


ARTICLE

## #BringBackOurGirls: Transnational Activism and the Remediation of the 2014 Chibok Girls' Kidnapping in Nigeria

Chijioke K. Onah 

Email: [cko34@cornell.edu](mailto:cko34@cornell.edu)

(Received 27 February 2023; revised 05 December 2023; accepted 03 January 2024)

### Abstract

In April 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped almost three hundred girls attending school in Chibok, Nigeria. The #BringBackOurGirls campaign emerged as a global activist movement in the aftermath of that kidnapping. Onah's article analyzes the global mediascapes of the campaign to show the mnemonic affordances of the Chibok girls' kidnapping and the intermedial dynamics that coalesced to make it a global memory phenomenon. By foregrounding the transhistorical and intermedial connections at the core of the #Bring-BackOurGirls campaign, it consolidates the understanding of remediation in memory studies. Consequently, Onah proposes new ways to understand African memorial traditions and testimonial practices in an increasingly hyperconnected world.

**Key Words:** #BringBackOurGirls; Chibok girls; memory activism; literary activism; Boko Haram; terrorism; testimonial narratives; remediation; digital activism

### Introduction

On April 14, 2014, Boko Haram terrorists kidnapped 276 girls who were attending school in the town of Chibok in Northeastern Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> The abduction sparked global outrage, drawing the attention of the world to the activities of this terrorist group. Activists in Nigeria employed social media platforms to demand the release of the Chibok girls, culminating in one of the most globalized activism of 2014/2015, in a hashtag known as #BringBackOurGirls (#BBOG). This transnational activism led to the immediate crystallization of the event into a mnemonic practice, as Chibok has become a metonym for the memory of not just thousands of other children kidnapped by Boko Haram, but of the group's activities in general.

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of African Studies Association. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

The centrality of the Chibok girls' kidnapping as the site of bearing witness to and remembering the violence of Boko Haram terrorism is intrinsically linked to the heavy mediation and mediatization of the Chibok event by writers, activists, and journalists all over the world. The various mediated accounts of the Chibok girls' case coalesced in the construction and evolution of a transnational memory of this event. The concept of remediation, as first theorized by J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999) and reformulated in memory studies by Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (2009), foregrounds this study. Centering remediation as a process of cultural remembrance also signifies the mediatedness of cultural memory. The dynamics of remediation further underscore the constructedness of collective memory and align with the definition of cultural memory as a process through which a shared story of the past emerges and is circulated and performed in the present (Rigney 2012:17). Arguing, however, that intermedial dynamics are insufficient in accounting for memory practices in a digital age, I expand on the understanding of remediation in contemporary memory culture by pointing out how mnemonic events achieve their singularity through transmedia, transnational and transhistorical connections, and affiliations with other memorial events or cultures. It is not just the vociferous representations of the Chibok girls' event across media that ensured its singularity; it is also its ability to cross historical, cultural, and memorial borders, drawing new meanings and affiliations along the way. In other words, the process of remediation and mnemonic solidarity are inextricable and co-constitutive; they occur simultaneously in the making of high-profile memory events in Africa or elsewhere. In a digitally networked world, media technologies are networked, but so also are memory cultures.

This article, therefore, is invested in the interplay between the global media technologies that effectively transformed the #BBOG movement into a transnational memory community that bears witness to the violence of Boko Haram terrorism and agitates for the release of the kidnapped schoolchildren from captivity. In locating testimonial narrative genres as an important medium in this movement, I underscore how media work together even in the digital world. The transhistorical and intermedial connections at the core of the #BBOG campaign offer new ways to understand African memorial traditions and testimonial practices in an increasingly hyperconnected world. This study, therefore, intervenes within three different nascent subfields in African studies—African digital humanities (see Adenekan 2021; Yékú 2022), literary activism (Davies 2008; Adejunmobi 2020; Mwesigire 2021), and memory studies (Anyaduba 2021; Adebayo 2023)—in order to stage a rapprochement between these fields in the study of contemporary African memory cultures.

To demonstrate how literary narration actively participated in this global activist movement, this article explores the wide-ranging literary responses to Boko Haram terrorism in the aftermath of the Chibok girls' kidnapping in 2014. I use Patience Ibrahim and Andreas C. Hoffmann's *A Gift from Darkness: How I Escaped with My Daughter from Boko Haram* (2017) and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani and Viviana Mazza's *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree* (2018) to establish these texts as the literary component of the #BBOG movement. Instead of a textual close reading, my analysis specifically accounts for what Edward Said theorizes as the

“worldliness” and the “circumstantial realities” of these texts (1975:4) vis-à-vis #BBOG activism in order to offer a cultural history of the social movement. While these texts are part of the cultural remnants of the event, they are mnemonic media engaged in specific acts of memory-making. My analysis also demonstrates how, as cultural media, they are in interaction with other media that respond to the #BBOG movement. As memory texts remediating the 2014 Chibok girls’ kidnapping, they are in themselves cultural monuments to ongoing acts of terror across the world.

