

KONY 2012-ANATOMY OF A CAMPAIGN VIDEO AND A VIDEO CAMPAIGN

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On 5 March 2012, the organisation Invisible Children posted their video *Kony 2012* online where it subsequently went viral. The thirty-minute advocacy video received approximately 112 million views in the period of six days, surpassing former records set by Susan Boyle on *Britain's Got Talent*, Rebecca Black's 'Friday' and even 'David After Dentist' (Visible Measures Blog 2012). The video trended on Twitter and Facebook where it was shared and the story reached major international news outlets. The enthusiastic response was followed by an almost equally enthusiastic backlash, as the euphoria generated by possibility of online participation turned to criticism and controversy. It is tempting to critique the campaign for its naive and offensive tropes, its misinformation, its questionable goal of military intervention, and its narcissism, [It is even tempting to attribute the dissolution of Invisible Children in 2014 to these factors. However, such dismissal might be premature.](#) The oscillation between these two poles of celebration and condemnation—whether in response to the possibilities of online activism or to entertaining advocacy—is a persistent one. But this binary risks obfuscating what can be learned from such campaigns. *Kony 2012* offers an occasion for thinking about the benefits and limitations of video advocacy as it moves online. Through an analysis of the video and its epiphenomena, this chapter outlines the practices and pitfalls of video in online advocacy more broadly.

Background: Invisible Children and Online Advocacy

When Invisible Children produced and uploaded *Kony 2012*, it was by no means their first foray into activism or filmmaking. Founded in 2004, the nongovernmental organisation Invisible Children (IC) made it their mission to call attention to the conflict around the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda and in particular to the human rights abuse of conscripting child soldiers. Between then and the upload of *Kony 2012* IC produced and screened numerous documentaries to schools and universities in the US and beyond, building a core constituency and networks of engagement. Their student base was active, particularly in realms of fund-raising and event-planning to which this typically affluent demographic was well-suited (Finnegan 2013 32). Meanwhile, IC engaged not only in filmmaking, but also in decision-maker advocacy, rehabilitation programmes, and through a partnership with Resolve, the LRA Crisis Tracker, which mapped and aggregated data in order to publicise the crisis. With regional partners, IC developed the Early Warning Radio Network, which alerted communities as well as NGOs and security organisations to violence in the area.¹ Moreover, their alignment with the Obama administration's position on Uganda resulted in significant impact on public and foreign U.S. policy (Titeca and Sebastian, 2014). Whatever one might say about IC and its student activists, the engagement was neither as fleeting nor as superficial as the eventual criticisms of 'clicktivism' (Drumbl 2012) would suggest.

Produced as centrepiece for the "Stop Kony" campaign, *Kony 2012* features IC co-founder Jason Russell as its key protagonist and voiceover narrator along with a cast of characters with varying degrees of input. These include: Russell's 5-year-old son Gavin; his Ugandan friend Jacob; Luis Moreno Ocampo, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC); John Prendergast of ENOUGH—an anti-genocide

human rights organisation; two Ugandan politicians; Invisible Children’s Country Director Jolly Okot; the enthusiastic participants in Invisible Children campaigns, and in some ways—global citizenry—as the foregrounding of social media (Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook) as method and aesthetic might suggest. The Stop Kony campaign had a seemingly straightforward mission: Stop Joseph Kony, Ugandan warlord and leader of the LRA by apprehending him and bringing him to justice at the International Criminal Court, where he has already been indicted. Clearly, arrest and prosecution are not the tasks of the audience; rather, as Russell explains in voiceover, the goal is to make Kony ‘famous’, a process that will lead to his capture.

As naïve as this plan may sound, this is the very sort of Enlightenment style thinking that underpins much human rights work: if people know, they will act accordingly (Cohen 1996; Keenan 2004; Torchin 2012). This model is based on the assumption that exposure results in knowledge, rational thought, deliberation, and response. This faith in a relationship between revelation and justice is embedded in the names, slogans and mission statements of a host of organisations. Human Rights Watch, [for example](#), investigates and publicises violations (not to mention sponsors film festivals), reporting on their findings in order to mobilise a range of responses from the shame of the perpetrators to the outrage of their public. [WITNESS’s name and logo \(“See it. Film it. Change it.”\) further underscores visibility’s value.](#)

[This tenacious formulation requires intervention if one is to better understand the relationship between images and action.](#) Exposure does not automatically lead to justice. Pushing a button does not automatically lead to regime change. But [it’s unlikely](#) anyone, even Invisible Children, is actually labouring under that belief.

