

LEARNING BY EAR 2012

"I am still human - A story of Africa's mentally ill"

EPISODE 7: "The root cause"

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List of characters by scene:

SCENE ONE: MALEMBA AND CHUMBA VISIT DOCTOR MAHIRO

- Malemba (f, 35)
- Mahiro (m, 50)
- Narrator

SCENE TWO: VALERIE RETURNS TO IRENE AT THE COLLEGE

- Valerie (f, 19)
- Irene (f, 19)
- Narrator

SCENE THREE: KAPAKA VISITS DR.MAHIRO

- Kapaka (m, 25)
- Mahiro (m,50)

INTRO:

Hello and welcome once again to Learning By Ear. We are at the seventh episode of this radio drama focusing on mental illness in Africa. The story is entitled, "**I am still human**". In the past episodes we have seen how difficult it is for people to accept mental illness as much as any other disease. But where does this ignorance, neglect and lack of empathy for people with mental conditions come from? We are about to find that out in today's episode entitled "**The root cause**". And we start with Malemba and her son Chumba waiting patiently to see Dr. Mahiro in the city. They got up very early so as to be first in line.

SCENE ONE: MALEMBA AND CHUMBA VISIT DOCTOR MAHIRO

1. ATMO: HOSPITAL AMBIENCE (INSIDE DOCTOR'S ROOM)

2. MAHIRO: (calls out) Next!

3. MALEMBA: Good morning doctor.

4. MAHIRO: Good morning, how can I help you?

5. MALEMBA: It's my son. His name is Chumba. I don't know how to explain this to you. My belief tells me he is being tormented by evil spirits, but on the other hand I am not sure why they chose him. I brought him to you so that you can help him, and help me. Because I have tried everything, but to no success.

6. **MAHIRO:** Mmh ... Well, tell me what exactly is the problem with him? What makes you think he is not normal?
7. **MALEMBA:** For one, he is 16 years old now, but he can't speak clearly. And when he does sometimes you can hardly understand what he is saying, especially when he gets frightened or angry and has one of his attacks. He makes these repetitive movements, and he prefers to be alone, and doesn't have any friends. He is withdrawn, lost in his own world and does not like change at all.
8. **MAHIRO:** When did this start? Can you remember when these symptoms began?
9. **MALEMBA:** I started to suspect something was wrong with him when he was one and half years old. He had been fine all along but then suddenly it seemed as if he was forgetting everything he had learned, social interaction, he didn't want to play, had difficulty communicating and so on. I thought it was just a phase, that he would again recover and get back to leading a normal life, but it never happened. For the last 14 years, I have endured such pain and misery watching him grow into a teenager with this condition.

10. MAHIRO: Well, from what you have told me, it seems as if your son is autistic. He is suffering from what is medically known as regressive autism. Autism is a developmental disorder that appears in the first 3 years of life, and affects the brain's normal development of social and communication skills. And it's a complicated brain condition especially in Africa where most people still have no clue about it.

11. MALEMBA: Autism, you said. Well doctor, can this autism be treated?

12. MAHIRO: With the right therapy, many of the symptoms of autism can be improved, but most people will have some symptoms throughout their lives. Most people with autism are able to live with their families or in their community.

13. MALEMBA: So are you saying that Chumba will live like this for the rest of his life?

14. MAHIRO: I am saying that with treatment and therapy he could improve, but it's uncertain whether he will totally recover. I still have to do more tests on him to ascertain that he is indeed autistic. There is still a great deal of research on autism going on at the moment. And what I want you to know is that Chumba is not alone. There are hundreds of thousands of children and teenagers who suffer from autism. Boys are four times more likely to have it than girls. And though there are no concrete figures about the worldwide number of people with autism, estimates range from 1-2 per every 1,000 people. Recently, the number seems to be increasing.

15. MALEMBA: Hmm... and what causes it? Is it witchcraft like my neighbours believe? Evil spirits like I believe? Why does this happen?

16. MAHIRO: I am afraid there is no precise answer to the cause of autism. Several reasons have been suggested but experts have failed to agree on them. Some believe it is caused by mercury, or by having kids in old age. But most likely it is caused by a genetic disposition and environmental factors. In other words, it is passed on from generation to generation. I must also say here that there is still no proof of what exactly causes autism.

KW begin

17. MALEMBA: So it is indeed a curse. Someone in my family must have done something terrible and now my son and I are paying for his or her sins.

18. MAHIRO: Madam, I am not here to tell you what to believe. I am a psychologist and my work is to do my best to medically explain your son's condition. I am sorry but that's all I can say.

KW end

You can bring your son to me tomorrow again. I will conduct some more tests and once I am sure of his condition, we can begin his treatment. Since he is already 16, the therapy may or may not work.

19. MALEMBA: Thank you doctor. I know I have taken up much of your time and the line outside is very, very long already.

20. MAHIRO: Don't mention it. About the queue outside: It's getting longer and longer, and the resources are getting smaller at the same time. Good day.

21. NARRATOR: Little research has been done on how far-reaching autism is in Africa. But one thing is certain: the brain disorder is affecting more and more people. Though families are learning about it, relatives, neighbours and others have no clue of what autism is, and so they mostly let their culture, religion and traditions explain its cause. In those few minutes, Malemba has learned a lot. She takes her son Chumba to return to her brother's house. As they leave Dr. Mahiro's examination room, it starts to rain outside.

