

# Mulenga Kapwepwe

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culture, politics, theatre, open, proverbs, history, museums, playwright, artist, Africa, museum, Zambia, Ghana

## SPEAKERS

Betty Kankam-Boadu, Mulenga Kapwepwe

### **Mulenga Kapwepwe** 00:01

Sometimes I think we Africans have left so many aspects of ourselves unexplored because we simply take the framework of the Western, and then try and fit ourselves in there. There are so many aspects of ourselves that we have left unexplored, that we must explore because they begin to make so much sense. And then you begin to walk in your own path.

### **Betty Kankam-Boadu** 00:26

Hello and welcome to Inspiring Open, candid conversations with influential women whose careers and open ethos have pushed the boundaries of what it means to build community and succeed as a collective. I am Betty Kankam-Boadu a journalist and women's rights advocate. Join me as I explore the fascinating backstories behind Africa's most tenacious female personalities. Inspiring Open is a podcast series from Wiki Loves Women, a project of Wiki in Africa. Be inspired, be challenged, be bold.

Mulenga Kapwepwe is an award-winning author and playwright. Mulenga's creativity was encouraged by her father, former vice president of Zambia, Simon Kapwepwe who was an author himself. She began writing her own plays early on in her career with a lack of formal theatre education. Mulenga's passion is preserving the history and culture of her people. In 2016, she co-founded the Zambian Museum of women's history, an initiative to spotlight Zambian women who have contributed to the country's traditional and contemporary history. She believes African proverbs are life hacks, and so should be preserved and passed on to generations. Mulenga sits on many boards and chairs many art and literary institutions in Zambia. She also owns a football academy for women, some of whom have gone on to play for the Zambian women's football team.

Welcome, on Inspiring Open, Mulenga Kapwepwe. Tell us about your childhood and how your parents brought you up.

**Mulenga Kapwepwe 02:13**

Okay, I was born before this country gained independence, which we gained independence in 1964. So I was born some years before that in 1958. And so, I kind of remember a little bit of the colonial experience because my father was so involved in the struggle for independence of this country. I think from the time I was small, what this country means, what a country means actually, on an individual level, I think was very amplified, because it was really the topic of discussion in our family. For us, it was about independence. My father was in prison, and all that stuff. So the whole struggle, and what it means to be part of a nation or to even bring a nation into existence, was very much part of my worldview. And also, the fact that my father and his friends were very deeply committed to serving and to service in terms of the country and its people. I think the whole idea of service and serving others, was also something else that just came with my mother's milk, I guess. So yeah, I come from a background where the whole reality of what you can do with your life, and not just for yourself, but for others, was played out right in front of me. I think being in service and serving others is just something that I think has come naturally, just from watching my parents and how they went about it, because both of them are very much involved, but also just in their daily lives. I remember my mother... I remember we're going somewhere and my mother saw this woman walking on the side of the road. She had just obviously... it was near the maternity hospital, and I think this woman had just given birth or something. And she was walking really slowly and she was obviously not very comfortable. And I remember my mother stopped the car and got out and said, "Where are you going? Did you just give birth?" And this woman said, Yes. And we immediately aborted, wherever we were going. And my mother said, "No, we have to take you wherever you're going," because this woman was going quite far. So our whole visit to whoever we were going to was abandoned and we took this woman home who, of course I knew, my mother didn't know who this woman was, or whatever it is. But for me it stuck in my head. Like, oh, when there's need, you should be able to see it and try and address it. And I think that's also been just part of what life has been. I think for me, in terms of how I want to live my life. So it's kind of like goes from that point.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu 05:12**

People know your father, as somebody who really fought for his nation, and later became the vice president, and they know your father for his politics side, and also his love for his country. Beyond what people know, you know your father is an artist, and he nurtured the artistic qualities in you. Tell us about the artistic side of your father, and how he gave you the liberty to also express yourself as an artist?