As I have written elsewhere (Torchin 2012), testimony provides a useful model and method for fleshing out the territory between seeing and doing. This first person narration of suffering, after all, has been deployed in numerous transformative scenarios: in Christian martyrdoms, where the performance of suffering bears witness to the truth of Christ and ushers in utopia; in therapy (Felman and Laub 1992), and in politics, such as in the Latin American genre of *testimonio*, which “records the cry against oppression” (Peters 2001 714) and endeavours to “[set] aright official history” (Yúdice 1996 44).

Meanwhile, the function and efficacy of the testimony rests on its deployment of generic codes, characterisations, and recognisable tropes to translate distant suffering into an immediate cause for concern. Equally important, if not more so, is to consider the conditions of the testimonial encounter, or the contexts of production, exhibition, and circulation of the text. It is necessary to view this video as one highly visible component of a much larger campaign. (Torchin, 2006; Torchin 2012). There is a dynamic relationship between these two aspects that accelerates and deepens as we move into the online world.

The viral “success” of *Kony 2012* was due in part to practices long building among activists. Since the founding of YouTube in 2005, NGOs, advocacy organisations and coalitions have established channels in order to exploit the Internet’s capacity for radically extending witnessing and promotion of information. Here, they can bypass the restrictions of mainstream news media and post videos where they may be shared and circulated among communities bound by shared

interests. Such advocacy potential led to the founding of “Citizen Tube” in 2007, a political video platform where not-for-profit organisations were invited not to broadcast themselves, but broadcast their cause (Torchin 2012, 196-215).

Even in this new field, *Kony 2012* signalled a change, as the runtime of this advocacy video significantly exceeded the typical lengths of those found online.

Many run the length of a Public Service Announcement or Public Information Film—30, 60, or 90 seconds to correspond with usual timeslots allowed to advertisers. And like adverts, they contain basic information and a brief directive. Some videos, particularly those intended to be circulated within a young adult age group, run three to four minutes, as slide shows with image macros (photographs with textual information) are set to music associated with the well-meaning (Gary Jules’s “Mad World,” for instance, John Lennon’s “Imagine” or anything with Bono). As they grow longer, they are nonetheless constrained by the former parameters of the platform sticking around the nine-minute mark—the original cap of a YouTube video length.

In cases of streaming video, highlight reels are posted. Despite greater liberties to post longer videos, short running times can be crucial in a context where a small screen competes for attention with many others—on the computer and off (Caldwell 2005 15-19; Torchin 2012 196-215).

Even so, the longer video may not have been a liability given shifts in consumption practices that cater to long-form viewing. After all, IC’s target audience viewed most audio-visual media on phones, tablets, laptops, and desktop computers.

Kony 2012: The Text

The video's runtime allows for a lot of information and the development of a clear narrative. It opens with a prologue that praises social media, observing that the world is connected unlike ever before and that these connections have benefited interpersonal relationships, community building and social change. Jason Russell articulates this sentiment as a montage of technologically facilitated human interaction takes place. From there *Kony* launches into a section that could be called "The Story of Two Boys." Russell introduces himself and his son Gavin in a section that has baffled many who tuned in to watch a film about Uganda and instead found an extended sequence of a caesarean birth followed by home video horseplay. During the birth sequence, Russell explains that this is the start of all human life. This secures the focal point of identification in the white, American, male body. Or rather, two bodies. In the YouTube home movies sequence, we learn of Gavin's love of filming and being a star, highlighting the father-son prominence as image-maker and subject. Audio-visual media is the start of life and human connection, and the theme persists throughout the video.

