Beyond #Kony2012

Atrocity, Awareness + Activism in the Internet Age

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Beyond Kony2012

Atrocity, Awareness, & Activism in the Internet Age

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Preface

This book is for those who know a little about Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army, and want to know more.

Invisible Children's Kony 2012 has become the most viral video ever. Concerned citizens around the world, from middle school students to celebrities like Oprah and Justin Bieber, watched the film and shared it with their friends. It has now been viewed more than 87 million times.

That success was soon met by a critical backlash. Critics nearly as varied as the campaign's supporters pointed out that Invisible Children was offering an oversimplified, even misleading narrative. They faulted the campaign for failing to provide a context for the LRA conflict, and pointed out that the video portrayed Africans as either helpless victims, or heartless killers.

This book is both a collection of that criticism, and a constructive response to it. The authors each wrote a short essay offering information that they felt was missing from the video, or explaining how they thought the campaign could be improved.

The first several chapters provide historical and po-

litical context. Adam Branch, Daniel Kalinaki, and Ayesha Nibbe explain the roots of the conflict, and how it has persisted for so many years. Alex Little and Patrick Wegner discuss various attempts to end the conflict through peace negotiations, ICC arrest warrants, and military operations, and why they have not been successful.

Later chapters consider the ethics and effectiveness of awareness campaigns like Kony 2012. Jina Moore and Glenna Gordon draw on their experiences as journalists to critique the video's portrayal of Africa and the people who live there. Rebecca Hamilton, Laura Seay, Kate Cronin-Furman, and Amanda Taub examine the weakness of "awareness" advocacy. Alanna Shaikh explains the ethical dangers of bad aid work. Teddy Ruge offers a different view of Africa, as a place of dynamic innovation instead of violence and helplessness. And youth activist Sam Menefee-Libey describes his frustration with the tone and substance of the campaign meant to target his generation.

– Amanda Taub, April 20, 2012

Contributors

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How Civilians Became Targets: A Short History of the War in Northern Uganda

Adam Branch is a Senior Research Fellow at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. His research focuses on questions of political violence and intervention in Africa, with a focus on the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine and on the International Criminal Court. He has also worked extensively with Human Rights Focus, a grassroots human rights organization based in Gulu, northern Uganda.

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What Have They Got to Lose?

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Three Strikes and Kony's Still There: What I Learned from Negotiations with Joseph Kony and the International Criminal Court's Efforts to Indict Him

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Kony2012: Treat the Political Causes of the LRA, Not Just Its Violent Symptoms

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Moral Agents and Patients: Trayvon Martin and Invisible Children

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Ethical or Exploitative?: Stories, Advocacy and Suffering

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Peace from Juba: Peace Talks between the LRA and the Government of Uganda (2006-2008)

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Beyond Kony 2012 – Reasserting the Transformative Power of Youth Activism

Sam Menefee-Libey is a youth organizer who focuses on supporting campus activists. He has experience working on a broad spectrum of economic and social justice issues, including anti-oppression, education and environmental justice.

How Civilians Became Targets: A Short History of the War in Northern Uganda

Adam Branch

> *The utter ruin of the country was the consequence. For many miles' circuit from Shooa, the blackened ruins of villages and deserted fields bore witness to the devastation committed; cattle that were formerly in thousands, had been driven off, and the beautiful district that had once been most fertile was reduced to a wilderness.*

These lines describing the horrors of war in Acholiland, familiar as they may sound today, were not written five or ten years ago. Rather, they were written 150 years ago by Samuel Baker, and the war

was not that of the government and the LRA, but that of the slave traders, Egyptian administrators, and rival Acholi clans. Indeed, massive violence is no stranger to Acholiland, and forms of violence even seem to repeat themselves. The raids by slave traders of the 19th century are reminiscent of the attacks by the LRA; the British so-called pacification effort involved huge levels of forced population displacement, mirroring the mass forced displacement of recent decades; and rumors that outsiders were going to grab Acholi land have swirled for over a century.

However, to recognize the long history of violence in northern Uganda is not to argue that violence is somehow Uganda's fate, an inescapable product of "ancient tribal hatreds" or of arbitrary colonial-era borders. Rather, it is to show the precise opposite, that violence is a product of certain historically determined social and political conditions. This enables us to see that, just as these conditions can be transformed, so can the violence growing out of them be brought to an end.

In fact, an attention to the history of the conflict is doubly important: as it teaches us that violence can be ended, it also teaches us that any solution to the violence must take history into account. Without an effort to understand the long-term root causes of the conflict in northern Uganda, we will end up with a superficial analysis and, thus, a superficial solution.

Indeed, this has been the dominant approach in the West towards Uganda's conflict, one that the Invisible Children movies buy into wholesale. They tend to represent the conflict as one pitting the basically benevolent, but short-handed, Ugandan government against the utterly irrational and incomprehensibly evil Lord's Resistance Army. The natural solution suggested by this narrative is thus for the West to provide support to the Ugandan military to eradicate the rebels. While tempting, this "solution" is also deeply wrongheaded and highly dangerous. In fact, providing military support to the government, or sending in Western troops directly, will be counterproductive—it will likely only inflame the violence and have a host of destructive consequences for peace, democracy, and justice in Uganda and in the region. Therefore, we need to locate the basis for a solution not in the reductive, black-and-white moral narratives that tend to characterize the West's understanding of Africa, but rather in the complex historical dynamics underlying the violence. A complex situation will require a complex solution—but this should not dissuade us from trying.

In this chapter, I discuss only the most recent phase of violence in Acholiland, which has ravaged the region since the southern-based National Resistance Army/-Movement (abbreviated as the NRA/M—the NRA was

the movement's military wing, the NRM its political wing), under the command of Yoweri Museveni, took power in 1986 after a five-year guerrilla struggle. By focusing on the particular characteristics of violence since 1986, we will be able to better understand LRA violence, as brutal and unjustifiable as it is, in its social and political context, and thus help explain its origins and its brutality.

This context, in brief, was one of a violent counterinsurgency carried out by the Ugandan military in Acholiland, as that military sought to fight against the guerrilla LRA by trying to destroy its suspected support among the population. The state's counterinsurgency thus was almost exclusively focused on containing, controlling, and punishing civilians, while taking an often apparently permissive approach to the LRA rebels—so much so, that it is probable that the LRA could not have survived without the NRA/M allowing it to do so, and raising questions about the government's interests in prolonging the war. It was a context, thus, in which the LRA survived long past what popular support would have allowed, which led the rebels to turn primarily to violence in its relations with the civilian population; the LRA's anti-civilian violence was mirrored by the government's anti-civilian violence, and the brutality of each side became locked together, each reinforcing and intensi-

fying the other, while civilians paid the price.

1986: The NRA/M Victory

When the NRA/M, under Museveni, took power in 1986, the new government faced the immediate need to consolidate control over the country. The Obote regime, which they had just overthrown, was primarily from the north of Uganda, and so it is not a surprise that the NRA/M saw the north, in particular Acholiland, as a significant threat, especially given the large number of soldiers from the previous regime who had returned home there following the NRA/M victory. This fear of a renewed threat from the Acholi combined with a widespread antipathy among the NRA/M towards northerners, whom they blamed for the previous regime's vicious counterinsurgency in the south. The result was that, when the victorious NRA/M arrived in northern Uganda in mid-1986 and sought to consolidate their power there, they proceeded by launching a "counterinsurgency" of their own. However, there was no insurgency to counter. Without an actual armed rebellion for the NRA/M to combat, it was the northern civilian population that bore the brunt of this military strategy.

Consequently, instead of preventing the outbreak of armed resistance, this military approach provoked

one. The first shape it took was the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA), made up mostly of remnants from the previous regime's army, which emerged in late 1986. By that point, the NRA/M had so alienated the Acholi population that the rebels gained significant popular support, despite the population's weariness with conflict. The imagined insurgency that the NRA/M had been fighting became real, its counterinsurgency was escalated, and, by the end of the year, NRA atrocities were being widely reported.

The UPDA, however, proved unable to provide adequate protection to the Acholi civilian population and unable to score convincing military victories against the NRA. Under severe pressure from the NRA/M, Acholi civilians withdrew their support from the rebels. The UPDA soon factionalized, and by 1987, there was little coherent political or military order left among the warring parties in Acholiland, with civilians suffering at the hands of all sides.

The Holy Spirit Movement and the LRA

It was in this context of widespread violence that a new rebel group arose in northern Uganda. It claimed to be able to tame the violence of the factionalized

UPDA and to end the violence of the NRA. This was the Holy Spirit Movement, led by the spirit medium Alice Auma, known as Lakwena. Lakwena's mobilization, founded upon a discourse of spiritual and social cleansing, proved successful enough that she was eventually able to assemble an army of almost 10,000 troops.

Lakwena's sojourn in Acholiland was intense but short-lived. Soon facing a dearth of new recruits, in July 1987 she led her forces out of Acholiland in a bid to take Kampala and bring about the national redemption she had promised. Her forces moved east and south following the course of the Nile, finding support in all those parts of Uganda where the NRA/M's arrival the previous year had been interpreted as an occupation instead of a liberation. The limit to this alliance was the border between north and south: as the rebels made it within a few dozen miles of Kampala, they were no longer seen as liberators but as an invading northern army. They were soon defeated by a peasant mobilization coordinated by the NRA/M.

After Lakwena had left Acholiland, violence there between the remaining rebel factions intensified further, as the fragmented UPDA and the splinters of the HSM terrorized each other's suspected civilian supporters. Additionally, once Lakwena had exhausted the supply of volunteers, those factions remaining had to step up

forced recruitment. It was from this environment of chaotic anti-civilian violence and widespread devastation that Joseph Kony emerged. Although at first Kony may have had some limited support, he was generally confronted with a deficit of volunteers, a population unwilling to support continued violence, and a number of different perceived enemies, many of them Acholi. Kony soon had to rely on increased violence against civilians for his group's survival.

In the eyes of the NRA/M government, Lakwena had demonstrated the dangerous potential for popular mobilization in Acholiland. Resolved not to let this support develop again, the NRA/M would, from then on, generally abandon the Acholi to rebel violence, letting rebel groups prey upon the civilian population as a kind of collective punishment by proxy, ensuring that the rebels did not gain civilian support but also doing little to build support among the Acholi population itself.

The Acholi were left without any clear leadership, as none of the rebel factions had achieved dominance, and the government had only displayed its incapacity and unwillingness to provide protection. Acholi civilians were alienated from the rebels at the same time that they realized that they could not actively support the NRA/M against the rebels. They were truly caught in the middle—the government accused

civilians of supporting the rebels and thus turned its violence against them, while the rebels accused the civilians of supporting the government, and so did the same. Civilians were prevented by the violence of each side from supporting the other, but not protected by either side from the other's violence.

Escalating Atrocities

By early 1998, the UPDA had been dissolved after peace talks with the Ugandan government—talks from which the LRA was, inexplicably, excluded. As a result, Kony's forces were left as the sole viable rebel group in Acholiland. The Ugandan government, meanwhile, intensified its counterinsurgency by recruiting Acholi for a basic local administration and for Local Defense Units (LDUs). To ensure their cooperation, the NRA/M frequently purged the local units of those whom it believed to be sympathetic with the rebels, thus organizing a group of Acholi who became an integral part of the state's military apparatus.

In the eyes of the LRA leadership, the incorporation of Acholi within the counterinsurgency meant that the external enemy, the NRA/M, had been implanted within Acholi society. These government collaborators were seen as a new internal enemy that required

elimination at the hands of the LRA. Kony accused all those cooperating with the government as being "false Acholi," to be cleansed from Acholi society by the "true Acholi," led by the LRA. This opened the way for extreme anti-civilian violence against those labeled false Acholi.

As Kony's forces stepped up their violence, the population remained unprotected, afraid to report on rebel activity, and NRA/M violence escalated in turn. As one newspaper reported, the dominant feeling was that "both the Holy Spirit [Joseph Kony] and the NRA are no longer fighting each other but [instead] . . . the civilians."

In 1991, the government launched "Operation North," its last serious effort to defeat the rebels for over a decade. In mid-March, the NRA/M cut off all communication with the north, seized all radios, and then conducted a massive house-to-house cordon-and-search operation. The government troops rounded up and interrogated tens of thousands of Acholi in an attempt to root out rebels and collaborators.

The NRA's brutality in the course of the screening operation still reverberates among the Acholi. Newspapers from the time give details on abuses of detainees, killings, torture, looting, and rapes. In the course of my work in Acholiland, I have had the locations

of what are said to be mass graves dating from this period pointed out to me.

The NRA/M also formed a new, expanded system of militias known as Arrow Groups as part of the operation. Thousands of men, armed with arrows, spears, machetes, and sticks, were recruited, mostly forcibly, against the rebels, and for the first time, the Acholi were made part of the NRA's war effort. This development was short-lived, however. Without warning, the NRA decided that the Arrow Groups could take care of the rebels alone. While Acholi local administrators pleaded for the Arrow Brigades to be better armed, the NRA refused to supply more than a handful of rifles. They abandoned the mobilized Acholi at the very moment that the LRA stepped up attacks on militia members and their families. The NRA left the Acholi unprotected against an unprecedented wave of atrocities, as Kony's forces began their first massive campaign of collective punishment, including maiming, as they cut off the hands, lips, or ears of those suspected to be working with the Arrow Brigades. As atrocious as LRA violence was, it conformed to a certain political logic, intended to punish those suspected of collaborating with the government, dissuading others from doing so, and proving to the Acholi population that the government was unable and unwilling to protect them. As a rebel commander

explained at the time, "You the teachers turned school children into intelligence staff of government, you turned your classrooms into operation rooms. People turned their mouths into devices for telling NRA how we have moved through a village. They used their hands to point at which direction we have taken. The NRA would follow us, attack us and some of us died, why should we leave you untouched? So we cut off your lips, hands, ears and noses of people to teach them a lesson."

The Failure of Peace Talks

By late 1993, a détente finally arose between the rebels and the population, as atrocities waned. The rebels had demonstrated to the Acholi that the government would not or could not protect them and, therefore, that mobilization against the rebels was pointless. In response, the Acholi disbanded the Arrow Groups, and the rebels scaled down their attacks.

This period of calm set the stage for peace talks. Unfortunately, these ended in disaster in early 1994. After months of negotiations, Kony asked for six months to gather his troops and leave the bush and for a UN observer team to oversee the process. Museveni, in response, publicly announced that Kony had seven days to come out or be annihilated. Kony withdrew

from the talks, Museveni sent reinforcements, and the LRA stepped up attacks. As usual, civilians bore the brunt of the onslaught by both sides.

After the debacle of the peace talks, the violence was internationalized as the Ugandan conflict became incorporated into the U.S. effort against the Sudanese regime. At that time, the U.S. was providing aid through Uganda to the Sudan People's Liberation Army, or SPLA, the southern Sudanese rebel group led by John Garang. In response, Khartoum began to provide increased funding to the LRA in order to retaliate against the Ugandan government's support for the SPLA. While the Ugandan government would from then on use the Sudan factor to explain the intractability of the war, the prolongation of hostilities were not caused solely by Sudanese support. Indeed, the LRA had managed for years without Sudanese support, and, given the NRA's permissive attitude toward looting, probably could have managed for years more without it. Furthermore, by the mid-1990s it had become clear that there were certain forces within the Ugandan government and military who had political and economic interests in the war against the LRA and who were allowing it, or enabling it, to continue.

Internment Camps

The LRA is often accused of having no political agenda, but in the mid-1990s this was clearly not the case. After the failure of the 1994 peace talks, the LRA combined its violence with an information campaign in the villages. In statements and manifestos, it explained that Museveni and his advisers were to blame for sabotaging the peace talks, while laying out positions that included demanding the end of the war through negotiations, the national political integration of the Acholi on an equal basis with the rest of the country, an end to government violence against the Acholi, reparations for lost cattle, and even free and fair multiparty elections—the last demand had wide resonance, given that the NRM had effectively ruled Uganda as a one-party state since they took power.

However, despite the articulation of a political program that resonated with many of the concerns of the Acholi, the LRA never was able to rally sufficient support so as to pose a military threat to the government. For one thing, government violence made supporting the LRA too costly, and the LRA was unable to provide protection against government retaliation. Also, the LRA failed to win victories or to hold territory, which convinced many Acholi that they were not a viable military force. Most importantly, the LRA's

extreme violence against civilians thoroughly alienated many Acholi. In seeking to root out government support, the LRA cast its blame widely, and ended up targeting large numbers of civilians who supported neither the government nor the rebels. Its violence proved its undoing: indeed, many young Acholi I and other researchers have spoken to explained that, if it had not been for Kony's extreme violence, they might have supported the LRA.

Blind to the lack of support for the rebels among the Acholi civilians, the government, like the rebels, continued to see civilians as the problem. As the LRA executed massacres to prove their viability, the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF; the post-1995 successor to the NRA) employed helicopter gunships against rebels and civilians. Once more facing pressure over his premature announcements of the war's end, Museveni turned to a new strategy. In September 1996, the UPDF began forcibly displacing and interning the Acholi in what it has euphemistically termed "protected villages" or "protected camps." The internment camps' total population stood at a few hundred thousand by the end of 1996 and grew to over one million by 2004. Although some Acholi government supporters took refuge in the camps for their own safety, the majority of the Acholi went to the camps in response to a wide-scale campaign

of forced displacement by the UPDF involving intimidation, murder, and the bombing and burning of villages. Determined to prevent the Acholi from returning home, the UPDF conducted a scorched-earth policy that included burning down fields and granaries so that life outside the camps would become impossible. The UPDF announced that anyone found outside of the camps would be considered a rebel and killed.

Perhaps the Ugandan government genuinely thought that the population would be protected in the camps; perhaps it genuinely thought that, with the people cleared out of the countryside, it would soon defeat the isolated LRA. We will probably never know the thinking behind forcing people out of their homes. But what we do know is that, once people were interned, the government failed to protect the "protected camps." In fact, with its military attention increasingly focused on Zaire, once the camps were formed, the UPDF began withdrawing soldiers from the north, leaving the Acholi unprotected by the regular army. Even the few UPDF soldiers who did remain rarely responded to rebel incursions. As a result, not only were the camps useless from a strictly military perspective focused on the defeat of the rebels, but they were counterproductive in terms of civilian safety.

In fact, displacement into camps led to increased rebel

violence. The poorly armed and undertrained Acholi militia members made responsible for trying to protect the camps by the government were nothing more than easy target for the LRA—if anything, they incited the LRA to further retaliation. Displacement made the parameters of government support even more uncertain, as the LRA frequently accused all those in the camps of being government collaborators and attacked civilians they found outside the camp. The LRA consistently demanded the dismantling of the camps and the return of the Acholi to their lands, at times launching intense attacks on the camps, burning them down, and calling on people to go back to their villages. Indeed, the LRA would regularly defeat the Acholi camp guards and then punish the civilians they were guarding, while the UPDF refused to intervene.

Devoid of protection, the camps did not serve a military purpose for the Ugandan government. Instead, the camps had political consequences: they prevented Acholi political organization that might hold the UPDF accountable, demand the end of the war, or provide a base of opposition to the government. Whereas in the late 1980s, anti-civilian violence by the government was in response to the fear that the Acholi were the support base for the rebels, by the mid-1990s, a reversal took place and the accusation of being a rebel collaborator became a convenient way

of eliminating independent political organization in the north. The Ugandan government's policy of suppressing potential political challenges or dissent from northern Uganda, begun when it took power in 1986, was thus intensified. Anti-civilian violence came to be used, not just to prevent the population from building political ties with the rebels, but also to prevent the population from organizing to demand an end to the war.

This direct violence by government and rebels was combined with intense structural violence. The total population of the internment camps stood at a few hundred thousand by the end of 1996, but by the mid-2000s had grown to around a million, encompassing nearly the entire rural population of the Acholi sub-region, with devastating consequences for the interned civilians. Whereas humanitarian aid was only occasionally needed before 1996, with mass displacement and internment the population became entirely dependent on relief aid. The inadequacy of that aid and the squalid conditions in the camps in fact created a massive humanitarian crisis where one had not existed before. At its worst, approximately 1000 people were dying every week from disease, hunger, and other effects of being interned in the camps. To put that death toll in perspective, it was rare for the combined attacks of the LRA and the government to

kill 1000 civilians in a year. These deaths were the outcome of an explicit government policy supported by Western donors and aid agencies, a policy that was, moreover, totally unnecessary.

Violence Today

Today, much has changed. Open fighting in northern Uganda ended in 2006, and in 2007, people began to leave the camps and go home, a process that continues until the present. The regime of direct violence and brutality has largely come to an end. However, political violence continues, albeit in different forms. The most pressing problems people face today are over land. Land speculators and so-called investors, many foreign, in collaboration with the Ugandan government and military, are seeking to grab the land of the Acholi people in northern Uganda, land that they were forced off of when the government herded them into internment camps. Another serious problem for northern Uganda is so-called "nodding disease"—a deadly illness that has broken out among thousands of children who had the bad luck to be born and grow up in the camps, subsisting on relief aid. Indeed, the most serious problems people face today in northern Uganda have little to do with Kony. Rather, the problems people face today are the legacy of the camps,

where over a million Acholi were forced to live, and die, for years by their own government as part of a counterinsurgency that received essential support from the US and from international aid agencies.

