Cyber-activism Against Sexual Violence: #BringBackOurGirls

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ABSTRACT

Over the last few years, many successful campaigns have both denounced women's vulnerabilities and protested against gender violence. The success of these campaigns can be gauged by the number of their followers, spreading the message and involving celebrities and agencies around the world. Those campaigns have put gender inequality and women's protests against sexual abuse firmly on the agenda. However, this still raises questions as to both the limits to and opportunities for cyber-activism in general and in war-torn areas in particular. This paper addresses the influence of digital campaigns against sexual violence, exploring the impact of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign, which covers the kidnapping of a large group of girls in Nigeria by the Boko Haram terrorist group. Among other things, we find that the campaign narrowly focuses on a group ('The Chibok Girls'), ignoring the vulnerability of many other girls and young women in Nigeria.

Keywords: extreme violence, digital campaigns, gendered violence, post-colonial.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, international Civil Law has been an inclusive transnational movement that embraces women's rights. In recent years, the speed and impact of campaigns in this field have been greatly boosted by digital media (Bunch, 2001; Riles, 2002), which have become powerful tools for denouncing violence against women and defending them from it. Contemporary digital activism has crossed borders and the bounds of local cultural communities — a trend that can also be seen in feminist movements (Cockburn, 1998; Friedman, 2016). Thus, many campaigns have denounced women's vulnerabilities and have made common cause against gender-based violence.

Examples of this phenomenon can be found in the #BringBackOurGirls, #StopRapeInConflict, #NiUnaMenos, and #MeToo campaigns, whose success is shown by the number of their followers, the global reach of their messages, and the celebrities and agents involved. Feminist cyber-activists have pursued an agenda that covers issues such as sexual abuse in various settings (governments, organisations, the film industry, etc.). However, we do not know the real impact of these campaigns on local communities and the lives of the girls and women supported by such global initiatives. In this paper, we delve into the impact of cyber campaigns on women and girls in war-torn areas given the lack of information on and the complexity of power relations there. Accordingly, we focus on women's roles, specifically of girls and young women subject to extreme violence (Anderlini, 2018) from an agency perspective — that is to say, not only as vulnerable bodies but also as agents and digital activists.

There is a growing trend of seeking role models for both teenagers and young adults. Thus Malala Yousafzai, Nobel Peace Prize winner and champion of girls' right to education, and Greta Thunberg, Swedish teenage activist against climate change, have become well-known figures on the world stage. In the process, they have become spokeswomen for their causes, drawing on the ideas and experiences shaping the younger generation (Bent, 2016). Here, social networks spread their ideas, trumpet their speeches, and forge links with their followers, and in so doing, define the generations that make most use of these media.

Yet as members of patriarchal societies and despite the leadership noted above, girls and young women may fall prey to adults, especially in war-torn areas. Likewise, women are used as weapons of war against foes and their bodies are exploited by armies, relatives and boyfriends. Hence, there are settings in which girls suffer violence meted out as a function of their social origins, geographical roots, and ethnic group. As Braidotti (1994) notes, this is because girls, like adults, are not a homogeneous group. The passage from girlhood to womanhood varies in each case.

This paper is split into four broad sections. The first gives an introduction to the subject. The second contains a theoretical discussion of the framework of digital activism and the roles played by girls and women in war-torn areas and in online campaigns. The third section describes the research group's goals and methodology. It contains three sub-sections: (1) setting out our findings on the role played by women in war-torn areas (with special reference to digital campaigns); (2) discussing the strengths and weaknesses of such campaigns; (3) giving a summary and some ideas to guide activist's campaigns covering war-torn areas. The fourth and last section of the paper reflects on good practices for campaigners using social media.

FRAMING CYBER-ACTIVISM

Regarding digital participation, Claudia Mitchell (2017) explains that "social media platforms are deeply rooted in the daily lives of many young people around the world." Users employ these platforms for many purposes, such as sharing pictures, thoughts, or even discovering their sexuality (Ringrose and Eriksson, 2011; Boyd, 2014; Bustillos, 2017). Garrett (2006) and Carter Olson (2016) add that digital tools provide visibility, mobilise social forces, and spark quick, broad response, and in so doing, help shape public policy.

