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On Freedom and Complexity in *The (Captive) Nation*

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ABSTRACT

In Biodun Jeyifo's readings of the Chibok girl's captivity in *The Nation* magazine (Nigeria), he reveals his desperately optimistic insistence on collective substantive freedoms. Jeyifo's response to the situation is one of doubling complexity, pointing to the systemic violence that not only made the girls vulnerable, but also produces the young male perpetrator/victims who hold the girls captive and that holds the nation captive as well. In this paper, Murphy argues that Jeyifo's complex reading of denied substantive freedoms in (what he might now call) a captive era in Nigerian history also provides a lens for removing the "familiar mask of the righteous judge" represented by the Western iteration of the #BringBackOurGirls movement. The paper interrogates the way in which Boko Haram tapped into the exaggerated post-9/11 fears that Islamic militants were a threat to Western values and freedom and provided evidence for Christian fundamentalist mythologies of a clash of civilizations. The paper suggests that the fervent discourse regarding the Boko Haram kidnappings point to a contest of fundamentalist ideologies, two opposing but tactically similar movements that ignore the structural lack of substantive freedoms that bring members into their fold.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Nigeria, freedom, Chibok, #BringBackOurGirls, sex slavery, capabilities approach, Biodun Jeyifo

In his introduction to a collection celebrating the works of Wole Soyinka (*Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity*), Biodun Jeyifo argues that "the god of revolution chose to make a habitation in Soyinka's writings, not in the familiar mask of the righteous judge and executioner of the unjust, the exploiters and the despots, but in the confounding and contradictory doubleness of prophet and charlatan, altruist and misanthrope, victim and perpetrator, creator and destroyer" (xxi). It is in this space of uncomfortable doubleness and seemingly paradoxical "complexity" that Jeyifo's own conceptualization of Nigerian (and human) emancipation also resides. In his articles over the last few years for

Nigeria's *The Nation* newspaper, Jeyifo lingers in something of an optimistic despair or, perhaps, a desperate optimism when he describes life and the contingencies of freedom in Nigeria. In a recent article on the 55th anniversary of Nigeria's independence, Jeyifo exclaims, "Oh, to be young and full of hope and a joyful openness to all of life's possibilities again" ("Those of Us") but his work in that article (leveling a scathing critique against the current failures of Nigerian universities) and in the rest of his writing refuses the naivety of youthful openness in favor of a radical oppositional optimism that insists that only an end to systemic violence will provide freedom to Nigeria's citizens.

Jeyifo's desperately optimistic insistence on substantive freedoms in his journalistic denouncement of the Chibok girls' captivity and the government's response to it is particularly instructive on this point. On the night of April 14, 2014, Boko Haram descended on the Chibok Government Secondary School in Bornu State, Nigeria and captured 276 teenage girls. The leader of this self-proclaimed fundamentalist Muslim jihadists took responsibility for the kidnappings and announced that they would sell the girls as sex slaves ("Boko Haram Leader: We Will Sell"). The government's response was slow and ineffective; two years later, the vast majority of the girls remained in captivity and the hope that they would be recovered safely by Buhari's military had also been dashed.

Jeyifo's response to Boko Haram and their enslavement of young women as a terrorist tactic is one of "doubling complexity." Jeyifo focuses on the systemic crises resulting from Nigeria's "predatory political order," which create a doubling effect – the feminization of poverty and the masculinization of violence. Impoverished girls are vulnerable to predatory fundamentalists, to be sure. But Jeyifo expands his critique to the

endemic “pathological maleness” (Jeyifo’s term) that holds young Nigerian men captive (“Boko Haram, Sex Slavery...”). Those young men, in an effort to escape their own impoverished circumstances, hold the girls and the nation captive as well. The problem is a direct consequence of Nigerian politicians’ refusal to ensure the substantive freedoms of its populace. “With all [the] wealth in human and natural resources,” Jeyifo wonders how there can be “so much violence, insecurity and suffering in our country, especially for the majority of our peoples?” (“Between Ourselves”). Jeyifo repeatedly reminds his readers that the median age in Nigeria is 19 (“Boko Haram, Sex Slavery”), at the same time as 70% of Nigerians live in extreme poverty (“Voting Against One’s Interests”). As a result, young men and women are chronically unemployed and those who are lucky enough to have a job often work unpaid (“May 29, 2015”). In his exuberant response to Pope Francis’s speech in the U.S. Congress outlining the very systemic problems he has been lamenting in Nigeria, Jeyifo reminds us that this is globally endemic: “millions or even billions [of people] in all the countries of the world are being excluded from all that is vital for life lived in dignity and freedom from want” (“Pope Francis, The Talakawa Pontiff”). The result is a burgeoning class of young adults who are disconnected from opportunity, vulnerable to exploitation, and susceptible to persuasion by anyone who can offer them some semblance of freedom.

