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FLEEING BOKO HARAM: THE TRAUMA OF CAPTIVITY AND CHALLENGE OF FREEDOM

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FLEEING BOKO HARAM: THE TRAUMA OF CAPTIVITY AND CHALLENGE OF FREEDOM

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INTRODUCTION

Captivity and freedom are seen as opposites. To be captive is to be imprisoned, detained, confined. To be free is to have liberty, autonomy, free will. It seems logical to associate captivity with trauma, and freedom with an end to trauma. However, enduring elements of trauma challenge the notion of freedom, especially when considering possible psychological effects of long-term captivity. The assumption that the cessation of captivity and experience of freedom constitutes a peaceful, joyful, and self-determining existence may be highly problematic, as may be the social implications of freedom and the impact of responses by others to a person once in captivity but now “free.” This article conceives of the route traversed from captivity to freedom by the victims of Boko Haram (including the young female students abducted from a school in Chibok) as akin to walking a tightrope—a tense, tenuous, perilous, unstable process. It is not impossible to get to freedom, but successfully traversing the tightrope may require unbelievable, extraordinary luck. The surest way to get through is to have the requisite training. Experience also helps. The experience necessary for surmounting the odds need not be experience of abduction and its horrors, but experience with strategies on how to cope with trauma. Such strategies can be provided through culturally appropriate psychosocial support.

This paper aims to provide insight into captivity-induced trauma and its implications for the experience of freedom by Nigerians—both those who successfully escaped from Boko Haram and those rescued by the African Union’s multinational task force—after their forcible abduction from their communities in northeastern Nigeria by Boko Haram. It attempts to provide a conceptual framing of how the abducted girls survived the violence of the insurgency, trauma of captivity, and real fear that even after freedom, they or their relatives and friends might still be attacked. It also focuses on structural violence to provide a gendered analysis of the security threats facing girls and women in war zones. Finally, the paper critiques the ways that governments, civil society organizations, and other international agencies have addressed the safety, well-being, and rights of girls and women traumatized by captivity, and provides recommendations for future action.

Although boys and men have also been subjected to Boko Haram’s violence in Nigeria, this paper employs a gendered lens and structural violence framework to examine the Chibok girls’ abduction, arguing—as Mary Caprioli (2005) has posited—that “societal-level discrimination and violence against women [may] have a far more deleterious effect on society in increasing the likelihood of internal conflict” (161). Gender politics in this view may cause the emergence of a situation where “the cultural roles assigned to women and overall impact of gender” could lead to “intrastate violence and conflict” (Caprioli 2005, 161). Boko Haram is patriarchal nationalism come to life, employing gender norms to define women as child bearers, and men as soldiers. The impetus to control women’s reproduction and labor influenced them to abduct the Chibok girls and hundreds of other women and girls for use as “wives,” sex slaves, and unpaid domestic labor. This paper argues that the pervasive “domestic environment of inequality and violence, structural and cultural violence results in a greater likelihood of violence at the state and the international level” (Caprioli 2005, 161).

This paper also proposes that the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is a result of structural violence, a combination of frustration arising from “inequality, discrimination, rebellion and relative deprivation” and an ability to finance rebellion, causing intrastate conflict (Caprioli 2005, 162). It is clear that exploitation and marginality are built into the Nigerian social order. Despite becoming the largest economy in Africa in 2014, Nigeria ranked third in percentage of population in poverty worldwide, following India at number one and China at number two (Omoh 2014). There is significant

evidence of the asymmetrical distribution of benefits in Nigeria. While the richest African is Nigeria's Aliko Dangote, with an estimated net worth of \$12.1 billion, and the lifestyles of Nigeria's rich and famous favor a grand flaunting of wealth amidst the majority's misery, there is no welfare state in Nigeria to provide a safety net for the poor and marginalized (Vinton 2017). Ethnic, religious, and sectarian strife are pervasive barriers to the ability of the exploited to unify. It is a violent world for the economically disadvantaged and marginalized. Those with no stake in the existing system may be persuaded to join violent insurgent groups, such as Boko Haram, that claim to want to destroy the system and put a better one in place.

This paper further argues against the assumption that trauma ends with the cessation of captivity, since individuals still deal with enduring effects of the trauma experienced while captive. Most need consistent support, counseling, and other psychosocial assistance. While a supportive family and community are helpful, sometimes that cushion is insufficient to bring peace and healing to the traumatized. Therefore, intensive, reliable, and consistent psychological therapeutic intervention and social support may be necessary for their long-term security and well-being.

METHODS

I belong to the Bring Back Our Girls movement and founded #BringBackOurGirlsNYC with three young Nigerian men I met at the rally held at Union Square in New York City, organized by Gugulethu Mlambo, a young South African woman (Akande 2014; Freelon and Lehman 2014). #BringBackOurGirlsNYC is an interfaith coalition of people of many nationalities, committed to advocacy and actions that will continue until the Chibok girls and other abducted Nigerians are free and reunited with their families. I maintain online campaigns on social media, have organized conferences on the Chibok girls and the security situation in northeastern Nigeria, and have been interviewed by mass media outlets (Okome 2015c).

I originally intended to interview five escapees, to privilege their voices, confident I would have no problem because I was well known to the Bring Back Our Girls groups in Nigeria. I assumed there would be interest in having the issue analyzed and publicized. However, my assumptions were proven incorrect. Very little of the expected assistance to link up with the girls and their families was available. I also found that some of the girls who had benefited from scholarships meant for Chibok girls and who

were accessible to me were not necessarily abductees, but daughters of prominent Chibok community members. There were also allegations by the chairman of the parents of the abducted students that “fraudsters” were using their children’s names to raise funds (Daily Post 2015). That assertion raised more questions about girls who were more readily accessible as research subjects. Time was of the essence, as I was only in Nigeria for three months, so in the end, I interviewed only one Chibok girl and about fifty internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Katampe, a section of Abuja, Nigeria. Names of those interviewed have been withheld or pseudonyms used throughout to protect their identities.