The next boy introduced is Jacob, Gavin and Jason's friend in Uganda. His introduction once again highlights the function of social media in the social world. "Who is this?" Russell asks his son, as they look at his photograph pasted to a refrigerator door. As Gavin answers, the camera pulls back, revealing this interaction to be taking place on a video that plays on Russell's Facebook timeline. A cursor stops the video and navigates the timeline, moving further back in time to play additional video clips, highlighting both the personal element of the story and

Russell's clear agency: He is the centre of activity as he is imbued with the power to navigate space and time as he moves back to Uganda, in 2003, where he first met Jacob. The goal is double: Jacob provides the entry point into the issue under discussion and offers emotional resonance as counterpoint to Gavin's privilege.

In the first encounter, Jacob tells of his brother's murder and speaks of his worry and fear of abduction. Other snippets articulating this fear follow, as images of speaking individuals give way to a wide shot of bodies huddled on the ground of a shelter, and Russell's breathless shock at the magnitude and length of this crisis. He returns to Jacob, combining interviews that share Jacob's wish for education and his despair, before Jacob breaks down in tears, the film fades to black. In the darkness, Russell promises him all will be ok. It is this suffering Russell promises to alleviate—it is here that he makes his promise to help.

This reliance on the testifying body—whether the masses on the floor or Jacob's personal voice—is a mainstay of the human rights display, which relies on the forging of an encounter between suffering subject and witness. Social documentaries have often relied on testifying bodies to articulate a problem, one that will ostensibly be fixed by the viewer or producer of that film in what Brian Winston has termed, "The Tradition of the Victim" (1988), Jacob's helplessness is underscored by the film's refusal to grant him much in the way of testimony. The statements are cobbled together, with almost all interrupted by Russell's prodding. It is as if the goal is to reduce the boy to tears, to produce a spectacle of suffering. Meanwhile, the other children appear as predominantly mute, whether in the huddled crowds or in the highly stylised re-enactments of abduction that follow later in the film. In both image

and speech, the children receive little opportunity to demonstrate agency or voice, which is unsurprising as this segment receives less than a minute compared to the detailed introduction to Gavin, which takes two to three minutes.

This is the dark side of human rights discourse: the human rights subject must show him or herself as the bearer of human rights, but also—simultaneously—as one whose rights (including dignity) have been stripped away (Hesford 2011). Trauma erodes or assaults the dignity, humanity and rights of the subject—and the performance of trauma perpetuates this loss. Through this encounter, what Luc Boltanski called a “politics of pity” emerges as a spectator encounters an “unfortunate” and experiences a moral obligation to act (1999). At the same time, this encounter positions one as abject other whilst endowing the spectator with agency and the capacity to bestow rights. These dynamics, which apply to the spectator of *Kony 2012* are on display in the video, as Jacob breaks down weeping, becoming nonverbal and fading into the darkness where Russell promises to make things better. Such are the limitations of a victim-based politics, particularly here as they reanimate the ugly tropes of Africa in Crisis and White Man’s Burden or the White Saviour complex. It reinforces ideas of helplessness and the need for Africa to be guided by the White-West. This strategy, particularly as deployed in the film, reduces the endangered community to mute victims as it maintains power and agency in the body of white men.

Narratively, this encounter precipitates Russell’s own trajectory of action. Following the promise, the video delivers a montage of Russell as activist, wielding a camera and addressing crowds. According to the voiceover, this story has “led me to

here and the movie you're watching," thereby hailing the spectator into this movement. The invitation is explicit. This project "is not just about Jacob, or me, it's also about you," he states, shifting into the first person plural with the claim that this is the year "we change the course of human history."

An outline of aims and directives ("I'm going to tell you exactly how we're going to do it") concretises what might otherwise stay in the abstract. A montage of young people putting up "Stop Kony posters" and protesting at the U.S. Capitol delivers the first glimpses of the plan. These placards resemble an election campaign poster. With its bold type of "Kony 2012: One Thing We Can All Agree On," the image situates itself within the political, and potential for (American) democratic action.