In his response to the abduction, Jeyifo passionately expresses his solidarity with the mourning families and his desire for the young women to be set free. However, Jeyifo uses the moment of the Chibok abduction to ask for more than that the state #BringBackOurGirls, and he even correctly predicts that the state will be unlikely to emerge as the hero in this horror story. Indeed, Jeyifo’s concept of freedom is

characteristically more complex than that which the Chibok girls' rescue from their physical captivity would provide. Instead of merely demanding what Isaiah Berlin and others have dubbed a "negative freedom" from captivity, Jeyifo's writing amplifies young men and women's insistence on their right to "political, economic, and social power," social safety nets, a quality education, and access to jobs as "leaders and opinion molders" ("Boko Haram, Sex Slavery," "Those of Us"). He posits a conceptualization of freedom that is a modification of Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, which suggests that freedom takes the "form of individual capabilities to do things that a person has reason to value" (Sen 56) and emerges most readily in environments free of tyranny, poverty, repression, and social oppression. It is from this insistence on substantive freedoms that Jeyifo's desperate optimism grows.

Because political parties, elite capitalists, and terrorists are so adept at dividing people along ethnic, religious, and class lines, however, Jeyifo seems to call for a movement of Nigerians who would together announce that "we can't breathe," echoing black Americans' lamentation and rallying cry after Eric Garner's death. He writes, reflecting on his 70th birthday, that people need to be deliberate in their struggle against the predatory political order, and they "must tirelessly organize and strategize to find the best means available to us for wresting control of our lives and our natural resources from the looters and their minions." In dedicating his own life to this deliberate communal struggle for individual freedoms, he states, "the celebration of one life, or of one's life can only and truly be an act of rededication if the one becomes the many, if beyond the person, beyond individual merit or achievement, there is cause for collective liberation from the forces that degrade and impoverish human life in our society and in our world"

(“Celebration”). Essentially, Jeyifo posits another doubling concept: a notion (similar to Sen’s) of freedom as grounded in an individual’s capacity to achieve the lives they seek to pursue, but for Jeyifo, the consummate Marxist, those freedoms are most likely to be enacted when citizens seek them out in a unity of revolutionary spirit with one another. Jeyifo thus proposes a *communal* capabilities approach. This notion of freedom avoids the individualist focus of most conceptions of freedom for a sense of collective responsibility for ensuring that all citizens have the capability to do what they reasonably desire paired with a revolutionary Marxist foundation that supports revolutionary collective strategies to counter government interference in access to those capabilities.

With significantly less complexity, Boko Haram seems to recognize these two driving desires among impoverished Nigerians – a drive to substantive freedoms and a drive to communal action in support of those freedoms. While Boko Haram boasts a diverse group of adherents, their ideology particularly appeals to those who have been disenfranchised, the “street hawkers, cobblers, blacksmiths, knife sharpeners, tailors” who don’t see their interests represented by the government elites (Walker 146). Islam provides the guise of community and support that young men seek and Boko Haram’s anti-government violence serves as the proxy for the political, social, and economic power that they lack. By representing religion and violence as the protection and weapons of the oppressed, Boko Haram mobilizes disaffected young northern Nigerians to action. But as Jeyifo notes, “religion is a mere excuse for self-serving, reactionary insurgencies in which faith is transmogrified into an opportunistic heresy to induce droves of disaffected male youths into their ranks” (“Boko Haram, Sex Slavery”). Boko Haram’s

reliance on Islam is a façade for mobilizing disconnected young men to their geopolitical cause.