This continuing regime of structural violence takes place against a backdrop of the menace of a renewal of direct violence, as national and international militarization march onwards. Fighter jets roar overhead in Acholiland. The US military expands its presence and even carries out military operations, while the Ugandan government continues to militarize with American support. The answer to the history of violence in northern Uganda cannot be more violence—it must be an uncompromising demand for peace.

*This chapter is a revised version of material found in Displacing Human Rights: War and Intervention in Northern Uganda[1] (Oxford, 2011).

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[1] http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/Politics/?view=usa&ci=9780199782086

northern Uganda.

Kony2012: Treat the Political Causes of the LRA, Not Just Its Violent Symptoms

Daniel Kalinaki

The Kony2012 video is focused on treating a symptom – the LRA's campaign of brutal violence against civilians – rather than the underlying disease of political repression that gave rise to the rebellion and perpetuated it. The video portrays Kony and his men as "bad guys," without giving any further context for their origins, or motivation. There is no explanation of their ability to continue fighting for so long, unchecked. After the video presents a simplified view of the conflict, it is no surprise that it then calls for a simplified solution – military support for the government of Uganda so that it can apprehend Kony and defeat his army.

In fact, however, the origins of the LRA rebellion can be traced to the politics of ethnic exclusion that arose out of long years of colonialism and dictatorship.

Invisible Children's proposed solution will not address those underlying problems. If young people who watch the video truly want to help Kony's victims, they should not ask for more military support. Rather, they should ask their governments to help strengthen Ugandan democracy, and promote effective political institutions there.

Ethnic Exclusion and the Rise of the LRA

In the often-bloody mish-mash of African politics, the call of the tribe is difficult to ignore. Ugandan history over the last several decades has been marked by a series of coups, rebellions, and reprisals. Each time, tribal loyalties, and mistrust between different tribal groups, were of key importance.

In 1985, senior army officers from Kony's tribe, the Acholi, overthrew the government of Ugandan President Apolo Milton Obote, a member of the Langi tribe, in a coup d'état.

They held talks with the National Resistance Army, a rebel group that had been fighting Obote's government and whose fighters mostly came from the South of Uganda – a different region from the Acholi.

However, the military momentum was with the NRA

and the coup had divided the government forces along tribal lines. In January 1986 the NRA took power and its leader, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, declared himself president.

Fearing reprisals, the defeated army fled into northern Uganda and the neighbouring Southern Sudan. They had reason to. When dictator Idi Amin Dada, had taken over Uganda in a coup in 1971, he consolidated his power by ordering the killing of senior army officers who belonged to the Acholi and Langi tribes.

Museveni's rebels were the first southern army to take power in Uganda. In doing so, they destroyed a myth, created by the country's former British colonial masters, that Ugandans from the southern parts of the country were soft and pacifist. Those from the northern tribes – like the Acholi, the Langi and Idi Amin's Kakwa – were believed to be naturally more athletic and pre-disposed to the violence that the military required. Northerners had therefore dominated Uganda's colonial army and its successors until Museveni's victory. Southerners, by contrast, were trained to do clerical work and run the civil service.

Kony's people, the Acholi, felt disenfranchised by the 1986 defeat. The NRA, fearing that they could re-assemble and resume fighting, pursued them through brutally violent "mop up" operations.

Some sued for peace and signed deals with the NRA. However, many remained deeply resentful and suspicious. In August 1986, Alice Auma, a lithe, unassuming spirit medium, formed a rebel group called the Holy Spirit Movement, which marched rapidly across large swathes of the country until it was defeated in November 1987.

Joseph Kony then took up the Holy Spirit Movement's mantle, forming the Lord's Resistance Army. Kony was an unlikely warlord. He had spent a notable part of his youth under the care of a Roman Catholic mission in northern Uganda, and then trained to become a catechist. By 1987, however, his goals had changed, if not his fervor. As a rebel leader, he vowed to capture state power and run Uganda in accordance with the biblical Ten Commandments.

This history, simplified as it might be, is important if we are to understand the contemporary narrative of Joseph Kony and make informed decisions about it. Because of that history of rebellion, reprisal, and ethnic exclusion, several Acholi elders gave tacit support to Kony's rebellion and encouraged their children and relatives to join him. To them, military power was not an end in itself. Rather, it was the means to the material gains that came with being in power.

Yet within a few years Kony had gone from fighting

for the Acholi to fighting against them. The new government imposed its authority on northern Uganda, albeit brutally, and many lost the will to fight. Some of the elders who had encouraged and supported Kony made up with the new government.

Feeling betrayed, Kony turned against his own people. His attacks were chilling and savage. He cut off hands. He cut off lips. He killed the old and abducted the young. The girls were raped and given to his commanders as wives. The boys were turned into fighters. Their training involved bludgeoning those who had tried to escape with their own hands. It was a lesson to those with escape on their minds but it also left the stain of guilt that turned some of the abductees into young, cold-blooded killers.

The Persistence of the LRA

Why has Kony survived for so long, and why did it take so many years and so much blood for the world to care?

The first question is easier to answer. It was a combination of intransigence and incompetence. Peace talks had been arranged in 1994 but were scuttled by General Museveni whose demand for an unconditional surrender masked a desire for a military victory.

Widespread corruption in the army, however, hamstrung the military operations that ensued. Commanders inflated their nominal rolls with "ghost soldiers" and kept the money meant for their salaries. Bullets were diverted, under-sized uniforms bought. Even General Salim Saleh, the President's own brother, admitted to receiving a bribe of $800,000 off a bungled contract in which junk helicopter gunships were bought. Saleh was forgiven and asked to spend the money as he saw fit on the army.

The army's cause was not helped by widespread allegations of gross human rights abuses by its men and officers. These ranged from a scorched earth policy to burning suspected rebel collaborators in a train carriage and, eventually, to herding an estimated 1.5 million people into squalid camps across the Acholi region in northern Uganda.

Although civilians were ostensibly put there for their own safety, the camps were rife with crime and disease. They were also dehumanizing. Adults shared tents or grass-thatched huts with their children. Child prostitution soared (government soldiers, who had money, were prime customers), as did the rate of HIV.

Everyone lived on food handouts from the World Food Programme.

All of this was widely reported in Ugandan media,

in regional newspapers, on the BBC, and elsewhere. Books were written. Documentaries were shot. But the world did not care.

Part of the problem was that the Kony crisis was one of many on the African continent. Throughout the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s there were armed conflicts in Sudan, DR Congo, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Angola, Mozambique, Liberia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Chad, among others, on top of Genocide in Rwanda.

To foreign audiences, it was hard to grasp the nuances and intricacies of who was killing whom, where, and why. The wars in the Middle East and in the Balkans were easier to digest and tell to late-night television audiences.

Three changes help explain why the Kony story went from the backwaters of central Africa to the front page of the New York Times.

First, Africa started becoming more peaceful. From Maputo to Monrovia, the guns started falling silent, allowing for those with the interest to examine each conflict individually.

Secondly, in 2003 the government of Uganda requested that the International Criminal Court take up the matter of Joseph Kony and the LRA – the first referral to the new body. The newly-formed ICC had had a difficult birth, and was desperate to prove itself useful.

The ICC Prosecutor, Luis Moreno Ocampo, eagerly took up the challenge, obtaining indictments against Kony and his top lieutenants. He promised that allegations of atrocities committed by government soldiers would also be investigated later. However, if any such investigation has taken place, the results have yet to be made public.

The third reason for Konymania is that social media allows users to consume content without the gate-keeping obstacles of mainstream media institutions, with their agendas and precious minutes.

With its alternative approach to international news, Al Jazeera, the Qatar-based channel could probably have been persuaded to air the Kony2012 documentary but could any of the big American TV networks have done the same before it went viral on YouTube?

The problem that ensues – and it is a big problem – is that stories like that of the LRA are then either stripped down to their bare bones to fit into the tiny time slots and brief attention spans of faraway audiences, or garnished and marinated in self-serving anecdotes in order to hold their attention for longer. The former perpetuates ignorance and indifference; the latter misinformation and misguided reactions.

How Do You Solve a Problem Like Joseph Kony?

Why has Kony, with a motley band of about 200 demoralized fighters, evaded capture thus far? It is largely because the states where he operates, in particular DR Congo and Central African Republic, are too weak to maintain law and order within their borders.

The truth is that the LRA insurgency, like many others across Africa, is the result of weak democracy in those countries, and their lack of institutions through which differences can be resolved and political consensus built. To be truly effective, a solution to the conflict must address those underlying problems.

In Uganda, there has been progress in many areas in the past two decades (many anti-media laws, for instance, have been defeated in court and repealed). However, the political culture still does not support genuine widespread participation and contestation.

Uganda's army remains dominated by commanders from President Museveni's part of the country (the west) 26 years after it took power. Museveni won elections in 1996, 2001, changed the Constitution and ran again in 2006 and 2011. None of the elections were free and fair, according to independent observers.

The ruling NRM party enjoys access to state funds and patronage, which give it a large majority in Parliament. In a poor country where about three in 10 people survive on less than a dollar a day, votes are often given to the highest bidder.

The Judiciary has remained somewhat independent, but may not be so for long; President Museveni, who appoints judges, has publicly indicated he intends to fill the bench with "cadres" loyal to his NRM party.

Media and civil society are relatively free but the threat of arrest, or worse, is always a clear and present danger.

Where to Go From Here

Taking arms and fighting a war to change things like Joseph Kony did – and President Museveni did before him – is so 1980/1990. Ugandans have moved on. Protests against high costs of living, government corruption and profligate spending are a new kind of urban "warfare," contested between unarmed civilians attempting to exercise their constitutional right to protest peacefully, and a military police force keen to stop them.

Should American Special Forces assist in the effort to capture Kony? Yes, for every little bit helps.

However, to treat the underlying cause of the LRA conflict, we must ensure that African countries have working internal democracy. They must move beyond routine elections every five years, and develop strong institutions that can defend sovereignty and support the aspirations of the people.

In July of 2009, President Barack Obama excited the continent when, speaking in Accra, Ghana, he said: "Africa needs strong institutions, not strong men".

Ahead of the 2011 Uganda election, the US said governance and democracy would top its agenda of engagement with the country. US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton was asked to provide quarterly reports to the US Congress on those matters.

Then al-Qaeda linked terrorists struck Kampala, the Ugandan capital, on July 10, 2010. Their bombs killed at least 78 people, in apparent retaliation for Uganda's decision to deploy troops to Somalia – at the request of the US government – to help pacify the country and keep it from becoming a terrorist haven.

The US governance demands fell quiet and Uganda became an even closer ally with Museveni, the strongman, firmly in charge.

Instead of buying wristbands, young Americans who want to help should ask their President to put his money where his mouth was. Africa needs strong

institutions (including strong armies that can defeat murderous savages like Kony), not strongmen whose policies encourage their emergence.

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The Making of a "Humanitarian Emergency": Night Commuters, Invisible Children, and the Business of Aid and Advocacy

Aid and Advocacy

Ayesha Nibbe

Entering the Humanitarian Aid Zone

I traveled to the warzone of northern Uganda in 2005 with great trepidation. In the preliminary study I conducted about the conflict in the North before I left the States, I read about the fanatical, bizarre, and

violent rebel leader of the Lord's Resistance Army – Joseph Kony. I had heard about his child soldiers who killed and senselessly maimed their own families for no apparent reason. I had heard about the "night commuters" – the tens of thousands of children who walked into town every night to escape abduction from the rebels. I read about the millions of people struggling to survive in displacement camps that were set up to protect them. The conflict in the North was baffling and horrifying with its sadistic spirits and brainwashed child-murderers, and I feared seeing blood, guns, suffering, and violence.

When I finally reached Gulu – the biggest town in the North – the scene I encountered seemed more like a carnival. Everywhere I walked, LandCruisers buzzed by me showcasing various organizational emblems – "World Vision," "United Nations," "Save the Children." These white vehicles driving triumphantly down the streets of Gulu with their huge flags had an air of pageantry, like medieval horsemen galloping into battle. Virtually all the local Africans – the Acholi – were wearing T-shirts with humanitarian aid slogans. In the market, I saw liquid funnels selling at the side of the road that had been refashioned out of old food aid tins. "How very odd…" I thought. Humanitarian aid seemed to permeate even the most mundane parts of life in Gulu. How and why did Northern Uganda

become such a major hub of humanitarian activity?

Conflict and Displacements in Northern Uganda

I was surprised to learn that the humanitarian aid scene I witnessed in Gulu had been in place for less than two years. The international community was essentially a silently complicit set of actors in much of the two-decade long conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda. Most analysts see the conflict as an historical power struggle between ethnic Bantu groups in the south and Nilotic groups in the North. In a nutshell, this multi-phased counterinsurgency was launched in 1986 when the current president, Museveni, triumphed in his rebellion against his predecessor. As fears of an anticipated retribution petered out over time, the conflict started to wane and might have died out in the mid-1990s. But assistance from Sudan at that time transformed the northern Uganda conflict from a local skirmish to a regional conflict in which the LRA essentially became a pawn within the larger Sudanese quagmire. The LRA essentially became guns-for-hire for the Sudanese government, and the reasons for the conflict transformed and shifted.

After over a decade of failing to defeat the rebel

insurgency, the Ugandan government employed a far-reaching military tactic in the mid-1990s. The Ugandan military forcibly displaced the entire rural population of Gulu District in western Acholiland and rounded them into areas called "protected camps." Of greater priority than protecting civilians, the government had a strategic aim: they wanted to clearly identify the rebels by removing civilians from the countryside. They informed Acholi that if they were caught outside of a two-kilometer perimeter around the camps, they would be assumed to be rebel "collaborators," and that the military had authority to deal with them accordingly.

No one anticipated that millions of Acholi would be in the camps for more than a few months. Acholi left their crops in the ground, and seeds drying in their huts – decisions that led to a loss of the local food and seed base. Because of the two-kilometer perimeter boundary, an artificial situation of land scarcity was created, and food production became almost impossible. The government only had provisions for six months of food rations – and no plan in place for long-term basic needs. After government rations ran out, the World Food Program started distributing food aid to northern Uganda. Acholi were only eligible to receive food aid if they were in the camps, so while some people might have migrated to nearby Gulu

Town or the capital city of Uganda, Kampala, most people hedged their bets and stayed in the camps.

If people refused to leave their homesteads, they were subjected to harassment, lootings, and sometimes killings perpetrated by Ugandan troops. As a result, by 2002, about two million people fled to the camps, a second mass displacement that extended into the eastern Acholi, Teso, and Lango sub-regions. But even when in the camps, Acholi suffered indiscriminant beatings, shootings and other atrocities perpetrated by the Ugandan military. For a time, it was unclear whether most of the physical violence was perpetrated by the military or the rebels. Although it is difficult to substantiate with existing statistics, many Acholi assert that the effects of living in the camps – disease due to cramped living quarters, lack of food and water, and poor hygiene conditions – caused more fatalities than the actual violence of the conflict. It was estimated in 2005 that approximately 1000 people died each week in the camps due to malnutrition and disease (Counting the Cost 2006). Unfortunately, food aid had an unintentional effect on the situation. While food aid just barely kept Acholi alive in the camps, it also provided the material means to maintain this devastating camp system – a system that lasted over 12 years. So, in spite of their best intentions, the World Food Program

became a complicit supporter of President Museveni's forced displacement of millions people and the thousands of deaths that occurred as a result of the displacement. Of course, little of this story made it into Western newspapers (and oftentimes Ugandan ones), though occasionally the media would publish simplified storylines about the conflict. The most common story was that the LRA aimed to take over Uganda to institute a rule of law "based on the 10 Commandments" – even though they were allied with the staunchly Islamic Sudanese Government. The LRA was characterized as an organization without a political agenda, which simply wanted to wage terror for no apparent reason. Anyone who bothered to try to learn about the conflict was confronted with a baffling web of relationships and events that hinted at, yet defied, political, economic, or social explanation. The situation in northern Uganda was characterized as "bizarre" and Joseph Kony was branded a "madman."

A rare exception to this characterization was found in Sverker Finnström's work. He painstakingly showed through manifestos and other evidence that the LRA did indeed have a political stance. However, because most works maintained a narrative about the conflict that was mired in confusion, this and other counter-narratives were lost in the mix. As a result, the displacement was not questioned – it was simply seen

as a necessary action to protect Acholi from the rebels (Finnström 2008).

The "Most Forgotten Emergency in the World"

In the case of a massive internal displacement, oftentimes the government will announce a "state of emergency." With this, the United Nations, the Red Cross, the European Union, and the Americans all mobilize to bring resources and personnel to the areas of need. But in the case of northern Uganda, a state of emergency was never formally declared by the government. How could it be? The government –the very entity that caused the humanitarian crisis –could never be expected to call international attention to the mess it had created.

After 16 years of war, Acholi leaders were completely fed up with the escalating humanitarian crisis. At this time, tens of thousands of children were walking to town every night to sleep in bus parks, hospitals, and on the streets. These children – called "night commuters" – were said to be finding safe haven at night from rebel abduction. A group of Acholi civil society leaders in Gulu created a coalition, and joined hands with concerned scholars and activists from southern Uganda, Canada, and Norway to address the conflict.

Their strategy was to bypass the Ugandan government and appeal directly to the international community to put political pressure on President Museveni to end the conflict. To create a sense of urgency, the delegation discussed the political situation highlighting the emerging humanitarian crisis, in particular the plight of the children. As part of this effort the coalition organized several conferences and produced two major papers about the conflict that were circulated internationally. They sent a delegation directly to the UN, and then met with diplomats from the United States, Canada, and key European nations. They also approached the newly formed International Criminal Court in The Hague to solicit an investigation of atrocities waged in northern Uganda, an inquiry that would implicate both the LRA and the Ugandan military.

In response to the papers produced by the Acholi coalition, a high-level UN delegate was sent on a scouting trip to northern Uganda. As a result of that visit, in November 2003, Jan Egeland, the UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs made his very first overseas mission trip to northern Uganda. It was then that Egeland made a public statement in which he famously declared northern Uganda "the most forgotten emergency in the world." He talked about the conflict having an absence of a "political

face," and he mentioned the "pseudo-mystical brutality" of Joseph Kony. Most people credit Egeland with creating a "CNN effect" that mobilized the humanitarian aid machine. With Egeland's statement, northern Uganda became an internationally recognized "humanitarian emergency" and this particular narrative about the conflict was told over and over again in the media. Around the same time, three young Californians visited this region and stumbled upon the night commuters in Gulu. When they returned to the US, they made a rough-cut film called Invisible Children. Their aims were simple – they hoped to show the film locally in San Diego in order to raise awareness and help the night commuters in Gulu. By word of mouth and a grassroots campaign, Invisible Children caught the fascination of young American high school and college students. The film was so gripping to American students that they started calling their elected officials, doing fundraisers, and spreading the word about the conflict. One student told me, "This is our Vietnam." With the help of this band of high school and college students, by 2008 Invisible Children had built up the largest advocacy movement ever to converge upon Washington DC to lobby on behalf of an African cause – and that includes all advocacy efforts on behalf of Darfur.

Both Jan Egeland and Invisible Children generated a

huge buzz about the night commuter phenomenon in the international press. In response, shelters were set up for the children by UNICEF and their partner organizations. Unfortunately, the shelters became a major destination for what was termed disaster tourism by Acholi leaders. Every evening, when the night commuters were going to sleep, delegations of journalists, donor reps, movie stars, UN officials, and other voyeurs stomped through the shelters to gawk at the children.

Massive amounts of money from donor governments poured in as a result of these visits, creating an environment of non-accountability. Many NGOs set up operations with no background in child protection. They received money for assisting the children, and then pocketed it. Meanwhile, the children were exposed to physical and sexual abuse while traveling to and sleeping in the facilities. Ironically, a UNICEF survey revealed that the children were not sleeping in town just to escape the rebels – almost half of the children reported that they were sent by their parents as part of a family strategy to survive cramped conditions in the camps. I interviewed many former night commuters and asked why their parents did not sleep in town with them. I was surprised by the predominant answer: "To get food." Families needed to maintain residence in the camps in order to remain

eligible for food aid. So, essentially, the structure of aid operations caused the bizarre effect of tens of thousands of Acholi children marching into town to sleep every night. In spite of this knowledge, UNICEF and their partner organizations turned their heads away from the situation in the shelters and in the camps. One former UNICEF official admitted to me that the night commuter sector was simply too big, too sexy, and too lucrative.

While the night commuter issue was the main point of entry for the aid community, there was a "trickle across" effect to other sectors that caused a broad proliferation of humanitarian organizations in Gulu. From a total of less than 20 organizations in 2003, by 2006-7 there were over 200 officially registered organizations working in Gulu district alone, a district with only 300,000 people. And there were an unknown number of unregistered NGOs that were estimated to outnumber the official ones. Donor nations injected (and continue to pump) hundreds of millions of humanitarian aid dollars into this little place. And as this area is shifting to post-war development, the aid sector is expected to grow even more. Aid is the growth industry in the North. It is the biggest employer, and students all over Uganda rush to get degrees in "NGO Management" and "Humanitarian Studies" in the hopes of getting a coveted aid job. The

influx of hundreds of millions of aid dollars caused a situation of severe economic inflation in Gulu and it has grown from being a dusty trading center to now becoming the most expensive town in Uganda.

