

WALKING THE BOWL

A TRUE STORY OF MURDER
AND SURVIVAL AMONG THE
STREET CHILDREN OF LUSAKA

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

We expect one of the first questions people to ask after reading this book is, “How did they do this?” At first glance, it might seem like the whole thing is based on a series of incredible coincidences. More often than not, however, there’s a backstory behind coincidences, which of course undermines the whole notion that they’re coincidences at all. In this case, that backstory involved a unique team of individuals and years of planning and preparation, immersive fieldwork, data coding and management, and collaborative writing. A lot of people had to put in a lot of time—and make a lot of missteps along the way—to result in a book that might prompt readers to ask about the process behind it.

It’s helpful to start with a broad timeline of how everything came about. The two authors first met in 2011 at a conference in Lusaka. After discussing our own experiences working among street children (Daniel Chama in Zambia and Chris Lockhart in northwestern Tanzania), we discovered a mutual frustration with the ways in which street children were portrayed in the existing literature. Despite the mind-numbing array of surveys, reports, and statistics surrounding street children, we both felt

like their everyday lives and experiences remained hidden from view. Street life is a diverse and wide-ranging realm where individual identity and survival is continually shaped and reshaped by countless cultural meanings and social practices. We asked ourselves how we could effectively capture the distinctiveness of that realm while making clear that it is not an exotic world unto itself, but always and forever a part of the wider landscape, a part of us. Children who spend time on the streets are not the “other,” they do not exist “over there,” and the fact that they do spend time on the streets does not somehow make them more amenable to being objectified by numbers and typologies. Like anyone, they have stories to tell.

But if we were going to find and tell a story about street children, we needed to immerse ourselves in Lusaka’s street scene, which itself involved gaining an unprecedented level of trust among as wide a cross section of children and others as possible. An anthropological methodology based on ethnographic immersion was the only possible way to do this. By now, most people are familiar with the notion of “embedded journalists,” or individual news reporters who attach themselves to specific military units in an armed conflict in order to get at an “insider’s account.” Anthropologists engaged in ethnographic immersion play a similar role, though with a few notable differences: anthropologists immerse themselves over much longer periods of time, they focus on the routine aspects of individuals’ lives and the sociocultural characteristics of their communities rather than report descriptively on major historical events like wars (though this is not always true), and anthropology as a discipline has a well-developed body of literature involving the ethical, methodological, and theoretical assumptions behind their engagement with others, which among other things dictates what aspects of a particular society to focus on. The latter is often referred to as the “anthropological gaze.” It simply refers to the ways in which anthropologists make sense of their observations, with the un-

derstanding that the very choice of what to observe and what not to observe—as well as the corresponding interpretations—are influenced not only by our profession and education, but also by such things as gender, class, ethnicity, and a myriad of other factors. While they lean more toward the academic side of things, anthropological accounts based on extensive ethnographic immersion can be truly astounding (two of the best examples out there are *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* by Phillipe Bourgois and *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* by Nancy Scheper-Hughes).

By 2014, the two authors were making some initial forays into Lusaka's street scene as part of the project itself. Since Chama was already familiar with that scene, these preliminary outings were geared toward introducing Lockhart to the city's street culture while also thinking through what it would take to capture its sheer depth and breadth in as unobtrusive a manner as possible. We knew that we could not do this alone, so we focused our efforts on assembling a unique team of talented young people who were themselves capable of spending significant amounts of time on the street. This alone proved to be a challenging task and one that took us over six months to accomplish. Ultimately, and in addition to the two authors, the team consisted of a graduate student at the University of Zambia and five former street children (one girl and four boys) who were themselves just several years removed from the street scene. It took another year of team building and collaborative, field-based instruction on the finer points of ethnographic observation, note taking, and field recording to work out all the kinks. We also developed a fairly unobtrusive, on-the-spot interview technique that ended up working quite well under the circumstances. As an experienced anthropologist, Lockhart did the bulk of the initial training, though ultimately Chama took on this task since his knowledge of the street scene and job as an outreach worker made him a natural. Ultimately, Chama oversaw the work of the entire field

team (while conducting fieldwork himself) as Lockhart focused on managing and organizing the massive amounts of information that began pouring in (though given his relationship with certain key individuals, Lockhart also participated in fieldwork throughout the project). The result was a carefully orchestrated street presence of uniquely skilled field researchers who fanned out across Lusaka, attaching themselves to a specific person and/or site for several days and nights each week. In addition to team building and field-based training, our main objective during this time was to achieve an acceptable degree of trust and acceptance among Lusaka's street children. In order to do this, we found it necessary to carve out, as much as possible, a unique space for ourselves that was truly independent from the city's tangled web of government ministries, nongovernmental organizations, missions, and other institutions working with street children. As a result, there was a nonpartisan, almost rogue-like quality to our work, which we embraced as both necessary and preferable.