While Boko Haram might be able to offer a semblance of the political authority young men seek, it appeals to women in a slightly different way. A gendered angle on Jeyifo's critique reveals that the lack of substantive freedoms that push young men to Boko Haram are similarly push factors for young women. As Hilary Matfess suggests, women also found Boko Haram appealing because "the lives they were promised under the rule of Boko Haram were tangibly better than their lives as Nigerian citizens (Matfess 6). Indeed, Boko Haram's provision of food, services, and education appealed to both women and men. And yet Amnesty International indicates that between 2014 and 2015 Boko Haram kidnapped as many as 2,000 women (Amnesty International 59), many of whom were forced into sexual servitude, forced marriage, and slavery. Boko Haram is one of two groups (the other being Islamic State) that explicitly and brazenly embraces slavery in the 21st century. They celebrate and practice sexual slavery, in particular, as their terroristic modus operandi. It seems necessary but almost naïve to ask: Why would an organization want to emblazon the two most universally reviled practices – rape and slavery – on their public banner? It is no coincidence that for those disaffected Nigerian young men, permission (and even encouragement) to practice slavery provides them precisely what they seek: power in a world in which they feel alienated and disconnected. This is an especially salient promise when marriage and children confer status but are out of reach because of economic disenfranchisement (Matfess 59). More specifically, though, slavery provides them power over an individual, it creates subordinates – women who are considered and treated as lower than they are, someone even more impoverished

than they are. Practicing slavery does not empower them to undermine the system, nor does it provide access to political power or material well-being. Tapping into the psychology of poverty, Boko Haram instead provides young men the power to control individual women, which is merely a simulation of the real power of redress that they seek.

That shadow of power seems to be enough to appease those who experience no substantive freedoms whatsoever. On the one hand, they frame their repulsion out of Maiduguri by the Nigerian military and local militias as “*hijra*” comparable to Mohammed’s exile from Mecca, thus conjuring a sense of victimization by summoning Islamic tradition that paints the Nigerian state as radically opposed to their rights (Walker 156). In response, Boko Haram advertises their own power to fight back against oppression and assaults on Islam in their propaganda videos, featuring footage of their soldiers in action, armed with assault weapons, military artillery, and tanks. They show young men murdering other young men who were marked as infidels. They show crowds of submissive women who they claim will be married to their single soldiers. Thus, as Jeyifo suggests, the hyper-masculinization of violence and the meager authority afforded them through the enslavement of women helps project a false sense of escape from the poverty that emasculates them.

When the government responds by engaging Boko Haram in traditional combat instead of providing substantive freedoms to the young men of Northern Nigeria, they mistake the battle for the battleground. Fighting the Nigerian government in this way only serves to reinforce the masculinization of violence and the simulation of freedom that can be won through it. As Jeyifo astutely suggests, the revolution instead lies in

addressing poverty, healthcare, employment. The young male minds held captive by Boko Haram will only be freed when they are granted opportunities for power that grow from political participation and economic opportunity instead of an assault rifle.

But it is not only impoverished Nigerian young men and women who have been captivated by Boko Haram's propaganda machine. The terrorist group's other striking victory has been captivating Western audiences. Boko Haram's messaging since 2009 (when Abubakr Shekau rose to power after the death of founding leader Mohammed Yusuf) has often been preoccupied with an outward-facing message. Boko Haram advertises – not just to Nigerians but to everyone in the world – that they are using women as “sex slaves” and that they will “sell them off” because “there is a market for selling girls” (“Boko Haram Leader: We Will Sell”).

Their commonly used name suggests that they condemn Western beliefs and practices at home and abroad – *boko*, which means “misleading or false” and is colloquially used in the phrase *karatun boko* to mean misleading non-Islamic teachings, is *haram* or forbidden (Bargery). Their official name (before declaring allegiance to IS and becoming Islamic State West Africa Province) was Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, a name that asserts that they are people committed to the prophet's teachings, the dissemination thereof, and jihad in the name of those teachings. At its very core, Boko Haram's project is to undermine Western ideologies and educate the world in the teachings of Islam, so their messaging to the West is central to their recruitment of disconnected Nigerian men.