**Mulenga Kapwepwe 05:48**

Absolutely, my father was an artist. I think, for me. Probably above all, he was a politician and whatever, but for me, he was an artist. My father was a writer, he authored quite a number of books. And so I think, because I was kind of like the artistic child in the family, we struck up a chord, I think, and my father really encouraged me to be an artist. He always said, if you want to be an artist, be an artist. There was literally one conditionality though, it was; go to school, go to finish your secondary school, go to university, get a degree, and then do whatever you want as an artist. But don't forget your art. I was very good at the visual arts. I think if my father came back alive, he'd be quite surprised that I'm actually not a visual artist. I write like him. I'm very appreciative of the fact that I actually had a father who supported what I am, because I am an artist. I was born that way. So both my parents actually supported me very, very much whether it was later on when my father was gone, and my mother was still there, and I was researching for my books, or my plays, my mother would always ask, "What's this? Or what does this mean?" She would always be the one who would say, okay, this means this, this looks like this, and she would send me that thing. So both of them actually supported me. And I'm very grateful for that, because I see a lot of parents discouraging their kids who are born artist or artistic. And that I think can be a very painful place to be as a human being, because these gifts we come with. And if you're not encouraged to express them, it can be a very painful or confusing place to be.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu 07:40**

Your father is such an important person in Zambia's history. And, obviously, his legacy and who he was follows you everywhere. But I wonder if there are some advantages and disadvantages to this?

**Mulenga Kapwepwe 07:59**

Absolutely. Having a name or living in the shadows of someone who was that large, on our national stage, is a double-edged sword. Sometimes, no matter what you do, it's like, no, that's because she's this, or this is because her father was that. But even if it's your own effort, and your own sweat, some people tend to kind of write you off, because no, it's because of whatever. And on the other side of that same coin, sometimes it can be very gratifying, because you can... For me, the most satisfying thing about my father's legacy, I think, is just meeting people who remember my father. Who say, do you know, I met your father on this and this occasion, and this is what happened, or this is what your father did; he saved my wife's life. I like to share those kinds of things about my father with people. Because it just brings him back for me. So that's for me a pleasurable part of that thing. But otherwise, my father always kind of stressed that you what, this whatever it is, my being known and who ever I am, who ever I made myself to be, is mine. I mean, you go out and make your own, be who you are, make your own stage and play your parts on those stage. This

was my stage, so, that's very much part of also the way I see the world. I am on a big stage, which is huge, simply because of that name, but I'm writing my script.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu 09:56**

I love that you're writing your script. I really love that. I don't think it would be fair to talk about your father and not talk about your mother. Because I heard you tell a story about how your mother was so part of who your father was, and particularly the author side of your father. Your mother would type your father's manuscripts. And there's a story about how when your father was about to be arrested, your mom did everything to save a particular manuscript that your father had written. Can you tell us about that story? I think it's so interesting.

**Mulenga Kapwepwe 10:36**

Yeah, absolutely. And this happened shortly after we were born actually, because my father was arrested. When I say we, it's because I'm a twin, by the way, there's two of us. So shortly after we were born, we were born in October, my father was arrested, I think, by like January, but he had just finished writing a manuscript which had been rejected by the colonial publishing house, because they said it was a little bit too political. I think it was actually one of the things that they wanted actually to confiscate. But anyway, because my mother was always such a part of my father's writing process; she was editor, critic, everything rolled into one, and the person who typed up everything, she knew, one, the value of the content, she'd worked on it as well, she put her sweat in there. And both of them valued that work, and they didn't want to lose it. And so, my mother, when my father was arrested, my mother made sure she actually hid that manuscript as they searched the house. And after they missed it, and they didn't actually find it, she, through the help of some friends, actually managed to smuggle it to Egypt, where it stayed until 1967, three years after independence. And then those friends, and I think actually mom went to Egypt and she came back with the manuscript. And that was when my father, again, submitted it now to a postcolonial publishing house. And they actually published it. And two years ago, I actually turned that book into a play, into a musical actually. And we actually performed it in about three, four different towns here in Zambia. It was great for me, because I felt like I was working with my parents on the play, because I knew how much they put into it. But I was also kind of working with it. And when you read your own father's thoughts, and you know your mother was in there as well, it was very, very, I don't know, it was a very delightful experience for me, I think, just to work with my father's words, work with his ideas, and then put my own ideas with his ideas to make it into a stage play. So that was... for me, that book has become even more special.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu 13:17**

The first time you walked into an office to experience what the formal job was like, you could not imagine sitting at one place from morning til evening. That was not the kind of life that you imagined you could do. Tell me about that experience? And what happened from there?