By engaging with the meaning-making and memory-making processes that turned the Chibok girls’ kidnapping into *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) for memorializing the victims of Boko Haram terrorism, I am following the recommendation made by Erll and Rigney for cultural memory studies scholars to study cultural remembrance “at the intersection of both social and medial processes,” since it is the social and the political forces of the society that turn “some remediations into relevant media versions of the past, while it ignores or censors others” (Erll & Rigney 2009:5). Through constant iteration and circulation, certain versions of the past are privileged in the present, either because they are useful to the memory community involved in the collective act of remembrance, or because they fall into the privileged normative pattern of understanding events in the present. Literary testimonials—broadly defined—play a significant role in constructing and circulating versions of history across time and space, thus making it relevant to explore their role in the global activism against Boko Haram terrorism. Relatedly, literary texts do not act in isolation from other media, for as W.J.T. Mitchell noted, “all media are mixed, and all representations are heterogenous” (quoted in Iheka 2021:11). As such, literary texts are in themselves hyperconnected and networked within media architectures and cannot be studied in isolation from other media forms (Sturken & Cartwright 2018:8), thus necessitating the articulation of the intermedial dynamics between traditional and digital media in contemporary memory cultures in Africa and globally. Not only is it true that media are connected and networked (Gitelman 2008; Iheka 2021), but as the last part of this article will show, the same is true of memory cultures as well. They do not work in isolation; rather, they borrow from, interpolate, and remediate other memories (Rigney 2016; Adebayo 2020; Lim & Rosenhaft 2021; Liebermann 2021). Consequently, this article adopts the theoretical frame of remediation in memory studies to discuss the sociopolitical conditions that facilitated the emergence of the #BBOG movement, vis-à-vis the peculiar role of narrative texts in contemporary social movements. The study concludes by foregrounding the global groundwork and social-political milieu that made the Chibok case legible within different memory cultures and historical contexts.

### The Politics of the Chibok Girls’ Kidnapping

The ubiquity of testimonial narratives in relation to the emergence of #BBOG as a transnational memory community should be situated within the political milieu that birthed the movement. Although the kidnapping of the Chibok girls in 2014

engendered the #BBOG movement, and thus the global protest against Boko Haram terrorism, the terrorist organization existed long before that. While various scholars claim that Boko Haram existed before 2009 (Kassim & Nwankpa 2018; Pereira 2018), it was in 2009 that the organization became increasingly insurgent (Pereira 2018:250), unleashing terror across communities in the northeast of Nigeria and even some parts of Niger and Cameroun, and the abduction of women and girls has remained one of its most visible strategies (Human Rights Watch 2014; Pereira 2018:256). A study commissioned by Human Rights Watch in the aftermath of the Chibok violence shows that although the kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls was the biggest single incident of abduction by the terrorist group at the time it occurred, the group had been involved in the abduction of girls and women since 2009 (2014:18). Though the sheer number of girls in the Chibok case jolted many Nigerian activists and journalists, the fact that the administration of the president at that time (Goodluck Jonathan) not only kept quiet after the kidnapping but also sought to dismiss it as basically a political scheme to damage the president's reputation ahead of the 2015 presidential election enraged Nigerians and non-Nigerians alike, which was instrumental to the emergence of the #BBOG social campaign (Yékú & Ojebode 2021:503). A pertinent example is the notoriously popular and intensely remediated meeting between the first lady Dame Patience Jonathan and the parents and principal of the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls. In that meeting, Mrs. Jonathan decried a perceived ploy by Northern politicians to discredit her husband (a Southerner) and cost him re-election in the 2015 presidential race. The first lady's theatrical outburst, "There's God oh," remains actively remediated in Nigeria's boisterous entertainment industry. Even if Mrs. Jonathan's crying image (see Figure 1) and the lyrics of her performance are often adopted within Nigerian popular imagination as a subject of humor and entertainment, a memory studies perspective appreciates them as mnemonic media, constantly



**Figure 1.** Channels Television (2014), "Chibok Girls: First Lady Breaks Down in Tears."

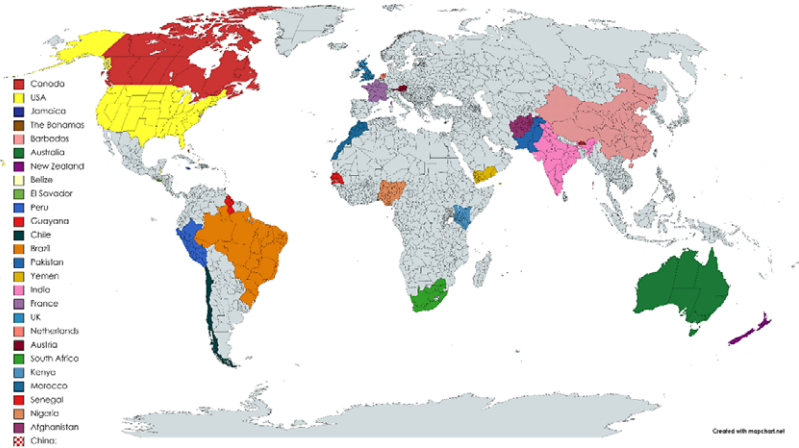
reframing and remembering the Chibok girls' case. Each iteration recenters, circulates, and consolidates the traumatic memory of the Chibok event and its controversies.

