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Introduction: Preliminary Consideration

During the first half of this decade, between the year 2010 and 2015, many important social movements of our time were formed. Unlike the social movements of old, these new social movements were not restricted to the countries where they started. Through social media and new communication technologies, they rapidly spread beyond borders, attracting millions of sympathizers from far away countries. The Arab Spring that started in Tunisia in 2010 and spread to many countries in North Africa and the Middle East; the Occupy Wall Street that began in 2011 in Zuccotti Park, New York City and rapidly expanded to many other countries; and the Black Lives Matter movement that was created in 2013 and quickly gained momentum and membership from many Blacks in different U.S. states and other countries around the world, are just a few examples.

In addition to these movements, and with a different goal and way of organizing, the world witnessed a torrential social movement that emerged from Nigeria in 2014 with ripple effect in many other countries. Bring Back Our Girls made international headlines and millions of people from many countries, faiths, ethnicities, and races were mobilized in support of their common cause - a cause rooted in the restoration of the dignity and safety of girls.

Bring Back Our Girls was formed immediately after a news report broke out stating that Boko Haram, a terrorist organization in the northeastern Nigeria, kidnapped 276 schoolgirls on April 14, 2014 from their school dormitory in Chibok, a town located in Borno State, Nigeria. Outraged by the kidnapping of the schoolgirls, as well as the security and safety threats posed by insurgent and violent extremist groups in Nigeria and the failure of the Nigerian government to protect Nigerian citizens, a former Nigerian federal minister of education named Mrs. Obiageli Ezekwesili initiated the Bring Back Our Girls movement during a rally in a Nigerian city of Port
The movement quickly gained momentum on social media, and #BringBackOurGirls recorded the most tweeted hashtag of the time. Millions of Nigerians both in Nigeria and in the diaspora, as well as millions of social justice activists and ordinary people from many countries around the world went to the streets with banners and posters that read Bring Back Our Girls. Celebrities, world leaders, foreign governments including President Barack Obama and the First Lady Michelle Obama made videos for the Bring Back Our Girls campaign and spoke passionately for the safe release and return of the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls.

The intent of this paper is therefore to explain how the Bring Back Our Girls movement contributed to the release and safe return of some of the Chibok schoolgirls. Three sections of the paper are vital for the overall understanding of the activities of the Bring Back Our Girls social movement and the release of the Chibok schoolgirls. The first section is a review of the CNN article co-authored by Stephanie Busari and Jay Croft and published on May 8, 2017 with the title: “82 released Chibok schoolgirls arrive in Nigerian capital.” The second is an analysis of the major points in this article using relevant concepts from social movement texts. The third is an examination of the effect of the rise of Bring Back Our Girls social movement on the Nigerian politics.

**A Review of the CNN Article: “82 released Chibok schoolgirls arrive in Nigerian capital”**

After two to three years of the Bring Back Our Girls global campaign, it was reported by CNN that the current government of Nigeria engaged in negotiations with the terrorist organization, Boko Haram. The negotiations were facilitated by Swiss based negotiators and mediators, and supported by the Nigerian security personnel and the International Committee of the Red Cross. According to Busari and Croft’s CNN news report, the negotiations with Boko Haram were based on the principle of *prisoner swap*. This means that if Boko Haram releases the
Chibok schoolgirls, then the government will free some of the Boko Haram commanders and militants detained in the Nigerian prison. Although many democratic governments have a rigid policy that prevents them from negotiating with terrorist organizations, the government of Nigeria claims that the vulnerability and innocence of the Chibok schoolgirls oblige policymakers to explore various options that may result in their freedom. Swapping prisoners between the Nigerian government and the Boko Haram terrorist organization becomes the only plausible option that could lead to the release of the Chibok schoolgirls.

This policy decision shows the limitation of the use of military might in the fight against terrorism. A military intervention in such a situation will result in the killing of many of the kidnapped schoolgirls. Probably, Boko Haram knew that the only way to free their top commanders in the Nigerian prisons was to kidnap many schoolgirls to create the condition for a negotiation with the Nigerian government. They got what they wanted. Busari and Croft’s CNN news report reveals that the negotiations were packaged and divided into three phases.

The first phase involved the release of twenty-one Chibok schoolgirls by Boko Haram in order to prove to the government that the terrorist organization will respect the terms of the negotiation when the government releases some of its commanders and militants. To show that they are willing to move ahead with the negotiations, Boko Haram released twenty-one Chibok schoolgirls in October 2016. The release of the first group of the schoolgirls gave hope to the negotiators and the government. It was a proof that the girls are alive and that the remaining girls could also be safely released if the negotiations continue and if both parties respect the terms of the negotiations.

