are the two most concerning forms of corruption in the novel. Personnel managers and decision-makers abuse their power in favour of helping their relatives, friends, and tribes at the expense of others who might be more qualified. In other words, in the novel *Woman of My Uncle*, the reader witnesses the hiring of relatives or close friends, regardless of their merits and abilities. In such an environment, as a job seeker, the protagonist Muyunda may not succeed in his job search due to his ethnicity and lack of connections. Consequently, what Muyunda will need is persistence. This persistence in the job search can be linked to the concept of "resilience" that is a phenomenon of a person striving through and bouncing back from difficult situation (Luthar et al. 2000; Masten et al. 1990; Rutter 1990).

According to Werner and Smith (2001), resilience is characterized by determination and perseverance even in the face of adversity. In a quest to make ends meet, a human being usually encounters serious challenges and hurdles that require a spirit that does not falter. Positive self-esteem is a factor that can keep an individual's determination and perseverance afloat even in the midst of problems. In the early chapters of *Woman of My Uncle*, Muyunda is seen as having an unwavering determination to get a job despite his physical appearance and all the frustrations:

[Every morning,] the tall young man walked up the legendary Cairo Road. He wore a pair of worn, unpolished, half-smiling, black-turned-white pair of leather shoes. And an old patch-ridden black pair of trousers. On top he wore a fairly new, clean white shirt [ . . . ] The young man did not show any sign of sadness on his face. He did not try to look happy either. He was not an aimless vagabond. He alone understood himself. He understood that he was a desperate object. He understood that he was desolate and despondent. He was optimistic that [ . . . ] very soon, sooner than later, he will have to start fending for [himself]”

(Sitali 2013: 8-9)

From the excerpt above, we can see how Muyunda defies all odds despite his poor physical appearance. The positive self-esteem that Muyunda possesses helps him to glide over the problems that unfold before him. What is far more important about resilient people is their ability to accept who they are and use a unique mindset that in turn helps them adapt very rapidly to their present condition without losing focus. They realise, as Muyunda does, that their present condition is just transitory. Given that Muyunda’s physical appearance is pathetic in this case, a less resilient person would not even attempt to enter the offices of those highly profiled persons to look for a job. Thus, resilient people have no time for self-pity but do have positive attitudes that drive them toward their goals. Werner and Smith (2001) mentioned that one of the central characteristics of a resilient person is that they tend to perceive experiences in a positive light despite their suffering and possess a strong reliance on faith to maintain their positive view.

Even more striking about resilient people is their attribute of ever-glowing optimism. Such people are capable of managing their emotions during times of stress because they tend to be in touch with their inner life. This aspect leads them to the attainment of inner peace that navigates them to a shore of success despite the negative experiences. To further this argument, O’Leary (1998) points out that emotionally, resilient people understand that adversity and difficult emotions are transient, and this enables them to stay optimistic.

As mentioned earlier, job-seeking is not a single-time event, it is a taxing process in that it involves the expenditure of time, effort, and resources on activities such as preparing a resume, reading job advertisements, and contacting employers. Indeed, for over four months Muyunda searched for a job but to no avail. This impacted him not only psychologically but also physically. For instance, during an evening meal, he reports to his uncle about the progress in his job seeking:

‘Welcome home nephew. Were there any lucky with your job hunt today?’

‘No uncle,’ Muyunda answered. A worried expression suddenly swept over his uncle’s face. ‘Why was it taking so long for his nephew to find employment?’ Muyunda’s uncle worried silently. ‘Maybe you are not trying hard enough to find a job,’ he said aloud. ‘I am doing all I can, I just don’t know why I can’t come across any job’

(Sitali 2013: 13)

As Muyunda gives this report, “he could not speak audibly except mumbling because of his dried lips and for fear that the cracks on his lips would deepen and break and hurt him very much” (Sitali 2013: 13). At this point, it appears as though Muyunda is suffering from the effects of staying hungry for too long because of looking for scarcely available employment.