Castells (2011: 11) argues that cyber-activism is an extension of traditional social movements, a new and powerful tool that allows one to reach a global community pursuing the same goal. Thus, the Internet becomes a forum for deliberation that extends Civil Rights but also experiments with them and widens the overlap between freedom and discourse, and between the political arena and activism. That said, one should note criticisms of these practices. Annelisse Riles (2002: 302) warns that overexposure to Civil Rights campaigns dulls audience sensitivity — something that is not helped by a plethora of goals and decontextualisation of the issues at stake. Digital activism can all too easily become a 'post-colonial practice' if it neither deals with the concerns of Western citizens nor those of local actors (whose voices often go unheard in these global campaigns).

Charlotte Bunch (2001: 145) suggests that social activism is neither consistent nor homogeneous, since digital activism stems from conflicts and grassroots disputes, reflecting the myriad complexities of today's global society — war zones, poverty, ethnic and religious conflicts, poor digital access, and social inequalities (Mohanty, 1991; Khoja-Moolji, 2015; Maxfield, 2016). Given the sheer range of contexts shaped by diverse cultural and social factors, who handles the message and what diversity of voices does this type of campaign include? The open debate on the international and local conduct of virtual campaigns is only one of the dimensions of this complex issue. Scholars and activists must take all voices in a given conflict into the account, and vulnerable groups and local agents' access to communication tools. At the end of the day, who supports the messages and directs digital campaigns? Even more importantly what long-term results do these campaigns have for those involved?

Social networks also introduce a new notion of action — a kind of "suspension of the present" (Coleman, 2018) based on a different time-flow in these campaigns. Timing in digital media exhibits special features that have an impact on the cause espoused. The continuum between the local and the global is part and parcel of social media, in which past, present, and future coexist all at the same time (Coleman, 2018). This "suspended present" shaped the lives of the girls and young women in our research, girls who became young women — many while in captivity. In this regard, the #BringBackOurGirls campaign started five years ago with the kidnapping of girls between the ages of 12 and 16. Now, five years on, their ages range between 17 and 21. In The West, we see them as young women but the Western Press still refers to them as "The Chibok Girls", freezing their status as girls and overlooking the fact that they have all become women in the time gone by since their kidnapping. Furthermore, one should not overlook the fact that from the local cultural standpoint, the victims were already seen as women on the day they were snatched from their school (Mohanty, 1984).

Thus it is important to establish the course of this digital campaign, which began with a tweet from Nigerian lawyer Ibrahim Abdullahi, alluding to a public speech by Dr. Oby Ezekwesili, Nigerian Education Minister at the time. In that tweet, Abdullahi demanded the release of the girls kidnapped from a Catholic school in Chibok. This strengthens the idea that a male channel echoes women's voices in order to reach them. The campaign stemmed from public awareness of gender violence. In the words of Dr. Oby Ezekwesili in a personal communication for this research, the success of cyber action boosted interest from Nigeria's Government and international figures, making the issue hit the world headlines. Yet this can boomerang, for example in this case, the Boko Haram terrorist group exploited the publicity to put itself on the map, setting a bad example for like-minded groups (Cox *et al.*, 2018). As a result, 'me-too' kidnappings were carried out by others terrorist groups in search of notoriety. Some Chibok girls are still with the terrorist group and have not returned home.

WOMEN IN WAR ZONES: THE POLITICAL SETTING
There is wide-ranging debate on the roles of women in war zones (Enloe, 1989; Bloom, 2011; Magallón, 2010; Ponzanesi, 2014). Women are traditionally assigned

a passive role in wartime — something that contrasts with the active role played by Feminist Pacifism, which stresses both women's roles in stopping the path to war and in building the peace that follows. Pacifist feminists argue that women have always played an active role in wars, whether as soldiers or as nurses, and thus stress the vital role women must play in peace-making — a role shamefully overlooked by the history books. According to Ponzanesi (2014), the concealment of women's active role in conflicts is facilitated by their return to home and hearth after the war. This approach helps frame the roles played by women in the context of Boko Haram's terrorism.