This controversy, though, laid the groundwork for what would emerge as the most mediated event in post-civil-war Nigeria. Activists, journalists, and writers, therefore, had to resort to testimonies to convince not just the international community but even Nigerians, especially in the Southern part of the country, that the kidnapping did indeed happen. This, in part, explains why testimonies became prominent after 2014, even though Boko Haram had been in existence for some time before then, abducting women all along (Human Rights Watch 2014; Pereira 2018). Testimonies from those who escaped the kidnapping, those who had survived similar kidnappings elsewhere, and those who would later abscond from their captors would emerge as the most powerful medium to bear witness to Boko Haram terrorism and resist the government's denialism. This surge in narrativizing testimony and bearing witness links this event to the genre that dates as far back as the antebellum slave narrative tradition (Goyal 2019; Whitlock 2015).<sup>2</sup> This analysis, therefore, demonstrates how this rich history of testimonials has been employed in the #BBOG global activist movement.

### #BringBackOurGirls: Transnational Activism

The watershed moment in the history of Boko Haram terrorism is the night of April 14, 2014, when the 276 girls who were attending school in the town of Chibok in Northeastern Nigeria were kidnapped. While this was just one of the many acts of terror unleashed by Boko Haram by this time, the outrage was swift. A few hours after the event, activists in Nigeria cried out against Boko Haram terrorists and the government's slow and indifferent handling of the situation. Their demand was simple: #BringBackOurGirls. The campaign gained global traction as the news of the kidnapping was received as a global tragedy beyond what Nigeria could/should handle on its own (Chiluwa & Ifukor 2015:183). Protesters gathered in locations around the world, including Abuja, Vancouver, London, and Los Angeles, demanding the immediate release of the girls. As the map below shows (see Figure 2), the #BBOG protests spread across various countries, including many different cities and states in those countries. These protesters condemned Boko Haram terrorists and pressured world leaders to get involved in the international effort to rescue the girls. These protests would globalize the campaign, turning it into a highly mediated example of digital activism, which garnered over 3.3 million tweets in less than a month (BBC News 2014), and #BringBackOurGirls would become, for a time, Twitter's most tweeted hashtag, reaching up to 6.1 million tweets in 2016 (Murphy 2016:19). #BBOG, thus, became a transnational social movement, thanks primarily to the affordances of new media technologies which transported the stories instantly across borders, media, cultures, and genres.

Through the transnational media investment in the Chibok case, the campaign succeeded in securing the attention of international cultural and political institutions. Amnesty International and UNICEF, for instance, backed the



**Figure 2.** Map showing the global reception of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign. (Designed by the author.)

campaign, as did world leaders and celebrities such as Hillary Clinton, Beyoncé, Malala Yousafzai, Wyclef Jean, and Chris Brown, just to mention a few (Howard 2014). During the first hundred days following the abduction, vigils and prayers were held across Nigeria, and across many countries of the world, including Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Togo, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Portugal (Watt 2014). The European Parliament followed up the event with their resolution of July 17, 2014, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the abducted girls. Further, the kidnapping led the governments of Canada, China, France, Israel, and the UK to join the global effort to combat Boko Haram and rescue the girls, while Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger formed a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram, with supporting troops from Benin (African Union 2019).

Public commentators and journalists wondered why the Chibok girls' case became a subject of such intense mediatization and mediation. Given that Northern Nigeria has been a fertile ground for countless insurgencies and social-political violence since its independence (Onah 2023:135; Suhr-Sytsma 2022), and given that Boko Haram has been on the rampage, unleashing terror since 2009, why was the Chibok kidnapping of 2014 the singular incident to draw the world to its feet?<sup>3</sup> Or to cite Daniel Jordan Smith's own concern in his essay on the Chibok girls, why did this one event produce so much international outrage when multiple years of arguably worse atrocities had generated little concern? (2015:161).

One of the reasons often adduced is that the fact that these were young girls provided the right combination of platform and emotions to mobilize the world to action. Smith claims that the other events before the Chibok abduction were "symbolically less charged" (2015:161). In this regard, the activists recognized and exploited the "affective economies" (Ahmed 2004) of this event to rally the world to their cause. The centrality of this argument can be underlined when we

look at how Michelle Obama became a central figure in the history of this campaign. Delivering her husband's weekly address to mark Mother's Day in May 2014, Michelle roused the empathy of the world, especially anyone with a teenage daughter or sister, when she said: "In these girls, Barack and I see our own daughters. We see their hopes, their dreams, and we can only imagine the anguish their parents are feeling right now." As the first lady of the United States at the time, Michelle Obama's statement and image (see [Figure 3](#)) were intentionally curated to facilitate "affective sharing" (Helmond, quoted in [Sacks 2020:248](#)) within the global mediascapes. The effectiveness of this strategy is evident in the way the statement and Michelle's image became vigorously retweeted ([BBC News 2014](#)), making Michelle Obama one of the greatest international icons of the movement. Significantly, her performative solidarity typifies the gendered representation of victimhood and the pathologization of the Chibok girls through which the #BBOG campaign gained its global currency ([Berents 2016](#); [Oriola 2021](#); [Onah 2022](#)).