I used a semi-structured method to conduct the interviews. In addition, I extensively culled news reports, other scholars’ research on girls in conflict situations, and reports by governments and international non-governmental agencies. Abigail Ali (pseudonym) said she was the first Chibok girl to escape from Boko Haram after the abduction. She recounted having escaped with a friend, who is now in school in Jos. Although in captivity for a short time, she remains highly traumatized. Now living in a poor section of Abuja with an older brother, Abigail said she suffers from flashbacks, guilt, depression, and other signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Other than prayer and comforting words from family, Abigail has received no treatment (Ali 2015). The IDPs I interviewed in Katampe were a mixed group of Christians and Muslims who were not in a camp, but who said they had trekked from Borno, Niger, and Adamawa states to the capital to escape Boko Haram. Several were looking after children whose parents had been killed by Boko Haram, and many families’ children had been killed as well. The community had also lost two young children to snake bites during the journey to Abuja. Having no shovels or tools to dig graves, they were forced to pile branches on the dead bodies, much to their sorrow (Anonymous 2015).

BOKO HARAM

Boko Haram is an insurgent group in northeastern Nigeria employing organized terror to advance its objectives. In its early days, it was supported by al-Qaeda and appears to have first become active in a noticeable way in 2002. Headquartered in an Islamic center in Maiduguri, Borno State, it recruited combatants from the children of poor, dispossessed Nigerians, as well as Chadian and Nigerien children enrolled in its Islamic schools (Chothia 2013; Wilhelm 2015). The Salafist (“a school of thought often associated with jihad”) cleric Mohammed Yusuf helped found Boko Haram

in 2002, so adherents are called “Yusuffiya,” with a majority said to be “impoverished northern Islamic students” (Chothia 2014). The name Boko Haram popularly translates as “Western education is forbidden,” due to the group’s rejection of all aspects of Western culture, as well as social and political life, as *haram* (forbidden in Arabic).

Prior to 2009, Boko Haram did not express commitment to the violent overthrow of the Nigerian government. Instead, Yusuf condemned northern Muslims for participating in what he described as “an illegitimate, non-Islamic state and preached a doctrine of withdrawal.” With increased conflict between Christians and Muslims, government crackdowns on Boko Haram in Maiduguri and elsewhere, as well as rampant police brutality and violent measures by state agents culminating in the deaths of approximately seven hundred of its members (including Yusuf), Boko Haram became radicalized, with its central objective expanding to the creation of an Islamic state in Nigeria (Sergie and Johnson 2014). Boko Haram is estimated to have from a few thousand to nine thousand members (UK Home Office 2016, 11), now calling itself *Wilayat al Sudan al Gharbi* (West African Province) of the Islamic State (Adio 2015).

President Goodluck Jonathan’s administration declared a state of emergency in several states in May 2013. The United States declared Boko Haram a terrorist group later in 2013, and in May 2014 deployed a small group of military advisers and troops to Nigeria to assist in the search for the abducted Chibok girls (Miller 2014). Boko Haram became more ruthless after the failure of its proposal to negotiate an exchange of the Chibok girls for Boko Haram prisoners in government custody, and began using children, predominantly girls, as suicide bombers and possibly as spies and recruiters (Alexander Smith 2015; Chothia 2014). Al-Qaeda disavowed Boko Haram in May 2014 after the abduction of the Chibok girls and the release of the infamous video of Abubakar Shekau boasting that he had sold the girls off to marriage for approximately \$12 (Nossiter and Kirkpatrick 2014). The Baga massacre on January 3, 2015, in which Boko Haram militants killed anywhere from several hundred up to two thousand people, was the group’s deadliest recorded single attack by far (Fessy 2015; Mark 2015a). Many of the victims were women, children, and elderly residents. As of mid-2015, at least seventeen thousand people had been killed since Boko Haram began its rampage in 2009, according to Amnesty International (BBC 2015a); and more than 2.1 million Nigerians have been displaced due to the violence, according to the International Organization for Migration (AFP 2015a).

On August 13, 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari announced he was setting a three-month deadline to defeat Boko Haram (AFP 2015b). He appears to have taken more initiative than his predecessor in seeking to collaborate with other West African states beset by Boko Haram (Andzongo 2015; BBC 2015a; Buharimeter 2015; Channels TV 2015a; Greenberg 2015; Omonobi and Agande 2015; Vanguard 2015). Nevertheless, although the insurgents currently appear to be weakened, Boko Haram has not been defeated.

ABDUCTION OF THE CHIBOK GIRLS

Chibok is the headquarters of the Chibok Local Government Area, which had a projected population of 78,630 as of 2011 (City Population 2011). It is adjacent to Sambisa Forest Reserve, in the northern part of Borno State, and is eighty miles by road to Maiduguri, the state capital. The people are predominantly farmers and wild game hunters, and the majority are Christian, though there is a minority Muslim population and some residents who worship indigenous gods. The ethnic group and language spoken are both Kibaku. The people are very enterprising but predominantly poor, and the area lacks sufficient potable water, infrastructure, and housing (Manasseh and Bitrus n.d.). The people of Chibok, while hard-working, suffer the same fate as other rural communities in Nigeria: growing poverty exacerbated by gross neglect by the government. The percentage of people living under the poverty line in rural Nigeria increased from 46 percent in 1992 to 71.7 percent in 1996, and the depth of poverty increased from 16.3 percent in 1992 to 30.4 percent in 1996 (Nsikak-Abasi and Udoh 2013; Anyanwu 2005). Education is often embraced as a means to achieve upward mobility, but families that seek to educate their children struggle against great odds. Girls tend to get the short end of the stick when the combined weight of meager resources and social constraints push families to choose which of their children to educate. However, the Chibok girls had already surmounted some of these odds and were in secondary school by the time they were abducted and began to receive international attention.

