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**What the Poor Man Says is Not Listened to**

“What the poor man says is not listened to.” Coming from a country where 55% of the population lives in poverty, many South Africans hold close to their heart proverbs such as this one. Does this mean that 55% of the South African population is not listened to? That their wisdom is shunned based on claims of discredibility? “What the poor man says is not listened to.” If this is true, how did Uganda’s ‘Ghetto King’, Bobi Wine, rise from poverty in the slums of Kamwokya, and continue on to become one of the nation’s most notable and inspirational leaders? “What the poor man says is not listened to.” If my father had agreed with this, he would not have survived his ten years living in one of the poorest regions of Tanzania. From the slums of South Africa, to the Ugandan ghetto, to the lone mzungu living in Tanzania, we see patterns of knowledge and trends of credibility. And so the question arises: who and what determines the credibility of another person, and is their perception of credibility affected by affluence?

**(Nelson Mandela: South Africa)**

A poor man seeks to empower a nation, while a rich man seeks to take power from it. Prior to Nelson Mandela’s presidency, during a period of apartheid, rich white men were the only kind of men to hold the position of president in South Africa. Who better to tell their nation that “What the poor man says is not listened to,” than a rich white man. Mandela sought to progress the diversity of South Africa. In conjunction with the African National Congress, Mandela protested against Apartheid; he represented the millions who had never been represented, the disenfranchised majority. However, when this poor man finally gained a voice, he was charged with conspiring to overthrow the state. What the poor man said was heard, but it went against what the rich men wanted to hear. While Mandela was sentenced to life in prison, racial tension in South Africa continued to grow. How could a felon rise to rid a nation of apartheid? Ask any of South Africa’s underrepresented communities and they will tell you; Mandela’s only felony was fighting for representation, fighting for equality.

What made Nelson Mandela fit for president? The fact was, Mandela had something that no president before him had: experience. He had experienced the negative effects of apartheid, poverty, and under-representation; he could relate to every South African who had experienced the same things. The 76% of the population that was black saw that he was too; the 55% of South Africans living in poverty saw that he had too. This is where his credibility came from; his experiences were those of the people. He had to continually prove that what the poor man said was worth listening to. To truly end Apartheid, South Africa’s former president, de Klerk, worked alongside Mandela in an uneasy partnership. Together they turned Mandela’s words into action. Creating a diverse South Africa involved cooperation, and open ears. Listening to the poor man allowed change to happen. We can see many stories similar to that of Mandela’s in our current world as well.

**(Bobi Wine: Uganda)**

Spotify’s new podcast “The Messenger” sees Dreamville rapper Bas interview Ugandan pop star turned politician Robert Kyagulanyi (better known as Bobi Wine) in his bid for president. They discuss his childhood, his family’s ties to politics, and his upbringing. Bobi’s family supported the overthrow of Idi Amin, Uganda’s prior president, who was known for his authoritarian style of leadership and lack of regard for Uganda’s people and environment. Although Bobi’s family supported his unseating, they were skeptical of the insurrectionist - Uganda’s new self proclaimed president: Musevini. The podcast then turned to Bobi’s childhood. His father passed away when he was young, leaving his mother destitute and with the only option of moving to the slums of Kampala. This is how Bobi Wine gained his popular name of “Ghetto King”. He began making music and immediately rose to fame; his music directly related to the people around him. Following in his familial footsteps, Bobi became interested in politics and began making more politically charged music. He continued to rise in popularity, leading him to run for president. After what seemed to be a very successful campaign, Wine did not win the popular vote. According to Rodney Muhuzuma of ABC News, Wine’s Team is now disputing the vote. Wine could not be contacted for comment, as since the election, he has been held under siege in his household.

Much like Nelson Mandela, Wine has experienced poverty and corruption. Wine, who is 39 years old, lives in a country where 77% of the population is under the age of 25, and where Musevini has held the position of president for 35 years. Leading up to the election, I had the opportunity to talk with many Ugandan citizens; I was able to ask them questions regarding the election as well as their opinions on Bobi Wine. For their safety, all names will remain anonymous. “We do not expect Bobi Wine to provide us jobs or money, Ugandans are willing to work for themselves. We do not need handouts. We are grateful for everything Museveni has done for this country, but we need new leadership, new development and jobs. He (Museveni) has become corrupt.” “Many young Ugandans have only known this country with Museveni as president; they have only seen Museveni as a greed-filled, authoritarian ruler.” To many of these young people, Bobi Wine is the new representation they need; as Bobi Wine actually represents the people and all of the hardships they have faced.

Bobi Wine came from a slum of Kampala, but his voice has reached an entire nation. In a government where affluence determines publicity, “What the poor man says is not listened to” only reigns true because the poor man is not given a platform to speak. In the case of Bobi Wine, the poor man is not listened to because he is actively shut down. Tear gassed, arrested, sieged; Museveni has made countless efforts to prevent Bobi Wine from defying this proverb, and in doing so he has further shown that Wine is all deserving of his respect. Ugandan youth face oppression from the government every day, but Bobi Wine’s direct opposition to Musevini’s government exacerbates the antagonization he faces. He has thus become a face for the campaign against the current government. Bobi Wine had to earn his credibility, and in doing so is now a voice for the people.