What the foregoing shows is that the processes that turned the Chibok girls' kidnapping into a transnational site of memory are a complex interplay between digital activism, transnational affiliations, and the dynamics of remediation.

The transnational reach of #BBOG and its ability to create a global memory community centers the debate within memory studies on the significance of new media technologies in the formation and circulation of collective memory—a debate increasingly vocalized in digital memory discourses in Africa ([Ndlovu 2018](#); [Yékú & Ojebode 2021](#)), and across the global Black diaspora ([Liebermann 2021](#)). Observing how the emerging new media is transforming memoryscapes, [Andreas Huyssen](#) argues that media technologies "contribute liberally to the vertiginous swirl of memory discourses that circulate globally and locally." According to him, "the voraciousness of the media and their appetite for recycling seems to be the sine qua non of local memory discourses crossing borders, entering into a network of cross-national comparisons, and creating



**Figure 3.** Michelle Obama's #BringBackOurGirls official photo.

what one might call a global culture of memory” (2003:95). The astuteness of this observation is clear to all today—and the Chibok girls’ kidnapping is one instance—as the digital media have emerged as the single most important catalyst and carrier of any truly global and transnational memory culture. Pondering over this issue, Jose van Dijck asserts, while advancing the claims of the media sociologist John Thomson, that what makes mediated experiences today differ from lived experiences 200 years ago is the fact that individuals need no longer share a common locale to pursue commonality (2007:29). #Bring-Back-Our-Girls’ global memoryscape attests to the power of the new media to create a new memory community, which can lead to what can be called, pace James Yékú (2022), a transnational mnemonic netizenship. The mediation of the Chibok event across the media thus played a distinctive role in the cementing of this movement in the social consciousness of people around the world.

Though I have underscored the Chibok girls’ kidnapping as a global transmedia event, it must be acknowledged that new media technologies were not the only cultural media used by activists to advance their cause. In the few years after this incident, the Chibok kidnapping has been intensely mediated, making it a subject of representation in multiple literary and cultural forms. It has been taken up in such literary works as novels (including Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree* [2018] and Edna O’Brien’s *Girl* [2019]), short stories (such as Anjali Sachdeva’s “All the Names They Used for God”), anthologies (such as Tanure Ojaide and Mohammed Razinat’s edited text *The Markas: An Anthology of Literary Works on Boko Haram* [Malthouse Press, 2019]), poems (such as Ben Ubiri’s collection of poetry *The Book of Chibok* [self-published 2015]), drama (such as Fidelis Okoro’s *Preamble to Apocalypse*), literary memoirs (such as Patience Ibrahim and Andrea Hoffmann’s *A Gift From Darkness* [2017]), and literary reportage (such as Helon Habila’s *The Chibok Girls* [2017] and Isha Sesay’s *Beneath the Tamarind Tree* [Dey Street Books, 2019]). There have been filmic representations such as Nollywood’s movie titled *Boko Haram* and documentaries (such as the award-winning *Stolen Daughters: Kidnapped by Boko Haram* and Kachi Benson’s award-winning virtual reality documentary, *Daughters of Chibok*). Also, a scene in the very famous Afro-futuristic Hollywood movie, *The Black Panther*, represents the rescue of the girls as constitutive of the imagined African liberation. The visual arts are represented in such works as Sarah Peace’s public art installation in a 4,000 square foot clearing in Little Monk Wood, Loughton, U.K, depicting the missing girls with black veiled figures, and the “Statues Also Breathe” sculpture created by the French artist Prune Nourry, displayed in Lagos in 2022. There are even references to the event in songs, such as Pardis Sabeti’s “Around the World,” featuring #BringBackOurGirls activist Oby Ezekwesili. These are just a few examples; there are many others across multiple genres. With such transmedia and plurimedial mediation of the Chibok case, it is imperative to contextualize these cultural artifacts within the #BBOG movement that inspired them. Devoid of this cultural history, a proper understanding and analysis of their political agenda and activist preoccupation are impossible. The multimedial representation of the Chibok girls’ kidnapping presented here, together with



the global #BBOG movement, helped to stabilize, consolidate, and disseminate the memories of the Chibok girls' kidnapping globally.

While these cultural texts offer insights into the importance of mediation for the development of cultural remembrance, as it is through the process of mediation that the accounts and experiences of the Chibok girls' kidnapping are turned into shared and shareable stories and circulated globally, an exclusive focus on mediation is inadequate. As Ann Rigney points out, the field of cultural memory has moved beyond the study of memory production in single texts or discrete artifacts, given that cultural remembrance emerges at the interplay between media (Rigney 2015:69). Inasmuch as the process of mediation facilitates the emergence of a shareable story of a historical event, it is in the interplay between media texts and the dynamics of remediation that a global site of memory, such as the Chibok girls' kidnapping, emerges. An awareness that different media work together to stabilize and disseminate a particular memory/event into a site of memory is a foundational assumption of this article. Cultural artifacts, forms, and media provide a conduit for expressing the traumatic memories of the Chibok girls' event; but as studies have shown, "they also play an active role in shaping what is remembered and how" (Rigney 2015:65). What the attention to the dynamics of remediation in the next section will show is that the mediaspace is not a passive site for the depository of historical events; it is when a particular version of the past is told and retold, and repeatedly performed in different media, that a shared frame of reference emerges, thus galvanizing disparate people across time and spaces into members of imagined memory and witnessing communities (Rigney 2016:10).