The second phase was the actual exchange of prisoners between the government and Boko Haram. After the release of the twenty-one Chibok schoolgirls in October 2016, the
Nigerian government reciprocated by releasing five of the top commanders of Boko Haram. On their part, and to move the negotiations forward, Boko Haram released eighty-two Chibok school girls in May 2017 with hopes that the government will free more of its imprisoned commanders and militants.

The third and probably the last phase will be to find a way to release the one-hundred-and-thirteen Chibok schoolgirls who are still in Boko Haram’s captivity. Given that these negotiations are based on the principle of prisoner swap, it is possible that the Nigerian government will decide to release another set of Boko Haram’s commanders and militants for Boko Haram to free and return the remaining Chibok schoolgirls alive.

Analysis of this Case in Relation to Relevant Concepts from Social Movement Texts

While reading about the kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls by Boko Haram, and after a long rumination on the story, one important question seems to be left unanswered. Must Boko Haram kidnap schoolgirls in order to coerce the Nigerian government to free some of its commanders and militants? In other words, why should these little schoolgirls pay a costly price and be made the scapegoats for what they know nothing about? Why girls and not boys? For those who are aware of the chronic social ills and injustices that today’s feminist social movements seek to confront and address, the answers to these questions are obvious. But for the sake of those who are not familiar with feminism and the feminist social justice struggles, one important element that explains why the Chibok schoolgirls were kidnapped by Boko Haram is carefully examined.

The kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls by Boko Haram and the emergence and rapid spread of the Bring Back Our Girls social movement could be explained from the perspective of gender-based violence. In northern Nigeria, especially among the adherents of Boko Haram
Islamic teachings, women and girls are viewed as being inferior to men and boys. The career choice of females is conditioned and predetermined by their socio-cultural and religious norms. As the current President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, recently said about his wife – the First Lady – during his official visit to Germany and while standing next to the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, “my wife belongs to my kitchen, and my living room, and the other room,” the mentality of some men from northern Nigeria is that women and girls should be educated in kitchen and home affairs, and not for the professions and businesses. The popular slogan of Boko Haram - “Western education is a sin” – and therefore the strict prohibition of Western education, and their preference for Islamic religious education in the northern states are likely to be more enforced among girls than among boys.

These socio-cultural and religious norms and the perception of women and girls as being inferior to men and boys could explain the reason why Boko Haram chose to kidnap the Chibok schoolgirls instead of boys. Against this background, the founder of Bring Back Our Girls, who is also a woman and a champion of girls’ education having served as a federal minister of education in Nigeria, decided to act quickly. Bring Back Our Girls is not just a social movement aimed at pressuring the Nigerian government to use all means possible to make sure that the Chibok schoolgirls are released. Bring Back Our Girls addresses the chronic gender-based violence and war against women and girls in all parts of Nigeria. Through the Bring Back Our Girls activism, issues about sexual violence and the safety of girls in Nigeria are brought to the center of public discourse both at the national and international levels. As Amrita Basu would say in their edited volumes on “Women's Movements in the Global Era,” Bring Back Our Girls highlights once again the unlimited ability of local women to influence and catalyze structural, systemic and social change.
Effect of the Rise of Bring Back Our Girls on the Nigerian Politics

Because of the activism of Bring Back Our Girls, the immediate past president, President Goodluck Jonathan, was not reelected in the 2015 presidential election. President Goodluck Jonathan was viewed by many Nigerians as a weak president whose government could neither protect the Chibok schoolgirls nor destroy Boko Haram and safely release the girls.

National security and the safety of school girls were major issues that were highly debated by the presidential candidates during the campaign. As a former Nigerian military head of state and a northern indigene, Muhammadu Buhari was viewed by many Nigerians as a stronger candidate and the only person who could restore national security, destroy Boko Haram, and release the Chibok schoolgirls. For these reasons, Muhammadu Buhari won the 2015 presidential election.

Nevertheless, unlike what many Nigerian voters thought, President Buhari realized that it is not possible to bring back the girls through military might alone. A deal with the terrorist organization, Boko Haram, is needed, combined with a series of negotiations and mediation. Although one-hundred-and-thirteen Chibok schoolgirls are still held in captivity by Boko Haram, President Buhari’s strategy should be commended for the release of one hundred and three girls.

The short-term task of the Bring Back Our Girls movement and the Nigerian government is to make sure that the remaining Chibok schoolgirls and other people in Boko Haram’s captivity are safely released and returned alive to their families and loved ones. In addition, Bring Back Our Girls should intensify its fight against gender-based violence in all Nigerian states. Once the Chibok schoolgirls are liberated, the Nigerian government will have to decide through policymaking how to deal with Boko Haram and eradicate its networks within the northern part of Nigeria and across the border.