"Humanitarian Aid is a Business"

Given the living conditions in the camps, the "night commuter" phenomenon, and the economic bubble created by the aid industry – one has to wonder why the dominant narrative about the conflict and the night commuters persisted in spite of all the contradictions, effects, and consequences. Even though many international diplomats and journalists were oblivious to the historical underpinnings of the conflict, some were fully aware of the nuanced political relationships in Uganda. However, they feared getting on the wrong side of President Museveni; if they were to raise issues about the displacement in the North, they could lose their privileges to maintain successful development work in the South. Under Museveni, Uganda appeared to be enjoying a period of economic and political stability. In the eyes of the international community, in comparison to Idi Amin's reign of terror Museveni's forced displacement paled in comparison. President Museveni was also praised internationally for the progressive way

he dealt with the AIDS epidemic. With few places in Africa where development efforts can thrive, some analysts of northern Uganda have speculated that the donor aid community was reluctant to risk losing this "African success story" that generated so much aid money.

The Americans in particular did not want to lose their relationship with President Museveni. After September 11, 2001, all US activities overseas were colored by the specter of "terrorism." In 2002, the United States put the LRA on the US Terrorist Exclusion List because of their affiliation with Sudan – a state sponsor of both Osama bin Laden and other regional groups friendly with Al Qaeda. Currently, as the threat from Al Qaeda wanes, the US is increasingly concerned about Chinese influence in Central Africa; AFRICOM, US military command in Africa, is bolstering its regional presence to respond to an emerging Chinese economic threat of access to valuable resources in the Congo and the larger region (including oil and gold, but also key resources used in the technology sector, such as coltan). As a result, it was (and still is) strategically important for the US to maintain a good relationship with President Museveni to keep a presence in the area. Thus, maintaining a narrative about the conflict in which Museveni is characterized as "good" and the LRA as "bad" is in the interests of not only Museveni,

but also of key donor nations – and their corresponding aid organizations.

While it is clear that donor nations have political aims in mind, it is less clear why non-governmental and multilateral humanitarian organizations that aim to alleviate suffering cultivate a narrative that exacerbated the crisis in the North? One answer to this question came from the top UN official in Gulu: "Humanitarian aid is a business." Is there an element of self-interest that encourages humanitarian agents to choose narratives that perpetuate their "business"? Perhaps this is a product (if you will) of the pervasiveness of neoliberal economic processes and a focus on the proverbial "bottom-line" that seeps into seemingly every aspect of our globalized social reality – even parts of society that are decidedly not about profit-making, like humanitarian aid, reflect this pervasiveness. Still, it is only fair to assume that aid organizations do not aim to perpetuate suffering itself in the interests of their "business," but rather to sell the perception of suffering and need. Thus, humanitarian aid organizations, media producers (such as journalists, photographers, and filmmakers), and advocacy groups are active producers of particular imaginings about Africa. One side of the narrative is one of Africa as an "evil" place; a place of danger, of chaos, and violence, home to Idi Amin, camel-jockeying

Janjawid, machete-wielding Hutus, and gun-toting Somali pirates. This "evil-Africa" is defies rationality and instills fear – it is depicted as a place where sound political engagement is seemingly impossible.

Given these perceptions of Africa, the only justifiable action is to avoid political tangles and instead focus on vulnerable populations caught in the crossfire. And this then cultivates "evil-Africa's" opposite in the story – the good, pure, and blameless victim. As the most "vulnerable of the vulnerable," the image of good, pure, blameless children caught in the midst of "evil-Africa" is a fundamentally effective marketing tool with which to sell a humanitarian cause to the international community. With this conceptualization of the child as pure and blameless, there is a clear moral stance, a clear victim, a clear location of good and evil – and therefore a clear point of action.

This is clearly evident in northern Uganda – every significant advocacy movement and media group focused squarely on particular images of children, most prominently illustrated through the Invisible Children "brand." As a result, the issue of "night commuting" and the overall aid response took on a life of its own that was detached in many ways to the reality on the ground. Since "night commuting" was such a compelling story, humanitarian, media and advocacy actors were able to create a whole industry around it

for several years. However in the end, the duration, extensiveness, and ultimately the importance of the issue was largely a construction by all these players.

Undoubtedly the marriage of these themes through particular images of children and war powerfully sells the case for a call to action in Africa. However their use has at least two damaging effects on solving an African humanitarian emergency. By focusing on innocence in one-dimensional apolitical narratives that market children prominently in the story, the violent structural economic, social and political situations in Africa that cause humanitarian crisis – for example, war and genocide – become an uncomfortable backdrop. As a result, meaningful political engagement is kept at bay. In addition, a constant barrage of images of African children infantilizes the continent in the consciousness of the international community. Africa perpetually remains a place of need, of dependency, and junior status. The most insidious part of the infantilization of Africa is that this effect is internalized by Africans themselves. They adopt this depoliticizing discourse and ultimately it renders them helpless and politically impotent. These two effects merge and create a situation of overall political inaction in Africa where humanitarian aid becomes the only possible site of action.

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[2]http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/uganda.pdf

Three Strikes and Kony's Still There: What I Learned from Negotiations with Joseph Kony and the International Criminal Court's Efforts to Indict Him

Alex Little

"Stop Kony."

Although the slogan is simple, the task is quite difficult. So far, the world has taken three separate approaches to it: peace talks, military action, and criminal prosecution. All three have failed. This

essay attempts to explain why, and, in the process, demonstrate why any future effort to "stop" Kony isn't going to be perfect.

First, some background: I was introduced to the problem of Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in 2000, when I began to work for former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who has long had an interest in the region. The year before, in 1999, Carter negotiated the Nairobi Agreement between the governments of Sudan and Uganda. The primary purpose of that peace pact was to end each government's support of rebel groups operating in the other's country – Uganda had armed and collaborated with the Sudan People's Liberation Army, while Sudan had armed and collaborated with the LRA. By agreeing to end their support for rebels in the other country, Sudan and Uganda essentially ended a proxy war between them.

Quite obviously, the purported end of overt Sudanese support for the LRA was not the end of Kony. Rather, five years after the Nairobi Agreement, in January 2004, he remained a menace. That month, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Luis Moreno-Ocampo, announced that an investigation of the LRA's crimes in northern Uganda would be the ICC's inaugural case. A few months later, I joined Ocampo's office. The next summer, in 2005, the Court

secretly issued indictments and arrest warrants for five leaders of the LRA, including Kony. In October 2005, those warrants were revealed publicly: Kony became the first individual indicted for crimes against humanity and war crimes by the ICC.

In those five years, from 2000 to 2005, I had an intimate view of the possibilities and pitfalls presented by both peace talks and international criminal justice. Here is what I learned:

1. Talking Peace Is Easy, Doing Peace Is Hard

Peace is good politics. Whether you're an elected official, an undemocratic despot, or a rebel in the bush, you make more friends talking about peace and prosperity than giving speeches about death and destruction. Unfortunately, death and destruction also have proven lucrative to many of the same people. As a result, government officials and rebel leaders often pursue a path that affords them an opportunity to fight and talk.

Northern Uganda is no exception. Notwithstanding his well-earned reputation for brutality, Kony has repeatedly invoked peace and prosperity in statements he has made to the public, including speeches he

recorded onto tapes for radio broadcasts in northern Uganda. And Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has regularly talked about his desire for peace in Acholiland throughout the years of conflict. Yet, year after year, peace talks stalled and fighting began anew, often with a greater intensity and urgency than before.

The lesson? Even if Kony and Museveni were serious about participating in negotiations each time a new initiative began or a different mediator arrived on the scene, they also were using the lull in battle to re-equip, rest, and plan for future military action. In other words, while the parties were talking peace, they also were preparing for war.

This constant cycle of talking then fighting eroded the foundations for trust between the Government of Uganda and the LRA from the early 1990s to the latest round of peace talks that ended in late 2008. For example, after the first failed peace effort in 1994 – led by Betty Bigombe, the Ugandan Government's Minister for the North – the LRA moved into southern Sudan, resupplied thanks to the Sudanese government, and launched more aggressive raids into northern Uganda. Peace talks led by civil society leaders then started, and failed, in 1997 and 1998, only to be followed by more intense fighting. After the 1999 Nairobi Agreement and efforts by President Carter to engage Kony

in direct negotiations, the LRA again launched a series of attacks against civilians. In 2002, the Ugandan army launched its own renewed military effort, targeting the LRA in "Operation Iron Fist." The resulting battles killed hundreds of civilians and displaced thousands. A year later, in March 2003, the parties agreed on a ceasefire. Within months, however, fighting began again, and the LRA's attacks swept deep into Uganda.

The last decade of the conflict followed a similar pattern. Peace talks led by Bigombe again in 2004 concluded with fighting in 2005. Over the next three years, negotiations between the Ugandan government and the LRA started and stopped irregularly; the only constant was military maneuvering by both sides. In 2008, after a series of ceasefires, negotiators completed a draft Final Peace Agreement. Kony failed to show up for the signing ceremony, however, and the LRA then stepped up attacks against civilians in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In response, the Ugandan government led a joint military operation with Sudanese and Congolese forces dubbed "Operation Lightning Thunder." It failed to capture or kill Kony, and the LRA responded with further abductions and attacks on civilians.

To date, a negotiated solution remains elusive. But, as this timeline demonstrates, it is not for a lack of trying. In the last twenty years, you can count well over a

dozen discrete peace initiatives – led by a diverse cast of mediators – between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. Even when these efforts have resulted in concrete negotiations and concessions between the parties, however, the parties could never close the deal.

Why not? Because there was never a moment when both Kony and Museveni could sign the same piece of paper at the same time. Since the war began, the obstacles to a comprehensive peace deal between the LRA and the Government of Uganda were diverse, and they evolved as circumstances on the ground changed. If, in 1999, Kony had been offered the deal he was offered in 2008, he probably would have signed it. But, by 2008, he was an indicted war criminal fearful of a trial in The Hague. And, while the resolution of the civil war in Sudan dramatically changed the context of Uganda's interests and the LRA's ability to operate in Sudan, instability in the DRC provided the group with new territory to exploit.

In the end, wanting an agreement and coming to an agreement were two very different things. The actual doing of peace_ – reaching a deal to stop the fighting – proved too difficult.

2. Never Fight a Land War Against Rebels in Central Africa

If negotiating peace with the LRA was difficult, so too was waging war. The Government of Uganda learned this the hard way, launching operation after operation to kill Kony and defeat the LRA. Operations "Iron Fist," "Iron Fist II," and "Lightning Thunder" were all touted as the final military push to end the LRA threat, yet all proved unsuccessful.

There is plenty of blame to go around for these misfires, and the often ill-equipped and undisciplined Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF) certainly bears its fair share. But, although the UPDF was larger than the LRA and had greater resources, the conditions and context of the fighting often gave the LRA substantial advantages on the battlefield.

Consider the UPDF's challenge: The LRA operates in the remote wilderness, which renders armored vehicles and tanks useless; the group knows its terrain well, having fought in the same areas for decades; they have grown accustomed to living in harsh conditions away from supply lines; they are willing to employ highly dangerous tactics because many of their forces are abductees; and they have a single military objective: stay alive. By all accounts, the experienced fighters within the LRA have been well trained, ei-

ther by prior military experience or by advisors from former allies like Sudan. And, when necessary, they replace lost troops with new "recruits" through forced conscription. Add to all of this the reality that the LRA can play a cat-and-mouse game indefinitely, as the battlefield has extended at times across northern Uganda, southern Sudan, northeast DRC, and the western part of the Central African Republic – an area roughly twice the size of Uganda itself, much of it without roads or any government presence at all. Even sophisticated methods of tracking and targeting the LRA are unlikely work, since Kony and his top commanders have reportedly stopped using satellite phones and two-way radios and now resort to low-tech couriers and "runners" who pass messages.

None of these factors makes the military option easy. But, even if operations against the LRA could be effective, there is a significant moral complication. Because the LRA has at times been so successful at using forced conscription to build its army, and so ruthless in enforcing discipline among the conscripted troops, there is no clear distinction between victim and victimizer – apart from Kony and a very small leadership circle around him. There are many LRA troops who, sometimes literally, fight with a gun pointed at their heads. As a result, a military defeat of the LRA would mean that even more of Kony's

victims – forced into the role of soldiers – would die. Nobody wants that result.

Given all of this, there is good reason to adapt and adopt the advice that U.S. General Douglas MacArthur reportedly gave to President John F. Kennedy in 1961 to "never fight a land war in Asia." Fighting a land war against the LRA in central Africa has proven a losing proposition, and there's no reason to believe the equation will change anytime soon.

3. An Indictment Is Only Words on Paper, But They're Important Words

International criminal law is supposed to be different. The creation of the ICC in particular promised a new era of accountability for war criminals like Kony. No longer would the pursuit of such villains be limited to the battlefield; it would move to the courtroom. At least, that was the theory. The reality has proven much more complex, particularly in the case of Kony and the LRA.

In 2005, the ICC issued sealed indictments charging Kony and four other leaders of the LRA with war crimes and crimes against humanity. The listed defendants included Kony, his deputy Vincent Otti, and

three other members of the group's command: Raska Lukwiya, Okot Odhiambo, and Dominic Ongwen. None of these five have been arrested, although two (Lukwiya and Otti) are now dead and a third (Odhiambo) has reportedly defected from the LRA; only Kony and Ongwen remain on the battlefield.

The ICC's inability to arrest the three living defendants demonstrates the limits of its power. The Court does not have a police force of its own to make arrests; it relies entirely on the cooperation of member nations. To date, that cooperation has been lacking. Odhiambo is the best example. If he is indeed living in Uganda after defecting from the LRA, as news reports suggest, then Uganda is violating its treaty obligations to the ICC to arrest him and bring him to The Hague. But there are no real consequences for this breach. Ocampo can criticize the Ugandan government, and maybe even write a letter, but neither of those paths will make Odhiambo's arrest more likely.

Kony and Ongwen pose a different problem. They haven't been arrested for the same reasons that military efforts have failed – it's not an easy task, and a country is going to have to place its troops in jeopardy to accomplish it. Needless to say, volunteers for that mission are in short supply. This is one of the paradoxes of the ICC: It can charge individuals with crimes and hold trials to determine whether or not

they are guilty, but it cannot do anything on its own to bring the defendants to face the judges.

Another paradox is that, by issuing indictments in the midst of a conflict, the ICC may well make matters worse. For example, the ultimate obstacle to Kony accepting a peace deal in 2008 was likely his fear that he would be shipped off to face trial in The Hague. Between 2005 and 2008, Kony's response to the ICC indictments was pragmatic. He recommitted to peace talks and told the Ugandan government that he was willing to end his insurgency. But there was a catch: Kony would only hang it up if the ICC's charges against him were dropped. The resulting dilemma is often described as one of peace versus justice. Cloaked by this dichotomy, however, is the reality that Kony and the LRA were threatening further violence to save themselves from trial. That was not the Court's desired result. But, once the indictments were unsealed, the only bargaining chip that Kony and his commanders held was their willingness to resort to violence. And that's a powerful chip to play.

All of these issues stem from the nature of the ICC, which only has the capacity that others impart to it. If countries want to support the Court's effort – by helping to capture suspects or lending investigative support – the Court becomes more effective. If countries ignore the ICC, or actively obstruct the progress

of its cases, it loses power and legitimacy. This is why, when the Court issues an indictment, it does no more than place words on paper. The effect of those words is for others to decide. Fortunately, the Court's words carry weight. International news media report extensively on the issuance of indictments; international organizations treat the Court as a partner and help it succeed; and countries across the globe have more often chosen to assist the ICC than obstruct its efforts.

The result for Kony has been notoriety and vulnerability. The world knows about him in large part because the ICC indicted him. And because the ICC indicted him he cannot sleep soundly; arrest and imprisonment are an ever-present possibility. For now, he remains free. But he is a marked man, and that's something.

4. Stop Kony? It's All About How You Define Success

The past failure of peace talks, military operations, and criminal prosecution is discouraging. But that doesn't mean there aren't options to "Stop Kony." Rather, it means that we have to consider the options in their full context and recognize that none are perfect. There is no silver bullet. Without divine intervention, a well-placed snakebite, or an opportune

viral infection, Kony will only be stopped through one of the three avenues above.

The choice of which option is best depends on what we mean when we say "Stop Kony." If our concern is only Kony himself, a peace offer that grants him full amnesty and protection from prosecution by the ICC probably would do the trick. It also would do little to discourage the next "Kony" from taking up arms and committing similar atrocities. If our hope is stopping Kony in an absolute sense, then only a military attack assures us of that, as there is no guarantee Kony would keep his promises if he signed a peace pact. But the collateral damage of military operations likely would be high, and another member of the LRA might well step into Kony's shoes to continue the war. If, instead, we want to hold Kony accountable for his crimes and stop them from happening again in the future, then prosecution by the ICC is likely the most effective method. As we have seen, however, that path may delay the opportunity for peace and lead to further violence now.

No matter how you define it, stopping Kony should be everyone's goal. With the stakes so high, less-than-perfect is preferable to the status quo. That's probably the most important lesson: halting, uncertain progress toward peace is better than no progress at all.

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Peace from Juba: Peace Talks between the LRA and the Government of Uganda (2006-2008)

Mark Kersten

The Juba Negotiations: "The Best Opportunity" for Peace

When official peace talks between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) began in August 2006 in Juba, South Sudan, the optimism was palpable. The positive attitudes, amongst both northern Ugandans and external observers, were unsurprising. Since the outbreak of the conflict, virtually every approach to ending the war had been attempted and had subsequently failed to produce peace. Massive military operations led by the Govern-

ment of Uganda, and complemented by international and regional support, had failed to produce an end to the war, leading to massive retaliations by the LRA in their wake. While the offer of an amnesty from prosecution, in combination with traditional forms of reconciliation for any rebels who denounced the rebellion produced thousands of defections of LRA combatants, it did not result in comprehensive defections from the LRA, nor the defection of the rebels' senior command. Previous rounds of peace negotiations in 1988, 1994, 1998 and 2004 floundered and resulted in deepening distrust. Most importantly, the people of northern Uganda had suffered at the hands at the conflict since the mid-1980s and the talks were widely seen as the most promising opportunity to finally resolve the brutal war. It was in this context that the Juba peace negotiations were seen as the 'best opportunity' to finally achieve peace in the region.

The Juba peace talks covered five agenda items: (1) a cessation of hostilities; (2) comprehensive solutions to the conflict; (3) accountability and reconciliation; (4) a permanent ceasefire agreement; and (5) demobilization, disarmament, reintegration. The question of justice dominated the peace talks and its effects on the negotiations remain a hotly debated subject. While the talks ultimately failed to produce a comprehensive peace agreement, they contributed significantly to

the current peace and stability that northern Uganda currently enjoys.

Juba, Peace, Justice and Accountability

Central to the peace talks was the question of how to achieve justice and accountability. In 2005, the International Criminal Court (ICC) had issued arrest warrants for five senior LRA rebel commanders, including leader Joseph Kony and his second-in-command, Vincent Otti. As a result, the question of justice and reconciliation dominated the subsequent peace talks. As Lyandro Komakech, a transitional justice scholar from northern Uganda, maintains, justice and reconciliation were "the critical stuff" of the talks. Other agenda items, including demobilization and agreeing on comprehensive solutions to the conflict were, to a remarkable extent, negotiated to agreement quickly.

In the so-called "peace versus justice" debate, opinions have been sharply divided with regards to whether the ICC's arrest warrants contributed to bringing the LRA and the Government of Uganda to the peace talks and the extent to which the Court helped or hindered the negotiations. There were palpable and widely expressed fears that the ICC's judicial intervention

in northern Uganda represented the hammer that smashed any hopes to achieve peace in the region. But within just a year of the arrest warrants being issued, the Government and the LRA were at the negotiating table with the arrest warrants creating what Michael Otim and Marieke Wierda have described as "an early recognition by both sides that the issue of accountability must be addressed as a central part of the negotiations" something that had been readily put aside in previous peace talks.

Competing demands and views on the appropriate approach to justice were evident at Juba. Many argued that local, traditional justice mechanisms, like 'mato oput' should be prioritized. Others argued that the demands of justice were lop-sided, because accountability for the government's crimes wasn't being sought, despite the widespread recognition the government had committed atrocities as well. Predictably, the LRA delegation focused its efforts during the negotiations on ensuring that the indictments were dropped.

Delegates at the peace talks came to the conclusion that traditional justice and formal retributive justice had to be pursued in parallel. A key element of the compromise position was to combine a domestic legal institution which could try perpetrators of crimes during the conflict in addition to promoting

traditional justice mechanisms. The Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation and its Annexure maintained that accountability would be achieved by employing a special unit of the Ugandan High Court, the War Crimes Division (later renamed International Crimes Division) "to try individuals who are alleged to have committed serious crimes during the conflict." Traditional forms of justice would also continue to be used in the north to help reconcile victims and survivors and an Amnesty Law remains in place.