Matfess (2017) has detailed many of the complex tasks performed by women in Nigeria's war zone[1], especially in terrorist camps. These tasks range from being terrorists' 'wives' to being suicide bombers, as recruiters, and as spies. Sometimes the Islamic terror group has been described as women's 'friend' (Matfess, 2017: 57) because it gives them money to support themselves and their offspring in war-torn areas. Like men, young women make key decisions that help them climb the social ladder, to survive, and to improve their lives and those of their families. In Westerners' eyes, these strategies may be deemed perverse or incomprehensible. Yet such a view stops us seeing that they are merely doing what they can to survive in the face of gender subjugation and extreme violence (Mohanty, 1998). However, the complexity of the conflict is not only reflected in the terrorists' violence against girls and women but also by that of the Nigerian army itself. In April 2019, Amnesty International condemned the sexual, gender-based violence committed by Nigerian soldiers both in prisons where Boko Haram women are held, and in camps for displaced persons set up to house and protect people fleeing the conflict. In considering the theoretical background to the case study, one should highlight the complex stories of the girls who were sexually abused. The lives of girls in Nigeria

vary greatly depending on where they live (in the countryside or in towns) and their religion. Those girls living in rural, Muslim areas seem to be particularly at risk (Maxfield, 2016).

The plight of girls in Nigeria went unnoticed on a global scale until the emergence of the cyber-campaign studied in this paper. In 2014, after widespread international coverage, many intellectuals and politicians demanded the release of 214 Christian girls kidnapped from their school. This violent deed revealed that Nigerian girls and young women, both Muslim and Christian, are victims of broader repression as a result of patriarchal and gender regimes, and of economic, cultural and social conflicts.

According to Mandrona (2016: 8) "Childhood is often viewed in terms of the implications for understanding femininity rather than an experience and ethical research topic in its own right." This becomes even more relevant when we add the intersections of ethnicity and religion to the equation. We must not only think of each woman being different (Braidotti, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 2006) but also see childhood as a personal experience covering myriad aspects. Thus the journey from girlhood to womanhood is a complex one. Is this complexity the same in peacetime and in wartime? Here, Hooks (1986) argues that we must address intersectionality. In the case of the Nigerian girls, these intersectional factors include: race in the context of the Civil Rights movement; religion; urban versus rural settings; educational and socioeconomic contexts.

Thus girls and young women involved in this conflict may play different roles. Some of these roles are as victims (of kidnapping, suicide bombing, rape, etc.). Other roles are as direct protagonists (terrorists, wives, mothers) or as social activists campaigning against gender violence and social injustice (whether locally or on the world-wide stage). Furthermore, the international uproar over the kidnappings sparked by the cyber campaign has turned the abducted girls' bodies into valuable bargaining chips between

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1   The Boko Haram insurgency is rooted in Borno State in North-Western Nigeria. Northern Nigeria tends to be much poorer and more illiterate than Southern Nigeria.

Nigeria's Federal Government and Boko Haram (Escola de Cultura de Pau, 2019), and into a plank in feminist politics and activism for putting sexual violence in war zones on the international agenda.

THE STUDY: METHODOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION
Our research looks at the impact of digital campaigns fighting sexual violence against girls and women in war zones. Our methodological approach is build in three stages. The first examines the geo-political nature of Nigeria, specifically in relation to the main socio-political events in the country from the beginning of the Chibok kidnappings to the present. The second analyses the #BringBackOurGirls campaign in relation to gender relations in the local and international context. The third looks at female participation in this campaign.