Muyunda is frustrated following his unsuccessful job search. He did not want to believe that for almost four consecutive months, there was no job offer in the whole City of Lusaka for a holder of a Division One Cambridge School Certificate. His situation is not different from that of Meja and Maina, the central characters in Meja Mwangi's novel *Kill Me Quick* (1973). Meja and Maina also travel to the city expecting to get white-collar jobs. On the contrary, the young men land into situations that drive them into criminality, juvenile delinquency, and trash scavenging. The multitude of problems facing the two town-bound individuals are common to young job seekers in neo-colonial African societies (Kehinde 2004). However, in *Woman of My Uncle*, Muyunda holds the rope tightly regardless of its thorns hurting his palms. Indeed, undeterred by his situation, coupled with the living conditions at home, Muyunda does not give up his job search. Regardless of the mistreatment at home and disappointments during his job-seeking expeditions, Muyunda "did not like leaving a place without speaking to the employer of the firm" (Sitali 2013: 21). All this translates into how much determination he possesses in finding employment.

In the study of resilience theory, there are three important resilience models which are fundamental mechanisms for the impact of stress on quality adaptation. These are compensatory, challenging and protective factors of immunity versus vulnerability models. The compensatory model sees resilience as a factor that neutralizes exposures to risk. Under this model, a resilient person is characterized by optimism, empathy, insight, intellectual competence, self-esteem, direction or mission, and determination and perseverance (O'Leary 1998). The circumstances that Muyunda finds himself in are very threatening because less resilient people, would have given up. But Muyunda is optimistic and has self-esteem. He is seen to demonstrate resilience and he manages to neutralise every negative circumstance that comes his way.

It should also be noted that one cannot be resilient to do something just for the sake of it; such people possess some characteristics that are unique and such characteristics may be a determining factor for resilience. Masten (2001) has commented on this extensively and identified three main characteristics that help people to transform negative events into opportunities, these include individual traits, social support, education, employment, and income. These variables are important to this study as they will help to understand Muyunda's character.

Muyunda as an individual has some admirable qualities that are worth taking note of. For example, determination towards getting a job and having a positive mindset even when things do not mostly work out. Muyunda does not deny that things are hard for him and that he comes from what Karl Max terms "lumpenproletarial" rag poverty, which means that he belongs to the very bottom of the class hierarchy (Cited in Mutunda 2017). Indeed, he belongs to the low class and that is the more reason why he left his village for Lusaka with the view of getting a job so that he could support his young wife Namangolwa and their child.

However, for Muyunda, inaction is not an option. Despite being poor, he is determined to fight for a place in the corrupt society so that he can feed himself, his young wife, and their child who remained in the village. He believes that employment and income offer freedom from poverty. The omniscient narrator explains Muyunda's thoughts each time he lies in his bed:

As Muyunda lay in bed that night, he thought about the coming day and what it would bring for him. The routine would almost certainly be the same. Setting out in the morning in search for a job and coming back to his uncle's home in the afternoon

without any good news. Maybe tomorrow would be different. Maybe he would be offered a job tomorrow. The next day Muyunda woke up early. He was in high spirits and eager to go out in the world and face any hardships that were there.

(Sitali 2013: 21-22)

According to Rand and Cheavens (2012), hope is the perceived ability to produce pathways to achieve desired goals and to motivate oneself to use those pathways. Other studies suggest that like resilience, hope can also be seen as a positive form of human adaptation for individuals who experience prolonged unemployment (Tolentino et al. 2019). From the above excerpt, therefore, we can see that Muyunda is not deterred from job searching. Despite acknowledging that things are not as easy as he thought they would be, he never thinks of giving up, and he keeps hoping that someday he will get employed.

Other attributes that Muyunda possesses include the ingenuity to find solutions to problems, independence, and the ability to distance himself from trouble and the pressures of family, friends and circumstances. These attributes are important to Muyunda in his quest to improve his livelihood. In life, distracters are always present, especially in people who are going through rough times. Some find comfort in drug abuse, while others engage themselves in illicit activities like prostitution in the case of women; all this in the name of finding solace. However, undeterred by the previous unsuccessful attempts, Muyunda does not give up his job search. He remains steadfast and resilient and keeps going out to look for a job. Resuming his search, Muyunda is this time on Cairo Road, one of the busiest roads in Lusaka city. The narrator explains: “The tall young man walked up the legendary Cairo Road from the southern end [ . . . ] He wore a worn, unpolished, half-smiling, black-turned-white pair of leather shoes. And an old patch-ridden black pair of trousers. On top he wore a fairly new, clean white shirt” (Sitali 2013: 8). His current position did not allow him to board a bus, but he utilized his God-given wheels that qualify him as homo-erectus. He was not an aimless vagabond because:

He knew where he was going. [ . . . ] His precious Division One Cambridge School Certificate was carefully tucked away in a large, crumpled khaki envelope. He tightly clutched the khaki envelope in his right hand and kept it close to his chest for security reasons. [ . . . ] The young man did not show any signs of sadness on his face. He did not try to look happy either. He alone understood himself. He understood that he was a desperate object. [ . . . ] The young man was thinking; working his mind over time. Somehow, he felt that the inevitable must happen: ‘very soon, sooner than later, I will have to start fending for myself.