To be sure, Shekau threatens the presidents of Nigeria, the governors of Bornu state and other local officials in his videos. He complains that too many Muslims in Nigeria have fallen prey to Western ideologies. Shekau also regularly addresses the “non-believers of the world, especially the tyrants of United States, France, and Germany” as the intended audience of his videos (“Video Shows”). Around the time of the Chibok kidnapping, Shekau’s threats were aimed less at the enemy within Nigeria’s borders to the ideologies of the global north. He declares that neither Obama, Hollande, Netanyahu, Ban Ki Moon, nor Queen Elizabeth can kill him and that Boko Haram will continue to govern an Islamic caliphate and pursue the teachings of the Koran despite all their efforts (“Boko Haram Leader Dismisses Reports”). After denouncing disbelievers of all stripes, the Saudis, the Shias, and democracy, and insisting that he does not need their approval, Shekau smugly lists his tactics for global domination: “We will kill!! We will hold slaves!! We will sell!!” (“Shekau Makes Takfeer”). Though he only briefly allowed his delusions of grandeur to extend to threatening the United States directly, he has always been aware that his tactics (for instance saying that he will himself marry a girl of 9 or 12 years of age) are nearly universally reviled and that he is thereby explicitly challenging Western norms and mores in his pronouncements. Even the Islamic State denounced Boko Haram’s tactics and remotely, but very publicly, announced that they were installing new leadership for Boko Haram. In August of 2016, Abubakar Shekau reiterated his claim to leadership of Boko Haram, saying that regardless of what Islamic State may say about his practices, he cannot abide by anyone who disobeys Koranic doctrines by “dwell[ing] in the society with the infidels without making public his opposition or anger against infidels” (“Boko Haram: Abubakar Shekau Reappears”). Shekau’s interpretation

of the Koran suggests that it is compulsory that he denounce so-called “Western” behaviors and practices in Nigeria and openly and directly condemn the West for promoting these behaviors globally. The claims Boko Haram makes in their videos about kidnapping, raping, and enslaving young girls ups the ante. They contend that they are undoing Western education through the most forceful forms of “conversion” and thus asserting themselves as the most radical defenders of the faith. Through this doubling attack, they play on the most salient of post-9/11 fears in the West – that fundamentalist Islam will destabilize Western ideology in countries like Nigeria and threaten Western hegemony worldwide.

If Shekau’s goal was to strike terror in the hearts of Westerners, he succeeded. The spectacle of power exhibited by kidnapping and enslaving teenage girls woke Westerners up to Boko Haram’s existence. Through the promotion of these particularly heinous acts, Boko Haram evokes a terror response through invoking sexual slavery – a practice that has recently gained significant attention and has risen to be considered perhaps the most abhorrent, and almost certainly the most sensationalized, crime against humanity. For onlookers in the West, the specter of “sex slavery” evokes an image of absolute terror – a life utterly disarranged by the power of strangers, an inescapable fate of absolute servitude, community shaming for compulsory actions, physical violation – a life without freedom of any kind. It plays on the most potent of democracy’s myths, the notion that people are essentially free by birthright, and it calls into question the nature and accessibility of freedom in democratic states.

Boko Haram tapped into the exaggerated post-9/11 fears that Islamic militants might descend upon innocent Christian children in the night and steal them away; they

made what was otherwise a myth a well-publicized (though still anomalous) reality. And thus, Boko Haram's announcement that they are called by the prophet to embrace sexual slavery shook unsuspecting armchair activists the world over. When the #BringBackOurGirls activist movement hit the scene in the United States, it particularly captured the imagination of American Christians. Though there have been hundreds of other people kidnapped by Boko Haram and thousands killed, and though there are kidnappings and murders and sexual slavery both at home and abroad nearly every day, the Chibok girls' abduction into a life of sexual slavery spoke intimately to the concerns of Western Christians. Many, such as Teju Cole, derided the Western response to the Chibok girls' disappearance as simply clicktivism, the self-congratulatory tendency of 21st century Americans to conflate effective social justice action with supporting a cause by merely clicking a button (Mackey). Indeed, social media hastened the spread of awareness of the Chibok girls' disappearance and thousands of Americans acted upon their manufactured horror for the girls through ineffective and superficial online "actions" geared toward sharing basic information rather than creating a sustainable response.