Our case study was based on secondary data (reports, media news, academic studies on the conflict both in regional terms but also in relation to The Global North). Content analysis of the cyber-campaign's hashtag was carried out, and supplemented with interviews with key Nigerian players. We examined #BringBackOurGirls activism on Twitter from October to December 2014, and the movement's political impact up to the present. Analysis of the message and the political discourse around this hashtag are covered in our study since girls are the main subject covered. As the campaign stemmed from Nigerian civil society and spread widely to the international community, we also include contributions from interviews held in Nigeria with local and global activists. We spoke to them about how to fight against gender violence through digital mobilisation, as well on their participation in the #BringBackOurGirls campaign and their views on it.

We also take an intersectional approach to shed greater light on what girlhood and womanhood mean in these war-torn areas. In particular, we start from the need identified by Yuval-Davis (2006: 200) to include:

Various kinds of differences in our analysis [so that] we can avoid the combination of positioning, identities and values. Taking such an approach also helps us avoid attributing fixed identity groupings to the dynamics of positioning and location processes, on the one hand, and to the controversial and shifting political construction of categorical boundaries, on the other.

CYBER-ACTIVISM AND WOMEN'S VOICES IN THE #BRINGBACKOURGIRLS CAMPAIGN
After five years, the story of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign (both online and on the ground) holds valuable lessons given both its length and its outcomes at both the local and global levels.

In our view, this campaign is a poster-child for all of the following reasons: broad mobilisation; international impact; high participation by world-renowned figures in the art and political fields; the local results achieved; media impact. From a geo-political standpoint, the campaign has had a big impact on Nigeria's government and administration. This impact took the form of: (1) President Goodluck Ebele Azikiwe Jonathan losing the March 2015 national elections (Carter Olson, 2016); (2) legislative and military measures to combat corruption and terrorism by the new Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari (Comolli, 2015); (3) timid inclusion of gender policies in Nigeria's political agenda, albeit with few real results given the persistence of the gender gap (Matfess, 2017).

The #BringBackOurGirls campaign has sparked a worldwide reaction. Our study revealed both positive and negative aspects of this international focus. It boosted interest in Nigeria's problems and, in particular, those affecting children and women in war zones. Here, one should note that childhood has been the focus of attention for the international community since the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 2001) and its Optional Protocol on child soldiers was signed. Likewise, The

UN Security Council, through its resolutions 1261, 1314, 1379, 1460, 1539, 1612, 1882, 1998, 2068 and 2143, has helped create an over-arching framework for the protection of those affected by armed conflict. It was not until the 18th of June 2015 that the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2225, which expressed "grave concern about the kidnapping of children in situations of armed conflict". Reading the document carefully and placing it in the context of the year it was passed, one can reasonably assume that the Chibok kidnappings and the impact made by the digital campaign that followed them were the catalysts for the UN Resolution. The fact that the kidnappings described in the Resolution broadly reflect the *modus operandi* of the Boko Haram terrorists and the Human Rights abuses committed by "non-State armed groups, in particular violent extremists"(UN Security Council, 2015) lend support to this thesis.

Nevertheless, the campaign also raised the profile of the Boko Haram terrorist group, making the kidnapped girls an even more valuable bargaining chip to pressure the Federal Government. Here, one should note that while most of the girls kidnapped on the 14th of April are still missing, a small group was released in exchange for the Government freeing some imprisoned members of the terrorist group. Thus Nigerian girls and women remain subject to patriarchal and social injustices, and their bodies continue to be used and objectified in the conflict. That said, it must be stressed that #BringBackOurGirls reflects the female voices of the conflict, as the hashtag comes from the speech of a Nigerian woman, Oby Ezekwesili.

This point in the campaign reveals both advances and setbacks on key issues bearing on gender violence in war zones, and handling of the complexities stemming from the diverse warring groups and their victims. First, the Chibok girls could adapt to the situation and become 'women' on the terms set by the terrorists, thus perpetuating their roles as victims in this conflict. Second, women played an active part in the local and global campaign, despite taking a critical stance.