**Mulenga Kapwepwe 13:47**

Yeah, you know how, it's kind of weird, you're told you're on the right path, when you've done your school, you've gone to university, you've graduated. Now, the next thing that you must get a job. This is how life progresses. And I think already in my head, I wasn't really kind of looking for that. But I got a job. So the first day, I went into that office, and this was a really, really nice place to work, actually. The feeling that came with it was just like what? I looked, and this was a huge corporate, and I was looking at everybody and thinking, these people come here every day and sit in these little rooms from eight until five o'clock. And this is their life every day, every week, every month. You're giving away eight hours of your life, literally, to come and sit in a room and whatever, push the papers or whatever it is that you're doing. Like what? How much are you missing? How much are you missing that's going on out there? You know what I mean? For me, it was just like no, I don't think so. I knew I needed to get the experience, the formal experience of working, and learning the ropes, and this is how a job works and whatever. But I just said to myself, I don't think so, I will be here for the experience, but I need to find a way of earning an income and sustaining myself, but not in a box for eight hours a day. So I kind of stuck that out for eight years. And when I thought, okay, so I've learned enough, I set up my own consultancy company, and started doing work, which I thought for me, suited me more than just going and sitting in a box. I kept on working as well as an artist, as well as doing all those other things. I consulted for UNESCO, I sat on the board of UNESCO, I sat on the board of museums, I chaired the Arterial Network , which was a continent-wide network of artists for four years. A lot of stuff that for me, I think, all kind of stemmed from the way my life progressed from that first day I knew that box called an office. Which inspired me to just promise myself I'd live life on my terms.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu 16:39**

You've gone on to write plays, to write books, and you've won so many awards. When you started out, what was the literary scene like for Zambian women?

**Mulenga Kapwepwe 16:51**

There were a few women who kind of stood out, who inspired me, in the art scene. But there were some women like Cynthia Zukas, Norah Mumba , Fredah Nkonde. Fredah was in theatre, Norah was a writer, Cynthia was a visual artist. There were some women who stood out and inspired.

Susan Chitabanta , she's an author. There were women who had already cleared the path, and who were making waves in the art world. And when I got into theatre, and so forth, it was some of that inspiration, that the Vivienne Silwambas and people like that, who were on the acting side. I can't act, even if they paid me a million dollars. But I can write the write lines for you to act. I was inspired by the acting, by the writing, by the whatever. I've never, and this is something that I should say, because the first play that I wrote, I had no idea how to write a play. I was just like, okay, so what's the scene? What's an act? I went and sat with people who knew how to do it, and I was like, Okay, so what's an act? Okay, what's a scene? What's the difference between this and that? I told myself you know what, I bet Shakespeare didn't go to any school to go and learn how to write a play. So I'm just going to do that as well. I don't think he knew how to do it. So I sat down. I knew I had a good story. I just didn't know how to make it into a play. So I sat down with a playwright and I said, okay, so what's a scene? And they explained it to me. And so I went back, I sat, I wrote the play, and then I went back and said does this make sense? And he was like, yeah actually, that makes sense. And that play literally won all the awards, the National Awards on the night. It won Best Script, it won Best Actor, it won Best Producer, it won Best Director. My lesson here to anybody is that you know what? Don't be daunted. If you don't know how to do something, just find out how to do it. And go for it. Don't let I don't know how to do this be an excuse. No, just do it. I mean, so what if it bombs? You know what I mean? For me, it's not every play of mine that has been wonderful and successful and whatever it is, but I can tell you that every play, whether it's been a success or not, has taught me lessons, has been a valuable lesson for me to go to the next one, to the next play, to do it better, to see how I can get more of the audience interest. But every lesson I've learned has come from, not just from success, a lot of it has come from failure as well. To tell you the truth, I have a big problem in seeing the difference between failure and success, because for me, both of them have the same weight. In my life, they're both very good for me in terms of lessons.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu 20:16**

Your kind of art is deeply rooted in culture and history. What sparked your interest in that direction? What really inspired you to take it all the way to the point of even creating the Museum for Zambian Women?

**Mulenga Kapwepwe 20:38**

The basic policy in our household was, for my parents, was that they wanted us deeply rooted in our culture, and our history, but also to grow as far as possible. Deep roots, but very long branches, and those branches should touch whatever aspect of life you wanted, not just your own. And it's funny, I was saying that my father kept literally everything that I ever wrote, whether it was a poem, or a composition, or whatever it is. And when I went home, I found my composition that I had written when I was 11 years old. And I was talking about the importance of culture and history. And nothing

has changed. That 11-year-old was saying exactly what I would say today. I was so shocked. I was like, you realise I was already thinking when I was 11. I had even forgotten. But I was quite amazed, like, okay, so I was already thinking like this, when I was 11?