Superficial social media engagement aside, I argue that a significant motivation for Americans latching on to this particular iteration of violence in Nigeria is linked to an influential strain of the current anti-slavery movement, which generates and maintains Christian anxieties about the end of Western hegemony and the rise of a Huntingtonian-style "clash of civilizations" battle between Christianity and Islam. Powerful American neoliberal think tanks mobilize the specter of Islamic slavery to mobilize political will in the White House to commit troops to intervene in military conflicts (as Balogun Jumoke

also noted of the Chibok response). They focus particular attention on conflicts in Africa – Sudan, Uganda, and now Nigeria – as a way of stoking anti-Islamic sentiments, even when it is counter-intuitive, as in the case of child soldiering in Uganda, which they blamed on Islam rather than on messianic Christianity (Murphy 103). The Institute for Religion and Democracy, a think tank that works to end the persecution of Christians worldwide, for instance, took as its poster child a Ugandan female child soldier, in an effort to trump up support for political and military intervention in Uganda that would focus on connections to Sudan and Omar al-Bashir (McDonnell and Akallo 102, 117). Christian Solidarity International's (CSI) programs to free slaves from Sudan was exposed as a sham when it was found that they were "redeeming" people who were actually only acting as slaves and were in fact providing funds for weapons for South Sudan's SPLA forces to liberate themselves from Sudan (Skinner 92). American Anti-Slavery Group (AASG), led by former deputy director of the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, Charles Jacobs, joined forces with Christian Solidarity International in their redemption efforts, and focused all of their anti-slavery work in Muslim nations including Sudan and Mauritania because, as Jacobs argued, other liberals won't stand up against "evil committed against non-whites" (Jacobs).

Organizations like these appeal to armchair activists and avid churchgoers, who in genuine concern for the suffering of others feel compelled to act when they hear inflammatory narratives that suggest that Islam permits and perhaps even mandates slavery, forced conversion, and forced marriage, especially when it affects Christians. For some time, it seemed that the anti-slavery activists were exaggerating anecdotal evidence of isolated cases of slavery that were not in fact being justified as mandated by

Islamic law. But then IS and Boko Haram provided the proof that this group of anti-slavery fear mongers were seeking. When Boko Haram and IS flaunt their idiosyncratic enthusiasm for slavery and link it directly to their faith, they provoke Western Christian fundamentalists and provide fuel to the flames that these think tanks are fanning among U.S. citizens.

Thus, I would suggest that U.S. interest in #BringBackOurGirls was so enthusiastic for reasons that are perhaps more significant than clicktivism can explain. #BringBackOurGirls, or more specifically the Chibok kidnapping itself, seemingly provides evidence of the think tanks' false allegations of Islam's commitment to slavery and the rabid mistreatment of women. When the US media picked up on the Chibok girls story, it was always sensational, and the sensationalized images the media produced added weight to the anti-Islamic claims. The early focus of many of the stories was typically on the girls' Christian faith and practically never on the fact that Muslim people are also oppressed, kidnapped, and murdered by Boko Haram (see, for instance, Djadi), and certainly paid no more attention to the systemic oppression of impoverished Nigerians than they do of the systemic inequality that plagues their own country. Reports that included survivor voices and descriptions of their lived experiences among Boko Haram focused heavily on forced conversion to Islam (see Mackey) and on the bastardized version of Islam that Boko Haram professes as justification for slavery (see Bauer). CNN and other news outlets were quick to pick up on the news that a Chibok girl was responsible for a recent bombing in "a small village" but never recanted those statements when it was proven false, allowing Christian news outlets to continue spreading the myth that the Chibok girls (the captives who seemed to be deemed innocent

enough to garner sympathy) are being transformed into suicide bombers and Muslim martyrs (see Abubakar and Ellis). Images of the Chibok girls as “wives,” “sex slaves,” and exposes of their pregnancies in captivity provided *Time Magazine*, *The Daily Mail*, and other publications the “humanitarian pornography” that satiates the media appetite for suffering (see McFarlan, Alter, Bauer).

The end result is that media and activist organizations acted as megaphones for Boko Haram’s sensationalized portrait of themselves, which in turn encouraged fundamentalist Christian organizations to malign – and suggest intervention – in Nigeria in general. *Christianity Today*, a self-proclaimed monitor of global Christian persecution, who tracks the number of Christians who are martyred for their faith each year and speciously lists the top 50 countries where it’s “hardest to be a Christian,” now ranks Nigeria seventh in overall religiously-motivated violence and fourteenth for persecution in general. 36 of the top 50 worst Christian-persecuting countries are African nations, according to Christianity Today’s ranking system. In the top 20, only North Korea and Vietnam are included for reasons other than violence attributed to Muslims, and thereby, Islam in general. One of the authors of the report explicitly indicated that “the purpose of the report is to ‘create effective anger,’ leading people to pray and act on behalf of persecuted Christians” (Burgess). The end result, however, is a general panic about what is happening in Africa and in Nigeria specifically, and increased fear-mongering about the specter of Muslim terrorism.