This peek at the future is interrupted when Russell restarts the story of the LRA and of his activism. Gavin makes an appearance as Russell seeks to explain the situation to his young son in the simplest of terms. This exchange is one of the more problematic ones in the film, and not simply because of the questionable parenting on display. He pitches the narrative and the politics to a five-year-old register when the target audience, the IC constituency of high school and university students, is older and more capable of comprehending something more complex. As a result, Russell fundamentally redraws the terrain, transforming it into a ready to comprehend battle of good versus evil. At the same time, such simplicity is easily distilled into 140 characters and shared. The framing of the issue lends itself to memification—reproducibility and spreadability. When the LRA Conflict is filtered through the figure of one man, Joseph Kony, apprehending him and prosecuting him seems like

an achievable goal. This section, much like its prologue or the short interview with Jacob, provide repetition and consumable data to accommodate the challenges of attention in viewing, and to supply soundbites to be repeated and transmitted by the listener.

The second explanation develops his points—however slightly—with its brief interviews with Ugandan politicians, Santo Okot Lapolo and Norbert Mao as well as American human rights activist John Prendergast, onetime Director for African Affairs of the National Security Council and co-founder of the Enough Project. These excerpts support the claims of urgency, provide invitation to intercede, and ultimately serve to legitimate Russell’s goals—despite Lapolo’s disturbing human rights record (Diebert 2012). Alongside this institutional reinforcement, Russell presents the obstacles he faced: without financial or policy-based interests, intervention was unlikely.

These impediments feed the dramatic arc of activism, as IC and its publicity strategy are shown to overcome these challenges. Russell decides the solution is to “show the movie [*Invisible Children*] to everyone.” His voiceover avers its success as he states, “Awareness turned to action.” The video supports this claim, with a depiction of the tours of schools and university campuses and with montages of youth attending screening events and joining demonstrations. The embodied meets the virtual, as Facebook emerges as an expression of community building through page building—its growth represented in the climbing numbers as well as repeated shares and invitations. The sequence of mounting activism concludes with Obama’s promise to commit troops and the celebration of Invisible Children groups world-wide. As

Russell tells the viewer (mistakenly) “For the first time the government took action because the people demanded it.”

Ostensibly pushing the naïve sentiment that awareness leads [inevitably](#) to action, this sequence in fact offers much more. The activity shown onscreen or with screens (the film exhibitions, the Facebook groups, the YouTube posts) is in a dynamic relationship with activity off screen. Here, publicity is only one component of a larger campaign, used to support such activities including direct services, lobbying and capacity building. [Whatever](#) one may think of Invisible Children, they developed a nationwide network of student activists focussed on what was then one of the lesser-discussed issues in Central Africa—an issue whose prominence has grown in recent years. Covertly, this sequence models one of the key principles of video advocacy outlined by WITNESS Programme Manager Sam Gregory: video complements other forms of activism. It is not the sole arrow in the advocate’s quiver (Gregory 2012a; Gregory 2012 b).

[This](#) success story may activate what Jane Gaines (1999) has called *political mimesis*, which refers to the sensuous link formed between onscreen and off-screen bodies that encourages personal affiliation and replication of the struggle. These sequences of youth activists burgeon with possibility, promise and excitement as they direct their energies into public demonstrations and advocacy projects. It is frustrating that there is no such encouragement of affiliation with the African bodies on screen, whether in terms of the activists on the ground or in the figure of Jacob. Yet, this limited field of representation is, as Melissa M. Brough observes, in keeping with both Invisible Children’s overall strategy and a trend in Western humanitarian culture

to cultivate “the sex appeal of America as donor/consumer” (2012 180). Situating the video within a broader field of commodity activism, which unites consumer and popular culture with advocacy, one can see how it is the consumer who is hailed, and whose idealised self is projected as possibility.

The video deploys images of past genocides, including that in Rwanda, to remind the viewer of other atrocities that took place on the world stage to sluggish or minimal intervention. The gesture emphasises the obligation that comes with awareness. Here, multiple political emotions come into play: pity—that sentiment which intends to foster moral obligation to the subject and shame—no longer reserved for the perpetrator, but extended to the bystander. These recollections warn of failed promises. It is at this point that Russell outlines the plan and breaks down how it will work, each offering a step and a player: Kony is to be captured by Ugandan military who must be supported by the U.S. government which will act only if they believe the citizenry cares, which can happen only if people know his name.