Maxfield (2016), along with many intellectuals, has denounced the overexposure of the girls during the campaign. The message #BringBackOurGirls expresses public concerns over the use made of the girls' bodies. In addition, some Nigerian activists, such as the writer Teju Cole, demand that the case of the kidnapped girls be re-contextualised in terms of Nigeria's domestic politics. She argues that this would let her fellow countrymen make the issue their own — one to which they had become mere onlookers as a result of the international campaign and mobilisation. As we said in the introduction, the experiences of these young women are unique. That is why we suggest an ethical examination of online digital campaigns with a view to avoid a permanent state of victimisation.

During these five years, some local people have wondered about the scope of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign. Nigerian activists have argued that by putting the international media focus on the Chibok girls, the plight of other Nigerian has been rendered invisible. They also call for greater attention to Muslim girls, who are at higher risk because they come from poorer, more vulnerable backgrounds and from mainly uneducated communities (Mahmood, 2017). Two Nigerian women interviewed in this study note that the campaign made a difference to the lives of the country's girls and women. Yet they argue the media spotlight on the Chibok girls has led to Nigerian women and their plight being thrust into the shade. Thus, the girls who have been defended in Western social media are Chibok girls, who were both Christians and schoolchildren. Meanwhile, illiterate Muslim girls living in poor, rural areas are ignored. Education and reinforcing the role of Nigerian girls emerged as the main action in Africa to prevent violence and gender discrimination. These measures would also help stop them and their families from joining Boko Haram's cause.

Western neo-colonisation is a furthe theme in this analysis, given that Western actors' intervention has had a direct impact on Nigerian politics. One of those we interviewed mentioned the way President

Goodluck gained a bad world reputation because of the Chibok case — something that helped him lose the election. He was not the only political casualty. Oby Ezekwesili (the most visible actor in the #BringBackOurGirls campaign) withdrew from the 2019 Presidential race because she failed to garner sufficient support. It seems that Nigerian citizens want action that reflects local factors and that they resent the imposition of Western ideologies.

So if we are to draw up ethical digital campaigns, we must avoid falling into the trap of attributing fixed identities to the subjects studied or — worse still — Westernise them. We must therefore be aware of possible post-colonial practices. Empirical analysis of #BringBackOurGirls suggests a blinkered vision, with our informants claiming that the campaign has only focused on the Chibok girls and ignores other girls affected by extreme violence.

This campaign is a good example of post-colonial discourse because it was begun by local agents and the international community's actions were confined to supporting the main initiative. Nigerian actors warned at various points in the campaign that non-nationals should be given a subordinate, supporting role so as to stress the key role played by the country's leaders and citizens in tackling the problem.

However, analysing the discourse of the *Bring Back Our Girls* campaign, one can see repeated patterns in the defense of child victims. We focus our attention on the fact that they were kidnapped because they were educated Christian girls. Boko Haram is trying to convert them to Islam to turn them into 'good wives and mothers'. The campaign has been running for five years. When the girls were kidnapped, they were aged between 13 and 17. Likewise, intersectional factors show the need for a situational definition of girls in the discussion: Are they 'girls' and if so, for whom? Are they 'girls' for their families and communities, but not for the terrorist group? How do they define themselves? Are they still girls after years of suffering or simply because they are under constant threat of being abducted?

UNDER DISSENTING EYES: THE INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO THE CONCEPT OF CHILDHOOD IN NIGERIA

So far, Nigeria has made little progress on gender or indeed any other kind of equality. According to Oxfam International (Mayah *et al.*, 2017), Nigeria ranked last out of 152 countries in terms of reducing gender equality. Poverty and unemployment have been identified as forces driving recruitment for terrorist bands. Botha and Abdile (2019) explain that being a member of an insurgent group offers booty and marriage opportunities for young people living in extreme poverty in war-torn areas.