(Sitali 2013: 9)

From the excerpted passage above, it can be said that Muyunda did not deny that things were hard for him, and despite earlier unsuccessful job hunt attempts, he was positive that a day would come when he would get a job and regain his independence and masculine identity.

A very close analysis of the story shows that employment is reserved for relatives, friends or any known and well-connected person and not for people like Muyunda who is not known, either as an individual or through his uncle. This is the perfect practice of nepotistic hiring. Indeed, nepotism is one of the things Muyunda has to fight as he is looking for a job. This vice, as stated earlier, grants favors to relatives or close friends, usually in the forms of hiring practices and employment opportunities. In his mind, Muyunda thinks that getting a



job in Lusaka is purely on merit and nothing more. Little did he realize that what worked in Lusaka was the notion of *wakoniwako*, meaning whom one knows and how much one is willing to pay to get what he or she wants matters most, not what one knows. This is reminiscent of the old and commonly heard saying: “It is not what you know but who you know.”

As Muyunda was desperately looking for employment, he came to A. Barry Manufacturers. At this firm, there were two vacancies for employment. Knowing that he had already taken his application a month before, Muyunda makes a follow-up to this small company. When he arrives, this is what transpires at the reception desk, as seen in the excerpt below:

‘Good morning [. . .] What can I do for you?’ the receptionist said without taking her eyes away from him.

‘I am looking for a job as an accounts clerk,’ he told her.

‘Have you got an appointment with the personnel officer?’

‘I am afraid not,’ he replied.

‘In that case, it is not possible for you to see him. You will have to write us an application letter first,’ she said. ‘Well,’ said Muyunda, ‘I brought an application letter to this office. But I haven’t heard from you since then.’ The lady looked up at him again and smiled: ‘That explains it. I am sure; there are no vacancies at the moment. Try us some other time in the future.’

(Sitali 2013: 23-24)

However, Muyunda could not leave, he insisted that he met with the personnel officer in person: “You don’t know just how much I am in need of a job. I have got to have a job. I am really desperate. Your personnel officer might have something in store. Now can you let me see him” (Sitali 2013: 23). When Muyunda is finally allowed an audience with Mr. Chula the personnel officer, his hopes are raised. The personnel officer genuinely admires Muyunda’s Division One Cambridge School Certificate to the point that he wondered why he did not go straight to university:

‘I understand you are looking for a job. What sort of a job are you interested in?’ Mr. Chulu asked.

‘As a general accounting clerk or any other job,’ Muyunda replied in a discontented voice.

‘Tell me about yourself, please,’ Mr. Chula requested Muyunda.

Loudly Muyunda said: ‘[after looking at my certificate, I am sure] you know my name. I was brilliant at school and did well in my examinations. I expected to find work after school, but up to now, Sir, I haven’t been successful.’

‘Where do you live?’

‘Rhodes Park Sir,’ answered Muyunda.

‘With whom?’

‘I live with my uncle, Sir.’

‘What is his name—your uncle?’

‘Mubuka Muyunda, Sir’

‘Now, now, now,’ he uttered. ‘Where did I meet Mr. Mubuka Muyunda . . . eh . . . eh? He works for The Rural Development Company, doesn’t he?’ Mr. Chula asked.

‘No Sir. My uncle works for Shangwe Financing Company.’

‘I guess I was thinking of Mr. Mubuka Lutangu who is with the Rural Development Company. I don’t know your uncle. I am sure of that now and I am really sorry. I

regret that we cannot offer you a job here. I wish you the best of luck in some other organization,' said the personnel officer in a voice feigned of sorrow.

(Sitali 2013: 25-28)

Cited studies suggest that job seekers can benefit from connecting with both strong (i.e., friends and family members) and weak (i.e., acquaintances and referrals) ties (Barbulescu 2015; Obukhova 2012). But in Muyunda's case, he doesn't have any connection whatsoever, so he only relies on his academic qualification for job-searching. Unfortunately, despite being aware that there were two vacant positions in his firm, Mr. Chula, the personnel officer, could not offer Muyunda a job as there was no connection or relation between Muyunda and Mr. Mubuka that Mr. Chula knew.