In this regard, the ubiquity of testimonies in the aftermath of the Chibok girls' kidnapping did not just help to record the experiences of the survivors of Boko Haram terrorism. Their specific work as memorial media involved in memory construction must be emphasized. By representing the Chibok girls' kidnapping across media and disseminating them across the world, they are constructing and consolidating certain versions of the past and shaping the narratives surrounding this event. Already, to say "Boko Haram" is to bring to mind an insurgent group that is notorious for kidnapping women, abusing them, and hindering their access to education—the exact framing that #BBOG was able to consolidate and elevate, thanks to "the archival possibilities" of the new media technology (Yékú & Ojebode 2021:502). It is by turning the Chibok girls' kidnapping into a transmedia phenomenon represented across the spectrum of available media and circulated through the instrumentality of the internet that the kidnapping emerged as the site of memory for the various atrocities of Boko Haram terrorism.

### Remediating the Chibok Girls' Kidnapping

My use of the term "remediation" is drawn from its understanding in the rapidly expanding field of memory studies. Adapted into cultural memory studies from media-focused works of David Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999), remediation

has become a useful analytical concept in the study of contemporary memory culture, where Erll and Rigney have been instrumental in repurposing it for the study of cultural memory. If Bolter and Grusin originally introduced the concept of remediation to articulate “the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms” (1999:273), Erll and Rigney have recalibrated the concept to explain the intermedial dynamics that turn certain topics, events, persons, or versions of the past into “high-profile” sites of memory (Rigney 2015:69; Erll & Rigney 2009). Noting that intermedial relations are at the heart of the process that turns cultural texts into media of cultural memory, Erll argues that those events which are transformed into *lieux de memoire* are usually represented again and again across media platforms so that, over time, what is known about such an event “seems to refer not so much to what one might cautiously call the ‘actual event’, but instead to a canon of existent medial constructions, to the narratives, images, and myths circulating in a memory culture” (Erll 2009:111). When one version of the past (an event, a person/icon, or a place) is intensely mediated in different media such as newspapers, films, novels, life writings, or photographs, and vigorously circulated through these media and the internet, that event, person, or place becomes sedimented into the historical consciousness of the remembering community. Remediation, thus, creates, stabilizes, and consolidates sites of memory, but it also critically reflects upon and renews memory sites.

If the multifarious representations of the Chibok case previously discussed speak to the mediation of this event in multiple media, I mobilize the theorization of remediation in memory studies to centralize the interplay between the process of mediation and the dynamics of remediation in the making of the Chibok girls’ kidnapping into a memory event. This observation has multiple implications for the study of the Chibok girls’ kidnapping—and for the understanding of remediation in contemporary memory cultures. The first point that must be drawn from the theory of remediation is that there is no “unmediated” account of the Chibok case. This is to say that despite the attempt by the various actors, activists, and witnesses in the #BBOG movement to offer the “real” account of the Chibok case, the Chibok girls’ kidnapping comes to us already mediated. Insofar as this attests to the power of mediation to constitute the “reality” of a historical event, it also shows the impossibility of telling the Chibok story outside these existing narrative frames. As Bolter and Grusin observe, “all mediations are remediations, in that mediation of the real is always a mediation of another mediation” (1999:18). In this way, the various media texts bearing witness to the Chibok girls’ kidnapping are better seen, like cultural memory itself, as performing rather than reproducing the “real” account of the Chibok event. This is important, as it clarifies that what is meant by the Chibok girls’ kidnapping event is the tapestry of representations in media reports, artworks, oral stories, survivors’ diaries, letters, political statements, digital networks, and narrative accounts that mediate the Chibok case. It is through this pantheon of texts and at the interstices of their mediations that what we know and how we remember this event are produced. Furthermore, given that most of these accounts, including media reportage, evolved in relation to the

#BBOG campaign, to argue that these texts remediate the Chibok case, therefore, is to gesture to how they are influenced by the movement's framing of the Chibok event. It is not just that these texts were informed by the #BBOG social movement; it is also that they embraced, critiqued, and/or consolidated its memory. Many of them not only reproduced #BBOG's framing of the Chibok girls' kidnapping but, as the next section shows, they also participated in the agenda-setting and the externalized publicity that characterized the #BBOG campaign. It is in these contexts that I argue that these texts are constitutive of the plurimedial networks of the #BBOG campaign and are part and parcel of its transnational activism.