Unemployment is given as the cause of youth support for extremism in Nigeria (Comolli, 2015; Ordu, 2017). The Government's counter-insurgency operations have also made people feel less safe in the area where Boko Haram operates. Young people — including girls and young women — who grow up in settings where extreme violence and poverty are the norm become targets of and participants in the actions of insurgent groups.

The plight of Nigerian girls and women stems from gender inequality and a deeply patriarchal culture.

Despite Nigeria's wealth of natural resources and the country's economic growth over recent decades, mass poverty remains a scourge, with over 62% of the nation's 180 million people still living in extreme poverty in 2017. In 2013, Nigeria ranked 48.8 on the Gini index, putting the country in 21st place on the world list. The aforementioned Oxfam Report states that things are going from bad to worse. Nigeria comes last in a ranking of 152 countries for its lack of commitment to narrowing inequalities. At the same time, gender indicators show that women in Nigeria get a raw deal. The average schooling is nine years but for girls it is eight. The mortality rate is 9.6 per 1,000 inhabitants but maternal mortality is 917 per 100,000 live births (2017). The situation in rural areas is complex, with girls expected to marry and become mothers at 16. Marriages are haggled over by male family members to set the dowry — a practice that is still common in Nigeria. Women cannot own land even though it is

they who slave in the fields. This means they have less chance of earning a living and fewer survival strategies open to them. The value placed on women and their bodies is so low that the prices at which they are sold by traffickers and vice rings in Nigeria has steadily dropped (Matfess, 2015: 166).

However the broad data conceals the fact that girls and women make up a heterogeneous group and play diverse roles. With this in mind, a new question arises in the debate on the definition of agency. According to Mandrona (2016: 3), girls can be "systematically discriminated against but can also be […] capable social actors, who influence and are influenced by the world in which they live".

Yet one may ask how girls and women living in such grim, violent places can perform agency? Can they act autonomously and speak with their own voices? The vulnerability of minors seems to justify adults' vision of their lives given that it is grown-ups who take care of them, focusing on their age and identity.

As explained above, we need to take an intersectional approach and to do so by determining: (1) who belongs to a given community, and; (2) how Westerners have taken part in the campaign. That is why this paper seeks to "produce [new] imaginaries and understandings of ethical human beings regarding rights, otherness, power, agency and responsibility" (Mandrona, 2016: 3). These imaginaries suggest a relational ethic that includes local agents as a vital part in: (a) drawing up political campaigns fostering relational agency; (b) responding to gender-based violence to root out the patriarchal culture.

Because young women play a key role in socialisation and passing on culture, we also want to show them as agents of peace consolidation (Enloe, 1989; Bloom, 2011; Magallón, 2020; Ponzanesi, 2014; Anderlini, 2018). This do so, we must examine the roles young women play under conditions of extreme violence.

Botha and Abdile (2019) report gender differences in Boko Haram's recruitment of women as terrorists.

They state that many young women were forced to join the organisation as mothers, wives and soldiers. These authors warn that 'The Stockholm Syndrome' (whereby victims identify with their captors) is a hurdle to the success of peace-building programmes seeking to resocialise the women. Insurgent women and kidnapped girls are ensnared in extremely violent settings in which they come up with survival strategies to protect themselves and their children. That is why they see being freed not as the end of the road but rather as just a new stage in their lives, posing new challenges. So far, reintegrating the rescued girl in society has proven hard. That is because they and their families have suffered the stigma of the offspring born by the girls after being raped by the terrorists.

Some civic associations, such as the Federation of Muslim Women (FOMWAN), have launched a girls' education and empowerment programme. Its aim is to overcome women's feeling of helplessness in Africa. Notwithstanding the diversity of opinion among those interviewed for this study, all of the respondents agreed on the need to empower the girls so that they can face the future.

As long as young women are aware of their own precarious situation, they will play various roles depending on the extreme violence they experience, and come up with complex strategies to deal with it. This points to huge failings in society that force girls and women to live out wretched lives under the thrall of the patriarchy. Lack of educational and other opportunites, and female roles shaped by arranged marriages and early motherhood are the unenviable lot of so many Nigerian girls and women.