What Mr. Chula forgets is the effects of nepotistic hiring on his company. In a study on the effects of nepotism on organizations, Keless et al. (2011) observe that one of the negative effects of nepotism, favoritism, and cronyism on human resources management recruitment and placement practices is the fact that candidates are recruited due to their friendships and bold ties. Because these people may not have sufficient knowledge and qualifications for the job, they may not perform as well as other candidates that have appropriate qualifications. This causes unproductiveness on the part of other employees in the enterprise and can negatively impact organizational justice, motivation, and harmony. Such impacts can cause productive employees to leave their jobs over time and to make comments about the institution to customers, colleagues, and people around them which can harm the operation and image of the institution (Araslı and Tumer 2008).

Disappointed, Muyunda leaves Mr. Chula's office amazed and wondering why some employers like asking about parents or guardians instead of focusing on the candidate's qualifications and whether it would benefit the company by employing him: "Did parents and guardians have had to be known to the personnel officers or managers of firms, or organizations before a job seeker could get a job with them? If that was so, then it was god damned stinking corruption" (Sitali 2013: 29), Muyunda wondered. At this point, the reader is made to sympathize with Muyunda even more because it is clear that for someone to be given a job, the parents or guardians of the prospective employee needed to be known by the employer. Muyunda has the required qualifications, but he will not get a chance to be employed unless he presents a relative connected to anyone in top management positions in the company where he wishes to be employed.

Muyunda experiences another incident of nepotism and favouritism when he goes to Pantangu Brokers. Mr. Zulu the company's personnel officer wanted to offer Muyunda a job as he thought he was related to someone he knew, as seen in the excerpt below:

'There might be a vacant position in our company, you seem to be the rightful person to fill it, the personnel officer explained to Muyunda.

Please don't misjudge me. But where do you leave? Do you leave by yourself?' asked Mr. Zulu.

'I leave in Rhodes Park, Sir. Along Omelo Musonda Road with my uncle Mr Mubuka Muyunda,' Muyunda answered.

'Isn't Mr. Mubuka Muyunda the Managing Director of Rucom Industries?' Mr. Zulu asked triumphantly. He stared at Muyunda jovially.

(Sitali 2013: 29-30)

Like in the previous incident mentioned above, we learn that Muyunda is almost offered a job. But no sooner had Mr. Zulu realized that he did not know Mr. Mubuka, Muyunda's uncle, then he decided not to hire him: "How can you give a job to someone that you don't know, or that is not known to someone that you know?" (Sitali 2013: 30), the personnel officer cursed silently under his breath. Consequently, without wasting any more time, he regrettably told Muyunda that there were no vacancies at Pantangu Brokers that required filling up. From the excerpted passage above, it was more than clear enough to Muyunda that anyone that seriously hoped to be employed anywhere had to be backed by some important or influential individual somewhere. He thus, once again wondered: "Why do personnel officers and managers all want to know who was who, and who was for whom for? Why do they all want to know who the parents and guardians of their prospective employee were?" (Sitali 2013: 30).

According to Eze (2004), recruitment is a vital soul of any organisation, if it is to survive and keep going in the highly competitive industry of this modern age. This is because the success or the failure of any organisation hinges squarely on the level of technical competence, skills, ability, experience, knowledge, attitude to work, etc. that are deposited in its personnel. The process of recruitment and selection should therefore be embodied in the corporate strategy of the organisation. This assumes heightened importance if new talents are needed to drive the main parts of the organization's strategy.

However, Mr. Zulu, the personnel officer of Pantangu Brokers ignores all the standard procedures of recruitment. In his organization, candidates are hired based on their affiliation's family ties rather than their requisite skill. Arasli and Turner (2008) posit that nepotism is an unprofessional phenomenon that provides benefits merely to the family members. Therefore, nepotism paralyzes human resources practices and affects the level of satisfaction among employees.