The story is well known. Nearly three hundred girls, taking examinations at Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria, were abducted in the middle of the night on April 14, 2014, by Boko Haram insurgents pretending to be members of the Nigerian armed forces. The Chibok girls' abduction was the most audacious of several carried out by Boko Haram, and the largest number of abductions in one incident. Alarmed

families and communities gave the Nigerian security forces information on the whereabouts of the abducted girls and their abductors, but the Nigerian security forces failed to act, as President Goodluck Jonathan's administration did not believe the reports, suspecting an attempt to embarrass the Nigerian government (BBC 2014a, 2014b). A firm response to the shocking skepticism and nonchalance of the Jonathan administration was provided by Ibrahim Sabo, Chairman of the Presidential Fact Finding Committee on the Abducted Chibok Girls:

During the siege on the school, 119 students escaped from the school premises, before the insurgents took away their classmates. A total of 276 students were thus abducted. As of today, 57 of the abducted students have been reunited with their families after escaping.... Sadly 219 students remain unaccounted for. (Usman 2014)

The school from which the Chibok girls were abducted is government-owned, which is a troubling indication that the government has failed to provide sufficient security for its own schools. Yet, President Jonathan's response to the report of the committee, which he appointed, emphasized the responsibility of the government and other school proprietors for the security and welfare of students. He charged corporations, federal and state governments, and individuals who own schools, especially in northeastern Nigeria, to provide basic security (Usman 2014). Boko Haram abducted girls at will, and the government's response to the abduction of the Chibok girls proved to many its callous disregard for the plight of abductees and their families (Okeowo 2014a, 2014b). In August 2015, the governor of Borno State finally met with parents of the Chibok girls, but it was too little, too late. Concerned locals set up a civilian Joint Task Force (JTF) in Borno and other northeastern states, with vigilante forces confronting the better-armed Boko Haram (Okeowo 2014a, 2014b). While feats of the vigilante JTF are much touted, they have not ended the depredations. Further, it is troubling that non-institutionalized militias are being employed instead of forces with a legitimate mandate to maintain law and order. Thus far, eighty of the Chibok girls have been freed from Boko Haram captivity, with many of them managing to escape by themselves (most in the immediate aftermath of the abduction). Fifteen are reported to be in the United States, traumatized and suffering flashbacks, nightmares, and lonesomeness (Oduah 2015c; Yaro 2015; Alter 2014). At the time of initial writing, the two-year mark of the abduction was approaching, and 219 Chibok girls had yet to be found,

despite the rescue of hundreds of women and children by the multinational forces mobilized by the African Union (Dixon 2015). As of April 2017, 195 Chibok girls were still missing (Akwei 2017).

TRAUMA

Trauma occurs when a situation is life-threatening or potentially damaging to physical integrity, causing a fearful, helpless response to “both objective characteristics of the event and subjective responses on the victim’s side” (Klasen et al. 2010, 1097). Trauma, then, can be caused both when a person is faced with extreme stressors that are apparent to observers, as well as by stressors that only the individual experiences in a way that cannot be apprehended through observation by others who do not experience the trauma. Single-incident trauma differs from repeated, prolonged, or complex trauma. If allegations that Chibok girls have been used for military operations by Boko Haram prove true, observations about effects of trauma on child soldiers apply to them (McLaughlin 2015). According to citations in Klasen et al. (2010, 1097), child soldiers experience “complex trauma” (Herman 1992; van der Kolk 2005), stemming from “multiple, chronic and prolonged, developmentally adverse traumatic events, most often of an interpersonal nature (e.g., sexual or physical abuse, torture) and early-life onset” of these stressors (van der Kolk 2002). Most of the 276 abducted Chibok girls can be classified as experiencing this latter type of trauma, particularly the 195 girls still in Boko Haram captivity approximately one thousand days (as of April 2017) after their abduction (Akwei 2017).

Erica Greve, the founder of Unlikely Heroes—an NGO working with victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking—who has helped three escaped Chibok girls, has said the girls exhibited symptoms of shock, withdrawal, grief, fear, panic, and pain (Folarin 2014a). Borderline personality disorder is also a symptom of childhood trauma (Dietz 2000). Symptoms can be so severe that if left untreated, sufferers cannot undertake routine activities. Enduring trauma can do lasting damaging to the psyche, particularly when occurring in childhood (Waller et al. 2000, 82). Somatoform dissociation is one possible response to childhood trauma that causes an inability “to process somatic experiences adequately” (82). Trauma also can produce a psychological dissociation, causing an inability to incorporate “cognitive, behavioural and emotional aspects of experience” (82). Some damage can be temporary, and is best managed through a variety of therapeutic and culturally appropriate approaches that attempt to make life more bearable.

Furthermore, a *Time* article on abductees in the United States who were freed after ten and eighteen years in captivity has highlighted the impacts of long-term captivity, including the “disorientation of vanishing from one world when you’re a child and reemerging into an entirely different one when you’re a different person yourself” (Kluger 2013).