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 21:49

It was a calling from the beginning.

**Mulenga Kapwepwe** 21:51

I think so. And I think, also, like conversations with my dad, I guess, but also just the general atmosphere. It comes from that. And I think that now, I understand, has been literally the path that I have followed, because the thought process in that composition of that 11-year-old is literally the same thought process now. The importance of preserving our own culture, the importance of preserving our history, and for me, the two marry very well. Because there is so much value in our history, and there's so much value in our culture. And when the two for me, when the two come together, it's such a powerful spark. A lot of my plays are actually historical. So they need a lot of research, sometimes I research for three years before actually put a play on, because I want all the facts to be right historically, and everything else. But for me, that point of contact between history and culture has been very, very important in the way that I've actually articulated my art. And whether I'm writing a play or a book, I think those two always come together for me, one; because I'm really worried about losing our culture, because that's our library, our languages store so much science, stores history, stores everything. Our languages are also our libraries. So, everything that makes our culture and our history is really what makes our lives have context and meaning and therefore value. So I tend to bring those two together in literally everything I do. And culture and history are also happening now. And are being made now. And so even some of my plays were very much current, especially when I was doing the HIV side, one of the plays that I did, which was called choosing between eating and breathing, was simply because of what I had to work with commercial sex workers. And for me, it became very interesting, the reasons why they were doing commercial sex work in such a dangerous time, but also, what kind of human beings, just ordinary human beings they were, and the play is based on those kind of things. And it was very interesting for me to see the reaction from the audience from that one. The thing that I think for me also the female, the feminine, has also been very important to me. And because I think, the role my mother also played, and she was a very, very, very courageous woman. And, she played her role in a lot of courageous situations during the struggle. But having seen all that, all I ever heard really was about my father, whereas my mother had also done a tremendous amount of work to get to where we were in terms of independence. For me it bothered me that women's history was not being told. There are so many women who have done so much in this country in terms of the liberation struggle, in terms of breakthroughs in their own professions. And that just wasn't being told. So my

friend and I sat over coffee one day and decided, okay, and this is a legacy from my parents, as I pointed out, if there's a need, then you should stop and address it, like the way my mother gave a lift to that woman who had just had a baby. If you see something, then you should be able to do something, if not you then who will do it? I sat down and said, you know what, there's no women's history going on around here. Why not establish a women's history museum. And fortunately, we live in a digital age. We said, well, if we're going to wait and raise money to build a structure, it's going to take too long. So let's create a virtual museum and take it from there. And it's been a wonderful experience, I must say, in the sense of the reception that the museum has received, the kind of ideas we're pushing through the museum, the visibility we've given to women.

26:38

We partnered with Wikipedia as well, in terms of training about 34 young people to write the histories of Zambian women. And I think if you go to Wikipedia, now, I think Zambia probably has more women in Wikipedia than any other country in Africa. Because we've been pushing, we've been pushing our writers, and we got them trained by Wikipedia, and they've been writing and posting as much as possible, because we are determined from the angle of the museum, that women should also occupy their place in history. And so that has been gratifying in so many ways. We are currently engaged in the whole repatriation of objects, back to Africa, and so forth. But our conversation is very different, I think, from everybody else, because we're a virtual museum. But all that ties up in terms of your question. All that ties up for me, in terms of, I think, how I grew up, what culture, history, and also the role of women in both culture and history, what that has been, and how does that then translate into, into modern life and mainstreaming it as knowledge for people to actually be able to say, oh, I know that woman, she did this and this in our history, or I didn't know there was this woman and she did that. Or she's responsible for the vaccination or the way we now handle cattle vaccinations or whatever. There were so many things that came out that people didn't know that it's women in our country who actually did them first, or led the way to that. So everything has kind of tied up, I think, for me, simply because I think that 11 year old, and this 63-year-old are still talking the same language.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 28:37

As you are speaking, I was thinking and imagining how women have been written out of history, even in Ghana here for a very long time. The only woman whose name was mentioned in our history was **Yaa Asantewaa** and I think she fought during the colonial rule. And that's about the only name we know. All the rest are men. So were there no women existing at that time? Were there no women living at that time? They didn't do anything?