It should also be noted that each mediation of the Chibok case calls to mind other cases representing Boko Haram terrorism (see [Table 1](#) below). The singularity of the Chibok event, as framed by the #BBOG, demonstrates what Rigney formulates as the "scarcity principle," which ensures that limited sites of memory emerge in memory cultures (Rigney 2005, 2012). However, from a memory studies perspective, to center the Chibok event as a site of memory is to memorialize these other associated memories and events that renew, reinforce, and recenter the Chibok case. In this case, the logic of remediation shows how the Chibok case becomes a shorthand, used to signify and draw attention to the history of Boko Haram's abuse of women and girls in the Northeast, thus implicating other such events. Each of the new mass kidnappings of schoolchildren after the Chibok event reinvigorated the campaign. This is not peculiar to the Chibok case, but as Rigney's study of the Irish Bloody Sunday shows, it is a fundamental characteristic of collective remembrance, as it enables memories to "travel" across memory borders, media, cultures, and languages (Rigney 2016:78).

Finally, this theorization of remediation so far focalizes a point that is fundamental to the understanding of remediation in memory studies. Though this is implied in Erll and Rigney's reformulation of remediation, it has not yet been distinctly articulated: memorial media and memory sites are inseparable, given their mutual dependence. It is not intended to suggest that they are the same, but they are indeed interlinked. Like the two sides of the same coin, they should be seen as complementary and mutually dependent paradigms in the formation of memory cultures. Though it is true that cultural memory is unthinkable without media (Erll 2011:113; Kennedy 2020:60), it is important to remember that the media of memory are not memory sites themselves; rather, they produce and crystallize the site of memory (Kennedy 2020:59). Consequently, remediation in memory studies does not simply connote how media borrow from each other, but shows how in performing cultural memory, memory media renew the memory site. It is the memory event's ability to proliferate itself through plurimedial engagements that characterize any powerful mnemonic event (Erll 2023:413). Through this interplay between mediation and remediation, memory cultures and histories travel across time and space, thus forming part of "a much larger transnational dynamics of remembrance" (Rigney 2016:78). It is through this process that the Chibok case has achieved memorial kinship, transnational solidarity, and global resonances.

**Table I.** Some major attacks on schools by Boko Haram terrorists since 2009.

Date	Place	Persons Affected
October 1, 2012	Adamawa State University, the Federal Polytechnic, and the School of Health Technology, both in Mubi, Adamawa	At least 26 students killed
March 18, 2013	Mafoni Day Secondary School, Yelwa Central School, Shehu Sanda Kyari Secondary School and Ali-Alaskiri Primary School, Maiduguri	4 teachers killed
June 16, 2013	Government Secondary School, Damaturu	7 students and 2 teachers killed
June 19, 2013	Ansarudeen School, Maiduguri	At least 9 students killed
July 6, 2013	Government Secondary School, Yobe	30 people, including at least 22 students killed
September 21, 2013	Success Private School, old Maiduguri.	4 killed and scores of students injured
September 28, 2013	College of Agriculture Gujba in Yobe state	At least 50 students killed
February 11, 2014	Abba Ashigar School of Business and Administrative Studies, Konduga, Borno State	20 female students abducted
February 24, 2014	Federal Government College Buni Yadi, Gujba Local Government Area of Yobe State	29 male students killed
April 14-15, 2014	Senior Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State	Over 200 students abducted
September 17, 2014	Federal College of Education, Kano	13 Students killed
November 10, 2014	Government Science Secondary School, Potiskum, Yobe State	46 people dead
November 24, 2014	Zanna Mobarti Primary School, Damasak, Borno State	300 abducted children and over 100 women and teachers
February 19, 2018	Government Girls Science and Technical Secondary School, Dapchi, Yobe state	110 schoolgirls kidnapped
December 11, 2020	Government Science Secondary School, Kankara, Katsina State	330 students kidnapped
December 19, 2020	Dandume, Katsina	80 Islamic school students kidnapped
February 17, 2021	Government Science College Kagara, Niger State	27 students kidnapped
June 17, 2021	Government Girls Science Secondary School, Jangebe, Zamfara State	279 schoolgirls kidnapped.
June 17, 2021	Federal Government College Birni Yauri Kebbi state	30 students kidnapped.
July 5, 2021	Bethel Baptist School Damishi Kaduna State	153 students kidnapped

## Literary Activism: Narrative Witnessing to the Chibok Girls' Kidnapping

Having situated Boko Haram testimonial narratives within the global #Bring-BackOurGirls campaign, I turn to two texts to explicate the political stakes of the texts, vis-à-vis #BBOG activism. Patience Ibrahim and Andrea Hoffmann's *A Gift from Darkness: How I Escaped with My Daughter from Boko Haram* (2017) and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani and Viviana Mazza's *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree* (2018) exemplify not only the activist posturing of these texts but also the global currents that informed their politics and production. Through a comparative contextualization of these two texts, this section offers insights into the genre, political stakes, as well as material production of these texts in particular and the other Boko Haram testimonial narratives in general.

Since we are primarily concerned with the emergence and consolidation of the Chibok girls' kidnapping as a site of memory, and the media dynamics that played into it vis-à-vis the transnational activism led by the #BBOG, I am not interested in offering a textual close reading of the testimonies. Instead, I am interested in how these texts and their authors position themselves in relation to the #BBOG movement, how they figure themselves as testimonies, and how both the texts and the authors bear witness to the violence of Boko Haram terrorism, thus foregrounding and globalizing the mediation and memorialization of the Chibok girls' kidnapping. This analysis gestures to the affordances of testimony as a genre in advocating for social justice, standing against denialism, and constructing the memory of a sad event.