We are told that after being frustrated and disappointed at Pantangu Brokers, Muyunda leaves sad and empty-handed. However, he remains focused and proceeded with his job hunt. When he gets to Rainbow Imports and Exports, the receptionist allows him to see the personnel officer and he is directed to his office. Surprisingly, Muyunda finds the personnel officer in an uncompromising situation; he was making love to a potential female job-seeker:

As Muyunda stepped into the office his eyes gazed at the surprising spectacle. Inside the office, what appears to be the stark-naked body of a beautiful woman, stumbled carelessly into a large office wall cabinet, presumably to hide [. . .] A middle-aged man, in an unbuttoned white shirt, with an exposed hairy chest, stood guilty behind a large desk [. . .]. He hastily pushed his legs into the two tubes of his pair of trousers. In the process of doing so, he frantically hopped about several times and crashed twice over the table before he pulled his trousers up to his waist and covered his manhood. [. . .] The offended man was scared like a wet chicken and looked very annoyed at the unwarranted disturbance he had received from an unknown person that had just burst into his office.

(Sitali 2013: 31-32)

Upon realising that he could be exposed for his unethical behaviour and would probably lose his job, the personnel officer attempts to bribe Muyunda with a job offer which the latter declines, as the narrator explains:

The embarrassed personnel officer said sweetly, ‘Do you really want a job?’  
‘yes, I do,’ answered Muyunda.  
‘Well,’ said the man, his hand held up before Muyunda in a friendly and forgiving gesture, ‘If you don’t mind all this [ . . . ]’  
Muyunda uttered a disapproving laugh, disagreeably shook his head from left to right and then said, ‘I won’t get a job from you’  
He backed to the door and opened it. He wryly stared at the man, shook his head again and quickly twisted his mouth in a gesture of a disgusted person. He said, ‘Don’t worry, I will not report this.’ And then went out.

(Sitali 2013: 33)

As evidenced above, we are witnessing a case of sex-based favoritism. This is where some employers use the hiring and interviewing process as a way to try and obtain sexual favours from job applicants, especially those who are in desperate need of a job. This is not only reprehensible but also illegal. Under Zambian labour laws and regulations of 2022, employers are prohibited from attempting to use a *quid pro quo* sexual arrangement during the hiring process. According to Kabat (2019), *Quid pro quo* harassment may occur when an employment decision is based on the person’s submission to or rejection of unwanted sexual conduct. In the context of the hiring process, it may involve a hiring manager or another decision-maker telling the candidate that he or she will get the job in exchange for a sexual favour, or that the candidate will not get the job if he or she does not submit to the request. Employers are generally liable for sexual harassment by a supervisor if the harassment results in a tangible employment action, such as failing to hire the candidate. The amount of compensation, vacation time, or other benefits or conditions of employment that may be negotiated during the hiring process may also constitute a tangible employment action.

Scholars such as Jaskiewicz et al. (2013: 123) remind us that nepotism is hiring based on family ties and thus it discriminates against non-family members. Similarly, Wooldridge (2003) opines that nepotism is a form of favouritism which is a kind of corruption where members of the family or friends are hired not because of their talents or experience but because they are relatives of the owner or the executive of the enterprise. And the narrator in the novel under investigation asserts that once non-family members are discriminated against in the hiring process, nepotism comes in:

Public institutions are converted into family business where only the relatives of top and middle management employees have access to employment opportunities in an organization. In some cases, public institutions are turned into tribal empires where only people who belong to certain tribes affiliated to people occupying influential positions in the organization or company can be considered for employment. Some decision-making or well-paying positions in certain organizations are reserved for one particular tribe.

(Sitali 2013: 151)

This type of nepotism is seen when Muyunda, while job-hunting, finds a security guard at Zambia Honey Development Company. The guard is not pleased that Muyunda does not hail from Petauke (Eastern Province) as he does; Muyunda is from Mongu (Western Province) instead. Thus, the guard bluntly tells Muyunda that he cannot get employed because he is not known or related to the personnel officer. He even goes further to brag that he was employed because of being related to the personnel officer: “The personnel officer is

my distant cousin [. . .] The available jobs are reserved for certain young men that we know. They are the only people that I have been instructed to let in. Don't blame me, but there are no vacancies here" (Sitali 2013: 48). Muyunda is baffled because, despite having a Cambridge School certificate with good grades, he could not stand a chance to be offered a job. As Muyunda was pleading with the guard to let him in, a car arrived at the gate and the man in the car enquired: "Are our jobs still vacant?" To which the guard replied in the affirmative: "Yes Sir. The three vacancies for trainee general accounting clerks are still available" (Sitali 2013: 49). Without shame, the guard chased Muyunda away, much to his disappointment. However, he did not give up on his job search.