While there is no conclusive evidence that the Chibok girls are being used as child soldiers, some reports do tell of their use for military purposes, with the abducted individuals forced to inflict punishment and brutality on other captives (McLaughlin 2015; HRW 2014). This practice makes relevant evidence from a study by Derluyn et al. (2004) on former Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) child soldiers, which has shown that they experience severe trauma and suffer from high rates of PTSD. Thirty escaped or rescued girls and women, including twelve Chibok girls, in testifying to Human Rights Watch (HRW 2014), have “described life in captivity which includes forced marriage and labour, rape, torture, psychological abuse and coerced religious conversion.”

The immediate effects of trauma include shock, denial, fear, despondency, despair, alertness to opportunities to escape, and high expectations of impending rescue, among others. As captivity progresses, expectation of rescue declines and greater submission occurs, in order to reduce abuse, though there are also occasional flashes of hope. The longer the captivity, the lower the expectation of rescue becomes. Abductors can psychologically traumatize captives by telling them that no one is looking for them and they will never be rescued. Abductees are also told that given the atrocities they may have committed, no one would want them back. Abductees may then begin to see captivity as permanent, and themselves as damaged goods who might be shunned if they were to return home. Beatings, forced participation in violent acts, continuous sexual assault as “wives” of their abductors, corporal punishment, and forced combat may all accompany captivity. Psychological studies of abducted child soldiers in other African countries have indicated that they can be expected to suffer from PTSD and other negative psychological responses (Derluyn et al. 2004). Yet some studies give reason to be cautiously optimistic: Klasen et al.’s (2010, 1104) study of former LRA child soldiers in Uganda has shown that 27.6 percent of them “showed a resilient mental health outcome.”

TRAUMATIC EFFECTS ON GIRLS IN CAPTIVITY

It is possible to argue that Boko Haram abducts girls and women for multiple purposes, including their use as domestic and sexual captives (Ogbeche 2015). It is also possible that the Chibok girls, being educated, are more desirable because they have skills that are needed and judged important by the insurgents. Human Rights Watch has reported:

Videos released by Boko Haram's leaders in January and May 2013 suggest three key motives for the initial abductions: to retaliate against the government for its alleged detention of family members, including the wives of the group's leaders; to punish students for attending Western schools; and to forcefully convert Christian women and girls to Islam. (HRW 2014)

There is a pervasive assumption that girls in captivity are subjected to sexual and domestic servitude, sometimes forced to engage in acts of brutality in an effort to harden them, and kept in line by acts of barbaric violence and brutality (Derluyn et al. 2004). But scholars like Blattman, Mazurana, and Carlson (2009) also have argued that captive girls have agency as commanders, wives, mothers, and combatants, and should be given the same consideration as male combatants when demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) programs are implemented. Furthermore, some scholars have argued that long-term psychosocial support is not necessary for the successful reintegration of most freed abductees. In fact, the language of passivity and victimhood is rejected as an inaccurate descriptor of this population (Blattman, Mazurana, and Carlson 2009), a position made clear in McKay and Mazurana's (2004) book on Sierra Leone, Mozambique, and Uganda:

[G]irls were part of government, militia, paramilitary and/or armed opposition forces in 55 countries, and were involved in armed conflict in 38 of those countries. In the 55 countries where they are present, girls were recruited by the fighting forces and a number of them made the decision to join. For many, "joining" is a response to violence against themselves or their community, a protection strategy or an opportunity to meet their basic needs. Others enter through being abducted by members of the forces, as occurred in 27 countries.... Thus, limiting our understanding of the roles they play to those of captive "wives," "sexual slaves"

or “camp followers” is inaccurate. (21)

The Chibok girls were abducted, so there is no ambivalence about their lack of volition. However, in other cases, it is important to distinguish between acts of volition and those that emerge from a “Hobson’s Choice” situation where, having no other choice, individuals or groups engage in predatory behavior to ensure survival. If girls “joined” armed groups out of fear for their own safety, is this an exercise of choice? If it is a choice, should there be no distinction made between it and less constrained decision-making? (Mazumdar 2015a; Ross 2015d)? It is also hard to agree that choice is being exercised where the choice is “join the military, become a street child, or die” (McKay and Mazurana 2004, 24). It seems that rather than argue that girls and women are combatants in the same ways as boys and men, one might make a case of support for both girls who were victimized and coerced into becoming combatants and girls who join of their own volition. A vital part of DDR must be psychosocial support that enables girls, women, boys, and men, as well as the families and communities affected by violence, to resume a modicum of normality in their lives.

CASE: ABIGAIL

When I interviewed Abigail, I asked what her life was like and how things were before Boko Haram came to her school. Abigail did not answer this question, but in her small, quiet voice, began to recount the events that immediately preceded the abduction, focusing on her abduction and its aftermath. Her words are the testimony of the one verified victim of the abduction:

The thing is on Monday in the afternoon around, in the morning around 8, yes we come write WAEC and after that we come hostel and we come fetch water and we go bath together with my friends we come hostel carry our books start to dey read and they, and I now tell them say I wan sleep. And I go back to laying bed I now sleep. Around 10pm I start dreaming that I was inside car but the car is moving with me, one of my brothers dies inside the car that’s why the dream is painin me and I just stand from that bed and my friend ask me “Abigail wetin happen with you?”...