**(My Father: Tanzania)**

What does it take to be considered knowledgeable? In the United States, employers seek out college graduates; the more years of school the more qualified an applicant. So how did my father, a man with a Master’s degree from one of America’s most prestigious schools, end up being the least knowledgeable individual in his town? Well as the lone mzungu (literally translated “white person”), he found that no amount of school could have prepared him for the lessons he would need to learn in order to survive as a resident of Kilimatinde, Tanzania. Speaking no Swahili, and having no knowledge of self-sustainability, he learned that to survive he would need to learn how to relate to the community around him.

“When you’re a stranger in another culture, all you have to do is ask for help. The local people have figured out a solution for every problem they have encountered.” This is the solution my father came up with for any troubles he faced; understanding that other people have knowledge that you don’t is essential when adapting to a new environment. For him, the questions began when he was given a chicken from a local villager. “African culture is much more hospitable than other cultures; after being invited to dinner, I was given a gift just for showing up.” But what does one do with a chicken? Again, all my father had to do was ask. After bringing his new chicken home, he asked his neighbor how he should care for it. She told him to lay out some grain in his storage room (the room where all rice and water was kept), and to let it stay there overnight. The next morning, he asked again, what do I do with the chicken now? He was told to open the door and to just let it go; he questioned her, asking “will it not just run away?”, but she insisted that it would come back in the evening. The chicken ran off, and my father thought that it was gone for good. Sure enough though, before bed the chicken had returned; it stood in front of the storage room waiting for the door to its new home to be opened. “I was the only mzungu living with the locals; I may have been the first white person they had ever met.” If my father hadn’t asked for help, he would have never learned something as simple as how to care for a chicken. “There’s life stories to be learned all the time.” It’s important to know that they can be learned from anyone.

As he continued to live in Kilimatinde, my father continued to learn from the people around him. As the only person in the village with a car, he held a status of privilege, and thus favors were always being asked of him. On one occasion, a Tanzanian friend asked for a ride in order to go hunting. My father agreed to drive as long as the friend collected the hunting permits. So that’s what they did; they drove off into the middle of nowhere, into the arid climate created by the six-month long dry season. They hadn’t seen anyone for two days. This prompted my father to ask “what happens if we were to break down, how would we find water?” Naturally, the Tanzanian man had an answer; he responded “well here’s how you find water… catch a baboon and tie a rope around its neck, give it some salt and when it’s thirsty it will take you to its source of water.” There was just one problem with this plan… “How do we catch a baboon?”. Well luckily enough, another experienced resident of Kilimatinde had already imparted this knowledge to my father. “All you have to do is find a dry gourd with a narrow neck. When you see the monkeys, you place peanuts in the bottom of the gourd. Monkeys are very curious, they will discover the nuts in the gourd and try to grab them. When their hand is in a fist, they cannot get it out of the gourd. They are so obsessed with nuts that they will not let them go. That’s when you run over and catch them.” A story like this further proves that the lack of conventional education does not equal a lack of practical knowledge.

Even after these lessons, there was still more to be learned. People in the developed world have learned to weed their gardens, but when my father did so in his Tanzanian garden, his neighbor would intervene. With every weed he pulled, she would say “no no no, Mchicha”. This continued until he learned that Mchicha is a valuable resource that is used to compliment Tanzanian meals. Mchicha, which is similar to spinach, was first introduced in Kenya in order to make meals go further. This is referred to as Sukuma Wiki, which means “to stretch the week”. When people have no more food, they use Mchicha to make it through to the end of the week. My father’s neighbor taught him that the man with the least resources learns to be the most resourceful.

One of the most crucial realizations he discovered was the importance of asking “can you show me?”. In Kilimatinde, everyone builds their own houses using handmade bricks. These bricks were built by mixing mud and water, then pouring the mix into a brick-sized mold. This mold must then be burnt over a fire for three days straight, day and night. These bricks served as the foundation for schools and hospitals. Unfortunately, there was not enough funding to plaster the walls. One builder chimed in, saying “we can use Kilimatinde cement.” As recounted by my father, “Upon asking what this cement was, the man grabbed my hand and took me into the bush. We came to a patch of white ground, contrary to the usual beige tone the dirt held, I was told to mix it with water and use it as plaster. I asked him to show me how. Sure enough, it worked just as well as regular plaster, and it was totally free.” He then was able to pass on this knowledge of Kilimatinde cement to other locals. From merely asking “can you show me”, my father was shown countless amounts of knowledge which he would otherwise never have been exposed to. He learned to truly understand a culture, you have to be willing to understand it.

**(Conclusion: Trends of Credibility)**

The most wisdom is gained by experience; the most knowledge acquired by those who have lived it. To say “What the poor man says is not listened to” discredits vast amounts of knowledge and wisdom. To truly understand the world and the plethora of cultures that comprise it, we must listen to everyone. Everyone has wisdom that we can learn from. During apartheid, Nelson Mandela was convicted for sharing his wisdom; now he is seen as one of the world’s most influential leaders. Bobi Wine was denied his ability to voice his beliefs, but they still reign inspirational for a hopeful Ugandan youth. The locals of Kilimatinde, Tanzania taught a helpless mzungu how to survive in a new environment. If the poor man was not listened to, the world would not see change. If the poor man was not listened to, countless amounts of knowledge would remain unheard.

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