

HASHTAG KONY2012 !1!!

Burn Shit

March 11, 2012

The year 2012 is the year we go after Joseph Kony and put a stop to his bloody Christian crusade in Northern Uganda. Or is that the Democratic Republic of the Congo? Or the Central African Republic? Or Southern Sudan? Who cares? He is the baddy. We are the goodies. Let's kick his arse! It's *our responsibility* as citizens of the overdeveloped world. It's our number one mission. It's *our burden*. Forget the cynics. This is a shining white ray of hope rising on the dark continent. Let's just watch the video, wear the bracelet, sign the petition, 'like' the facebook page, retweet the status, buy the action kit, join the club.

Let's log on to the 'Invisible Children' online store and get a T-shirt; the donkey and elephant uniting in political-zoological harmony, symbolising the universal support this righteous campaign is enjoying. Democrats and Republicans united against Evangelist thugs. Spread like a virus through youtube and Justin Beiber's twitter page, we will heed this call and take up the torch. We will feel the sense of belonging and pride it gives us. We will feel our egos assuaged and inflated as we see the smiling African faces beam back at us in the next heartwarming installment from Jason Russell, Bobby Bailey and Laren Poole. A job well done. Mission accomplished. Pat on the back. Circle jerk.

Forget the abuse, murder and torture perpetrated by the Ugandan military. This is secondary to *The Cause*. As is the repression of gays and human rights activists by the Ugandan government. Pipe down with your jaundiced mentions of underlying causes and structural inequalities! Your incredulous misgivings about the *origins* of the conflict, your ideological assertions about the African continent's wars being primarily the product of power struggles over resources. Quiet! You, doubter! You, supporter of Kony! You who won't stop bleating about the minerals that make the circuit boards, make our phones vibrate, go into our wedding rings and are so essential to the preservation of civilisation. This cause is universal – it is not political, it is humanitarian! Finally a chance to make a difference. To be part of something. A chance for change. Hope and change. Change we can believe in. Keep hope alive.

And what wonderful iconography! The Banksy/Shepard Fairy style is *so hot* right now, and social activism is *so* in vogue. Didn't you see Time magazine's person of the year? How about that Levi's advert?

A mass-hysterical explosion of fatuous and patronising comments on social networks. A fad-campaign initiated by three rich white men who have released a half-hour internet poverty-porn video, complete with emotional blackmail and all the standard bombarding images of 'the

destitute African', The Other and, of course, the inevitable white saviors. All in an effort to lobby our rich Western governments into militarily assisting the Ugandan army, to help find Joseph Kony – the black Blofeld, the evil genius and mastermind behind Uganda's (and perhaps the whole region's) problems.

This kind of bogus new social movement is a harbinger of our social void – a sad indictment on our bleak epoch. #KONY2012 is the archetypal symptom of an age in which we are presented with more information than ever before but find ourselves unwilling or unable to use it. The veritable eruption of the Kony trend points towards the depraved correlation of late capitalism between *access* to knowledge, *means* of communication, potential *catalysts* or *vehicles* for emancipation and the seeming impossibility of effectively breaking the endless cycle of social reproduction. We have found ourselves at a depressing impasse in which an intense, violent and generalised outburst of rage and disaffection can be easily co-opted by the Levi Strauss Corporation, where a sincere desire for change can be manipulated by a well-dressed politician, and where participation has successfully been reduced to clicktivism in support of phony charities. But this is nothing new.

With a complete obfuscation of the structural, social, economic, historical and political causes of conflict in Uganda, the Invisible Children video takes reductionism and condescension to never-before-seen heights. Framing the entire problem in terms of a good ol' good guy/bad guy dispute, diluting it into catch-all sound-bites for us and their toddler, the noxious scenes wouldn't look out of place in 'Team America', but for the lack of puppets. When did we experience this strange turn in which charitable giving became so intimately connected with celebrity self-aggrandisement and conspicuous consumerism? Bono's 'Red' campaign, where we were invited to buy handbags, iPhones and laptops with a portion of the mark-up going to AIDS prevention projects. Where we can remedy our guilt of privilege by off-setting our 'beneficiary-of-exploitation' footprint with every pound spent. A grotesque two-in-one bargain to mitigate the adverse effects of one's own purchasing history, engaging with the system and compensating for our engagement in the same tawdry transaction. This is our predicament. Capitalism has successfully merged the two distinct operations; the amelioration of the effects of structural inequities (charity), and the simultaneous reinforcement of those structures (consumption-[re]production), whilst remarkably managing to persuade us that the consumption and (re)production cycle is the *only* solution, rather than the fundamental problem. Philanthropy has reached a point where it is just as degraded and debased as the rest of the social superstructure. It promotes destruction with the one hand and remedy with the other in an absurd trade-off with people's conscience and desire.

Nobody bats an eyelid when Madge goes to Malawi and chooses herself an infant. There's no uproar when her promised multi-million dollar school project is cancelled. Invisible Children, the self-appointed protectors and representatives of Africa's 'Invisible' children, who have so benevolently 'discovered' these poor wretches, who tell us that 'they didn't exist' until they were kindly located by the trio of ambitious film school graduates, have quickly captured the attention of millions – Our outlook looks more gloomy every day.

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