To promote this core awareness, IC planned the action of Cover the Night, when, on 20 April during people would cover their towns with posters. The video outlines this plan and the visualisation of the chain reaction: A young man puts up a poster. The wall collapses to reveal another wall, whose embedded television screen broadcasts images of a demonstration. This wall collapses onto another, this time showing Congress in action. The domino effect continues until only one thing is left standing: A fantasy mock-up of the *New York Times* declaring “Kony Captured”. An action is connected to a distinct outcome. Even as exposure leads to action, the trajectory is not seamless: posterings is an activity linked to other projects and other screens.

[Cover the Night is not the sole advocated activity. Russell also](#) provides instruction on how to apply pressure to culture makers and policy makers. He provides the list of 20 individuals seen as useful public spokespeople for the campaign. And celebrities are lightning rods for attention: They can help make noise and get attention in a crowded media ecosystem. The names provided also come with twitter handles—a mode of direct address which has the benefit of not only reaching the person, but also of being seen by those who follow that person. The video does not end with the celebrity. Rather, it encourages the audience to send messages (and in effect lobby) those who have the authority to implement policy or apply pressure to those who do create policy.

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This campaign is predominantly American as suggested by the list of political names, and by [the](#) iconography of the posters. Here we see something that suggests a bipartisan nature of the campaign as the Republican Elephant and the Democrat Donkey come together in a Venn diagram resulting in peace. The poster, with its party-based imagery and a slogan of [“Kony 2012”](#), highlight the U.S. the election cycle. This is a period many citizens and organisations leverage to help set agendas. And in this case, Cover the Night becomes an agenda setting mechanism within a larger campaign. Although the U.S.-centric perspective possibly impedes a truly transnational movement, it is a shrewd decision.

The film concludes with some immediate practical instruction: to sign a pledge; to purchase an action kit; to sign up for [TRI](#)—a commitment to donate \$3 per week to IC; and to share the video. These directives give the excited viewer a space to

channel his or her energies, harnessing the excitement to activity, and they hew to

Gregory's second principle for video in an advocacy campaign: "Storytelling should be Audience-Oriented and Should Provide a Space for Action" (Gregory 2012b).

The Social Life of Video or, The Context for the Text

In the case of *Invisible Children* and *Kony 2012* one can see Gregory's principles come together along with the aforementioned recommendation that video and publicity function as components of a larger campaign. The video has clearly identified its audience, and for the most part, makes its pitch to that audience: students likely to be near a chapter of *Invisible Children's* robust network and impressive presence on campuses in the U.S. and beyond. *Invisible Children* has employed such strategic narrowcasting from its start, centring on, as Amy Finnegan has observed, "affluent, Christian, and largely female activists to 'save Africa' from itself (2013:31). Continuing, Finnegan notes that this demographic is well matched to the kind of "non-wave making activism" that centres on fundraising, event planning, and supporting mainstream policies toward Africa." A narrative that places agency within the male bodies might seem counterproductive given this largely female base, but this as Finnegan notes, they "often profess fascination with the *Invisible Children* male protagonists [and feel a deep-seated compassion for the African children and an urgency to respond and do something]" (2013:31).

Meanwhile, *Cover the Night* provided just the opportunity to build on the excitement and contribute to capacity building. It was a real-life activity intended to bring together local *Invisible Children* chapters and potential new members, as

students on campus sought to organise the event. The planning meetings leading up to the major event, as well as the event itself, could supply occasions to invite interested participants into a broader structure of sympathy outside the text of the video. For savvy groups, this could also provide an occasion to invite local media, and extend the reach of the campaign and reinforce its messages.

For some, the seeming failure of Cover the Night reads as a failure of the video or of the campaign. But this may actually be more of an issue of the unpredicted and unprecedented viral success of the video; in a manner, it was too successful. The video was released on March 5th with a plan for Cover the Night to take place on 20 April. Clearly they anticipated 6 weeks as the time needed to build the trajectory of awareness to action. This challenge manifested in real world challenges: There were not enough Action Kits available to meet the demand, leading to backlog and highly publicised frustrations with the operation. Meanwhile, the critiques proliferated and the backlash against the campaign came swiftly and hard.