And she asked me that why are you shout, there are emmm, dream with my brothers and before we go, people come inside

our school. They begin shouting “Boko Haram come inside town you people will come outside” and everyone go outside, me I carry my cloth in hand everything I pack put it inside bag and carry it and now come outside. They say that, one person say, me I wan move, one person say that “you, you wan go with your cloth and the person collect my cloth throw it inside the room. And no way that emmm, they gather us for one place. From there I start knowing that that people is not good people they now start say, they start ask us, they say “why you people are here?” we come say we come because of study. They say “study of what”, we say, and we didn’t answer for them. They ask “we dey ask question” and me I no know what happen with me some people they are crying, me I don’t cry, I know people cry and they ask me why I am not fear? And they tells me that I should go and show for them our store and we go me and one girl we go together and I go show for them. After they see me they go inside and go bring cars, and they start remover out our food. From that place I ask one person I tell him that “now as we done show for you this place you can leave us so that we can go? He now say that “who told you” and from that time my body start to shake and they start to dey bomb our school. After that we go back, we go into the hostel again come move the other girls before they carry us come outside and they throw bomb inside the school and they keep us near the fire so that the fire dey hot our body so everybody begin dey shout, come dey ask us say some people say that they should kill us, some people say that no these ones is girls, if it is boys we will kill them all but if it is girl emmm our religion say is not good that we should kill girls, they come and say you people should go outside, they collect everything burn it but if they see hyjab they will collect it and give to the others girls so that they will wear it. Some people the no get shoe we just commot like that, we think say they would go leave us, and they carry us go bush, after that they bring one Hilux and they go and bring some cars inside town they come and they tell us “who wan stay for the world? in this world” and they say that in this world everybody wan stay in this world. “Who wan die” nobody answer, they come say ok, if you wan stay for in this world enter this car, if you wan die, go for that side. (sobs)

After that we come enter the car and start moving, some of the

girls they put them inside the booth of car, we start moving, the car is moving, and they they will not follow the way, they will just follow bush....

Then, after I pray three times the time wey we was emmm waka inside the town, motorcycle for this side, front and back no how you will see a space and after I pray to God three times, I pray the first one, second one, third one before I open my eyes, all of them stop at the back and from that place I told my friends "I will not follow these people because these people they is bad people." ...I come say I go wan jump so that if I die my father go see my body so me I will not follow them, they come ask say why na me dey talk say wetin I dey talk, I say I dey tell them make them sit down well inside car so that they will not fall again. And the people from that place they say this is good and I still told them now I wan go, and I tell them anybody wan follow me, better follow me I tell them, they now say no they will shoot us, they come say is better make I dey there instead of jump. But just that time I jump out of the car. They see me, after they see me the start fire gun and I enter under tree and lie down, they start shooting me, I stand up started running, I am running in bush, and in that place I didn't see anybody, and still in the night and am still running, God help me I come see one village and one man come help me carry me commot. (sobs) (Ali 2015)

I tried again at the conclusion of my interview to ask what normal life was like for her before her abduction, but she totally shut down.

SURVIVING THE VIOLENCE OF INSURGENCY, TRAUMA OF CAPTIVITY, AND CHALLENGES OF FREEDOM

Trauma research on former captives has shown that dissociation, prayer (Harris et al. 2010; Tan 2007; Abernethy et al. 2006; Cohen et al. 2000), identification with the oppressor, negotiation, and succumbing to brutality while watching out for opportunities to escape are all survival tactics employed by captives (Waller et al. 2000). Following release from captivity, despite being free, a strong fear of recapture remains (Usman 2014). Psychosocial support for victims should include counseling from professionals and strategies for victims and their families to facilitate reintegration into the community. Not all returned abductees can depend on

more than family assistance, which while important, even crucial, may be more successful when combined with culturally appropriate psychological intervention. When asked whether anybody offered her psychological counseling, and whether she had been able to talk to anyone who offered advice, Abigail responded: “Yes, because my brother, he used to tell me that I should stop thinking and instead pray for them because crying cannot do them anything” (Ali 2015). Asked what difficulties she had faced since her escape, she answered:

[O]ur difficulties is in my family and my brothers, because before they come to kidnap us in school, they come and kidnap some there and up till now we did not have peace in our village. They still fear.... Am not happy because of the conditions, when we are running. (Ali 2015)

Abigail does not discuss her experience with anyone in her school or neighborhood due to fears she might be shunned or else barraged by voyeurs interested in her story for entertainment purposes. She has also been interviewed by the media and NGOs who promised to help her secure extra tutoring in English, math, and science subjects because she dreams of becoming a doctor. None of that help has been forthcoming (Ali 2015). I did not want to become one of her exploiters. I did not take photos, although I made a digital recording of the interview. Abigail has been on TV making basically the same statements she made to me. She speaks in a quiet, small voice that even to my untrained ears sounded like a person close to breakdown.

Abigail is deathly afraid that Boko Haram will abduct her again. According to a community member, at least one girl that escaped has been re-abducted. That girl was aided in her escape by a Boko Haram member who allegedly fell in love with her, extracted her declaration of love, made her promise to marry him, and then helped her to escape. After she returned home, he appeared with a few other Boko Haram members. When she spontaneously raised the alarm that Boko Haram had come, the community was thrown into confusion and everyone ran away while she was left in the company of the Boko Haram members who promptly re-abducted her in order to make good on the promise of marriage (Yaro 2015).

Another young woman escaped and was sheltered in a city far away from Chibok with a compassionate Chibok indigene. She was sometimes moody

or angry, and at other times non-communicative. Examined by doctors, she was found to be pregnant. Asked if Boko Haram had harmed or “touched her,” she said they were regular people, not bad as commonly perceived. The girl who denied being “touched” by Boko Haram shows that some of the escaped girls may be further traumatized after freedom because of a fear of being labeled a “Boko Haram wife” and rejected by their families and communities. If they have become pregnant through rape while in captivity, returned girls fear that the birth of the child will bring a living Boko Haram member into their families. Escapees may also face fear and mistrust from their own family members, since it may be hard for the families to separate victims forced to commit violent acts while in captivity from perpetrators and collaborators (Wilhelm 2015).

