

#Kony2012: How not to change the world

LSE's Mareike Schomerus says that the Kony 2012 campaign advocates a narrow worldview that could prove very costly.

“You are making our work here very difficult”.

It is a side remark, uttered politely and quietly. Near the start of the “Kony 2012” video, a man says this. If you have seen the video — and chances are you have — you might have missed this small interaction just four minutes into the film. The man who is worried about having his work made more difficult tries to interrupt the filmmaker who is interviewing a child in the northern Ugandan city of Gulu. I don't know who that man was or what he was trying to do. The footage is so old it will be hard to establish. But his words turned out to be prophetic: “You are making our work here very difficult.”



LRA warlord Joseph Kony

Jason Russell, the most prominent face of the group Invisible Children, has made the work of bringing about change very difficult indeed. Invisible Children's campaign is a well-packaged call to leave the state of affairs untouched; their message seems so modern because their tools are. The point made is conformist: Fight violence with violence, dismiss intricate steps of social change and make a narrow ideology mass-compatible by having millions of unquestioning people raise their fists in support. For the US, Europe and other generally comfortable corners of the world, this is a worrying picture of a mass culture that easily falls for propaganda.

For the world's less cozy places, to which the areas in which the Lord's Resistance Army has been active belongs, mass support for maintaining the status quo is a tragedy.

So what is the status quo? Well, it is indeed complicated. But suffice to say that for decades, this has been an intricate mix of violence that causes more violence, a violent government that garners international support by vilifying one side of the conflict, and international attention often reduced to uninformed celebrities expressing shock and horror. Crucially, it has been part of Ugandan government propaganda to make this war seem like the tour of personal madness of one man: Joseph Kony. This is the status quo that needs to be challenged.

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