Similarly, Christian Solidarity International, who is infamous for those staged slave redemptions in Sudan, added Nigeria as one of its focus areas after declaring Boko Haram to be one of their main targets for intervention. They write on their website:

“Powerful forces are trying to destroy Christianity in Nigeria. Please stand with us as we continue to stand with Nigeria’s Christians! A gift of \$142 can provide a family of seven in northern Nigeria with mosquito nets, mattresses, soap and food for a month!” (“CSI Reaches Nigerian Christians”). While their gift packs do address basic needs of internally displaced people, the focus of their concern is not in the lack of substantive freedoms or the inaccessibility of work that youth in Northern Nigeria face. Instead, their focus is on protecting only Nigerian Christians and, more to the point, protecting and promoting the dominance of Christianity in Nigeria.

This suggests a second reason why #BringBackOurGirls resonated so much in the U.S. fundamentalist Christian community – another iteration of what I call the “transitive property of suffering” (Murphy 108). It is no coincidence that Christian Solidarity International’s mission is based in the Corinthians verse that instructs: “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it.” (I Corinthians 12:26; see “About Us”). CSI calls upon their donors to imagine the suffering of others as their own. Similarly, the use of “our” in #BringBackOurGirls was tremendously powerful globally. In Nigeria, the use of the word “our” allowed allies to unite across geographical, ethnic, and religious lines. When it was adopted internationally, it inspired people to imagine the potential for global unity that can affect change. It fires up that desperate optimism that Jeyifo adheres to, which is required in the fight against all forms of terrorism and tyranny, but it does not speak to the revolutionary spirit central to Jeyifo’s thinking.

Indeed, the unity that “our” inspired did not promote a radical assessment of the structural inequalities that allow Nigerians to be preyed upon by Boko Haram. Instead, it played directly into the identification strategies employed by those on the religious right

to affect the “transitive property of suffering,” through which they convince American churchgoers to believe that their own lives and the lives of their families are at risk because the lives of the Chibok girls are. If they are “our” girls, then “our girls” are at risk. The conclusion suggested by these post-9/11 anti-Islamic projects is not one that critically examines the freedoms denied Nigerian youth who join Boko Haram or even the freedoms denied the young women abducted by them. Instead, the central concern is that American citizens are at risk of persecution and limitation on their freedoms.

The discourse around the idea of “persecuted Christians” has gained enormous traction in the U.S., even within high-power government circles. Persecution.org, the website of a group called “international Christian Concern,” indicates that their objective is to be ‘your bridge to the persecuted church.’ On their site the phrase “global persecuted church” is applied equally to the very real persecution of some Christians in Nigeria, on the one hand, and to the U.S. citizen who is the defendant in an “atheist law suit” that will force him to take his 230 foot cross off his lawn, and to the Kentucky family who engaged in a heated battle to get a Biblical course taught in the local public schools, and to the California citizens who are oppressed by the lack of prayer in their school board meetings, and to a NASA employee who has been banned from using the word “Jesus” in the NASA newsletter. Charisma Magazine, another online anti-persecution site, advertises the film “God’s Not Dead” and its sequel, which suggest in their ads and trailers that “Faith is on trial in America” and that they will “arm Americans to make a case for Jesus.” They provide readings with suggestions for how they should “devil proof your family” (Berglund). The examples of enslaved Chibok or Yezidi girls are rhetorically employed evidence of the creep of Christian persecution in the U.S.

instead of as way to contextualize and perhaps quiet the anxieties of lesser oppressions in Kentucky or California.