Despite agreements on questions of how to achieve justice and despite eagerly waiting for Joseph Kony to emerge from the bush, by the end of 2008 the talks had ultimately failed in producing a final comprehensive peace agreement and broke down. Many blamed the ICC, accepting the wisdom that Kony could not come to the sign the peace agreement with an international arrest warrant over his head. But were the Juba peace talks ever really about peace?

Was Juba ever about Peace?

Questions remain as to whether the negotiations between the LRA and the Government of Uganda were ever actually about achieving a peace agreement. The notion that the Juba talks were about peace is as much an assumption as a reality.

While some believe that Museveni and his government took the peace negotiations seriously, it is clear that many senior government officials, and even delegates, did not believe that there was any chance of the talks succeeding from the get-go. Many in the Ugandan Government favored a military solution, a position that has long been in tension with northern civil society groups. In a telling account, Jan Egeland, the former United Nations Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief International recalls that, following a meeting he had with Kony and Otti in Garamba, Democratic Republic of Congo, in 2006, he communicated the importance of the peace talks to President Museveni, who responded: "No, those talks were not to our benefit. Let me be categorical – there will only be a military solution to this problem."

According to Felix Kulayigye, a spokesperson for the Ugandan military (Ugandan People's Defence Force or UPDF), because of their faith in a military rather than negotiated solution, when negotiations at Juba began, Uganda's "military and politicians disagreed but obeyed." To the military, the LRA were a defeated force and it "made no sense to the military to negotiate with them but it was [accepted because of] political expediency [and external] pressure." The negotiations were framed as a "gift" to the LRA, an opportunity for

a defeated force to have a "soft-landing".

It appears that the Government accepted negotiations at least in part to appease international and domestic pressure. Yet the UPDF's military operations during the peace process continued and even as the Juba talks were underway, the government began to prepare for another military engagement, Operation Lighting Thunder (2008). Some believe that the seemingly unending barrage of military operations served the interests of certain government officials. Komakech, for example, describes the existence of "conflict entrepreneurs" who benefited from the ongoing war: "We had individuals within the national army whose interest was business and therefore to sort out Joseph Kony would also mean the end of business." Further, former LRA delegate, Ayena Crispus Odongo believes that the "[g]overnment wanted to get as much from [the negotiations] as could justify the [military] action it was taking against the LRA." Importantly, the government enjoyed a degree of legitimacy as America's partner in the war on terror and before, after and subsequent to the Juba peace talks, the US maintained support for a military solution, both politically and directly in the form of military aid.

Many also question whether the LRA itself was committed to the negotiations. During the talks, the LRA continued to kill and abduct civilians. Further,

Kony ordered the execution of Otti, his second-in-command, whom many felt had been the most serious about negotiating a peaceful settlement to the conflict. Justice and Reconciliation Project's Lino Ogora argues that Kony "was never interested in a peaceful settlement. And that is why he had to execute his Deputy, Vincent Otti."

Former rebel commanders and some observers believe that Kony would have come to Juba to sign the peace agreement had the warrant against him only been dropped. Kony was ready to "walk out of the bush" if only the ICC had revoked its indictment against him. Others disagree. John Lacambel, radio host at Gulu-based Mega FM and someone who was in touch with the LRA high command during the talks, for example, maintains that Kony would never have come out, regardless of the ICC warrants, because he feared and mistrusted the northern Ugandan community. Michael Otim, a trusted voice on justice and peace issues in northern Uganda who met Kony seven times, also doubts whether Kony would have signed the peace agreement and returned to Uganda, even if the warrant against him was lifted: "I highly doubt Kony would come back because, one, he is aware of the atrocities he has committed in Uganda. He even has a sense he cannot be forgiven." He adds that there was too much uncertainty facing Kony's fate for him to

come 'out of the bush' and sign the peace agreement.

It has often been suggested that the rebels, weakened by military strikes and defections, sought the space and cease-fire afforded to them from the talks in order to regroup and re-arm. The District Chairman of LC.V in northern Uganda, Martin Mapenduzi, for example, believes that, in the context of neither side being fully committed to the Juba negotiations, Kony used the opportunity to re-arm and re-mobilize. The ICC, in this context, was the perfect scapegoat.

There is ample evidence to suggest that the ICC and the Juba negotiations were instrumentalized by the LRA and the Ugandan Government for their own political gains. The government's global standing clearly benefited by siding with international justice and it could re-entrench the popular narrative of being a legitimate, responsible and human rights abiding government fighting a band of crazed criminals and terrorists. The LRA may have benefited from using the ICC to prolong negotiations and thus increase the space and time to re-arm and re-mobilize. If this holds true and neither the government nor the LRA were committed to a negotiated peace, then the talks may have been destined to be, in the words of Justice Owiny Dollo, a "still birth" and the "peace versus justice" dilemma in northern Uganda truly represents a false debate. If peace isn't on the table, justice can't

be said to help or hinder it.

The Peace in northern Uganda

As a process where the ultimate goal was to have a comprehensive peace agreement in place, the Juba peace negotiations ultimately failed. Nevertheless, while the Juba peace negotiations may not have been about establishing peace, to a remarkable extent, they have resulted in stability in northern Uganda or what many Ugandans call "the silence of the guns". For this reason many believe the peace talks were actually "successful". One can travel freely, at any time of night in northern Uganda without fear. Towns are bustling with development projects. The LRA is no longer a primary concern and there have been no reported attacks by the LRA in the north since 2006 – the year the peace talks began. Today, nodding disease, land grabs and education standards are the most pressing challenges for the people of northern Uganda.

Juba has a lesson for those interested in conflict resolution in central Africa and beyond. The Juba peace process demonstrates that peace negotiations don't always need to be a 'success' in order to successfully contribute to establishing peace. The effort, work and commitment of negotiating, as well as confronting

and demystifying different actors and narratives, can help create peace, even without a final peace agreement. Yet, in the context of LRA-affected areas, military solutions remain in favor, as the latest plans to have a 5,000 African Union force to hunt Kony in 2012 makes clear. The troubling reality remains that military operations have consistently resulted in vicious retaliations by the LRA against civilian populations. Surely, then, peaceful negotiations remains something worth pursuing in LRA-affected areas – but this time, with all of the regional players involved in the conflict at the table.

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Can a Military Intervention Stop the Lord's Resistance Army?

Patrick Wegner

This essay will give an overview of the military developments during the LRA conflict since 1986. It covers the different offensives of the Ugandan army in Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan as well as more recent operations with US support in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic. In a nutshell, all of these military efforts have mainly resulted in the deaths of more and more innocent civilians in northern Uganda, DRC, the Central African Republic and South Sudan. Advocating a military solution to the LRA conflict is therefore extremely unpopular among many northern Ugandans. It reminds them of decades of suffering during which one military attempt after the other failed to end the conflict.

When the current President of Uganda, Yoweri Mu-

seveni, took power with his National Resistance Movement in 1986, many people in northern Uganda were afraid. Museveni had ousted Milton Obote in order to become President of Uganda. Since Obote was a Lango from northern Uganda and had based his power on favoring people from the tribes in his home region, Museveni saw the tribes of northern Uganda as supporters of Obote. When Museveni's army moved north, it committed abuses, killed civilians, and stole large parts of the cattle herds of the northern Ugandan Acholi people. The Acholi are a tribe living in Northern Uganda, parts of South Sudan and Eastern Kenya who mainly lived off of cattle herding at that time.

In reaction, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) took up arms against Museveni's army. The LRA initially enjoyed some support among the northern population. But the leader of the LRA, Joseph Kony, soon realized that most Acholi did not support a war against the Ugandan Government. The LRA therefore started to abduct children and adolescents in order to recruit more fighters for his cause. The LRA also committed atrocities against civilians in retaliation for "betraying" them, such as maiming and killing civilians with machetes and cutting off their lips and ears. In the first years of the conflict, the Government of Uganda tried to defeat the LRA through a purely

military approach. In 1991 the government started its first offensive against the rebels, known as 'Operation North' or 'Operation Simsim' (Sesame). During the operation Northern Uganda was cut off from the rest of the country. Normal communication or travels to the north were not possible. Unfortunately, the military operation failed to stop the LRA. The rebels soon started to receive military and financial support from Uganda's northern neighbor, the Government of Sudan. The LRA also crossed the border from Uganda to Sudan to avoid the attacks of the Ugandan army.

In its military attempts to defeat the LRA the government was also accused of committing crimes. People in northern Uganda, as well as human rights organizations, accuse the government of rapes, beatings and extrajudicial killings during the various operations. The government also forced the civilian population into so-called 'protected camps' starting in 1996 because it still mistrusted the Acholi people in northern Uganda and suspected that they were supporting the LRA. Villagers who refused to move to the camps within the deadline were abused by soldiers, and some areas were shelled by the Ugandan army to drive the civilians out. In these camps the population was at the mercy of the LRA, as the Ugandan army utterly failed to protect them from rebel attacks. Due to the crowded living conditions, civilians started dying

from illnesses like Cholera and Ebola. At the same time Ugandan soldiers mistreated and raped civilians in the camps. People trying to move out of the camps in search of food risked being shot by the army as 'LRA collaborators'. At the height of the conflict, as many as 1,000 people died per week in these camps. It is important to keep in mind that forcing civilians into camps was a key part of the government strategy to defeat the LRA.

In 2002, Uganda received permission from the Government of Sudan to pursue the LRA to its bases in southern Sudan, which was not an independent state at that point in time. The attack, called 'Operation Iron Fist', destroyed many LRA bases in southern Sudan. The rebels reacted by outflanking the Ugandan army and returning to northern Uganda, attacking areas that had so far been untouched by the war. The LRA abducted more and more people to compensate for the losses they suffered from Operation Iron Fist. At the end of the operation the whole of northern Uganda was a warzone and 90 per-cent of the population lived in the 'protected camps' under grievous conditions.

In March 2004, the Ugandan Army started the next attempt to defeat the LRA with a new offensive called 'Iron Fist II'. The operation put the LRA under heavy pressure and many rebel fighters and officers were

captured or gave up and accepted a government amnesty in force since 2000. Yet, the LRA managed to adapt quickly to the new situation. While the government announced daily in the media that the LRA was as good as defeated, the rebels moved through northern Uganda and invaded eastern Uganda that had been peaceful until this moment. Large parts of eastern and northern Uganda were now a theater of war, and civilians were the primary victims in this conflict.

After years of military pressure and mounting international isolation, the LRA called for peace talks in late spring 2006. This was the third attempt to negotiate with the LRA after previous attempts had failed in 1994 and 2004/5. During the peace talks the last fighters of the LRA left northern Uganda and agreed to assemble at two points in southern Sudan. The LRA later moved into the Garamba National Park in the northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Negotiations between the LRA and the government led to peace in Northern Uganda, but the fighting soon reignited in the DRC, southern Sudan and the Central African Republic.

When Joseph Kony repeatedly refused to sign the peace agreement that had been negotiated by his delegation and the Government of Uganda, the Ugandan army decided to attack again. The United States had indirectly supported the government in its war against

the rebels via significant military aid, but had not been directly involved in the army's operations. After the peace talks broke down, however, the US became more actively involved, providing intelligence as well as military advisors. In December 2008 the Ugandan army started a combined air and ground offensive against the LRA base in Garamba called 'Operation Lightning Thunder'.

Operation Lightning Thunder was not a success. Due to bad weather, fighter jets could not be deployed as planned. The ground forces supposed to encircle the LRA arrived too late, so the LRA dodged the Ugandan forces. Kony and his men then committed massacres among the civilian population to retaliate against the military attack. They murdered 865 people in late 2008, early 2009. While the military operation against the LRA was still ongoing, the LRA killed another 321 civilians in DRC around Christmas 2009. Today, the LRA has scattered into small groups of 5-10 fighters to avoid detection by the Ugandan army that is hunting them. The rebels are today operating in north-eastern DRC, in the southeast of the Central African Republic, and in south-western parts of South Sudan. There have been reports that parts of the LRA have moved as far as Darfur in western Sudan or Chad. Even though the armies of Uganda, DRC, the Central African Republic and South Sudan are

cooperating to catch the LRA, the top commanders of the rebels have been able to avoid being captured. The Ugandan army is by far the most capable army in the region, but it is thinly stretched across the huge area. Additionally, the army has withdrawn more than half of its soldiers to send them to Somalia and is no longer allowed to operate in the DRC by the government there.

In May 2010, the United States intensified its involvement in the LRA conflict when President Barack Obama signed into law the 'Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act'. In this Act, President Obama decided to deploy 100 combat-armed military advisors to the areas affected by the LRA in mid-October 2011. It is often overlooked that many of these military advisors were already stationed in the area before the deployment and that the troops are advising the armies in the region but not taking part in combat operations. One of the reasons for this deployment was the consistent civil society pressure in the US, directed by organizations like Invisible Children. An important motivation for the deployment was the strategic importance of Uganda to the United States as oil had been recently discovered in the country and the Ugandan army provided many soldiers for a strategically important Peacekeeping Mission in Somalia.

The US-guided efforts to stop the LRA are the most recent attempt in a string of offensives designed to defeat the rebellion militarily. The approach has been heavily criticized by scholars, and by the war-affected communities of northern Uganda. Yet, the LRA continues to attack innocent civilians in the DRC, the Central African Republic and South Sudan. At the same time, credible negotiations with Joseph Kony seem unrealistic at the moment. Thus, a military intervention to protect these civilians might help, but it is very hard to tell whether the approach advocated by Invisible Children can be successful. Hunting the LRA in such a large area is very difficult. The armies involved lack helicopters to pursue the rebels quickly once they have been spotted. But even if helicopters were available, they cannot reach all the places in the LRA's zone of operation, due to the lack of sufficient bases for refueling in the area, good roads, and other infrastructure. All the while, LRA fighters have years of experience in jungle combat and know the terrain very well. The chances of success are therefore mixed at best.

At the same time, the approach advocated by International Children risks the lives of many civilians, like other military interventions have in the past. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the area in which the remaining LRA fighters operate is a huge jungle,

roughly half the size of France. It is very difficult to find the small LRA groups in such a huge area, let alone to locate Kony and its other leaders. It is therefore very difficult 'to remove Joseph Kony from the battlefield' as the US strategy that is strongly encouraged by Invisible Children in its Kony 2012 campaign suggests. If the armies focus on hunting Joseph Kony in the huge jungle, there is a high risk that the LRA will again be able to dodge their pursuers and kill more innocent civilians. There are signs that this is indeed happening again. In the last third of 2011 the LRA stopped nearly all of its attacks against civilians. This was probably a reaction to the US intervention and an effort to avoid too much attention from the US troops. But in early 2012 the LRA has again started attacking and abducting civilians. The LRA is focusing their attacks on the DRC, an area to which the Ugandan army has no access. The US strategy aims at empowering regional armies to catch Joseph Kony, but so far the Ugandan army is the only one that has the necessary capabilities to do so. The LRA is thus dodging its most dangerous enemy and concentrating on civilians in badly protected areas.

Secondly, attacks carried out against the LRA are most likely to kill recently abducted civilians – the very child soldiers that Invisible Children seeks to save. The LRA veterans have years of experience in jungle

combat. If a LRA group is ambushed by an army unit or an attack helicopter, the LRA fighters will disperse quickly into the dense jungle and regroup at another position later. However, recently-abducted civilians are unlikely to escape in the event of an ambush and are often accidentally killed by soldiers or attack helicopters. The abducted civilians and children who move with them are often forced to carry looted goods. On many occasions the LRA uses ropes to tie the civilians together in a long line to prevent escapes. Therefore, military action against the LRA may end up endangering the victims who are most in need of protection.

These are two reasons why the current US initiative to catch Joseph Kony is likely to lead to more civilian casualties while the prospects of catching Kony remain uncertain at best. We have to understand that the local population will suffer the consequences if a military intervention fails, while the advocates of the intervention will at most witness them on the news. In order to avoid negative consequences for the civilians, a military approach must be combined with efforts to develop the region and improve the local armies and police forces in charge of protecting them.

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tive Public Law and International Law. He is working on the impact of International Criminal Court investigations on ongoing intrastate conflicts. He blogs at Justice in Conflict.

Ethical or Exploitative?: Stories, Advocacy and Suffering

Jina Moore

If I had made KONY2012, I would have done much differently than Invisible Children did. I'm a journalist, so my video would have been journalism. They are activists, so their video is necessarily advocacy. These are not the same thing.

I point this out because here, I want to meet KONY2012 on its own terms. This isn't a piece about how much better a piece of journalism would have been, or why (or if) journalists are better at telling true stories than advocates. I recognize that Invisible Children was doing something different than I would do.

More important, I think, is whether we should trust Invisible Children – not as NGO officers or foreign policy experts or savvy advocates, but as storytellers. I focus on trust for two reasons. First, it is the currency

of non-fiction storytelling. As a reader or a viewer of something so labeled, you have to trust that the storyteller is not lying to you.

Trust is integral to trauma stories. When the stories are about real human suffering, there is an added layer of responsibility: to make sure as a storyteller that you are not injuring the survivors in the story, and to make that clear to your audience.

To experience violence is to be betrayed – by the perpetrator, or by bystanders who did not intervene, or by a system that allows the violence to be perpetrated (or to go unpunished), or by all of these. To experience violence is also to be powerless. A primary obligation of a storyteller trying to convey others' suffering is to not reinforce that betrayal or that powerlessness. And that's true no matter how noble your intentions for your story may be.

There's one other aspect of violence that has to be considered in these kinds of stories. Among the risks of interviewing trauma survivors is re-retraumatization. Dr. Frank Ochberg, a renowned psychologist and the founder of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, describes this injury simply. "Re-traumatization is the opening of old emotional wounds and the anxious anticipation of such re-wounding," he writes. "In treating traumatic stress, [specialists] try to avoid

opening a wound that is still too painful to be explored. Clumsy interviewing, bad timing, getting to a memory before rapport is developed - is bad therapy because it reinjures and destroys trust."

It is, of course, also bad storytelling – for the same reasons.

Storytellers aren't experts in trauma psychology, and I don't think they have to be. I do believe, however, that interviewing trauma survivors requires extra preparation. When it comes to telling stories of trauma, empathy alone is not enough to make our practice ethical.

Trauma stories need trust. The subjects must trust the storyteller – and so must the audience of the story.

Every story has clues about trust. In this essay, I'll decode some of them. At the end, I'll share five key questions I think help us distinguish ethical storytelling from exploitation.

It's Not Just What You Say. It's How You Say It.

When we talk, we are constantly, and unconsciously, sharing unspoken information. Let's say we're speaking English. From our accents, people can guess which

part of the world, or which part of the U.S., or even of a given state, we're from. From our word choice, people can guess how educated we are. From our tone of voice, people can guess if we're sad about something, even if we deny it, and from our gestures and facial expressions, people can guess if we're, say, lying about something.

We use this non-verbal information every day. These clues help us decide whom and what to trust, whom to spend time with, whom to listen to closely when they speak and whom to ignore. We give away information about ourselves not just in what we say, but in how we say it. (In fact, we give off so much information in this "how" that there are whole professions devoted to decoding non-verbal communication.)

The same is true of stories. How storytellers choose to say something betrays a lot about who they are as storytellers. Every moment of every story – even a non-fiction story – is a choice, and those choices tell us something about both the story and the storyteller. As the storyteller makes her choices, she is telling us not only about her subject, but also about herself and her approach. These choices help us decide if we can trust the storyteller.

When I watch Kony2012, I look at these choices. They tell me not to trust Invisible Children. Here's why:

What We See

After a bit of theorizing about the power of the Internet, Russell's video begins with his wife giving birth. He shows us himself holding his newborn son, Gavin, and a series of pictures of Gavin doing normal kid things. Eventually, Gavin becomes a motif, and a substitute for the audience.

These things tell me that Russell is at the center of this story. Russell-as-hero reappears often in the film: as an avowed protector of a young child soldier ("We're going to stop them"); as the stubborn citizen who refuses to let the government discourage him ("Everyone in Washington…said…no way"); as the crusader who gets laws passed ("After eight years of work, the government finally heard us and in October of 2011, 100 American advisors were sent…to assist the Ugandan army in arresting Kony….")

There's nothing necessarily wrong with Russell as the hero of the video. In fact, the viral success of KONY2012 suggests that the white-man-as-hero tactic is pretty effective for attracting viewers. But I subscribe to a school of thought that believes white savior narratives often displace the agency of Africans in their own affairs. I agree with those who argue that the prevalence of white heroes in stories about Africa is a kind of neo-colonialism.

But I also think it's lazy storytelling. It's lazy storytelling when media is so powerful, and when clichés about Africans as powerless victims are so prevalent. Media has the potential to break down barriers. By putting a white guy at the center of a story about Africa, and leaving out any Africans, KONY2012 reinforced those barriers. That's a disappointing choice, and it undermines my trust in Invisible Children as a group of people that claims to speak for, let alone listen to, Africans.

Who We Hear

Another clue is who talks in the film. Many critics have pointed out that the only Africans to speak in the original KONY2012 video are the Ugandan country director of Invisible Children and Jacob, the crying ex-child soldier. The absence of Ugandans who aren't paid by or allied to Invisible Children raises questions. How do the rest of Ugandans feel? Do they accept Invisible Children as spokespeople for the conflict? What do they think about this – about their experience with the LRA, and about what it would take to stop Kony?