IDPs interviewed in Katampe had not been abducted, but had suffered the deaths of their family members in Boko Haram attacks. I was told about a community of eleven IDPs who were squatting in an uncompleted building and nearby empty lots. When we got there, over fifty IDPs were living there in dismal conditions. One of them, a woman, had gone to the Federal Secretariat in Abuja to seek assistance and was passed from office to office until she got to the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, where she received comforting words and a promise of assistance. The Ministry’s personnel asked for my help in interviewing the IDPs to document their experiences. The Ministry began making plans to relocate them, but the IDPs were reluctant to move when it became clear that men and women could not be housed together and not all of them could be accommodated. They were also anxious about losing their autonomy and ability to fend for themselves (Anonymous 2015).

Daily brutality has been visited upon the abducted girls, who have been psychologically traumatized in ways guaranteed to make them submissive in captivity (Oduah 2015b). Thousands of families have experienced death, forcible separation, maiming, dislocation, lack of security, and forced migration; and thousands of children have lost their parents through separation or death. Millions of children are out of school and millions are haunted by flashbacks of horrors, yet there is scant treatment for the psychological effects of trauma; many of these children manifest aggression, insomnia, duplicity, and sometimes despondency (Idris 2015; Oduah 2015d).

Returned abductees of Boko Haram have alleged that the Chibok girls have now become integrated into the group as part of their chain of command; they are used to intimidate other captives, and as favored household

servants, preferred “wives” with higher status, and trainees for future Boko Haram-inflicted violence (Mazumdar 2015b). This situation has occurred in many other cases where girls and women have been abducted—Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, the Balkans, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and others (Annan et al. 2009). Transformation from victim to perpetrator may be attributed to a cycle-of-violence phenomenon, where a victim adapts to harsh circumstances and brutal imperatives for the sake of survival, eventually victimizing others (Abbe Smith 2005).

Freedom is not necessarily problem-free either. PTSD, flashbacks, Stockholm Syndrome, depression, ostracism, and ambivalence about captivity and freedom are sometimes part and parcel of being free. *BBC Hausa* interviewed three girls who had escaped, two of whom described experiencing these symptoms:

Maria: I continued to live with the thought that Boko Haram members were coming to get me. I couldn’t sleep.

Hajara: I was having nightmares every day. There was even a day when I dreamed that they gathered all of us who fled in one place, and said to us: “You girls have defied us and fled. We’re now going to burn you alive.”

I haven’t forgotten about the other girls who are still in the hands of those people. I keep praying for them. (BBC 2014e)

Beyond the psychological trauma, Boko Haram has imposed other tremendous costs on the Chibok community and others in northeastern Nigeria. The insurgency has inflicted extraordinary socioeconomic pain on the region. Business has ground to a halt, as Boko Haram has been known to raid businesses, banks, and markets; it is likewise impossible to carry on social activities (Folarin 2014b). There has been increased distrust of foreigners, causing the repatriation of citizens of neighboring countries, whom some accuse of being members of Boko Haram (Awojobi 2014). Schools are closed, so educational indicators have worsened. Altogether, people in the area feel insecure, and many have become IDPs or refugees.

RESPONSES TO GIRLS TRAUMATIZED BY CAPTIVITY

If the case of Boko Haram abductees is an example of how the Nigerian government, civil society organizations, and other international agencies respond to threats to the rights, safety, and well-being of girls traumatized by living in captivity, that response is woefully inadequate (Ross 2015b).

Nigerian Government

President Jonathan did not visit Chibok to commiserate with the broken-hearted parents of the abducted girls—a gesture that would have gone a long way toward demonstrating his concern—nor did he meet with or console the parents of the abducted girls until asked to do so by Malala Yousafzai during her visit to Abuja. Under the Jonathan administration, Nigerian armed forces were poorly armed compared to Boko Haram (Baker 2015; Okome 2015b; Robinson 2015). Only with the impending 2015 elections did the government become an enthusiastic opponent of Boko Haram, cooperating with Cameroon, Chad, and Niger to form a multinational force backed by the African Union, the European Union, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States (D. Smith 2015). Increased defense allocations were sought; clandestine attempts were made to buy weapons from South Africa; mercenaries were hired (Al Jazeera 2015b; Emeozor 2015; York 2015; Miller 2014; Premium Times 2014a, 2014c).

However, these programs did little to assist the recovery of those affected by Boko Haram's violence already. The one documented example of psychosocial support by the Federal Government of Nigeria is a counter-violence, counter-extremism, and de-radicalization program run by Dr. Fatima Akilu, who has said, "Recovery is going to be slow, it's going to be long.... It's going to be bumpy" (Mazumdar 2015b). However, even Dr. Akilu's program focuses predominantly on providing education and rehabilitation as methods of de-radicalization for boys and men who have been arrested as suspected members of Boko Haram, rather than psychosocial support for newly freed girls and women (Freeman 2015).

The only evidence of psychosocial care that can be readily found online appears to be provided by international agencies and non-governmental organizations external to the African continent, though some of these programs involve partnerships with the Nigerian government (IOM n.d.; UNFPA 2016; EU/UNICEF 2015; EU/National Planning Commission 2013).