Of course, one should not try to shove agency wholly on these girls and their communities. That is because they have little say in matters, and are tangled up in a complex web of power, prestige, vulnerability, gender violence, and isolation. We therefore need to find relational agency that distinguishes between the political lines of mass campaigns on the teenage girls, who grew to womanhood during their captivity. Digital campaigns require networks of inter-

generational activists. Thus ethical empowerment of the girls involves shared recognition of them and young women as "specific, encarnated beings" (Benhabib, 1992: 189) with limited access to political 'intelligibility' (Butler, 2009: XI) and to power.

Thus, as Mandrona states, new imaginaries based upon inter-generational dialogues are needed among all stakeholders. In concluding this paper, we make three recommendations for overcoming each of the following: (a) the intersectional definition of childhood; (b) relational agency as a feminist political strategy; (c) consensus for planning an ethical feminist digital campaign that is both local and global in scope.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has sought to critically reflect upon Nigeria's complexity and on the challenges of internationally fostering gender equality, warning of the risk of gender violence in war-torn areas (where the victims are overwhelmingly girls and young women). Various approaches were used to this end: (a) an analysis of historical events (secondary data); (b) feminist theory (intersectionality); (c) communication studies (analyses of social networks and message content); (d) International Law (discursive analysis of UN Resolutions), and last but not least; (e) a philosophical component requiring a broadening of ethics and agency beyond blinkered post-colonial perspectives.

Our findings confirm the value of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign for making the voices of local agents heard, turning these individuals into spokeswomen for their communities. Yet such a strategy also ran the risk of simplifying the message and hiding the broader social situation.

First, the Chibok girls are a sample of the wider population embroiled in the conflict. The fact that the victims were Christian girls raises the issue of the interests underlying discourses on the Nigerian conflict. Here, it is hard to resist the conclusion that

the plight of the country's Muslim girls and young women was largely swept under the carpet. Second, the campaign focused on the girls, objectifying their role as victims and building dichotomous categories (in which we are placed at the first of the two extremes), be it War versus Peace, Christians versus Muslims, Victims versus Evil-doers.

Yet the political analysis evidences multi-dimensional points of view, revealing that despite the 'girls' experience, they took personal decision based on their relational agency and their ability to respond to gender violence and the patriarchal culture framing it.

Patriarchal society allocates diverse roles, limiting the opportunities of its denizens, fostering gender inequality, forcing people to react through relational agency to their opponents and to forge solidarity and co-operation. This spawns adversity and dangerous friendships. Girls and women are highly vulnerable in this context and wield little power locally. Meanwhile, international actors may become the supporters of local actors fighting for justice (thus avoiding a post-colonial perspective).

Social networks create primary resources for mobilisation and give rise to a gender-based strategy for fighting violence and sexualisation. We need a kind of grassroots feminism that is both local and global in scope, and which identifies structural problems and local events. Thus, digital campaigns must include local and international experts to identify the best approach to the issue at stake and to draw up the campaign's mission strategy. Rigorous analysis of the long-term effects of a campaign will help in planning future ones. That said, a digital campaign is just one element in boosting public awareness of the issues, and in amassing resources. Yet policies and structural changes need to be put into action if problems are to be solved.

With regard to women and age intersectionality, the world has new needs that tend to overshadow the victims and the paternalism they are subjected to. That is why we must first deconstruct the role

women and their bodies play as an instrument of the universal masculine gaze, avoiding the over-exposure of women's bodies in public places and in the digital sphere. Second, the girls are actors in their own futures both as a sub-group of women and as part of the non-adult population. The role models followed by girls are important in guiding the population towards new messages and in deciding what the youngsters will do in the future, and in reflecting the diversity of the juvenile population. In addition, this paper includes a critical definition of childhood, based on the need to avoid a sole, fixed identity. Here, it behoves us to resist application of Western notions of childhood and of the roles played by girls and young women when faced by extreme violence.

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