**Mulenga Kapwepwe** 29:11

When I came to Ghana, I went to visit the museum, the Ashanti Museum, and it struck me just how similar the whole Ashanti monarchy and even just the structures of materiality and all that. It's very, very similar to mine. And the power of women in matriarchal and matrilineal societies is sometimes hidden. But it is the most powerful. And those are the kinds of things, because we tend to analyse everything from kind of like this western perspective where the West only sees power in the most visible forms or whatever. We have so many ways of hiding power. And in so many places. And these are the kinds of things that we also want to bring out and say; the powerful person behind this man, all the decisions that were actually being made, were actually by the women behind him. He was merely the ventriloquist dummy. But he was merely voicing what the women were actually saying. Our concept of power and I think we, sometimes I think we Africans have left so many aspects of ourselves unexplored. Because we simply take the framework of the West, and then try and fit ourselves in there. There are so many aspects of ourselves that we have left unexplored, that we must explore, because they begin to make so much sense. And then you begin to walk in your own path. When you try and walk in somebody else's path, which they know, and they've walked and, you keep stumbling and falling, or whatever. When you do it from a place where you're going and where you've come from, I think it becomes a much richer experience. So by all means, look at other paths, but define your own. And we have tended to take the lens in a way, of course, we're all going to the west to get trained in gender, and whatever. And all those perspectives come from there. But we had our own perspectives. And we knew how to articulate those powers and how we shared them and where we put them and where we hid them and where we put them out in the open. But we sort of don't have discussions around those kinds of things. And so it's something that we're trying to do at the museum as well, put some of that stuff into the mainstream.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu 32:00**

I mean, I completely agree with you, we really need to find our own path. It brings me to Proverbs, and your love for proverbs. And you have a book on proverbs. And for a very long time, I thought of Proverbs, in the present age, if I situate it in this present age, all I see is that oh, it makes language rich. So when somebody's speaking and the person uses a lot of Proverbs I say, oh, his language is very rich, or when the person writes, oh that's such a rich language. And then you put it in a whole new perspective that Proverbs are life hacks. Tell me about how you came to that realisation that proverbs are life hacks?

**Mulenga Kapwepwe 32:54**

And this is where it goes back to my passion for culture and all that stuff. And the biggest part of our cultures is our language. When you dive into your language and I encourage everybody to dive into theirs, you discover such gems especially when you come from cultures that didn't write, the language becomes where everything is written, everything. And the language carries that weight,

that heavy load of literally communicating everything, the knowledge of that people. And proverbs are fascinating because Proverbs, one; they sound nice as you said, they make your speech rich and wonderful and you look smart because of them. But they're also very small and very dynamic packages of very multidimensional information. I can tell you something and it will sit with you. I can say a proverb to you and it will sit with you in so many places where you are like, ah, yeah. It was so that I always tell people that in Africa we didn't need psycho analysts coach, where you go and lie on the couch and somebody's dissecting. We just needed proverbs. They sorted you out. They gave you, and this is why it was important from the time you're small, you start learning proverbs until. It was literally the duty of every individual to pass on the proverbs to the next person because proverbs told you how to look at situations. They told you how to manage your life. Don't procrastinate or if you procrastinate, this is what happens, share with whoever. There's so many ways, it's every way of looking at life and every situation might have 10 problems but because life is like that, because life doesn't have one solution or one way of being looked at and proverbs kind of provide that whole multidimensional way of looking at something. And so it's a way that actually psychologically you're not stuck if you know Proverbs. You will find something that will actually point you to the right direction of looking at something like oh okay, so tomorrow will be another day. I do not need to despair that today has gone so badly. It's a life hack. It's another way of moving on to the next day with a fresh mind. [African language: 35:36], which means every dawn comes with its own opportunities. [African language: 36:01] is like intelligence, you will think differently, you will see life differently when the dawn comes, so don't despair. There's so much support in terms of psychological balance, social balance. The human essence, if you want, is very supported by being able to contextualise life. And proverbs do that very, very well. And that is why some cultures have lost the power of their proverbs, which I think is very sad. Because you lose a huge amount of context for people. You lose a huge amount of the ability for people to resolve problems within themselves and between themselves. So we should keep them alive. And we should keep translating them and keeping them. I like it when I see a proverb printed on the back of a bus or on a t-shirt or anything like that. I'm thinking okay, that one's still alive. But we also constantly make new proverbs and we're not even capturing those because we kind of are not thinking about it. Words have the power to carry the therapy that we need, or the solution that we need for a situation. So I particularly like proverbs. One; they also just summarise situations very quickly. Because there are times when I'm watching something happening in some far off country. And I'm thinking, just tell that person that proverb. In my mind, I'm thinking, if you just tell that person that proverb, this situation will be sorted because that proverb would have been quoted.