Resilience is not complete without talking about two concepts namely thriving and hardiness. According to Ickovics and Park (1998) thriving is the effective mobilization of individual and social resources in response to risk or threat, leading to positive mental or physical outcomes and/or social outcomes. Muyunda is seen to thrive amidst problems and with the insatiable appetite for a job, he gives particular attention to what he wishes to have to improve his life. After going through the crucibles of life's hardships, Muyunda finally gets a well-paid job at Mammoth Oil Company.

When Muyunda arrives at the Mammoth Oil Company, he is panting and sweating from running and trotting. He goes straight to the guard at the gate: "Good morning, Sir, he greets the guard. I would like to come in to see the general manager" (Sitali 2013: 93). After hesitating for a while, the guard asked Muyunda what he wanted. As he waved the Time of Zambia newspaper at the guard he said: "Look at this! [. . .] Your company is looking for an accounts clerk. The advertisement for the job is here. Can I come in, please?" (Sitali 2013: 93). Unlike in previous case, the guard at Mammoth Oil Company is so courteous that he opens the gate and escorts Muyunda to the general manager's secretary where he is cordially welcomed. Thereafter, the secretary ushers him into the general manager's office. While in the office of the general manager, Muyunda's blood flows at high speed. The narrator conjures up what transpires in the following excerpt:

The general manager rose from his chair and extended out his hand and arm. 'Good morning,' he greeted the stranger in his office.

'Good morning, Sir,' Muyunda responded.

'By the way my name is George Haddock.' The General Manager of the Mammoth Oil Company spoke softly. 'What can I do for you?'

'Sir, I have been going round looking for employment but without success.' Muyunda pulled his certificate from his khaki envelop and gave it to Mr. Haddock. The manager scrutinized the certificate for a moment [. . .] 'These are very good results you got for your School Certificate.'

'Sir, are you going to offer me employment?' asked Muyunda.

'I have offered you the job,' the general manager told Muyunda, and he was so excited and happy that he almost collapsed.

'However, before I can definitely offer you the job let me explain to you a few things that go with the job that our company can offer you'

'Yes Sir. I am listening,' Muyunda said politely.

(Sitali 2013: 94-95)

Unlike the personnel officers mentioned earlier, Mr. Haddock, the general manager of Mammoth Oil Company believes in hiring candidates on merit rather than hiring based on family ties or nepotism. He is aware that nepotism and cronyism are bad for organizational

performance. Thus, all he does is scrutinize the certificate of the job seeker and then offers his view.

Finally, against all odds, Muyunda gets a job at Mammoth Oil Company. He seems to be confused with the message at his disposal. He was never expecting such an offer in that manner following his previous experiences as a job seeker. He has now become an accounting clerk which seems to be a decent job. This is the result of a long pursuit; Muyunda's resilience, determination, and focus have paid off. After working for a while, Mr. Haddock tells Muyunda that he has been selected to go overseas for training. Muyunda's character is worth emulating because it teaches us some important lessons. One of which is to be patient in life and not to give up. Muyunda encountered many challenges as he was looking for a job. Most of the challenges that he faced did not favour him, but he did not give up on his quest.

## Conclusion

This paper has outlined Zambian experience in the labour market. It discussed the theme of resilience in the face of unemployment and corruption. The paper has brought to light some of the factors that are key in enabling people to be resilient in times of adversity. What is noticed is that in the face of numerous challenges such as corruption, nepotism, and cronyism in his job search, as well as mistreatment by his aunt, Muyunda did not lose focus. He experienced both physical and mental torture resulting from his failure to get employed on time. Nevertheless, he did not sway his mind to the point of losing focus. The paper has also identified that the things which made Muyunda victorious were his attributes. These gave him a strong base on which to build resilience. The young man developed a determination that led him to get a good job with the prospect of studying overseas. This reminds us of a Zambian proverb in Lunda that says: *Kuma kwejiya kumutakalela*, literary translated as: "The pool of water dries up by draining". Indeed, just as a pool of water will dry when you drain it, so you also can achieve your goal only through hard work. Figuratively, the proverb entails that a person who perseveres, endures, and carries on during trials and tribulations will reap better results in the end. The lesson drawn from Muyunda's experience is that whenever one is faced with challenges in achieving their goals, resilience is the best tool. Things may not be fruitful at the time one needs them, but patience and consistency turn the black atmosphere white. In other words, whatever challenges and hurdles we encounter in life, we should never give up. We should be in the habit of fighting to our last breath!

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