*A Gift from Darkness: How I Escaped with My Daughter from Boko Haram* is a collaborative memoir by the Nigerian Boko Haram survivor Patience Ibrahim and the German journalist Andrea Hoffmann. Even though Patience is the sole survivor-narrator in the text, her narrative offers a broader perspective of Boko Haram terrorism in Northern Nigeria. In this case, despite adopting a first-person point of view, the narrative polyphonically encompasses the story of many other survivors of Boko Haram. Though the book presents the story as Patience's—"How I Escaped with My Daughter from Boko Haram"—thus positioning her as the author/narrator, we learn from the text that Patience is not literate enough in English to write the text (23). The text, therefore, is written in collaboration with a German amanuensis, Andrea Hoffmann, who worked with a translator to record Patience's experiences. Though the subtitle suggests that the narrative voice in the text is Patience's, the text is actually presented as an account of two people: the larger half by Patience herself and the second by Hoffmann. They often speak in two different and interchanging chapters, though sometimes Patience's account continues into several successive chapters. The function of Hoffmann's part of the text is to give context to Patience's accounts and to present the history of the conflict as well as a broader picture of the event beyond Patience's experiential account. Parts of the book are also based on Hoffmann's own experiences of living in Maiduguri, where she met Patience and researched the Boko Haram insurgency.

*Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree* (2018), on the other hand, is a young-adult novel by the Nigerian writer Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani (with Viviana Mazza). Though this text is categorized as a novel, Nwaubani posits:

Sadly, there are many women and girls who never lived to tell their stories of Boko Haram captivity. Almost all those I've interviewed told me of family or friends who died, usually in childbirth, from snake bites, illness, or during Nigerian military airstrikes on Boko Haram camps. *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree* is *journalism masquerading as fiction*—my attempt to go beyond the news headlines and present as many of these women's and girls' stories to the world. Boko Haram may have changed their lives forever and stolen their innocence and dreams, but the terrorists have not succeeded in silencing their voices. (Nwaubani 2018:n.p.)

She achieves this task of giving a voice to all the women and girls “who never lived to tell their stories” in the character of Yaa Taa (meaning “my daughter”), who is unnamed but is affectionately called Yaa Taa by her parents. Yaa Taa thus epitomizes every woman or girl whose story has been silenced.

Yaa Taa is a young, ambitious, and extremely talented teenage girl whose dreams extend beyond the boundaries of Nigeria and who is obsessed with obtaining a formal education. She succeeds in becoming the first girl from her community to win the Borno State Government scholarship for intelligent girls, which will sponsor her education until university. This bright prospect was cut short by Boko Haram, which invaded her village, killed her father and brothers, and abducted her into the forest where she was married to a man who masked his face every time they were together, even when he slept.

Even though these two texts differ in form and style, both texts, like the other narrative responses to Boko Haram, belong to the burgeoning sub-genre of testimony. Consequently, their sole responsibility is to bear witness to a traumatic event and act as the guardian of the memory of Boko Haram's violence. Like the paradigmatic witness, these texts adopt different narrative strategies in order to endow their testimonies with credibility and authenticity, thus engaging in constructing what Philippe Lejeune (1989) has called *le pacte testimonial*. Extrapolating Lejeune's ideas, Waintrater explains that:

The (autobiographical) agreement is a genuine moral contract between the parties: the ethical commitment on the part of the receiver of the testimony to ‘do everything in his power’ to protect and accompany the witness coupled with the ethical commitment on the part of the witness to tell the truth... (quoted in Gilbert 2018:134)

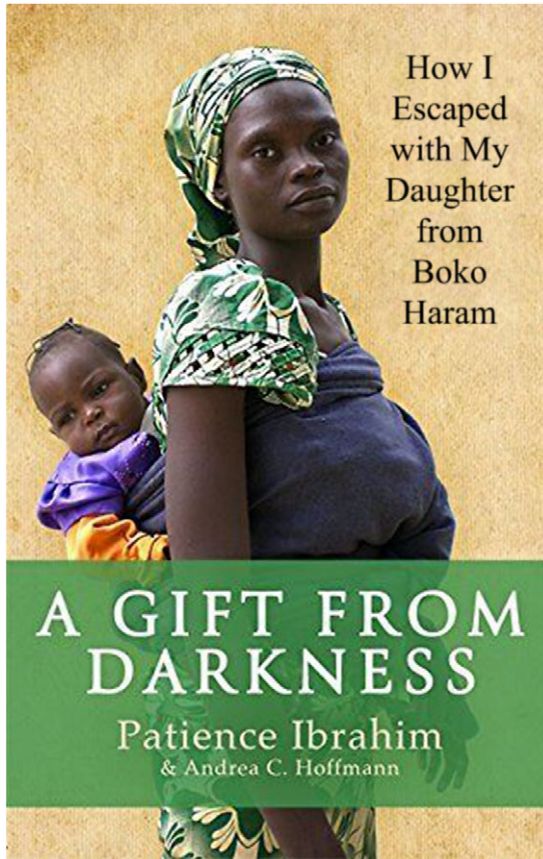
In other words, even if a memoir is generally understood as non-fictive—and thus ethically committed to telling the truth, Nwaubani's fictional narrative, as a testimony, is equally bound by this ethical commitment to the truth, even if the truth of testimonial fiction is much more contested. What is important in the testimonial narrative is not necessarily its statistical or historical accuracy but