We'd been in the field for another year when the death of the Ho Ho Kid occurred. At that point, we were busy building profiles of a select group of individuals whose experiences defied easy typologies yet, taken together, covered as wide a swath of Lusaka's street scene as possible. Given the mortality rate among Lusaka's street children and street-connected youth, the Ho Ho Kid's death could easily have gone unnoticed. But the level of police interest quickly caught our attention, in part because Lusabilo happened to be one of the children we were profiling. We were also engaged to some degree with Timo and Kapula, but that engagement became much stronger as we realized that they too were connected to the death of the Ho Ho Kid. Our association with Moonga came about shortly after that, though we were aware of his existence because we had a strong, almost twenty-four-hour presence among the "Beggar Boys" at Lusaka's Intercity Bus Station. As the lives of these four children connected around the death of the Ho Ho Kid,

we realized that we were witnessing a singular event that shed light on the depth and breadth of Lusaka's street scene and the children who inhabit it.

Over the decades, anthropologists have adopted various definitions and approaches to "events," often analyzing them as critical dimensions where key social processes and cultural meanings are produced and reproduced, and/or as historical moments that shed light on the relationship between macrostructural processes and individual experience. While we were less concerned with the academic debates surrounding events as units of social analysis, the literature definitely influenced our fieldwork and where we chose to focus our own "anthropological gaze."

So, it would be only partially correct to say that the whole thing was based on a series of incredible coincidences. In reality, it was a matter of putting in a lot of work and effort to be in that space at that moment, combined with a constant state of readiness to pursue specific events and their consequences as they unfolded. When that event did occur, it kicked off a much more intensive phase of fieldwork.

We dropped almost everything we were doing in order to focus exclusively on the murder of the Ho Ho Kid. While we continued to employ all the methods we'd been using to collect general information on Lusaka's street scene and the children involved in it, we now used those same methods to focus on the murder itself. As part of that process, we redeployed our field team to follow the story in real time as much as possible. Fortunately, and as mentioned earlier, that transition was made easier by the fact that most of our team had already been in the field for at least two years and were either connected or could easily make the connection with those involved. We also began spending much more time in the field and made sure that at least three members of the team were on the streets at any given time—both day and night. This kind of sustained pres-

ence turned out to be extremely important because things unfolded very quickly.

An important part of the team's work during this time revolved around certain predefined thresholds in terms of capturing things as they unfolded. When it was all said and done, we wanted to be able to say that we directly observed at least 75% of events described in the book and audio recorded at least 70% of direct quotes. In the end, we surpassed both objectives. Of those incidents that are described in this book beginning with the discovery of the Ho Ho Kid's body, approximately 85% were directly observed by a team member. Additionally, approximately 75% of quotes were captured with an audio recorder.

Events or quotes that were not directly observed or recorded were meticulously reconstructed within a few days of their occurrence—typically via in-depth interviews with multiple individuals who were present, until we were confident of “saturating” the individual's knowledge and perspective of what took place. Of course, memory is a tricky thing, but if for any reason we felt like we couldn't approximate what actually occurred, that particular incident was either omitted or the narrative makes clear that there is uncertainty surrounding it. It should be noted that reconstructing events like this did not just apply to those instances when a team member was absent, but was a general procedure that we applied to almost every event we believed to be of significance.

Given both our threshold objectives and meticulous reconstruction process, the number of events that we wanted to include in the book but could not were many times more than those that eventually made it in. But given those same objectives and rigors, we simply had to live with the shadow of the book that could have been. We suspect that omission and regret are inherent parts of all nonfiction.