There does not appear to be an autonomous program with a coordinated and coherent framework designed by the Nigerian government that demonstrates evidence of its awareness of the seriousness of the problem and preparedness to engage it as a long-term priority. Instead, it depends on the leadership of various international agencies to figure out what needs to be done and collaborates with them to do it. This is not a recipe for effective transformation of a very dismal situation.

Civil Society Organizations

The Bring Back Our Girls movement has members in Abuja, where there has been a sit-out protest every day for over five hundred days; Lagos, which has a protest every Saturday; as well as Borno, Ibadan, Kano, Oshogbo, New York City, and many other cities in Nigeria and around the world. Members in Nigeria faced significant government animosity during the Jonathan administration, and the group has been weakened by the short attention span of many who were initially supportive. It has been criticized for its focus on the Chibok girls, though the group does also advocate for other abductees and IDPs, using the #BringBackOurGirls mantra because of its popular recognition. The group's tenacity earned it a meeting with President Buhari, who has promised to address its concerns. Additional responses to the Chibok girls' abduction included laudable but short-lived social media campaigns by Michelle Obama and other celebrities supporting the Bring Back Our Girls movement (Aminu Abubakar 2014). There were also proclamations of readiness to assist the Nigerian government's search for the Chibok girls by the United Kingdom, United States, and many other powerful countries, as well as a declaration by the United States that Boko Haram is a terrorist organization (BBC 2013; CNN 2014).

The first major donation to fund the Chibok girls' education came from Malala Yousafzai, who visited Nigeria and met with President Jonathan on July 12, 2014, her seventeenth birthday (ABC News 2014a, 2014b; BBC 2014c). She succeeded in getting President Jonathan to do something that the Bring Back Our Girls groups had been unable to do: meet with the parents of the abducted girls. She also announced "that her foundation had raised USD\$200,000 in support of the girls' education" (Abimboye 2014). American University of Nigeria (AUN) in Yola, northeastern Nigeria, provided scholarships for twenty-one of the Chibok girls in 2014 (Freeman 2014b; Mark 2015b). In 2016—after Boko Haram released twenty-one girls—Robert Smith, an African American billionaire, promised to sponsor

their education and that of three other girls from the Chibok community at AUN as well (Kazeem 2016; Nsehe 2016). At the time of Malala's visit, President Jonathan also agreed to meet with the parents of the Chibok girls in Abuja and said the government was providing all of the girls with scholarships, which they were allowed to use in other parts of Nigeria. It is curious that despite these scholarships, Abigail attends an overcrowded, poorly resourced school where her family pays her fees. Nigerian NGOs like the Murtala Muhammed Foundation, Linking the Youth of Nigeria through Exchange (LYNX), and the Gabasawa Women and Children Empowerment Initiatives (GWCI) have worked with and provided services, including medical and psychological care as well as humanitarian donations, to the Chibok girls and their parents. This work has taken place under the radar, mostly uncoordinated, and without huge resources (Takyi 2015).

International Agencies

The Safe School Initiative (SSI) was established in Nigeria's capital, Abuja. Launched by the UN Envoy for Global Education, it became a multi-donor trust fund administered by the UNDP. Nigerian businesses, the African Development Bank, and Nigeria's federal government also pledged funds (UNDP 2014). It remains to be seen whether the SSI can fulfill its promise of constructing enough safe schools for the children of northeastern Nigeria. Sarah Brown, Executive Chair of the Global Business Coalition for Education, has reported that real progress is being made to address the challenges faced by schoolchildren in northeastern Nigeria, including the relocation of 2,400 students to safer schools in other parts of Nigeria, assessment of three schools for rehabilitation, and plans to rebuild the Chibok Government Girls Secondary School (Brown 2015). Unfortunately, reports by Chibok indigenes and others are less positive, as even these accomplishments are modest given the breadth and depth of the problems.

The International Rescue Committee, *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF; Doctors Without Borders), United Nations Population Fund, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund have all done work with escaped and rescued women and girls (MSF 2013, 2015; UNFPA 2015; UNICEF 2015). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has also worked with refugees and returned abducted girls. It also claims to be working with the government of Nigeria; UN agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), UNFPA, and UNICEF; international non-governmental organizations (INGOs); and local NGOs like the Federation of

Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), among others (IOM n.d.). Despite the positive language and best efforts of these international agencies, their work has not been noticeably coordinated, and some—like the African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)—took much too long to decide on a strategy (BBC 2015b; Channels TV 2015b; ECOWAS 2015; Guardian 2015a, 2015b; Mbella 2015; UN News Centre 2015). The International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent distinguished themselves from similar organizations, allegedly facilitating secret negotiations between the Jonathan administration and Boko Haram for the girls' release, which ultimately failed (Aminu Abubakar 2014; Freeman 2014a; Ibekwe 2014; PM News 2014; Premium Times 2014b).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The restoration of stability and peace in northeastern Nigeria is imperative. Well-intentioned groups have suggested relocating the Chibok girls, but this is not necessarily a desirable nor durable solution. They might do better in familiar surroundings with culturally sensitive and appropriate psychosocial care and support that enables them to reintegrate into their communities in a holistic way that attends to their psychological and emotional needs. Additionally, relocation might further traumatize the victims by removing them from familiar surroundings. It seems more effective to provide the necessary psychosocial support and better educational and social conditions within their own communities.

The psychosocial health of the abducted girls, their parents, and their communities must be attended to, starting with the girls who have escaped or been rescued thus far. Parents also need support in order to just survive. While many agencies do bits and pieces of this sort of work, their efforts are not coordinated, and there is no lasting structure to engage the work. It is possible to recover from trauma. However, even those who are resilient require intensive psychosocial support. Nigeria must provide this psychosocial support system to aid in the survival and recovery of traumatized girls and women, as well as their families and communities. The government should establish a center of excellence that provides cutting-edge, culturally appropriate trauma care to address PTSD, Stockholm Syndrome, depression, anxiety, and other issues.