Even the way Russell uses American sources is problematic. After his first trip to Uganda, Russell says he became determined to stop the LRA. He narrates,

"Everyone we talked to in Washington said there is no way the US would ever get involved…" Then he gives us a clip of John Prendergast, the co-founder of ENOUGH, another advocacy organization that has worked on LRA issues and pushed, with Invisible Children, for a specific set of policies. Prendergast insists that "no administration" will tackle the issue meaningfully. Then Russell narrates again, "Since the government said it was impossible, we didn't know what else to do…"

But the government didn't say it was impossible. Prendergast opined in that direction, but Prendergast doesn't work for the government. Russell's idea may be correct – maybe someone in the government did tell him, "No way we're taking up the LRA" – but he doesn't show us that person. He gives us someone who already agrees with his views and passes that person's opinion off as a proxy for the government. This is dishonest, and it is manipulative.

What We *Don't* See, or Hear, or Know

There's a lot that KONY2012 doesn't tell us, and that's just as important. Critics have pointed out that the original video neglected nuance and context. We

never see Gulu today, for example, and it's hardly the zone of kidnapping chaos it is portrayed to be.

But there are also fundamental problems with the storytelling building blocks that are there. The footage in KONY2012 isn't dated. When Jacob, an escaped child soldier and a key character in the KONY2012 narrative, sobs on camera, we don't know if that happened nine days ago or nine years ago.

That matters. It matters as a point of fact: As critics have pointed out, the story of the LRA and its abuse of children has changed over time. Offering viewers the illusion that Jacob's story is also the story of the present skews the facts. It also matters because dateless footage of a sobbing African child reinforces media stereotypes about Africa as a place of unending violence, static and senseless.

But it matters most especially because Jacob is not a timeless symbol of a terrible warlord. Jacob is a person – in this clip a young boy with recent trauma.

From my perspective as a human rights journalist, Russell's interview with Jacob is the most troubling part of the film. It crescendos into Jacob's breakdown, a moment that bothered some viewers. The interview is full of troubling moments: Should Russell have stopped interviewing Jacob when his agitation was clear? Should Russell have interviewed Jacob, a minor

newly (we assume) escaped from the trauma of rebel conscription, on camera at all?

Reasonable, compassionate people will disagree about the answers to these questions. I don't believe there's no one universal normative answer. I do believe that the material itself – what it contains, and how it is used – helps us understand if the teller is trustworthy.

Here, too, I find myself lacking trust in Invisible Children. I'm troubled not only by the decision to put Jacob on camera and the lack of information about the time, context and consent of the interview. I'm also troubled by Russell's unwillingness to let Jacob speak for himself.

Here's what happens in the clip:

> JACOB: It is better when you kill us and if possible you can kill us. For >us, we don't want now to stay. RUSSELL (INTERVIEWING HIM): You don't want to stay on this earth? JACOB: We are only two, no one is taking care of us. We are not going to >school so— RUSSELL: You would rather die than stay on this earth? JACOB: How— RUSSELL: Even now? JACOB: Even now. How are we going to stay in our future.

What Not to Do in Trauma Stories

Three times, Russell interrupts Jacob. The tone of his interruptions is shock and dismay – emotions more about how Russell feels listening to Jacob than about what Jacob is feeling or trying to express. Russell is preoccupied with what he reflects back as Jacob's death-wish. Jacob, on the other hand, is preoccupied with what his life is lacking. He can't go to school; he has no one to take care of him; and in the absence of these two most basic features of a child's life, he can't imagine a future.

What's remarkable about Jacob here is his ability, at so young an age and with such recent trauma, to articulate this so well. What's remarkable about Russell here is his inability to listen.

Eventually, the interview ends with Jacob's tears. The camera fades out on Jacob as Russell is assuring him, "It's okay, Jacob, it's okay."

But for Jacob, it's obviously not okay. And of course it's not. He's been kidnapped. He's likely been forced to kill people. His brother is dead. He has no caregivers. It is absolutely anything but okay.

This isn't a minor point. There's a basic tenet of responsible trauma journalism that applies no matter what the label of the true story: Don't be disingen-

uous. It's a hard thing to practice, because many of us are conditioned to be just that when faced with emotional pain. We tell people, "I feel your pain," or "It's going to be okay," or "It will get better." None of these platitudes is true; none of us enough authority to know this. That might be why these clichés feel so empty when we are on the receiving end of them. Saying these things is not about helping people in pain; it's more often about making ourselves more comfortable around someone in pain.

Russell continues narrating: "Everything in my heart told me to do something." The camera fades in on a child finished with his cry, cheeks still wet, looking sad. Russell narrates, "So I made him a promise." On camera – years ago, we assume – Russell tells a young, teary Jacob, "We are going to do everything we can to stop them. Do you hear my words? Do you know what I mean?" Jacob says, "Yes, yes." Russell tells him, "We are. We are going to stop them." He repeats this as the scene fades out again. Over the blackout, Russell narrates, "I made that promise to Jacob not knowing what it would mean, but now I do."

Think about this encounter in another way. What might Russell have looked like to Jacob? A dude with enough power and money to waltz around with video cameras, and to leave, cameras in tow, whenever he wants. A white guy who asks questions and then

interrupts Jacob's answers. An outsider whose pity so overwhelms him that he makes fantastical promises. And how many other, less fantastical promises has Jacob seen crumble? Childhood is full of simple, implicit promises – that someone will feed us and protect us; that we are safe in our own beds; that we will live long lives with our siblings. By the time Jacob met Russell, none of these was true anymore.

So it's hard for me to think about Russell's promise as anything but irresponsible. Russell admits that he had no idea what his promise meant – which also means he had no way of knowing whether he could fulfill it. This is more than just bad manners. Making outlandish promises to survivors of violence can betray trust and retraumatize them.

In those few minutes, Russell violates key principles of sensitive interviewing: He interrupts. He indulges cliché. He makes promises. For me, that destroys his credibility.

Four Questions for Trustworthy Trauma Stories

I've outlined what I think are the most troubling aspects of KONY2012. But the project of distinguishing sensitive, compassionate storytelling is more

important than this one campaign. So here are five questions to ask yourself when you're reading or watching stories about suffering.

1. Does the storyteller have the consent of the people in the story? How do I know? I think it's important for storytellers to find a way to tell the audience what kind of permission they have secured to wade into other people's pain, how they got that permission, and from whom. That's especially true when the trauma survivors are children. No one except the survivor has the authority to give permission to tell that survivor's story.

2. Are the survivors in the story defined only by their experience of violence? One good method for interviewing survivors of violence is to talk about things other than the violence they have experienced. It helps to reinforce the idea that the interviewee is a whole human being, not just a person reduced to one experience of powerlessness. I think it's equally important for stories about survivors to convey this idea and to present survivors as people defined by more than the violence they have survived.

3. Does the story, or details in the story, feel voyeuristic? In "The Tin Drum," a novel about

post-war Germany by Nobel Prize winner Guenther Grass, villagers go to a subterranean night club called "The Onion Cellar," where they sit and chop onions into tiny pieces. The smaller the pieces, the more the juices, and the harder the onions make them cry. By the end of the night, bonded by the relief from having had a good cry, they're sharing all kinds of secrets. The onions conjure an intimacy and a sadness they crave.

Trauma stories shouldn't be onion cellars. Different audiences will feel differently about whether a detail is necessary or voyeuristic. My standard is that truth is necessary – and some truths are painful to encounter – but suffering shouldn't have an agenda, even an emotional one. If the story the story is designed to manipulate the audience toward a given end, it's suspect.

This is a very difficult standard for advocacy stories. By its very nature, advocacy is meant to manipulate. Advocates are trying to get policymakers to enact a specific agenda; often, as in KONY2012, advocates are trying to create popular support to pressure policymakers to enact a specific agenda. I'm not saying there shouldn't be advocacy, or that advocates

shouldn't tell true stories.

I am saying that the bar for trustworthy storytelling by advocates is very high. Some of the most egregious violations of trauma survivors' dignity I've seen have been by people who are convinced their cause is noble. In trauma storytelling, the end never justifies the means.

4. Does the storyteller acknowledge his limitations? It can be tempting to oversell a story's power to change lives. But storytellers don't really have control over anything except the story they tell. Even advocates can only try to make a change; they can't guarantee they will succeed. Promising survivors of violence more than we can guarantee is dishonest. It can also retraumatize survivors of violence, who have already been betrayed.

So why tell trauma stories at all?

None of these ideas is meant to suggest we shouldn't tell trauma stories. In fact, I believe we must. We must tell them because the victims need justice. We must tell them because the victims need to have their voices heard. We must tell them because silence can be a kind of violence, too. We must tell them because they happen – and because for those of us who can choose

whether to watch or not, to read or not, to listen or not, even to tell or not – it would be so very easy to pretend these stories don't happen.

I think Invisible Children believes this, too. I think they also believe stories should inspire us to action. They aren't wrong. But having the will to tell those stories, and the determination to act, doesn't absolve us of the responsibility to be cautious, sensitive and compassionate in how we tell them.

For more information on sensitive trauma storytelling, please see "Covering Trauma: A Training Guide" (http://www.radiopeaceafrica.org/assets/texts/pdf/2011-Covering_Trauma_Color_EN.pdf) and visit the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (www.dartcenter.org).

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The Power of Images: Who Gets Made Visible?

Glenna Gordon

It's not cheap to get to the Sudan-Congo border, especially for three kids coming all the way from San Diego.

In April 2008, many people gathered there for historic peace talks with the Lord's Resistance Army: government officials from Uganda and Sudan, traditional Acholi leaders, diplomats, United Nations officials, human rights researchers, and journalists. Me, with my cameras. And the Invisible Children guys. They wore skinny ties and trucker hats, Converse and "African" bracelets. They seemed out of place in this crowd, but remained strangely self-assured despite the many people who doubted their presence.

I asked them why they had come. Many media outlets were there filming and they would easily be able to license footage as needed. With the kind of seriousness typical of all of their endeavors, they

replied, "We have some questions for Joseph Kony."

They weren't the only ones. But, at the time, no one had questions for them.

Bobby Bailey, Laren Poole, and Jason Russell pose at the Juba Peace Talks

They are young. They are handsome. They are strong. And, they are in charge.

Invisible Children co-founder Laren Poole holds an RPG, and his colleagues Jason Russell and Bobby Bailey grip AK-47s. It's them versus the unknown challenges that lie just beyond the image's frame. They

may have backup from the Sudanese rebels whose guns they have borrowed to strike this pose, but the only real backup they need is their own hardened resolve. They look out and to the left with seriousness, concern, and self-awareness so complete that it never falters into the realm of self-consciousness or the kind of anxiety that might take them out of the moment. They are completely present.

Behind them, the rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Army stand compliantly in the background, waiting for the return of their weapons.

At the time I shot this image, I was a freelance photo stringer for the Associated Press. I'd been sent to Sudan to cover the peace talks with the Lord's Resistance Army that were taking place in Juba. This was an historic moment, and the many parties present were truly hopeful that Joseph Kony would emerge from the bush and sign a peace treaty. He didn't.

We waited, for several days, thinking that perhaps Kony would change his mind and still might sign. There wasn't much to do – we played cards, smoked too many cigarettes, ate potato chips, and joked about how embarrassing it was for Riek Machar to see us in our pajamas in the morning, brushing our teeth at the edge of the encampment.

One afternoon Bobby, Jason, and Laren decided to

have some fun. They went out of the boundaries of the camp and started chatting with the SPLA. They had polaroid cameras and video cameras. They started by taking photos of the SPLA, and then with the SPLA, and then finally, posing holding the SPLA's guns. Jolly Okot, the Uganda Country Direct for Invisible Children, filmed the whole thing.

And I stood back a few feet, uncomfortably taking photographs of their hijinks. I took the photographs because I saw a situation I thought worthy of photographing. I was predisposed to doubt Invisible Children – they don't have a good reputation in Uganda, where I lived at the time – and these antics seemed like confirmation of my worst fears about their motivations.

I stood back, and to the left – not wanting to interrupt their activities, nor wanting to endorse them through participating. I was documenting, I told myself, showcasing their bad behavior. It was the kind of thing you wouldn't believe unless you were there. Or unless there were photos.

After the peace talks, I returned to Kampala and worked with a colleague to report and pitch a story

about Invisible Children's questionable finances, methods, and distorted claims. But, editors simply weren't interested in a story about some hipster activists in East Africa. I let friends publish it on their blog, and then filed it away on an old hard drive and hadn't given it much thought in the past several years.

Now, the viral success of Kony 2012 has brought renewed scrutiny to Invisible Children. Suddenly, this photograph has become an emblem of that debate. For those who feel uncomfortable with Invisible Children's slick message and questionable overtones, it has become a visual representation of why the organization should not be taken at face value. In the photo, they're valorizing warfare – doing in jest the very thing people accuse them of in seriousness.

The image repeats tropes used for centuries that justify the West's relationship with Africa – Westerners in the foreground with purpose, agency and authority; and African in the background, anonymous persons playing supporting roles. This isn't just the narrative of my photo, or of the Invisible Children empire, but of hundreds of years of history.

In a way, the photo is like a Rorschach test: if you believe in Invisible Children's mission and means, then the photo shows them doing the hard work of saving Africans; if you don't, they are smirking white kids

wielding power, prioritizing looking cool and having an adventure over understanding the consequences of their actions and their role in an ongoing narrative and a regional conflict.

The video's stark visual contrast between Jason Russell's cute, young blond son and the photo of the dark, crazy Joseph Kony repeats visual tropes used to justify repression, forced conversion, labor exploitation, and more, for the past several centuries.

Ever since Europe's first encounters with Africa, the continent and people have been homogenized and cast as a place filled with dark, unknowable tribes whose actions and choices defy logic. Only through Europe's well meaning colonizing and evangelizing do Africans have a chance at salvation.

Invisible Children's approach may be novel in its use of social media, but the message is not.

This narrative is well known, and is often laden with good intentions. (Proponents of Invisible Children are quick to mention "good intentions" as soon as any criticism is of the film or group is mentioned.)

Many people are arguing over whether the attention Invisible Children has brought to this conflict

is ultimately useful or harmful in terms of policy, development and more. Aside from the repercussions this will have in the immediate and long term future for Uganda and elsewhere, there is one thing that Invisible Children, this photo, and #Kony2012 all clearly do: they all perpetuate a narrative that's been in place since Europe first encountered Africa – a narrative that has been used to justify a means of engagement that does not prioritize the needs of Africans.

Rhetoric about Africa has changed and become more politically correct over time. We no longer see slavery as a chance to save the souls of heathen Africans; colonial administrators are no longer exhorted to rule over uneducated and ungoverned locals. But the narrative remains the same. Contemporary development rhetoric and "NGO speak" often simply replace terms that are no longer politically correct with new ones that are more palatable: "capacity building," "stakeholders," "gender based advocacy," "beneficiaries."

Economist William Easterly explains[3] the history of one buzz word:

> "Participation" as a buzzword goes all the way back into colonial times. In 1929,

[3]http://aidwatchers.com/2009/02/participation-of-the-poor-in-mainstreaming-gender-empowerment-for-civil-society-stakeholders-to-promote-country-ownership-of-good-governance-for-community-driven-sustainable-development/

a British MP told the Parliament that they had a "moral responsibility" to give colonial subjects "some participation in the shaping of their own destinies." Right after World War II, the Labour government would "inspire these {colonial subject} men with the hope that, as never before …. London could assist them in their work of extending popular participation in public affairs." The irony that these promises were made by an authoritarian empire run from London apparently escaped notice. The US Foreign Assistance Act of 1966 similarly promised to emphasize "maximum participation…on the part of the people of the developing countries" — all while the US was propping up dictatorial Cold War allies who were not too interested in giving power to anyone besides themselves.

Today of course, "participation" (and synonyms like "community-driven," "empowering stakeholders", "local ownership" etc. etc.) is everywhere in aid documents. Yet the aid powers giving away their power is not exactly going to happen anytime soon. Cornwall cites the 1998 World

> Bank "Participation" manual, which lists "the poor and disadvantaged" as only one of many stakeholder groups (another is "World Bank management, staff, and shareholders.") I wonder which stakeholder is going to win the next battle.

In one scene in the film, Jason Russell's son sits in front of the camera with two 8x10 photos on the table: the infamous Joseph Kony, and Jacab, the star of the first Invisible Children film from 2004.

"What do you think we should do about him?" Russell's voice asks his young son from somewhere just beyond the camera's reach. "We should stop him," his son replies.

No one can disagree with that. But, we can certainly disagree on how we go about it.

Economists, policy makers and governing bodies may think that all of their decisions are rational and data based, but every decision, every piece of data that is collected, exists within the framework of this narrative. Stories matter. Clearly, when Invisible Children offered a palatable and emotionally impactful story, it mattered to the 130 million people who watched the film.

The film leaves a visual blank on the vast canvas of East and Central Africa into which American teenagers can project their fears of the other and simplified stereotypes. Rather than showing viewers the individuality and actuality of people and places in Uganda and other LRA affected areas, Invisible Children shows their Facebook page and clips of other Americans excitedly charging forward with a great soundtrack.

Invisible Children has commodified the narrative of White Man's Burden, and Jason Russell is armed and leading the way.

The narrative presented by Invisible Children continues this trajectory of meaning: Invisible Children offers American youth the chance to save Africans. We can change things, the video promises. We can fix Africa's problems. In fact, we not only can, we must, because Ugandans are faceless, passive victims, just waiting for us to act. The steps to do this are simple, Invisible Children says: sign the petition, buy our action kit, donate money, and share this video online.

"Here's the biggest problem," Russell says to his son. "Nobody knows who he is." "But I know who he is, because I see him in this picture," his son replies with incredulity. "He's not famous. He's invisible. Joseph Kony is invisible."

Invisible Children succeeded in making Joseph Kony famous, but the person even more famous because of this media campaign is Jason Russell.

And this photograph is famous too, but not without complication. Ultimately, this is a photograph about privilege: Invisible Children's young founders are outsiders, playing soldier, involved in a conflict that they can leave whenever they please - in which others are not just playing.

And they know that. In fact, they know that so well that they used that photo as the banner image on their page responding to criticism - trying to re-appropriate it and snuffing out its power by making it their own.

In a direct response to the photo on their site (now removed), Jason Russell explained:

> Let me start by saying that that photo was a bad idea. We were young and we got caught up in the moment. It was never meant to reflect on the organization. The photo of Bobby, Laren and I with the guns was taken in an LRA camp in DRC during the 2008 Juba Peace Talks. We were there to see Joseph Kony come to the table

> to sign the Final Peace Agreement. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) was surrounding our camp for protection since Sudan was mediating the peace talks. We wanted to talk to them and film them and get their perspective. And because Bobby, Laren and I are friends and had been doing this for 5 years, we thought it would be funny to bring back to our friends and family a joke photo. You know, "Haha – they have bazookas in their hands but they're actually fighting for peace." The ironic thing about this photo is that I HATE guns. I always have. Back in 2008 I wanted this war to end, like we all did, peacefully, through peace talks. But Kony was not interested in that; he kept killing. And we still don't want war. We don't want him killed and we don't want bombs dropped. We want him alive and captured and brought to justice

This photo isn't ironic, though. There is none of the self-awareness associated with irony. And for a group supporting a military solution to what many experts deem a political problem, the claim that they HATE guns rings false.

But to all the young Americans and others, many of whom are learning about Uganda for the first time, the film ensures that the narrative is perpetuated, and that the way the West interacts with and conceives of Africa will not change.

Narratives involve a beginning, a middle and an end. Kony2012 starts with Invisible Children and ends with them. It is a film that is about young Americans, not about Ugandans or other Africans.

How can we expect a different future for the voiceless people portrayed in the film when we've already written the ending?

Glenna Gordon is a freelance documentary photographer who splits her time between West Africa and New York. In addition to her own projects, she also covers news and features, does work for NGOs, and trains journalists and photographers in Africa. Her work has been published in Time, Newsweek, The New York Times, and Foreign Policy. Her work from Sierra Leone was accepted into the curated exhibitions at the 2011 LagosPhoto Festival in Nigeria and the PowerHouse gallery in New York. Other projects have been shown in Washington DC at the Corcoran Gallery as part of Fotoweek DC, where she received second place in the photojournalism and social documentary category, and in a group show about cities in Los

Angeles, California, sponsored by the International Photography Awards. Gordon has also been a grant recipient of the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting for a project on justice in post-war Liberia.

Learning From Save Darfur

Rebecca Hamilton

Within just a week of launching, Invisible Children's Kony2012 video had been viewed over 100 million times. If page views were the metric of success, it would have beaten out every human rights campaign in history. But while its social media spread has been unprecedented, the core of its campaign is not. Remember Save Darfur?

I spent five years investigating the impact of Save Darfur, the U.S.-based constituency that came together in response to atrocities in Sudan's western region. I spoke with policymakers in the U.S. and Sudanese governments, the United Nations, the Arab League and African Union, citizen activists who were part of the U.S.-based campaign, local activists in Sudan, as well as both the survivors and perpetrators of the atrocities, all in an effort to get beyond the polarizing narratives that were being put forth by those who thought well-intentioned advocacy could do nothing but good on the one hand, and those who thought advocacy by outsiders could only be detrimental on

the other. As is so often the case, the truth lay somewhere in between.