In the same city, Valerie meanwhile is standing in front of her friend Irene's room, wet from the rain, hungry and cold. The coat Irene gave her is soaked, and in her hand, she holds a piece of bread from the garbage.

SCENE TWO: VALERIE RETURNS TO IRENE AT THE COLLEGE

22. ATMO: **HEAVY RAIN AND THUNDERSTORM OUTSIDE
(HEARD FROM INSIDE)**

23. VALERIE: **(calling out)** Irene... Irene... open up!

24. SFX: **KNOCKING ON DOOR**

25. IRENE: **(from inside)** Who is that? It's so early. Okay, hold on, I will be right there.

26. SFX: **DOOR BEING UNLOCKED AND OPENED**

27. VALERIE: I brought your coat back, Irene.

28. IRENE: **(pleasant surprise)** Valerie! Oh, it's so good to see you. You gave me such a fright when I found you on the street yesterday. And then you ran away... I didn't know you were that fast. But do come in... come in. You have to put some clothes on! Dry ones, of course.

29. SFX: **DOOR BEING CLOSED**

30. VALERIE: I have to go. I can't stay long.

31. IRENE: Valerie... it's okay. You don't need to be afraid. You are safe here with me, I can assure you.

32. VALERIE: No one is safe. No one. **(starts to cry)** I am so cold, so tired so... afraid.

33. IRENE: That's because you have been walking around for days, it's raining and you are soaking wet, Valerie. And who gave you that piece of bread? Why don't you take a shower first and in the meantime I will make you a good breakfast. How does that sound?

34. VALERIE: That sounds fine.

35. IRENE: Good. Go ahead then, I will start with breakfast, and I have some clothes for you. I hope they fit you. You have lost so much weight! And oh, Valerie, after that we will go and visit a friend of mine. You already met him. But first things first.

36. VALERIE: Okay... okay. Thank you. Thank you very much.

37. NARRATOR: Irene is relieved to see Valerie. After the chase the other night, she knew it would be hard to see her again. But here she is, and she came back all by herself. As Irene prepares breakfast for Valerie who surprisingly agreed to everything Irene asked of her, Dr. Mahiro is seeing another patient: a male in his mid-twenties. Listen on.

SCENE THREE: KAPAKA VISITS DR. MAHIRO

38. ATMO: DR. MAHIRO'S ROOM

KW begin

39. MAHIRO: (calls out) Next!

40. SFX: CREAKING SOUND WHEN DOOR OPENED

41. MAHIRO: Yes, young man. How can I be of help to you?

42. KAPAKA: My name is Kapaka. And I am here because I almost killed myself.

43. MAHIRO: Okay, Kapaka, do you mind closing the door? Privacy is very important in my field.

44. SFX: **DOOR CLOSED**

KW end

45. MAHIRO: So you were saying, you almost committed suicide. Can you tell me why?

46. KAPAKA: It all started when I lost my job as a cashier. My boss blamed me for stealing some money, but I swear I had nothing to do with it. I tried to explain this to him but he would have none of it.

47. MAHIRO: And when was this exactly?

48. KAPAKA: About two months ago. My wife was pregnant with our first child at the time. She gave birth recently to a baby girl.

49. MAHIRO: Oh, congratulations then! So now you are a father.

50. KAPAKA: Yes, but a very hopeless father. I just don't see any sense of this life. I have never felt like this before. It's like everything doesn't mean a thing anymore.

51. MAHIRO: Well, Kapaka, what do you like doing in your free time?

52. KAPAKA: I used to sing in the church choir with my wife. I loved that a lot, but not anymore. I have been staying indoors ever since I lost my job, and only left twice, when my wife went into labour and when the pastor who recommended that I come see you, asked me to join him for a walk.

53. MAHIRO: Well, Kapaka, I am very glad that you decided to come. You most certainly were suffering from severe depression, and it's a good thing you did not commit suicide. Depression can be treated and you can continue to enjoy your life as you used to. But you must be committed to therapy and don't lose hope when things don't change immediately.

KW begin

54. KAPAKA: What about a job? Will I ever find employment again?

55. MAHIRO: I see no reason why you shouldn't. But first we need to get you back in the right frame of mind. Then you can start worrying about getting a job.

KW end

Tell me something, Kapaka, how do you feel right now? What's going on in your mind?

56. KAPAKA: Right now... not so much. I am divided. On one hand I feel like I am doing the right thing, on the other, I am not sure whether this will work.

57. MAHIRO: That's very good. The fact that you are thinking about your condition is already a good sign. I will need to see you once every week, and will prescribe you some medication. I also advise you to try and find something to do that you like. If it's not the singing, maybe something else. Like playing with your daughter, or taking a stroll with your family. I wish you well Kapaka and once again, you did the right thing in coming to see me.

OUTRO:

That marks the end of our seventh episode in this continuing story on mental illness in Africa. Join us next time to see how the story of Kapaka and the others goes on. If you wish to listen to this episode again, or others please visit our website at www.dw.de/lbe. You can also follow us on Facebook. Until next time, bye and take care.