The notion that we have to fight for “our” girls – those apparently helpless Christian women abroad and at home – pervades the discourse of these Christian fundamentalist groups who target a similarly disempowered, disconnected populace in the U.S. This identificatory aspect of the fundamentalist propaganda – the appeal to “our” own interests as Christians – allows them to mobilize people to international causes that they would otherwise ignore and provides them with a common enemy and a community of people in whose name they can fight for their own freedom. These organizations make U.S. churchgoers believe they are part of a persecuted minority so that they will be willing to wage a war on Islam. They focus on uneducated, rural, white supremacist mythologies about the purported decreasing relevance of white lives in order to garner support for their interventions in Africa, bringing impoverished Americans into their fold through similar tactics of appealing to their sense of displacement and lack of resources. The promise a simulation of “freedom” from Islamic oppression as a false antidote to the systemic wealth inequality that is the source of their followers’ real problems.

And in the end, the focus on religion as the source of crisis in Nigeria simply serves to reiterate the claims of Boko Haram that they are acting for religious reasons. What is always a constant, whether it is Boko Haram or Christian Solidarity International who has produced the propaganda, is a deliberate and studied refusal to acknowledge the systemic failures that lead to such a crisis. Western organizations point to Sharia and Islam (interchangeably) as the culprit, never paying any mind to the disturbing realities that Jeyifo points to regularly – the 70% of Nigeria’s citizenry who remain in abject

poverty, the failure of the educational system, and most intimately tied to American interests and complicity, the extraordinary corruption that allows a resource rich nation to ensure such inequality. This lack of attention to systemic injustice is precisely what allows both fundamentalist Christians and Muslims to mobilize people through a façade of religious oppression rather than addressing the root causes of their oppression. Jeyifo's complex reading of denied freedom in a captive era in Nigerian history also provides a lens for removing the "familiar mask of the righteous judge" represented by the Western iteration of the #BringBackOurGirls movement. Creating a mythology of Nigeria's monolithic Islamic terrorist state allows them to overlook the very same systemic problems that both Boko Haram and Nigeria's own government does.

Thus, I am suggesting that the fervent discourse regarding the Boko Haram kidnappings point to a contest of fundamentalist ideologies, two opposing but tactically similar movements that require and demand state violence as a mechanism of both their oppression and their mobilization. The very violence that precipitates the engagement with the ideologies among the poor is replicated as the only response to their oppression. We must remain wary of those elites – Western and Nigerian alike – who conjure the suffering of Nigerian women, only to mobilize politically incendiary and racially motivated Islamophobic logic in the guise of human rights.

In the face of this willful ignorance of the structural violence that is at the heart of this fundamentalist movement, is it possible to maintain the desperate optimism Jeyifo invokes? When our governments woefully fail their citizens and when violence is met with violence which is met with violence, what hope does the citizenry – either in Nigeria or the US – have that the revolutionary spirit can be ignited and prevail? Jeyifo holds up

the public response to Ebola as a possible sign of human capacity to face a threat (a capacity they do not tend to have, says Jeyifo, when confronted with a seemingly intractable problem like corruption or poverty or terror). But is there still a reason for hope? How does Jeyifo maintain his desperate optimism?

In his discussion of Eric Garner's death, Jeyifo reminds us: "we must recognize this racism as an old, old racism that is on its last legs. It draws its strength and resilience from newer and more subtle forms of racism. And from its opponents who play into its hands by not recognizing that the fight against this old, hoary racism will be won only on the condition that we know and accept that when one black man or boy "can't breathe" men and women of all races and social groups "can't breathe" either" ("I Can't Breathe"). If indeed it is a blatant discriminatory logic born of a desire for a sense of essential superiority that is at the heart of the fundamentalist discourses we are discussing here, then Jeyifo's call to unity and identification in the face of systemic failures is important on both continents.

How does this identificatory process differ from that of those who would "wear the mask of righteous judge?" Can a movement to address the radical inequalities and systemic injustices that affect so many youth in Nigeria and in the United States – male and female, Muslim and Christian – invoke identificatory strategies and the transitive property of suffering – such as we do when we collectively chant, "we can't breathe" without having someone respond with the willfully ignorant "All lives matter"? Is it possible to mobilize unity between people through a focus on the substantive freedoms that so many on our planet lack, without it being coopted by those who would create more suffering?

Jeyifo's writing inspires us to focus a global struggle on the root causes of disconnectedness, poverty, and slavery instead of on the tangible realities of individual lives in captivity. We must attend to the larger structural issues that dispossess people and locate power outside of violence. Perhaps this is how we access t/hat "god of revolution" that Jeyifo speaks of, who is both altruist and misanthrope, creator and destroyer.

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