Save Darfur was the U.S.-based constituency that came together in response to atrocities in Sudan's western region. A few years ahead, and less tech-savvy, Save Darfur was built on the same assumption as Kony2012: That atrocities in Africa continue to happen because the American public does not care.

It is a view championed most notably by author, and now Obama administration official, Samantha Power. In her Pulitzer Prize-winning book, A Problem from Hell, Power argued that a lack of concern on the part of the American public facilitated ongoing atrocities overseas. It was an argument born of a particular moment in time. After the end of the Cold War and before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, U.S. hard and soft power was at its peak. Many believed that America could accomplish anything anywhere, if it only wanted to.

Today it remains true that public awareness can keep an otherwise obscure foreign policy issue on the radar of busy government officials in the U.S., and indeed other democratic states. But if concern by an American audience was the only ingredient needed to stop the world's worst crimes, millions of Darfuris should have been able to return safely to their homes

years ago. The real question is: What happens after awareness has been raised?

It seems like a distant memory now, but back in 2006, the Save Darfur movement, with its signature green wristbands, buzzed through college campuses the way Kony2012 has done this month. The campaign turned tens of thousands out to rally on the National Mall, its posters were plastered throughout the New York subway, and it secured primetime spots on television.

Save Darfur kept a remote region of Sudan on the agenda of U.S. policymakers for over five years. The U.S. Congress appropriated over $1.9 billion for Darfur between 2004 and 2008 (for comparative purposes, the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo received $424.4M over the same period). Between 2005 and 2007, constituent pressure led legislators to make Darfur the third largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid, second only to Iraq and Afghanistan. And that aid unquestionably saved lives.

But Save Darfur also locked thousands of well-meaning Americans into demands that lost touch with changing events on the ground as the conflict festered on. Kony2012 faces the same risk.

To build a mass movement quickly, Kony2012, like Save Darfur before it, relies on an over-simplified, emotion-laden narrative to convince people that by

doing easy tasks – sharing a link on Facebook, buying a bracelet – they can save lives. Central to the formula is that the agency of local activists gets downplayed in order to hype up the necessity of action by outsiders.

As bystander theory has shown, we tend to let someone else do the work unless we believe our actions are absolutely necessary. The none-too-subtle message throughout much of Kony2012 is that the difference between life or death for children preyed upon by the Lord's Resistance Army lies in the hands of you, the viewers at home. Without you, they are hopeless. With you, they can survive. That pitch is effective in moving people to action. But at the very same time, it undercuts the agency of the local activists for whom the children abducted by the LRA have never been "invisible."

Such quick tricks to mass mobilizing, in addition to dancing in the shadow of the White Man's Burden, can come with a delayed price tag. This is especially so if the simplified narrative is used not only to attract new recruits to the cause, but also becomes the basis for formulating policy demands.

Save Darfur got its start by analogizing the attacks on Darfuri civilians to atrocities that the public was already familiar with, especially the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. This enabled thousands of people with

no prior knowledge of Sudan to join the movement. But the Rwanda analogy was also used to formulate solutions for Darfur. Save Darfur demanded actions that commentators thought could have stopped the 1994 genocide, like getting the U.S. to condemn the atrocities and push for the deployment of UN peacekeepers.

Policymakers complained privately that peacekeepers were just a piece of the puzzle, and that the public's obsession with peacekeepers was distracting them from the other policies that Darfur needed. And in a multi-polar world, U.S. condemnation was unlikely to accomplish much. But rather than using the groundswell of political will to engage Khartoum's allies and push for more comprehensive solutions, they mostly followed the populist line.

Peacekeepers were eventually deployed. However, without the additional elements that were necessary for the deployment to succeed - like a genuine peace agreement and unified international backing - the peacekeepers were as ineffective as many policymakers anticipated they would be.

At that point a second-order risk crept in. A mass movement, by definition, relies on volunteers – people who do not get a salary from a human rights organization. The primary incentive volunteers have to

stay involved is their belief that they are making a difference. That is unproblematic if their actions are actually having a positive impact on the ground. But in situations like Darfur where - because of misguided policy demands, or simply because complex problems can take years to resolve – there is little progress for long periods, it can be hard to keep volunteers motivated.

The temptation some advocacy leaders fell into was to develop "quick wins" by getting the movement to push for demands that could be easily met; classic examples included getting the U.S. government to make more statements of condemnation or to appoint a new envoy to the issue – neither of which translated into improvements on the ground for Darfuris.

Even more problematic was when the sending of emails, signing of petitions or buying of bracelets – all symbols of the vibrancy of an advocacy movement – became the metric of success. Once that happened, the connection between advocacy and the reality on the ground became tenuous at best.

A few in Save Darfur managed to avoid this danger. And as they increased their understanding of the historical and regional context in which the Darfur crisis arose, they began to build partnerships with Sudanese activists, and increased the depth of their

policy demands. However, the damage had largely been done, with the bulk of U.S. leverage already spent on a peacekeeping force that failed to meet the expectations of the citizen movement, or of Darfuris.

The lesson for Kony2012 is that when you build a mass movement quickly on the promise that simple actions can solve complex problems, you risk creating a core of volunteers that will get disillusioned and walk away when, inevitably, progress is slower than you led them to believe it would be. This risk can, however, be mitigated by smart leadership that integrates local activists into the core of the movement.

As the jeers and rock-throwing that have greeted screenings of the video in Northern Uganda well convey, many from LRA-affected areas wish the Kony2012 video had never seen the light of day. But there is no rewind button. 100 million people and counting have seen the version of the conflict that Kony2012 chose to portray. So is there a way forward?

One positive development has been Invisible Children's launch of a second video, Beyond Famous, which begins to highlight the work of local activists and goes some way towards recalibrating the expectations of the well-intentioned millions who have plastered their pages with Kony2012. But the group must do more to explain that their efforts are just one

part of what is needed to improve the situation and plug the many existing nuanced reports of the conflict as strategically as they have pushed their videos. They will lose some people in the process, but they will gain a cadre of citizens prepared to stay involved for the long haul.

Others can also to step up. Educators should seize this as a "teachable moment." The millions of students with a newfound passion for stopping Kony can be introduced to the Ugandan government's role in the life of the LRA, and the actions of the regional actors that have used Kony as their proxy over the past two decades. The campaign might also be an opportunity for educators to teach students about the International Criminal Court, which indicted Kony back in 2005, and to show videos that African activists have posted in response to Kony2012 in order to generate discussions about the importance of agency and the risks of purporting to speak on someone else's behalf.

And finally, policymakers must remember that their job is not to score public points by simply repeating the populist Stop Kony line, but to do what is necessary to try and improve conditions in LRA-affected areas. Kony2012 is giving them an unprecedented opportunity to do just that.

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Avoiding "Badvocacy": How to Do No Harm While Doing Good

Laura Seay

It would be almost impossible for anyone with a moral compass not to be moved by the scenes depicted in the Kony 2012 viral video. Regardless of our individual political, religious, and cultural persuasions, we can all agree that the abduction of children to turn them into child soldiers and sex slaves is a horrible crime that must be stopped. No reasonable person would disagree.

So why was there such a backlash against the film? After all, filmmaker and Kony 2012 star Jason Russell and his colleagues at Invisible Children purport to address and end these crimes in the regions in which the Lord's Resistance Army operates. How could anyone be opposed to this idea?

The reasons for negative reactions to the film are

many, and have been addressed by other authors in this book. They range from critiques of an overbearing focus on outsiders (particularly American young adults and teenagers) as the keys to solving the problem to concerns about the accuracy of the film's depiction of the LRA crisis to criticisms of Invisible Children's focus on a military solution rather than peace building efforts. The storm of criticism on these and other issues led to arguments that with the Kony 2012 approach, Invisible Children is practicing "badvocacy," that is, advocacy that inadvertently does more harm than good. Even with the best of intentions and the most uncontroversial of goals, if advocates present a picture of a situation that is inaccurate or propose solutions that are unlikely to work, more suffering can result.

We learned about the effects of "badvocacy" from the mid-2000's movement to help Darfur, in which millions of people worldwide joined in efforts to help end mass atrocities in the western Sudanese region. As with Kony 2012, most outsiders were horrified to learn of the horrific human rights abuses, rapes, and killings perpetrated against innocent civilians, and when they learned about the crisis, they wanted to help stop it. However, because many of those working to raise awareness of the crisis were not experts on Sudan, the policy solutions the movement

pushed for were not well-suited to end the crisis, and caused harm to the very people they were trying to help. Advocacy for a military intervention to stop the crisis gave the government of Sudan an excuse to kick out non-governmental organizations helping civilians affected by the violence in Darfur. Those conflict-affected people then lost access to critical medical care and food assistance. Meanwhile, the focus on a military solution made it more difficult to engage the Sudanese government diplomatically to try to end the crimes being committed in the region.

The lesson of the Darfur movement for activists is clear: advocacy needs to be smart. Much of the negative reaction to Kony 2012 came from experts who are familiar with what happened in Darfur and who want to address the LRA crisis in ways that will not cause more problems than it solves. This does not make critics "haters" or "cynics," but rather people who care about ensuring that our good intentions of wanting to help in a crisis will actually result in policies that do help.

How can we avoid "badvocacy" in our activities relating to Kony 2012 or any other crisis around the world? Here are a few suggestions:

Acknowledge Complexity

One of the biggest problems with Kony 2012 is that it depicted the LRA crisis as a straightforward problem with simple solutions: Joseph Kony is a war criminal, with military action, he can be captured and brought to justice. This simplification is understandable given the limits imposed by the format; a long discussion of the causes of Kony's rise and the thirty-year history of the crisis would not fit well into a thirty-minute online video. The story also needed to be accessible to people who had never heard of Kony or the Lord's Resistance Army.

But oversimplifying a story in the name of making it easier to understand can have dangerous consequences. Defining a problem in simple terms often means that solutions are also defined simply. But ending the LRA's reign of terror is anything but simple. If it were easy, Kony would have been arrested or killed long ago, the LRA would have disbanded, and no families would be living in fear of their attacks in the Congo or the Central African Republic. Kony 2012 reduces the LRA crisis to an issue of awareness. If more people know about it, the film's logic goes, governments will do more to end the crisis.

If only it were that easy. The reasons Kony and the LRA have been able to operate unchecked for so long

are complex and many. Kony himself is a brilliant military tactician who uses tested methods to evade capture and who shields himself using child soldiers. He operates in some of the most difficult terrain in the world, under jungle canopies and in areas that are far from roads and airports. Moreover, in recent years, Kony has concentrated his army in some of the world's least-governed places, where central governments have almost no authority or ability to stop his activities. Stopping Kony under these conditions is more difficult than simply sending soldiers in to attack him. Indeed, there have been previous military efforts to stop Kony. These did not result in him being captured, but rather led to civilians being harmed due to the fighting.

Though a military solution may indeed be a necessary step in bringing Kony to justice, the people in LRA-affected areas will continue to suffer from the effects of not having a government that provides them with services or that can protect them from other warlords and rebel movements that tend to arise in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo. Smart approaches to fighting the LRA will account for this fact, as well as ensuring that civilian protection is a top priority of anti-LRA forces.

Better advocacy means acknowledging complexity. Doing so means that solutions will be more realistic

and less likely to cause harm to civilians.

Empowering Rather than Overpowering

The hero of Kony 2012 is, without question, filmmaker Jason Russell. It is Russell who is fighting the bad guys, as his son puts it. It was Russell who, along with two of his friends, "discovered" the LRA crisis on a trip to northern Uganda a decade ago. And it was Russell who promised a young Ugandan boy that he would fix this conflict and make things better. If film viewers join in Invisible Children's awareness-raising efforts, Russell promises, they can also be part of saving people from the horrors of the LRA.

This is a powerful narrative, and one that speaks to the basic desire most people have to help their fellow humans. However, it is also a narrative that causes many people in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other developing countries to recoil in anger or disgust, because it makes the hero of the story an outsider. This brings back memories of the colonial period, when outsiders came in with the mission of "civilizing" African communities and bringing in foreign ideas and customs that were not always welcome. It reinforces stereotypes that Africans are helpless, passive victims in need of saving. It suggests

that those affected by the LRA crisis are incapable of doing anything about their own plight.

These subtexts could not be farther from the truth. Ugandans and Congolese in LRA-affected areas have been engaged in efforts to stop the violence and build the peace for years, and, in Uganda, for decades. Groups like the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative have engaged in peace building activities, working to end the fighting and keep children safe. Other community-based organizations help ex-child soldiers reintegrate into their families and communities, provide health care to those hurt in the war, and assist displaced persons who had to flee their homes. Africans in these communities are anything but passive victims. They are leaders.

Smarter advocacy will support efforts that empower local leadership, rather than overpowering communities with solutions designed thousands of miles away. It must recognize that people suffering from atrocities – even in some of the poorest places in the world – are not simply victims of war. What is needed in these communities is not saviors coming in to fix everything, but supportive global communities that provide funds, expertise, and assistance for local initiatives that are already underway.

Letting local leaders do what they do best – lead – will

ensure that advocacy initiatives do not offend the very people they purport to help (as has unfortunately been the case with Kony 2012). A community-centered approach also increases the likelihood of finding successful, sustainable solutions to problems. After all, who knows how to solve community problems better than the people who live there?

Recognize Our Limits

One of the lessons of the Darfur advocacy movement was that there was only so much Western grassroots activists could do to end the crisis. As Rebecca Hamilton explains in her book, Fighting for Darfur, ultimately, pressure from different parts of the United States government (which acted in response to pressure from activists) could not ultimately change the minds of leaders in Sudan. Other countries like China had far more influence, and U.S.-based activists are limited in their ability to influence China to pressure Sudan to change its behavior. The failure to stop the Darfur crisis left many advocates disillusioned about the potential to stop human rights abuses around the world.

This is an important but difficult lesson to learn. The United States is a global superpower, but ultimately, there are political realities that matter more than what

the U.S. wants. In the LRA situation, Uganda is responsive to the United States' interest, but it is more difficult to accomplish tasks given the conditions in the countries in which Kony and his soldiers operate. Advocacy leaders need to acknowledge these limitations and explain to their supporters that it may simply be impossible to capture Kony and bring him to justice. Or there may be ways to do so that are very different from the policies for which Invisible Children advocates. Regardless, our advocacy should be tempered with a strong dose of humility about exactly what it is that we can pragmatically accomplish.

Conclusion

Doing advocacy right is difficult and time-consuming, but ensuring that it is done well is a responsibility we must take seriously if we do not want to harm those we purport to help. By acknowledging complexity, using an empowerment rather than a savior model, and recognizing and respecting the limits of our role in such a crisis, we can work to avoid "badvocacy" and move to smarter, more successful activism.

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What Have They Got to Lose?

Alanna Shaikh

One of the most depressing things about international aid projects is that so many of them mean well, and yet are bad anyway. Nobody starts an aid project intending to hurt people or demean aid recipients. And yet, it happens. In fact, every new technological or social advance seems to spawn its own form of accompanying bad aid. Why does this happen? Where do well-meaning philanthropists go wrong?

Bad aid projects often underestimate the complexity of poor people's lives. It's easy to assume that being poor is about doing without things; that a life in poverty is an empty life that needs filling up. That "poor people have nothing." If somebody has nothing, by definition anything you provide is an improvement for them. In reality, though, it's the other way around. The Kony2012 advocacy campaign is a prime example of this. Invisible Children seems to be basing its work on the idea that the communities affected by Joseph Kony have nothing. The use of the word "Invisible" could not make that clearer. But the fact is, Ugandans

– and all the other people affected by Joseph Kony – have busy, complex lives. They are not sitting around waiting for an advocacy campaign to save them.

Poor people have very complicated lives; wealth is an insulator from life's challenges. The poorer you are, the more challenges you face. The lives of poor people are busy with obligations they must meet in order to survive. Finding a way to support people who have busy, complicated lives is much more difficult than filling up an empty life.

Poor people's time is actually more valuable than other people's. If you're wealthy and you waste some time, it's probably leisure time anyway. If you do lose time you would have spent earning money, you can cut back on luxuries to compensate. When you are poor, the opportunity costs are far greater. Leisure time is almost non-existent. There are no luxuries to give up if income is lost. There is no room for waste. Wasting poor people's time can cause significant harm.

In practical terms, that sets a high bar for aid projects. You can't just say, "It's better than nothing." "Nothing" is not your baseline. Your baseline is "will this improve an already complicated life full of responsibilities, social ties, and (yes) material possessions?"

An example from the world of microfinance: Women

in many locations have been refusing microloans from institutions and instead borrowing at a higher rate from traditional moneylenders. It turns out they can't spare the time required to attend microfinance groups and then wait to give their repayment. An old-fashioned moneylender will visit them. These women aren't lazy. They're busy. The institutional offering may be a better cost when comparing interest rates, but that is not the only factor that matters for these women. The convenience of the moneylender is worth the higher rate because of the time saved on the transaction.

Unemployment is no exception. For people who are genuinely poor, unemployment isn't a time-delineated period of their life. It is their life. Being unemployed doesn't mean they don't need money to survive; it just means they can't get that money as salary. Instead they must beg and borrow what they need, a time-consuming process.

This makes good advocacy work extremely difficult. Good advocacy work is done by communities themselves, or at the very least in partnership with communities. Donors can't just jump in, start up an advocacy campaign, and expect it to succeed. Aside from the obvious moral problem of speaking for other people, you're likely to get your priorities wrong. The Ugandan responses to Kony2012 illustrate that

problem quite clearly. When the video was shown in rural Uganda, in communities who had experience with Kony, people responded negatively. They were angry and hurt about how their communities had been portrayed, and by the approach taken to opposing Kony. The NGO showing the video made a decision to stop the showings because they were doing harm.

Human attention is limited. As any marketer can tell you, attention is a hot commodity these days. In a world of web apps, it's very hard to get anyone to focus for more than the length of a YouTube video, let alone take action. It's not right, and it's not fair, but it is, unfortunately, true. If you put together a high profile advocacy campaign for, say, searching Uganda for a warlord who's not there, you have used up Uganda's share of human attention for the foreseeable future. Probably even Africa's. Wasting that global attention, and the potential to turn that attention into useful action, is unfair to people who need help. They could have benefited from a well-designed effort that actually addressed their needs. If instead they get intrusive press coverage and plastic bracelets based on an outsider's uninformed perception of their needs, that's cruel and unethical.

Working in partnership with members of the community you are trying to help will tend to steer you clear

of the shoals of cruel and unethical, but it has its own challenges. For one thing, developing that partnership takes time - your time, and the community's time. Their time, as you may recall, is more important than yours. If you are going to take it up with partnership meetings, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and so on, you have an obligation. At the very least, that obligation is to produce an advocacy campaign that is both relevant to community needs and actually effective.

Effectiveness can fail at two points. First, you can have an advocacy campaign that doesn't gain traction. Nobody watched your video, tweeted your tweets, or signed your petition. Your hashtag never trends, and no one pressures Congress to do something about it. That's the obvious way to fail.

You can also fail by advocating for something that won't work. You might get several million signatures for your petition, and see the legislation you supported fly right through the House and the Senate. But if your proposed solution doesn't actually address the problem, you've got nothing. This was the bitter lesson learned by Save Darfur; getting the US government to engage on Darfur didn't actually make things much better. Whether it's a bad aid project or a bad advocacy project, low-quality work is not better than nothing at all. In fact, it will make things worse.

Poor people, oppressed people, people who genuinely need our help – they are also the busiest people on this planet. They're busy just finding ways to survive. Wasting their time is damaging and wrong. You cannot do work on their behalf without them, and once you've started using their time you have a responsibility to use it as well as possible.

The human capacity for attention is not unlimited. We get donor fatigue, and we get attention fatigue. The more attention-getting your advocacy is, the greater your obligation to do it well. If you're going to be the best-known anti-child-soldier project in the world, you had better put those eyeballs to good use once they're aimed at you.

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Moral Agents and Patients: Trayvon Martin and Invisible Children

Hawa Allan

> If people can protest against Kony 2012 in large numbers they should be able to do the same for Trayvon Martin. Where you at people?
> – @Pretty_N_Pink33, tweet on March 23, 2012

> We share what we love and it reminds us of what we all have in common.
> – Jason Russell

In times of disorder, take to Twitter the way a physician takes a pulse. A search for "Trayvon" and "Kony2012" culls comments on everything from our collective ADHD (says @spankmesandy in a tweet tagged #sadbuttrue, "once all the media hype dies down, everyone's gonna forget about trayvon martin just like they

did kony 2012"), to our compassion fatigue (@VirtuousWoman92: "I'm really wondering how many will still care about Trayvon Martin, Troy Davis, Kony 2012, Joplin tornado, Haiti, Japan NOLA etc next week"), to even a sense of apocalyptic foreboding ("2012 Been A Crazy Ass Year So Far. First Whitney Houston Died , Then The Joesph Kony Thing & Now Trayvon Martin… What's Next ???").