### **Mulenga Kapwepwe 37:57**

I'm just like, tell him this proverb, that situation will be so clear, in an instant. Because also proverbs are very multidimensional in the way they examine things. We tend, especially in this day and age,

we tend to be very logical and very linear, in the way we look at something. But proverbs make things more multidimensional. You can look at the same thing from a lot of different directions. In that three seconds, you're given a proverb. And so the linearity of looking at something from just one side can also just be resolved by a proverb. And so for me, these are the kinds of things that **African universities** should have a whole curriculum studying that because it is a powerful, powerful tool in society. These are very powerful pillars in any society that actually help the society move in a different direction, or in the direction that they need to be. But we will throw them away, we will forget them. And that for me, would have thrown away a major psychological tool that actually helped and has helped us for centuries. That is why you have Proverbs in every, every culture, because the human mind needs that kind of mouse depth dimensionality to look at life.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu 39:35**

Talking about culture, there's this domination of culture from the West, and many Africans are ditching their own culture to embrace wholeheartedly the one from the West, and I don't see why we can't have both?

**Mulenga Kapwepwe 39:52**

This is a big one. One; there is no cultural vacuum. So when you lose your culture, it means another culture is coming in, because there's no such thing as a cultural vacuum. So culture is, and I'm kind of saying the word, although there are so many aspects of culture, but I'll say it as a way just to make the picture more vivid. Cultures thrive, and cultures can die. And even when they are dead, cultures can be resurrected. Cultures can refuse to grow, and cultures can grow. Cultures can refuse to cross the border or boundary or neighbourhood or even from one domestic culture to another, you can marry into another family and take your culture and your culture will not take root there, or maybe your culture will actually dominate that other culture that you find there. Some cultures are very dominant and very aggressive, some are very conscious of that aggression. And they're very conscious of wanting to be the dominant culture, which is very much the West, because they have decided their culture is the right culture. So all of us must kind of fall in line. Cultures are like that, they can be very aggressive, they can kill another culture, they can swamp another culture, they can dominate, take over oppress, they can suppress. And so the best way to survive in terms of your own culture is to be very conscious of what is happening to your culture. Is there another culture that is coming into your culture? What is it doing to your culture, what can you do about it? Because like I said, some cultures can die, but they can be resuscitated. Some aspects of culture can die, and they will die forever. Sometimes those aspects are killed by the owners of that same culture. But you can revive cultures, you can make them live on forever, or you can make them live for a very short time. It is entirely up to the owners of the culture. And we are owners of cultures, but we're very unconscious owners of those cultures. And we're not seeing the cost. We're not

examining what's coming at us. We are being swept by a flood of whatever the cultural glitter is coming from somewhere, without examining, is this really glitter? Or is this just surface stuff that is not going to-? When you get another culture and you adopt it into your culture, you are also adopting the problems of whatever you're adopting from that other culture. Do you have the wherewithal to pay the price that that other culture has paid? So there's, there's so many aspects, and my call to Africa, is let's become conscious of what is happening to our cultures, let's make those conversations take place. The healthiest cultures are those that are conscious of what is happening to them, the most painful thing in the psychology of a human being and the psychology of a society is the loss of culture. And that pain shows in many ways. In some cultures we've seen, it has shown in, literally mass alcoholism, where the pain of the loss of culture translates in a lot of social ills, alcoholism, psychosis. But it's the pain of losing the culture. It is painful, because culture is like the medium, is like a fish and water. Culture is the medium through which we exist on the planet. And once you lose the medium through which we exist, if you put a fish out of the water it is a painful experience. So for Africa, those are the things that we should be discussing in African universities.

