

The Exploitation of Nigeria's Chibok Girls and Creation of a Social Problem Industry

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Abstract

The kidnapping of nearly 300 high school girls by Boko Haram led to the rise of #BringBackOurGirls (#BBOG) movement in April 2014 in Nigeria. Scholarship on #BBOG mainly focuses on its success in generating global attention to the Chibok girls through effective social media engagement. This paper focuses on an unintended consequence of the movement — the establishment of a social problem industry around the Chibok girls and their community. The paper draws on a dataset with over 160 interviewees and FGD participants, including 42 #BBOG activists. The findings demonstrate the interplay of contextually situated actors with particular values, and interests engaged in claims making regarding the Chibok girls. The #BBOG turned the Chibok kidnapping into a *social problem* in a sociological sense. In the process, the BBOG engaged in an ideational battlefield with three other entities. The paper contributes to social problem theory by articulating a dynamic seven-stage social problem industry schema. This approach avoids the unilinearism and determinism of existing theory in the sociology of social problems. It argues that not all social problems are resolved in ways that are favourable to those affected. The empirical findings highlight the political economy of humanitarian crises caused by terrorism. The exploitation of the Chibok girls and their community provides an example of the persistence of social problems — social problems are useful in appropriate hands.

Keywords: #BringBackOurGirls (#BBOG), Social movement, Humanitarian crises, Chibok girls, Boko Haram, Social problems