What's more, in one formulation or another, a number of tweets have begged the above question asked by @Pretty_N_Pink33. "Just wondering if kids who bought wristbands from Kony2012 have thought about acting in response to the murder of Trayvon Martin," offered @schwartzbrown. And @DaBigChewy observed: "Seems more people cared about the KONY2012 than the Trayvon Martin case. Seems America cares about everywhere else but Home!!!"

This rumbling about who "America" seems to care about more – black children at home or African children abroad – is measured, in many such tweets, according to the relative attention given in social media platforms to George Zimmerman killing Trayvon Martin, on the one hand, and Joseph Kony abducting child soldiers, on the other. These observations range from the anecdotal (see @derocka proclaiming as the #SignOfTheTimes "[t]he people who tweet me about kony2012 but won't bat an eyelid @ #trayvon Mar-

tin's racist murder") to the empirical ("If 70 million + people can watch a video about Kony 2012, Then 70 million + people can stand up and demand justice for Trayvon Martin," tweets @RealIsaacCrosby).

Empirically, at least, the disparity cannot be denied. Within six days of being posted, Kony 2012, the video produced by non-profit organizationInvisible Children, tallied about 100 million views on YouTube and, according to Twitter data, sparked 25,000 tweets per ten-minute interval at the height of the campaign. As for Martin, data shows that the trend for "trayvon-martin" was hardly detectable until nearly a month after he was shot dead. Further, according to reports, though Martin's case gained significant online prominence after President Obama spoke publicly on the matter, as of March 24, 2012, his search trend lagged far behind that of Kim Kardashian – who was doused with flour by a promptly-arrested assailant.

So, what explains this discrepancy in "caring," in so far as what a society cares about can be diagnosed in tweets, views and shares? Some commentators have pointed to race as an explicit factor, specifying that the "America" that seems to care less about Trayvon Martin than Kony2012 is really "white America." Michael Skolnik, editor-in-chief of GlobalGrind.com put it bluntly:

> I mean, it was only two weeks ago when almost every white person I knew was tweeting about stopping a brutal African warlord from killing more innocent children. And they even took thirty minutes out of their busy schedules to watch a movie about dude. They bought t-shirts. Some bracelets. Even tweeted at Rihanna to take a stance. But, a 17 year old American kid is followed and then ultimately killed by a neighborhood vigilante who happens to be carrying a semi-automatic weapon and my white friends are quiet. Eerily quiet.

Skolnik's personal observations were later quantified. Not long after such racial disparities in social media responses were noted, the Pew Research Center reported that 43% of white respondents – as compared to 16% of black respondents – surveyed said that the Trayvon Martin tragedy had received too much media coverage.

Race, not incidentally, has been isolated as a contributing factor to the frenzied online support of Jason Russell's Invisible Children campaign. In an article published in The Atlantic, novelist Teju Cole contextualizes his critique of Kony 2012 in an environment

that produces a chilling effect on the direct speech of people of color, among other groups. Says Cole: "One cumulative effect of this policed language is that when someone dares to point out something as obvious as white privilege, it is seen as unduly provocative." Indeed, Cole's initial critique of Kony 2012 was encapsulated in a series of tweets, including the following: "The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege." As he elaborates in the article, "a nobody from America or Europe can go to Africa and become a godlike savior or, at the very least, have his or her emotional needs satisfied." The Ugandans helped by such saviors are, meanwhile, cast as helpless and inert.

Russell, certainly, was the central hero figure in the viral video that explained – in part, through the rudimentary lesson he gives to his toddler son, Gavin – the brutal tactics of Joseph Kony, the Ugandan 'warlord' and self-proclaimed freedom fighter who abducts children into his Lord's Resistance Army, which has launched vicious attacks on civilians in Uganda and, more recently, the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and southern Sudan. The remaining actors in the 30-minute video are satellites around Russell and the good intentions of Invisible Children, Inc., includ-

ing former child soldier, Jacob – an older boy who, contrasted with Gavin's penchant for "jumping on the trampoline, being a ninja and dancing," is filmed reliving the trauma of his brother's murder at the hands of 'warlords' and expressing his preference to die rather than continue living in his precarious situation. Russell, in response, tells Jacob, "we're going to stop them." As later depicted in Kony 2012, humanitarian action ensues.

Trayvon Martin and Kony 2012 – two new stories, two familiar tropes. Echoed in the charge that white people don't care about Trayvon Martin is Kanye West's assertion – amid the immediate devastation of Hurricane Katrina – that George Bush doesn't care about black people. Unpacked from an analysis of Jason Russell's "White Savior Industrial Complex" are mementos of the Civilizing Mission – all baggage that compounds the White Man's Burden to save "poor Africans."

The combined implication of these takes? If Trayvon Martin were transported to central Africa, stripped of his hoodie and Skittles, and, instead, armed with an AK-47, "America" would be more inclined to care about his death.

This thesis, though expanding within the Twitterverse, does not necessarily hold when America's car-

ing is measured according to economic assistance. Proposed spending on welfare – whose recipients tend to erroneously be perceived as majority black – constitutes 12% of the federal government's budget for the 2012 fiscal year. Meanwhile, foreign aid constitutes about 1% of the proposed budget for the same period, of which, of course, only a portion is destined for African countries. Further, when America's care is measured according to the readiness and willingness of federal intervention, we find that the FBI and the Department of Justice have launched investigations into Martin's killing and improprieties of local authorities; further, President Obama – prior to Invisible Children's high-profile intervention – deployed 100 AFRICOM military personnel to support the efforts of the Ugandan army to track down and capture Joseph Kony.

However, what distinguishes social media as a barometer of what Americans care about is how it facilitates direct, individual engagement. As a taxpayer and voting member of the populace, there is only so much a given person can do, in her personal capacity, to influence domestic or foreign policy. But what she can do is forward a petition, 'like' an article of public concern or mention the hashtag for a worthy cause. As Russell put it in Kony 2012, with "more people on Facebook than there were on the planet 200 years ago,"

people, so some think, can mobilize by sharing what they love. So, what irks some tweeps and Facebook friends is the apparent disparity in what other avatars of the body politic deem matters that merit their personal attention and those that do not even warrant a click.

What is being made, then, is a moral claim – an appeal to the conscience of "America" as to what deserves more or, at least, equal concern. While it does not provide a definitive answer to this evident dilemma, a study by two Harvard social psychologists helps illuminates its dimensions. As explained by Kurt Gray and Daniel M. Webster in their study on 'moral typecasting,' "morality describes a social interaction that takes two" – namely, a moral agent and a moral patient. Moral agents, as defined in the study, are active beings who do something right or wrong; moral patients, by contrast, are passive beings who are the recipients of the right or wrong action. Further, moral agents, as causally responsible for moral events (i.e., incidents that arise from their right or wrong actions), are deemed as deserving of praise or blame for their actions. Meanwhile, moral patients, on the receiving end of such actions, are either helped or harmed in a given moral event. In short, moral agents engage in good or bad acts and moral patients experience pleasure or pain as a result of such acts.

The fundamental elements of moral events outlined by Gray and Webster seem intuitive enough, but therein lies the rub – who we perceive to be a moral agent or a moral patient is subjective. Moreover, we generally perceive these entities as being in a mutually exclusive relationship – that is, we tend to perceive someone as either a moral agent or a moral patient, but not as both at the same time. There are other implications of how we see things. Our moral perceptions, as explained in the study, devolve into moral typecasting, whereby we not only designate parties as either moral agents or moral patients, but, accordingly, also take for granted the ability of a moral patient to feel pleasure or pain and discount the capacity of moral agents to do the same. Likewise, while we assume that moral agents bear more responsibility for their actions, we deem moral patients as bearing less responsibility in a given moral event.

To provide a concrete example: the study asked participants to rate the moral responsibility and relative pain of an adult and a child in a scenario when one pushed a tray of glasses off a table and the other's leg is cut by shards of shattered glass, and vice versa. In the end, participants tended to rate the child as less responsible than the adult for pushing the tray off glasses, and to perceive the child as experiencing more pain than the adult from the resultant cut leg. The

child, then, was perceived as more of a moral patient and the adult as more of a moral agent regardless of which one pushed and shattered the tray of glasses.

A caveat: as a lawyer and academic, it bears mentioning that relevant facts still remain to be 'found' by a jury that will hear the Trayvon Martin case, and, concerning Kony 2012, the events and explanations contained in the short viral video certainly pale next to more thoughtful and exhaustive considerations of the historical and socio-economic underpinnings of 'conflict' in Uganda and other LRA battlegrounds. However, it cannot be denied that facts – whatever they are taken to be – are filtered through perception, which is used to make and re-make meaning culled from observing current events. As such, the Harvard study, while less useful for helping to determine what "really" happened, is a valuable resource for illuminating discussions of what we perceive to have happened and considering possible implications of these perceptions.

Let's take Trayvon Martin's killing. A killing, surely, is a moral event involving the killer and the killed. As we have seen in Martin's case, the ascription of moral agency or moral patiency is in the eye of the beholder. Prior to the media campaign launched by Martin's parents and the subsequent public outcry, the moral perception of the Sanford police department

had prevailed unchallenged. Martin – a black male teenager walking in a gated community – was a bad moral agent, a suspicious "guy" responsible for causing fear in George Zimmerman, a moral patient perceived as bearing no responsibility for shooting Martin dead. Moreover, as per the perception of the Sanford police department, it was Zimmerman who was heard screaming, whose pain was audible to bystanders huddled by their phones and crouched below living room windows. Even Martin's corpse was imputed with a kind of agency, as demonstrated by police's move to submit it to drug and alcohol testing, rather than a still-living Zimmerman, the shooter, as per standard practice. Whether the fact that Martin, summarily, was found to be unarmed (with anything other than candy and Arizona Iced Tea) could absolve him from bad moral agency was a question suspended in abeyance, in the way his body was tagged 'John Doe' and left unidentified for three days until his parents filed a missing person's report.

It wouldn't be until weeks later, when national media attention was brought to the incident, to the moral event, that 'walking while black' was rhetorically exonerated from inherent culpability. Martin was transformed from a black "guy" to a black "kid" or "child," in other words, from a moral agent to a moral patient. It was Martin, the child, who was screaming

in pain, whose capacity to experience pain was more significant than the capacity of an adult and gun-toting Zimmerman to feel fear. Weighing in at a mere 140 pounds, Martin was restored to his rightful role in the moral dyad, as was Zimmerman, who became less a fearful (albeit overzealous) neighborhood watchman and more a murderous stalker and 250-pound hulk. Martin was an A- and B-student who majored in cheerfulness, and Zimmerman an unhinged wannabe cop who allegedly dialed 911 nearly fifty times in a year and, further, managed to get his hands on a gun despite prior charges for domestic violence and assaulting a police officer while resisting arrest. Even those who would directly or indirectly come to Zimmerman's defense would be forced to frame their arguments within the new terms in which the moral event was discussed. Geraldo Rivera, for one, would assign moral agency to Martin's hoodie, which, unlike the boy's race, could, perhaps, "reasonably" inspire trepidation in nearby moral patients.

The underlying moral event implicated in Kony 2012 is seemingly less complex. 'Seemingly' so only due to the general lack of background that "America" generally has with conflicts on the African continent, much less the LRA. Joseph Kony, the bad moral agent, spearheads the abduction, brutal abuse and rape of children – moral patients whom he forcibly recruits

into a militia that has terrorized civilians in Eastern and Central Africa. Russell's son, Gavin, exhibited this tendency best in the video, when, in response to his father's prodding, he cast Joseph Kony as a "bad guy" and the child combatants he has abducted and forcibly recruited as "nice guys." Other commentators intervened amid the viral Kony 2012 campaign to provide much needed historical and political context, including Ugandan political science and anthropology professor Mahmood Mamdani, who, in his usual display of patience and perspicacity, carefully explained that the LRA did not arise in a vacuum but amidst the Ugandan government's violent oppression of the Acholi people, of whom Kony is one and whose right to self-determination he has seen himself, albeit delusionally, as defending. Mamdani complicates the viral story by describing how victims become perpetrators, thereby disrupting the tendency toward moral typecasting. Nonetheless, in the limited moral dyad that involved only Kony and his child combatants, there could be no confusion among social media users in "America" over who was a moral agent and who was a moral patient.

Enter Jason Russell – a well-intentioned (if not particularly well-informed) advocate for capturing Kony and freeing the children he holds captive. An observer with good intentions, Russell, one supposes, did not

expect to be implicated in the very moral event about which he was trying to raise awareness. (Other than, perhaps, as a hero who, according to Gavin, set out to "stop the bad guys from being mean."). His detractors, however, perceived him differently. They pilloried Russell as a do-gooder – ascribed to him the role of the wayward moral agent "helping" helpless moral patients, namely, poor Africans devoid of their own agency and only notable for their capacity to experience the pleasure of being helped or the pain of being persecuted. Russell's critics made visible the moral dyad in which he was involved but likely hadn't contemplated, at least not consciously, and, further, triggered a split in his psyche: if he was a moral agent, was he good or bad? Were his intentions pure or self-congratulatory? Did his actions deserve praise or blame? Was he really helping or actually harming? These questions, for Russell, were suspended in abeyance as he recovered from "extreme exhaustion and dehydration" that coincided with a mental breakdown.

It is this question, of the personal implication of the observer of these moral events, which is germane to the disparate attention given to Trayvon Martin and Kony 2012 in social media platforms. As observers of Trayvon Martin's killing, our collective perception of this moral event is clouded by the extent

to which we ascribe criminality to, and experience fear on account of, resident black men, black skin or even hoodies. To the extent we experience this fear, whether consciously or unconsciously, we may feel inhibited from personally implicating ourselves in the moral event as participant-observer by tweeting or sharing or signing petitions: when Trayvon Martin is a moral patient subjected to pain, we are faced with our own existential culpability as bad moral agents whose fears were inflicted on the teenager's body via the barrel of George Zimmerman's gun.

By contrast, we feel less implicated in the suffering of black children far away in Africa. We know very little about them or conflicts in which they are embroiled, and have fewer preconceived notions to impute to them. In short, we harbor little fear of them, their non-resident black bodies or their AK-47s. When the Invisible Children are subjected to pain, we feel that we are more or less devoid of personal implication, as moral agents, and can click away on their behalf without looming reservation or, dare I say, guilt. But, as Cole reflected in his piece, this sensibility provides a false comfort: "The coltan in the phone can probably be traced to the conflict-riven Congo. I don't fool myself that I am not implicated in these transnational networks of oppressive practices."

This issue of personal implication, of the complicity

of the participant-observer, is not only reflected in our perceptions but in our policies. Indeed, domestic legislation aimed at eradicating the recruitment and use of child soldiers abroad has emphasized withholding aid and meting out punishment over raising consciousness of our consumption. Enacted in 2008, the Child Soldiers Prevention Act and the Child Soldiers Accountability Act establish a twin regime of "prevention" and punishment, respectively, by, on the one hand, prohibiting the U.S. from providing military assistance to governments identified as having child combatants in their national armies, and, on the other, by allowing for the prosecution of persons found in the U.S. who have recruited or used child soldiers anywhere in the world. Notably, President Obama has repeatedly waived the application of the penalties prescribed in the Child Soldiers Prevention Act, and charges under the Child Soldiers Accountability Act have never been filed.

Even putting aside issues of consumption, the disparate legal treatment of juveniles at home and child soldiers abroad may also reveal disparities in our projected fears. While children in the U.S. may be tried as adults and incarcerated for life, international tribunals – most notably, the Special Court of Sierra Leone and the International Criminal Court – have immunized child soldiers from prosecution irregardless of their

war crimes. Using other terms, juvenile offenders at home are deemed moral agents and child soldiers abroad moral patients. Moreover, recalling Trayvon Martin, while the fact of a simple hoodie is debatably sufficient to arouse reasonable suspicion and fear, the AK-47 toted by a young "African" boy is insufficient to rebut a presumption of innocence.

Returning to the initial question of social media, in the end, the medium is showing us not only what we actually or purport to care about, but also, perhaps, sheds light on our fears and perceived level of personal implication. The disparity of social media attention given to Trayvon Martin versus Kony 2012 may, then, come down to whether we see ourselves as sinners or saints.

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Armchair Critics Respond

Kate Cronin-Furman and Amanda Taub

First came the video. Then came the backlash. Then came the backlash-to-the-backlash. Except that Invisible Children and its supporters didn't just rally to defend their oh-so-very-viral video, they challenged its critics' standing to express an opinion on it in the first place.

One particular insult kept popping up: that those who questioned the campaign were just "armchair critics," inferior to the brave activists who were taking "real" action and raising awareness of a serious problem. The most prominent articulations of the argument appeared in the *New York Times* opinion pages. On March 12th, Roger Cohen wrote that he backed Invisible Children co-founder Jason Russell over his "armchair critics," because "he's put his boots on the ground and he's doing something." Two days later, Cohen's colleague Nicholas Kristof echoed his thoughts, referring to criticism of the Kony 2012 cam-

paign as "the sneering scorn of do-nothing armchair cynics." Similar sentiments could be found across the internet, on blogs, and in the comments sections of Kony-related articles.

Why should this be such a common defense of a campaign that is, itself, targeted towards the couch-dwelling masses? People who watched the video and shared it on Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr hardly had "boots on the ground" in Central Africa. Why is it that mobilizing to change policy with no information or context beyond a youTube video should be considered unassailably praiseworthy, while offering a different perspective based on deeper knowledge and experience is the act of an "armchair cynic"?

The answer, we believe, lies in the conviction that moral authority requires a particular type of engagement with the suffering of others. Specifically, the eye-opening discovery of injustice, followed by the decision to risk life and limb to help. And awareness campaigns, with their focus on the personal narratives of these "white saviors," offer a way for the folks at home to cloak themselves in borrowed moral superiority.

In this essay, we suggest that this type of advocacy is ineffective, and even harmful. The heroic central role is not available to those whose nationality, gender, or

poverty prevents them from performing acts of self-sacrifice in order to put their "boots on the ground." By focusing only on those who can, it privileges the already-privileged. Moreover, it demands a simplified narrative that is focused on "raising awareness" at home, and elides the details of how that awareness will translate into change overseas. At the very least, this risks wasting supporters' time. At worst, it encourages them to back policies that can cause serious harm, without understanding, or taking responsibility for, the consequences.

Armchairs vs. Heroes

The Kony 2012 campaign, like other awareness campaigns, is enthusiastically pro-armchair. Its goal is to motivate the heretofore-uninformed denizens of Facebook and Tumblr to change the world by speaking out against Kony and his atrocities. If their voices are important enough to be the focus of a multi-million dollar awareness campaign, how can Invisible Children or its supporters suggest that experience "on the ground" is a prerequisite for a credible opinion?

Additionally, most critics of the Kony 2012 campaign are not "armchair" anything. Rather, they are Ugandans, aid workers, journalists, survivors of LRA atrocities, and researchers who have lived in the region and

are experts on the LRA. Boots can't get much more "on the ground" than that. Dismissing these individuals' concerns as "sneering scorn" reveals a belief that only certain opinions are worth listening to. By deriding critical voices as "do-nothing armchair cynics" whose input is less credible than that of the Kony 2012 filmmakers, Kristof and his pals are suggesting that expertise comes from emotional engagement and personal risk-taking, not from knowledge or practical experience.

Establishing his own credibility as an expert on the region, Kristof notes: "I've been held at gunpoint in Central African Republic and chased through the Congo jungle by a warlord whose massacres I interrupted." This story echoes the Invisible Children founders' tale of their group's origins: They stumbled upon the conflict in northern Uganda during a summer filmmaking trip in 2003 when the LRA attacked the car in front of theirs, and subsequently decided to forgo the comforts of the developed world and commit themselves to helping the LRA's victims.

While bravery and self-sacrifice are admirable, this brand of credibility-establishment isn't available to everyone. Kristof is lauded for a commitment to investigative journalism that doesn't flinch from threats to his personal safety, but female journalists who find themselves in similarly dangerous situations meet

with very different reactions. Consider the case of Lara Logan. When the CBS reporter was sexually assaulted while covering the protests in Egypt last year, variations on the theme of "what was an attractive blonde woman doing there?" were a common response. Not only was there a conspicuous absence of praise for her bravery in pursuing an important story in a difficult context, many reactions denied her agency entirely, asking "Why did her editor send her to such a dangerous place?"

Likewise, being a westerner, male or female, offers certain protections even in highly dangerous environments. As George Packer memorably wrote in 2009, "it's always the fixer who dies." The list of local drivers, interpreters, and journalists who have lost their lives in situations from which the western reporters they were assisting managed to escape is heartbreaking. There was Sultan Munadi, the *New York Times* fixer who died in Afghanistan during a British Special Forces raid intended to rescue him and *Times* reporter Stephen Farrell. Farrell survived. And Ajmal Naqshbandi, the Afghan fixer who was working with Italian journalist Daniele Mastrogiacomo. Naqshbandi was beheaded, Mastrogiacomo eventually released. In 2011, in Syria, driver Mohamed Shaglouf was murdered at a checkpoint by Qaddafi loyalists. The four journalists in his car - the

New York Times' Anthony Shadid, Stephen Farrell, Lynsey Addario, and Tyler Hicks - were kidnapped and eventually released.

Local human rights workers who facilitate the efforts of international NGOs face similar risks. While researchers from New York or London headquarters can rely on the backing of their embassies to assist them if arrested or expelled, local activists can hardly turn to the government whose violations they are publicizing for protection. The stakes are simply higher when you are protesting from within than from abroad.