However, the crisis faced does not suggest the futility of a social media campaign, but rather it raises questions of how activists negotiate the speed and reach of these new media, particularly when assessing the timeline of a campaign. Sam Gregory sees this as a lesson in “the importance of building momentum through in-person screenings”—something formative in the development of Invisible Children until then—because these are still crucial and useful to “creating strong collective nodes of activism [that] allow responsiveness to questions that come up about choices of advocacy and dialogue” (Gregory 2012b). Such practices as outlined by Gregory indicate why viral video may be entirely desirable within programmes that are better

served not by broadcasting, but by narrowcasting, a form of niche marketing that speaks directly to its target audience.

The wider dissemination and viral spread gave rise to numerous critiques of the work. There were those who found the ‘slick’ ‘Hollywood’ aesthetics of the video to be instantly damning. Yet, that is not necessarily antithetical to the production of an advocacy video. Although there has been a longstanding discomfort in the combination of politics and entertainment, with mass culture seen to pose a threat to the political potential of the public sphere and dismissive scepticism lingering in hybrid-terms like “charitainment” or “slacktivism,” popular culture is not at odds with advocacy. Liesbet Van Zoonen and Henry Jenkins, for instance, explore the ways entertainment culture offers opportunities to exercise citizenship typically associated with entertainment as places where one can exercise or entertain citizenship. Andrew Cooper treats celebrities as significant figures in international diplomacy. A move away from the expected sobriety of an advocacy piece does not necessitate an ineffective or self-cancelling outcome.

In the case of *Kony 2012*, the aesthetics seemed to speak to the core constituency and target audience, particularly with the use of Facebook and YouTube, which reflected on the immediate modes through which audiences would encounter the film and then share it. Moreover, these platforms serve as sites for the construction and performance of self, and here, a performance of the humanitarian self, which works within IC’s “logic of neoliberal consumer capitalism and identity branding” (Brough 2012, 188). These pages, both as represented in the film and as imagined in

use, can function to articulate the relationship of the user to the world, and of the humanitarian to the person in need.

Such a focus contains a pernicious narcissism, wherein the self provides the filter for perceiving the world. And here, we can see here a quality of social media life that represents the perception of the world through expressions of the self. While Russell's navigation through the Facebook timeline may appear an innocuous segue strategy, it establishes his place as centre of the world, not only as explorer and navigator, but also as narrator and saviour of the others on his wall, and the Jacob he encountered in Uganda. It aggrandises Russell – and the identifying viewer—and unites this solipsistic approach to the world with the “politics of pity,” generating a “narcissism of pity,” whereby the emotion generated by the encounter creates a glorified humanitarian agent empowered to bestow aid upon the victimised subject.

Such an imperialist reaffirms problematic tropes and power dynamics. The sequence wherein Russell explains the situation to his son may be most representative of this practice. The drastic simplification of European saviours for an Africa in crisis, while emotive, obfuscated the complexity of what was happening on the ground, and at times relied on misinformation. At the time of the video's release, the Lord's Resistance Army had ceased to be the threat to safety and security it had posed earlier, and Joseph Kony was no longer in Uganda. Such facts brought into question the necessity of empowering the Ugandan military, particularly in light of the terrible human rights record of the government in power, one of the video's own interviewees, and the army that was fighting the LRA.

A Campaign Film, Its Critiques, and the Public Sphere

The success of this video allowed not only the critiques, but also the responses to the flaws to come to the fore. The digital platform of distribution and exhibition offered up a discursive space for people to debate the merits of the video and the campaign, and to speak back to it. Such activity fits neatly with Michael Warner's centrality of speech in the formation of publics as well as Craig Calhoun's suggestion that we "think of the public sphere as involving a field of discursive connections" with clusters "organized around issues, categories, persons, or basic dynamics of a larger society" (Calhoun 1992,37). Pierre Levy's idea of the virtual agora, where communities use knowledge space as "a site of collective discussion, negotiation and development" (1997,13) enhances this awareness of the Internet's potential as public sphere, and the capacity of this campaign to generate a number of publics.