The recommendations made by Human Rights Watch (HRW) are worth supporting as well, including the crucial importance of the creation of

frameworks for medical and psychological care for abductees and IDPs, as well as all other victims of violence; the provision of training for health-care workers and other personnel to attend to the care, welfare, treatment, protection, and support of victims; the investigation and prosecution of crimes of sexual violence in accordance with Nigeria's international obligations; the assurance that all schools are safe; and the public release of the report of the fact-finding committee on the Chibok abduction (HRW 2014). The Nigerian health-care system is woefully inadequate even for routine care, and much must be done to rehabilitate it. The need to put a framework in place to address the problems of Boko Haram's victims can be used as an opportunity to design solutions for all victims of violence.

The current administration, under President Buhari, has formally apologized to the Chibok parents for an inept and inadequate response. President Buhari has also promised that the government would do everything in its power to rescue the abducted girls, help their families, and rehabilitate their communities and others destroyed by Boko Haram (BBC 2015c; Channels TV 2015c; Nwabughio 2015). President Buhari had made the defeat of Boko Haram and restoration of peace and security to Nigeria one of the three priorities of his administration. He, his wife, and the wife of the vice president met as a group with two mothers of abducted girls (Channels TV 2015a). This is all admirable, but given the urgency of the situation, the Nigerian government must meet its constitutional obligations to all Nigerian citizens and work to build peace and security through the comprehensive provision of psychosocial support for escapees, those rescued, their families and communities, and eventually for the 195 Chibok girls who are still in Boko Haram captivity, once they are rescued and reunited with their families.

Throughout this crisis, members of the international community have acted like ostriches with their heads in the sand. The Jonathan administration was not called to order, probably because the ethos hews more towards respect for state sovereignty than the emerging norm of the responsibility to protect. Likewise, Nigeria's West African neighbors share some of the blame. They chose to see Boko Haram as a Nigerian problem and failed to seek a regional approach to curtail insurgent activity. The international community is also failing the Chibok girls. UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888, and 1889 have expressed laudable ideals and objectives on protecting women from violence under conditions of armed conflict, but these resolutions have not led the UN to respond to the girls' abduction with the speed and urgency required (UNSC 2000, 2008, 2009a, 2009b). The

immediate condemnation of Boko Haram as a terrorist organization, and an organized, coordinated response to rescue abductees would have been the right thing to do. However, the international community is mired in the politics of power and stymied from swift action in dire situations in which the lives of ordinary people are threatened.

Human Rights Watch's recommendations to members of the international community have asked them to assist and support Nigeria in establishing bodies to investigate and prosecute perpetrators of human rights violations by Boko Haram, pro-government vigilante groups, and government security forces; developing a comprehensive system to support and assist victims of abduction and sexual violence; training police and prosecutors in basic investigation strategies; increasing educational opportunities for girls and ending gender-based discrimination in education; harmonizing national with international law on the rights of women and children; and encouraging and supporting "post-trauma, psycho-social and mental health services for victims of sexual violence and abuse" (HRW 2014). They also have asked the International Criminal Court (ICC) to monitor and evaluate Nigeria's capacity to hold perpetrators of human rights abuses and sexual violence accountable (HRW 2014).

CONCLUSION

Structural violence is evident in Nigeria. Many Nigerians did not appear to care that the Chibok girls had been abducted, due to the combined influence of structural violence and patriarchal nationalism. The girls were abducted from a school located in a very remote rural community; they are not from wealthy families; and a majority are Christians in a predominantly Muslim area. The state government was nonchalant at national and sub-national levels, and so was the public. The concept that the state should guarantee the safety and security of its citizens did not seem to resonate. Without the relentless action of the Bring Back Our Girls movement, the abduction of the Chibok girls would have been long forgotten. But Nigeria is not yet out of the woods. State accountability for citizens' welfare remains a challenge.

Peace and security have no meaning in Nigeria until Boko Haram is defeated and the Chibok girls and other abducted Nigerians are freed, restored to their families, and offered psychosocial support. Moreover, without meaningfully addressing the factors that led to the emergence of Boko Haram, any peace that is accomplished would be temporary at

best. In hopes that the Chibok girls and all other Nigerians abducted by Boko Haram are rescued, it is important to ensure that restorative justice is offered to these victims. As Dyan Mazurana and Keith Proctor (2013) have reminded us: “Too often, in the aftermath of conflict, crimes against women and children are given a lower priority and the crimes committed against them typically go unrecorded. Around the world, transitional justice programs consistently fail to incorporate women and girls’ specific needs.” The Buhari administration will demonstrate its seriousness about bringing positive change to Nigerian politics if the Chibok girls and other abducted Nigerians are not only rescued and reunited with their families, but also offered long-term psychosocial care and assistance to reintegrate into their communities.

The most significant vector of structural violence is endemic, intractable poverty and its overwhelmingly negative consequences for the majority of Nigerians, especially rural communities, which have traditionally been ignored by local, state, and federal government authorities. Serious, multi-pronged efforts to significantly reduce poverty and enhance human security must be effectively implemented; otherwise, the recommended long-term, culturally appropriate psychosocial care cannot succeed. Worse still, the conditions that allow groups such as Boko Haram to spring up and thrive would fester, thus endangering the peace, security, and development of the country and its peoples.

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