We are not suggesting that Western journalists or researchers put their own safety ahead of their local colleagues. Nor do we believe that the "boots on the ground" narrative intends to privilege the voices of "brave" men over "foolhardy" women, or "self-sacrificing" foreigners over "compromised" locals. But scratch the surface of the attack on the critical response to Kony 2012, and you'll find an implicit assumption that only certain voices should be permitted to speak. That's the tricky thing about privilege - you don't notice it when it's yours.

For our part, we are more than happy to cop to being armchair critics. Unlike the founders of Invisible Children, we have never set off for "Africa" with a carload of video cameras, looking for people to

save. This is not due to apathy. We just don't think that our status as privileged Americans gives us the ability to "save" anyone. Nor have we ever been held at gunpoint by warlords whose massacres we've interrupted. It is a source of pride for us that, when we are working in dicey environments far from home, we take care with our own safety and the safety of those who help us. And we don't think being similarly cautious or reluctant to enact the role of white savior should render anyone else's opinions irrelevant and non-credible, either.

The Trouble with Awareness Campaigns

The hissing about upholstered seating, like all ad hominem attacks, ignores the substance of the critiques. No one is saying that the Kony 2012 campaign is flawed because Joseph Kony is an awesome guy who should be left in peace to maim and murder as he pleases. Rather, the critics have pointed out that the shortcomings of the campaign may lead to real harm.

The policies that Invisible Children advocates have potentially dire consequences. The campaign calls for the United States to support the Ugandan government militarily, but gives no indication of the risks of such

a policy. There is no mention of Museveni's troops' violence against the Acholi civilian population or the fact that forcible internment of the population in IDP camps resulted in far more deaths than Kony's attacks ever did.

Applauding Invisible Children's enthusiasm, Kristof excused their over-simplification of the situation with the LRA, explaining that: "Complexity is, er, complicated." This statement echoes Kristof's defenses of his own work. Challenged for printing the name and photo of a 9-year-old victim of rape, he responded that his actions were appropriate because it was "the only way to raise the issue on the agenda." Asked why his columns about Africa so frequently focus on "whites in shining armor," he suggested that American readers can't be convinced to care about far-off crises unless they have a white protagonist to identify with.

While all that may be true, the complexity-stripped, savior-focused awareness campaign also appeals to followers precisely because it is oversimplified. By removing any reference to potential negative consequences, and centering themselves around pure, self-sacrificing savior figures, awareness campaigns offer their followers a buffer between "doing something" about mass atrocity, and the consequences that "something" might lead to. This is an attractive proposition: get all the benefits of refusing to stand

by and do nothing, without any accountability for stepping up and doing something that might have potential negative consequences.

Saying "I support a military operation to capture Joseph Kony because I believe the long-term benefits of assassinating or capturing him are sufficiently great that they outweigh the consequences of this policy, which will almost certainly include massive reprisal attacks against civilians, and the deaths, in battle, of LRA members who were conscripted into the group against their will" is a morally defensible position. However, that defense is not an easy one: it requires acceptance of the consequences of such a policy, and acknowledgement that they may well be tragic.

Contrast that with the pledge that Invisible Children asks Kony 2012 supporters to sign, which calls on world leaders to "provide the African Union effort with the logistical support needed to arrest Joseph Kony and his top commanders and protect civilians." Informed readers will realize that this policy is the same one as in the previous paragraph. But the targets of Kony 2012 and other awareness campaigns are not, for the most part, informed. (By definition, such campaigns target the unaware.) And this statement offers no clues about the potential consequences of an AU mission to arrest Kony. Its language is unthreatening. "Arrest" sounds uncontroversial - in the

United States, police officers arrest people every day. There is no indication that achieving Kony's arrest would probably first require a military defeat. And the reference to protecting civilians makes it sound like that is an equal goal - or perhaps even the primary goal - of the AU force, when in fact it is a 5000-strong military brigade tasked with eliminating the LRA.

A supporter who signed this pledge without any of that background information, therefore, would enjoy an enviable position. By following the instructions of Invisible Children's merry band of hipster heroes, who have proven their worthiness by leaving the comforts of southern California to put their boots on the ground in central Africa, supporters get to share in their moral legitimacy. But the awareness campaign's simplified narrative protects them from accountability for the consequences of the policies they're advocating for. How could they be morally responsible if no one told them about the risks?

Viewed in that light, it's easy to see why simple campaign narratives - be a good guy, like Jason Russell, by helping him fight the bad guy, Joseph Kony! - are so appealing. But their appeal does not mean that they are a good idea.

This is not to suggest that awareness raising is never a productive activity. Awareness campaigns are well-

suited to combating injustices that arise from problematic public sentiment. For instance, public education projects aimed at decreasing HIV/AIDS stigma can directly improve the lives of HIV-positive individuals. A reduction in stigmatization will cut down on the harassment they face and improve their ability to secure employment and access public services.

Awareness campaigns can also be effective in cases where injustices are perpetrated by an actor who is vulnerable to pressure. This keys into the "naming and shaming" mechanism employed by non-governmental organizations against abusive governments, which assumes that violator governments care about their reputation. If public opinion can be mobilized to censure human rights violators, and/or to convince other governments to punish them, awareness can directly contribute to change.

But the situation with Joseph Kony and the LRA is different. Here, the abuses (including abduction, rape, torture, and slaughter of vulnerable civilian populations in central Africa) are committed by actors who don't care how many people know what they've done. Consequently, the actors most capable of halting LRA atrocities are invulnerable to public pressure. They can't be shamed.

In situations like this, where injustices are perpe-

trated by actors whose incentives can't be affected by pressure, the avenue for public awareness to produce change is through impact on external actors. Because they aren't directly responsible for the violations, external actors have a more limited ability to halt them. At the very least, they must act to alter the status quo, rather than simply ceasing the violations, as the perpetrator could do.

External actors' options are constrained. They can try to directly incentivize perpetrators to stop offending, or they can attempt to incapacitate them. But, for the reasons noted above, 100 million college students don't throw their weight behind a campaign calling for international actors to recognize that although it's unpalatable, bribing brutal warlords into good behavior may be the quickest route to civilian protection. Instead, they mobilize behind simpler messages: Arrest this monster. Stop at nothing.

Thus, in cases where violations are committed by actors who can't be pressured, awareness raising campaigns necessarily take a simplified, law enforcement approach to complex political problems. Hence, the Kony 2012 campaign aims to pressure the U.S. to commit more resources towards Kony's capture and trial, while ignoring the determinants of the original conflict. Other awareness campaigns have followed a similar script. The anti-conflict minerals campaign

for peace in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo asks external actors to restrict militias' funding sources, but doesn't concern itself with their underlying incentives to fight. Save Darfur demanded that the ICC indict President Omar al-Bashir, but did not address how ICC involvement might negatively impact the pursuit of peace in the region.

Measuring campaign success in YouTube hits and t-shirt sales not only risks confusing increased awareness with successful activism, it demands dangerous over-simplifications that ignore the potential negative consequences of advocacy decisions. Focusing on heroic "white saviors" as a hook to draw the interest of previously-unengaged Western audiences exacerbates these problems. Responsible activism does not shirk accountability for its harms while seeking credit for its successes. Ethical advocates do not insist that others have no right to speak.

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Africa's New Status Quo: Connected, Bold and Vocal

TMS Ruge

By now, the world has survived the Kony 2012 global online frenzy that resulted in over 100 million views of the viral video, and left thousands of mainstream media discussions in its wake. The video sparked fierce debates on the significance of everything from Uganda's tourism industry to development communication, the mechanics of viral messaging, and white privilege. Just weeks later, however, the conversation has shifted from excitable "have you seen it?" exaltations from the bitten masses to the chin-scratching machinations of the "what can we learn from this?" intellectual elite.

Kony 2012's momentary blip of global fame didn't just make Kony famous, it made African voices famous. For the first time, the world heard our voices rising in defense of our continent. Despite Africa's misfortunes; the world cannot continue to lull itself into thinking that it has the right to export solutions

to the continent to fix our problems - even (or perhaps especially) if the world at large is partly responsible for our arrested development. We —Ugandans, Kenyans, Malians, Zambians, et al — must pick up the pieces, dust off the scars of paternalistic rule, and begin to climb the ladder of development. In the words of Herman Chinery-Hesse, perhaps Africa's most successful entrepreneur to date, "only Africans can develop Africa." Jason Russell and Invisible Children (IC), and the millions of "click activists"—for all their want of saving the continent—cannot do it for us. We will not succeed on pathos alone.

The vast majority of people who propelled the Kony 2012 video to the global stage were not aware of overall trends on the continent. Africa is in the early dawn of a renaissance. They were not aware, for example, that Uganda was ranked as the top tourist destination in 2011 by Lonely Planet. They were not aware that 50% of Uganda's population is under the age of 15; or that the first computer this demographic will ever own will probably be a smart phone. Thanks to newly connected undersea broadband cables, faster and cheaper connectivity is already arriving to nearly 700 million devices. Add in the fact that six of the 10 fastest growing economies in the world are in Africa, and a prediction of a renaissance becomes an inevitable conclusion.

A nation that owns its development challenges is a nation best able to build a sustainable society. America didn't become a perennial French ward after France came in to help the fledgling young nation emancipate itself from England. Half a century after World War II, Japan and Germany are not dependent on global sympathy to fuel their growth. Today, these two economies are among the world's most developed.

Sixty years after the fall of colonialism, by contrast, the international aid complex is still perched on the premise that the African continent is in a perennial state of dependency, and perpetually in need of saving. It is from this false premise that organizations like Invisible Children derive. The reality of long-running regional conflicts, like those in Sudan and fought by the LRA in East and Central Africa over the past 25 years, help to propel this premise. Africa has become the Mecca of the West's do-gooder society: Pick an issue you feel passionate about, plant a flag somewhere on the African map and get to work appeasing your soul. Alas, upon such generous outflows of sympathetic altruism, a nation has never been built. For Africa to rise; for our countries to grow as nation states; for our people to ascend to equal status as citizens of a global community, our futures must be of our design and constructed by the sweat of our brows.

The rise of accessible communications technology has

begun to shape the way forward for the continent's citizens and vocal diaspora. Where previously mainstream Western media told our story for us, Kony 2012 rallied our collective consciousness, vaulting Ugandan and African voices like Teju Cole, Rosebell Kagumire, Semhar Araia, and Solome Lemma to the global stage. Ugandan journalist Rosebell Kagumire's early and concise rebuttal of Kony 2012 was posted to Youtube and quickly gained more than half a million views. Within a few days, she was on CNN and Al Jazeera. Other voices were featured on the BBC, the New York Times, and the Guardian, three of the largest news organizations with global reach. This not only signaled the rise of a new African voice, but the coming wave of Africans reclaiming agency, a journey that started in the early days of the digital publishing era with luminary texts like Binyavanga Wainaina's "How to write about Africa," and later by the uplifting talks and texts by Chimamanda Adichie. Was it by design that Adichie's strongest protagonist in Half a Yellow Sun embraced his own agency; transforming himself from victim to orator? Recognizing the single story that has come to define the state of our continent is the penultimate step to the African renaissance.

The process of reclaiming legacy is not only through literature; it is also physical and economic. En-

trepreneurs are changing the face of Africa. Andrew Rugasira, Uganda's emerging coffee giant, is improving the economic prospects of thousands of farmers via the global reach of his Good African Coffee brand. Not too far from the epicenter of past LRA atrocities, Okello Sam is hard at work rehabilitating and teaching former LRA abductees and victims at Hope North school. If you haven't seen Hope North's beautiful homage to respect to agency in storytelling, do yourself a favor and look up "The Thing That Happened" on Youtube.

These are but a few examples of local voices and agents of change hard at work reshaping the status quo. There are thousands more like them. Invisible Children's "Kony 2012" video glossed over their importance, focusing instead on selling Invisible Children's solutions and insisting that the organization had the rightful agency to carry out those reforms.

As it always does, the internet exhaled as quickly as it inhaled, and the world returned to its tepid state of being. The normalcy of global injustice; the calculated, unabated global spread of the cavern between privilege and want; the cries for freedom almost matched in octave with the inanity and fervor for the latest gadgetry. In a heart beat, we are back to the bitter sweet symphony of humanity's march through time and space. Except that this time, there is a wrinkle

in the fabric of normalcy. African agency is alive, and self-aware. The new normal is an Africa shaped and built by the new storytellers, the technically savvy youth bulge, and the uncompromising entrepreneurs. The new normal is an Africa embracing its role as a global partner worthy of respect and not just a perennial recipient. The question is, did the world recognize what just happened?

Beyond Kony2012 – Reasserting the Transformative Power of Youth Activism

Sam Menefee-Libey

Watching Invisible Children's video for the "Kony2012" campaign was a jarring experience. That's not because of its focus (warlords in Central Africa are not a new phenomenon, and hearing about them is no longer jarring. It mostly makes me very sad). Rather, this particular campaign disturbed me because it promises positive change even though it encourages action that does not challenge the status quo, and because it demonstrates very low expectations of the young people it targets.

Kony2012 tells us that if all of us take a few simple actions, we can convince people in power to do the right thing and make the world a better place. Jason Russell's four-year-old son may understand this ex-

planation of how change occurs, but the campaign's simple narrative shouldn't be enough to drive youth action. Young activists can do better than that. The campaign targets people of my generation as if we have no worldly understanding or moral sophistication, and can muster neither the capacity nor the interest to pursue them. It prioritizes the moral satisfaction of young people in the western world over the well being of people in Africa. Perhaps most tellingly, it implies that important issues don't demand careful thinking, or sustained, responsive engagement.

The Kony2012 campaign also struck a personal nerve. In 2008, I spent a semester studying abroad in Nicaragua. I chose Nicaragua because I was interested in its recent political history and how U.S. foreign policy had shaped that history. Nicaragua is also the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and I believed that if I was going to do economic justice work with integrity, I needed direct familiarity with the daily experience of extreme poverty.

I spent much of my semester living with several different host families in different regions, talking to Nicaraguan politicians, historians, and activists, and trying to cope with the cognitive dissonance caused by clashes between my surroundings and my white, upper-middle class, U.S. American upbringing. There are many, many people who do not need to study

abroad to know that kind of daily struggle, but at the time I experienced these things as remote and abstract.

While I was in Nicaragua, I learned some very hard lessons about politics and inequality. I learned over and over again that if activism was not rooted in the lived experience of the communities it sought to reshape, it would not lead to transformative change. After several dozen opportunities to learn this, I began to understand how profoundly different my experience as a US American was from the lives of the people I was working with. The more time I spent living in these communities, the more I learned about the consequences of these differences. Making change in ways that seemed obvious to me didn't work; I had to take action with the community, working in partnership with the people who lived there, acting on solutions based on their experiences.

I learned that good intentions, though important, were not enough to bring about a positive impact. I learned that all solutions to political problems are difficult, complicated, and are intertwined with history and power.

This learning was jarring, painful and terrifying. I was confronted with not only the huge, unwieldy problems left in the aftermath of war, but also with a horrifying realization that I had been part of the problem rather than part of the solution I so desperately

wanted. It provoked me to question who I thought I was as a person and how I thought about where I was from. It was very difficult for me, yet insignificant compared to the struggles I was encountering. It was a sobering reality to face, yet one that made it possible for me to start doing a different kind of work that was directly connected to communities I participated in. My relationships with my Nicaraguan host families, teachers, and mentors forever changed the way I thought about politics, community and justice. These terms became attached to experiences and people rather than abstract understandings of far-off situations.

I share my experience here because the Kony 2012 campaign violates every lesson that I learned in Nicaragua. Even though the campaign was clearly motivated by a desperate desire to solve huge and horrifying problems, it was not directly connected to the lived experience of people in the Central African communities that had been affected by Kony's violence. Rather, it was focused on connecting to the young, English-speaking Westerners who were its primary audience.

That manipulation and oversimplification bothered me because, as a long-time youth organizer, I know that young people are capable of much more than the campaign gives them credit for. Young people already do great work, and, contrary to what Kony2012

implies, we do so with worldly sophistication and complex moral judgment. The Kony2012 campaign clearly does not. That doesn't mean "Kony2012" is not a good viral video, or that awareness from it and videos like it are bad. It just means that it's inadequate – it won't do what we need it to or what it says it will do.

Effective political action must address, and seek to alter, the power relations that perpetuate the problem it seeks to solve. Often, finding a workable solution means changing how groups interact with each other, whether by increasing the power and capabilities of one of the groups, facilitating new forms of compromise and collaboration, or establishing new boundaries or safeguards. As many valuable critiques of Kony 2012 have pointed out, killing Kony or "bringing him to justice" does little to alter the situation in Central Africa, or the years of colonialism, exploitation, and political failure that allowed Kony to come to power in the first place. The actions of the campaign do not help those who have been terrorized by Kony take charge of their own lives or support a vibrant political system that serves their needs.

Effective political action must also be sustainable. If the solution you're working toward only shifts the impact of the problem to a new group of people rather than fixing it, it's not making the community better.

If your solution is only temporary, and once you stop paying attention, things go back to the way they were, that's also not sustainable. Sustainability means establishing long-term change to promote a long-term solution. Assisting the Museveni government and Ugandan military in capturing or killing Kony does not build up the lives and communities of the people in Central Africa. It also doesn't change the political situation that allowed Kony to rise to power in the first place. There are ongoing political, economic and cultural struggles that many Central African activists are working hard to address and Kony2012 has little relevance to any of them.

Effective advocacy must also be rooted in the community it seeks to serve. Even though laws and legislation are often about abstract principles or issues, people don't experience problems in the abstract. People's problems often impact other important parts of their lives, like their family, or their job. Those secondary effects can't be evaluated in the abstract, from afar. Failing to take them into account can lead to policies that hurt the very people they are trying to help. Therefore, in order to find solutions and address secondary impacts, it is important to be extremely familiar with the situation and context in which the problem occurs. People who are experiencing a situation understand how it impacts their daily decisions,

communities, and surroundings in ways people who aren't there cannot fully comprehend. People with the fullest understanding of the problem are likely to have the best solutions that make the biggest difference and are the most sustainable and compatible with their community. The huge outcry from Central African activists in the wake of Kony2012 demonstrates how disconnected the campaign is from their daily lives. Dozens of activists and NGOs on the ground posted angry replies and responses to the polished, expensive video that inaccurately portrayed their situation and undermined their more local efforts.

Within three hours of seeing Kony2012, I had tracked down quite a bit of information about the situation in Uganda, Invisible Children as an organization, and some people whose great work was being ignored because they hadn't made (or weren't able to make) a slick video. The video and the campaign did not encourage this exploration, did not expect it, and was totally unprepared for the responses it informed. That thousands of people resisted their misleading work and responded with great analytical depth and moral sophistication demonstrates that many people are working carefully and diligently to address these complex problems. And Invisible Children's response as an organization, deflecting and minimizing criticism and carrying on with the campaign almost

entirely unaltered, demonstrated that they were not willing to do so.

And in the same way that it is not enough to raise awareness about a problem or offer simple, ineffective solutions, we should not stop at critiquing the direction and content of the campaign. Critique does not excuse inaction. We must find new ways of engaging in strategic action that is relevant to the lived experience of impacted communities.

And our work should start in places where we can be strategic and where we can be in community with the people directly affected by the problems we are working to overcome. Young people from the United States and other developed countries probably shouldn't actually be directing their political action toward Central Africa unless they are willing to spend significant amounts of time there and make a substantial commitment to that work. There are great organizations that do this kind of rigorous and collaborative work, like Partners in Health and HEAL Africa, that people wanting to go beyond Kony2012 can look into. And, there's plenty of poverty, racism, political repression and injustice in our own communities that we need to address. And it's also important to recognize that our foreign policy (both past and present) impacts the problems facing Uganda and the other Central African countries where the LRA

operates in ways other than just whether or not we send advisors to the Ugandan military to hunt down Joseph Kony.

In order to do justice, we must think carefully and listen deeply. If something is worth doing, it will rarely be easy or simple. It takes more than a 30-minute video, an awareness raising group, and a few dollars. Transformative work takes time and effort. It takes research and study. It takes relationships and experience. You should be incredibly skeptical of any person or campaign that tells you otherwise.

Listen to your community, to your culture, to your history, and be open to seeing new things and changing the way you think and what you think about. When a non-profit in Uganda hosted a public screening of Kony2012, it was met with confusion, outrage, and betrayal. People were angry with the misrepresentation of something that had deeply affected their lives for the sake of western teenage indignation and merchandising. Invisible Children reacted to this by posting videos of individual Ugandans praising the campaign rather than addressing the criticism. That's a huge problem.

So, whatever your opinion about Kony2012 or what I've written, please get active. Check out organizations like Jobs with Justice or a local community farm.

Go volunteer with a Trio program or get involved with a public election campaign. Join the United States Student Association or a reading group at a local LGBT center. Build community and work to make concrete changes in people's lives. Do so in ways that are responsive to people's personal needs and to our shared history. It's hard, but it's also the most rewarding and fulfilling and meaningful thing that you could possibly do. There are already thousands of people out there, doing great work, and asking you to join them.

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