In this case, the prominence of the video provided an occasion both to clarify the political conditions, and, more importantly, for Ugandan voices to come to the fore. Al Jazeera online produced "The Kony Debate" as a page that combined additional reportage and clarification with links to Ugandan activists, in particular "Uganda Speaks," a collective of Ugandan bloggers and filmmakers who provided reports from the field, and who later released their own film about the LRA, bringing more local voices into the discussion. And while mainstream media aggregated the dissenting voices, less formally curated spaces also offered a platform as video bloggers and Ugandan journalists appeared on YouTube to speak back and respond to *Kony2012*.

Invisible Children was also interrogated as newly aware audiences inquired about the financial management and Evangelical ties of the organisation. And again, the online space where the video was released provided a platform for these debates and discussions. Blogger and communications specialist Jed Sundewall noted that while the organisation and its campaign was beset by many problems, corruption in the ranks was not one of them as the allocation of funds both fit the organisation's mission (to raise awareness through film) and was commensurate with that of other charities. Meanwhile, IC kept the conversation going, offering answers to critiques on their website, and even asking people to tweet their questions to @Invisible with the hashtag "#AskICAnything."

The question of the organisation's Evangelical ties is equally sticky, particularly as IC obfuscated their proselytizing mission and links to the religious organisation. The Fellowship (Troutfishing, *Daily Kos* 2012). Such potential ties become all the more unsettling when one considers Evangelical lobbying for fundamentalist values that ostensibly led to the introduction of the Anti-Homosexuality bill in the Ugandan government (Hunter and Sharlet, 2010). Indeed, both organisations have been seen as closely aligned with the government under President and Fellowship member Yoweri Museveni. Such discussion regarding these ties, appearing in many blogs such as *Daily Kos*, *Talk to Action*, and *Truth Wins Out* produced a public discussion about the organisation, its ambitions, and the risks of supporting even the most seemingly innocuous or well-meaning component of their work (Besen 2012; Wilson 2012).

Yet is essential not to condemn Christianity within activism. Although alarming when tied to ugly principles, religion and advocacy work have longstanding ties, and this has even been the case within early Protestant evangelical movements and human rights or humanitarian activism. Missions around the world have provided a transnational infrastructure for sharing testimony and administering aid in cases of the Abolitionist movement or the coordinated effort to end the persecution of Christian Armenians in Turkey at the turn of last century (Torchin 2006). Moreover, faith-based networks are prominent today in the in humanitarianism, human rights, and environmental justice. That said, Invisible Children maintained equivocation around their partners or their missionizing aims, which came under scrutiny within the new public and blogosphere that this highly visible campaign provoked into view.

Indeed, amidst the spreadability, came an opportunity for “drillability,” a term Gregory develops to address the ways a campaign can open issues beyond the core message; even when unintentional, the campaign and its videos remained productively drillable.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I’ve explored some of the concrete practices around crafting and deploying testimony within an advocacy campaign. Despite the seeming damp squib of Cover the Night 2012 and the backlash Invisible Children received for *Kony* 2012, it is essential to remember that this is one component of a wide-ranging and deeply entrenched campaign that offers lessons in how to build sustained engagement by complementing online media with other forms of action. Moreover, it offers an occasion to consider the ethical dimensions of representational strategies and prompts us to ask how one can engage an audience without resorting to excessive

simplification, or a narcissism of pity that engages politics of victimisation and occludes local agency and voice. The phenomenon of *Kony 2012*—its success and the backlash—offers a useful reminder of the changing landscape of online media, which amplify the speed and reach of a message and its response. How does one manage the distribution and exhibition of a video in a field of increasingly spreadable media? What emerges throughout, however, is that there is potential for the activation of witnessing publics through media and within media domains, but that content and context must be actively and rigorously considered.

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¹ LRA Crisis Tracker: <http://www.lracrisistracker.com/>.

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