In terms of the raw data, we ended up with somewhere in the neighborhood of 1,500 hours of audio recordings, 700 pages of

field notes, 650 hand drawn illustrations and maps (which we found useful when interviewing the younger children), 2,000 photos, and countless pieces of background information in the form of newspaper pieces, journal articles, reports, and other documents. In fact, we had so much data that it was necessary to use a data management software program to develop and apply an elaborate series of codes in order to sift through and make sense of everything. It proved to be an enormous, time-consuming, and at times overwhelming task. Eventually, however, we managed to identify and prioritize all the data that formed the basis of this book.

As much as we embraced academic rigor during our field work and data management phase, we went out of our way to snub the academic world when it came to writing the book itself. An academic writing style was totally incompatible with our desire to pursue and tell a story about a specific event involving a particular group of children. And at a more fundamental level, we wanted to keep away from all the lengthy professional discussions and debates surrounding street children, which are often as pedantic as they are intangible, and avoid a writing style that reduced street children to a barrage of bar charts, pie charts, exploding doughnut charts, scatter plots, and tables upon tables of numerical factoids and measurable datoids. Writing for a small, specialized class of professionals is the status quo when it comes to street children, and we wanted to do something different, we wanted to write for the wider public. In the end, narrative nonfiction was the only possible answer. We also felt that the combination of narrative nonfiction with ethnographic immersion and the rigorous data collection methods we adopted was an immensely powerful approach. It not only allowed us to write about all the issues surrounding street children in a more mainstream manner, but to do so via the voices and stories of the children themselves.

We are by no means the first to do this. We drew upon ex-

isting books for inspiration, particularly Katherine Boo's *Beyond the Beautiful Forever: Life, Death, And Hope In A Mumbai Undercity* (2012), Barbara Demick's *Nothing To Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (2010), Ben Rawlence's *City of Thorns: Nine Lives in The World's Largest Refugee Camp* (2016), Jonny Steinberg's *A Man of Good Hope* (2015), and Alex Kotlowitz's *There Are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing Up In The Other America* (1992). There are others, of course, but we wanted to acknowledge at least a handful of those that had a tremendous impact on us.

We'd also like to acknowledge that throughout the entire project, but especially so during the writing process, the two authors were cognizant of our very different backgrounds. Chama, a Black Zambian and former street child turned social worker with a lifetime of experience on Lusaka's streets, and Lockhart, a white American and trained anthropologist who'd worked for a slew of development agencies and nonprofits across Africa and around the world, could hardly be more different. But we found these differences to be of enormous benefit, especially when it came to choosing what made it into the book and what did not, as well as finding the right tone and style to describe everything. Underlying this process was the fact that Lockhart frequently saw suffering and exploitation where Chama saw hope and opportunity. We're not quite certain of the irony in that, but it's how it ended up working and it became an important theme in the book itself. At first we embraced our collaborative writing style as the way it should be. But over time, and as our friendship grew, we understood that it was the only possible way at all.

We'd like to conclude by saying a few words about sub-Saharan Africa—a large and enormously diverse part of the world that both authors love and call home. We are mindful that an account like this is vulnerable to reproducing a few well-worn and very misleading tropes, namely Conradian notions of a dark and exotic continent, a place that can only be under-

stood in terms of endless suffering and implicit victimhood. But that wasn't our intention, and our only defense here is that we tried to present the information we collected in a manner that was true to the lives of the children themselves while alluding in some fashion to wider forces that are not necessarily unique to a specific place or continent. In this sense, then, the issues involving street children in Africa are the same as the issues involving street children around the world. So the question is not "Why is Africa (or Zambia) like this?" but rather "What is it about our growing interdependence that creates and sustains such extreme inequalities between the haves and have-nots of this world?" And as a corollary to that, "What is it about this process that makes children so vulnerable?"

These are not easy questions to ask or answer, but neither can be done unless we make room for a more common language when it comes to shedding light on the world's most vulnerable children, one that motivates us to act based on our shared humanity. To paraphrase an old axiom, a single suffering child on the streets is a tragedy, a million is a statistic.

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We would also like to highlight some general sources of information. Since 1980, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) has reviewed the status of children who spend time on the streets as part of its annual *State of the World's Children* reports. These and similar reports can be found on their website at <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-of-worlds-children>. In addition, it is worth checking out the extensive resource library put together by the Consortium for Street Children, a global alliance of community organizations, national and international nongovernmental organizations, researchers, advocates, and field workers. They also published two comprehensive reports (in 2007 and 2011) as part of their *State*

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