**Mulenga Kapwepwe 44:08**

Not whether **Freud is the father of psychoanalysis** exclusively. But what is it? What is culture? What are our cultures? What are the things that are still in existence in our culture? What about this? What about that? How do we make this come alive? How do we make this die, whatever, but we must decide ourselves and when we're conscious, we are more able to do that. And we're more able to say well That which is coming, we don't think is going to do as much good because we've seen the problems that it's leaving behind in its work in that other culture. Or it's good, but in this culture, it will look different, because we will handle it like this. We don't have a platform, we don't have an avenue, we don't have a conversation, that is actually discussing all those things. And if we don't, we will suffer all the things that I've talked about, that we will meet cultures that are so dominant and aggressive, that they will swamp us, they will dominate us, they will make us forget who we are. And we will not even realise until it's too late.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu 45:17**

Can you imagine not rooted in anything and a strong wind comes, it blows you anywhere it wants to take you.

**Mulenga Kapwepwe 45:29**

There's a proverb for that. In my language, we have a saying that says [African language:45:42], which means wherever the wind blows, that is the direction we all go. Because you're not rooted in anything. You are just pushed around by whatever force comes.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu 45:52**

That's such a sad place to be. So, Mulenga, it brings me to open, my simple question is, what does being open mean to you?

**Mulenga Kapwepwe 46:08**

Being open, it is being able to not. One of the things about culture also is that it's very judgmental. Culture is very judgmental, we tend to judge others from our position, you know, what I mean? This, I'm better because these other people they eat that food, me, I eat this food, so I'm the better one. Being open for me is not to be judgmental, before I even know anything. But also just not to be judgmental. I can make an opinion, I can form an opinion about something, but not based on judgement, that I don't even have information about. That's being open, is being open to other opinions, other views, other perspectives. I always say, when I am doing something or I need to think about something, I always say there must be another way because I think I have to leave myself open to other ways of doing things, not just the way I do them. Because for me, every person who I meet brings something of value. And as I said to you, for me, whether you're bad or mean or malicious to me or whatever, that's fine. You're bringing me a lesson, it's all good, it's fine. For me, being open means really being able to look at something from many different perspectives. Not judging something when it is in front of me, without any cost to me. For me, a lot of my openness is about seeing opportunities, not for just myself, but for other people as well. To being open so that I receive the opportunities or I receive the information, I receive what I need for a particular time, because if I'm not open, how will I get what I need? It's like not opening your mouth when there's food around you. You will starve. But so for me, being open is not just about judgement or opinion or whatever. It's also about opportunity. It's about perspective, it's about ways of doing things, it's about receiving as well, from others.

And one last thing, because I know you're in Ghana, and this is for you, because my father during the struggle for independence, my father worked very closely with Kwame Nkrumah. And one trip when he came back from Ghana, before independence, one trip when he came back from Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah had given him this beautiful Kente and my father divided it into two and gave one half to Kenneth Kaunda, who would become the president and one half he kept. And when my father died, we actually buried him in that Kente.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu 49:11**

Wow. That's so sweet. This is so amazing, Mulenga, and I'm so happy we could have this conversation. I think it's really needed. And I'm so thankful you could make time for this.

**Mulenga Kapwepwe** 49:29

I am so grateful that you gave me the time to do this.

**Betty Kankam-Boadu** 49:33

Mulenga Kapwepwe, an award-winning author and playwright. Thank you for listening to Inspiring Open, a podcast series from Wiki Loves Women. This first series of Inspiring Open was funded through the International Relief Fund for organisations in culture and education 2021, an initiative of the German Federal Foreign Office, the Goethe Institute and other partners; and an annual grant from the Wikimedia Foundation. If you enjoyed today's show, subscribe on Spotify, Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen to your podcasts so you never miss an episode. Feel free to share, rate and review us. We appreciate the support. You can also tag us in your posts. We are @WikiLovesWomen on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. I'll leave you with the words of Ntozake Shange. "Sisterhood is important because we are all we have to stand on. We have to stand near and by each other, pray for one another and share the joys and the difficulties that women face in the world today. If we don't talk about it amongst ourselves, then we are made silent by the patriarchy. And that serves us no purpose. Until next time, look after yourselves and your sisters. And remember, be inspired, be challenged, be bold. I am Betty Kankam-Boadu and you've been listening to Wiki Loves Women, Inspiring Open.