its embodied experience or “narrative truth.” In this way, Nwaubani’s text, like its memoir counterpart, bears witness to the violence of Boko Haram terrorism and tells the embodied truth of the survivors. This is critical in the Chibok case, given the initial denials by the government, but it also furthers the claim within memory studies that listening to the survivors of traumatic events and “giving voices” to their stories constitute the primary function of literature in memory activism (Erll 2023:414; Gutman 2017). This explains the ubiquity of the testimonial genre in the age of witnessing and in cultural remembrance. Providing avenues for unheard and marginalized voices to emerge and be memorialized is integral to the work of memory (Kaplan 2023:6).

Nwaubani herself insists that her novel should be read as an authentic testimony by advancing the text’s experienced truth—which is to say, its faithfulness to the experiences and traumas of the survivors. In another interview with Suzanne Ross, Nwaubani said: “I tried as much as possible to only include things I have heard already, things that actually happened” (2019: n.p.). The author, therefore, authorizes her novel’s *pacte testimonial*, thus foregrounding the text as a work of testimony. Despite Nwaubani’s desire for “authentic truth” in *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree*, the text as a work of testimony cannot “prove” the Chibok case, even though it can “swear” to it.<sup>4</sup> As testimonies are always performative and mediated, imaginatively constructed in retrospect, it is, as Meg Jensen frames it, “a contextual performance” (2020:75). Significantly, even though Nwaubani is an established writer who frequently contributes to British and American media, and even though her testimonial narrative is a novel, she chose to produce the book in collaboration with an Italian journalist, Viviana Mazza, thus foregrounding the text within the collaborative practice of testimonial literature quite conventional within the postcolonial and African testimonial narrative tradition (Beverley 2004; Whitlock 2015; Gilbert 2018). If Patience Ibrahim’s collaborative work with Andrea Hoffmann in *A Gift from Darkness* reminisces this “ambiguous” collaborative tradition and its compromised conditions of production (Jensen 2020:69–70), which John Sekora—in the slave narrative tradition—popularly critiqued as “black messages” in “white envelope” (1987:13), one wonders why that tradition was attractive to Nwaubani.<sup>5</sup>

What is clear, however, is that even though Viviana Mazza’s journalistic piece appears as an afterword, her piece is integral to the novel and authorizes it as an indisputable work of testimony. The afterword contextualizes the novel within the #BBOG campaign and its global politics while also foregrounding Nwaubani’s text as a testimonial legible to global audiences. Mazza’s piece documents further “real-world” testimonies from survivors and explores the politics of memory that *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree* is consciously performing. By utilizing both the fictional and non-fictional affordances of the testimonial genre, *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree* grounds itself as a testimonial text that bridges narrative forms while bringing disparate histories, memories, and cultures together. It is not surprising that this text has become one of the most globally recognized narrative testimonies to the violence of Boko Haram terrorism.

If the fictional and non-fictional bridge in Nwaubani and Mazza’s text is a way of asserting the authenticity of the witness, Ibrahim and Hoffmann’s text



**Figure 4.** The cover page of *A Gift from Darkness: How I Escaped with My Daughter from Boko Haram* by Patience Ibrahim and Andrea Hoffmann

formally undercuts such anxiety, given that theirs fits more within the typical tradition of testimonial narrative texts, and thus enjoys a normative sense of testimonial truth. The authoritative narrating “I” evident in the title aligns with the survivor’s photo on the cover page to offer an unambiguous identification of the text as a testimony (see Figure 4)—a strategy typical of the testimonial tradition.<sup>6</sup> The survivor’s photograph humanizes the story in the text, while also accentuating the truthfulness of the narrative. As Susan Sontag puts it, such a photograph “furnishes evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we’re shown a photograph of it” (quoted in Howie 2015:508). By adopting these various narrative and paratextual strategies to assert their authenticity as trustworthy witnesses, these texts achieve the urge in every witness to proclaim to the audience: “you must believe me, I have been there.” These texts, thus, like all testimonies, insist on representing actual events, even when they appear in a genre called fiction. And by insisting on representing



authentic experiences, they are engaged in the politics of raising awareness of this event and invested in creating a global moral community that resists Boko Haram's insurgency and counters the government's denialism.

Though these two texts are much more measured in pronouncing their ideological positions when compared to other Boko Haram testimonial texts such as Wolfgang Bauer's *Stolen Girls* (2017), their political stakes are still apparent.<sup>7</sup> As testimonies, they are primarily invested in giving voices to the survivors of the insurgency and raising global solidarity for their plight. Andrea Hoffmann, for instance, was consciously building a literary monument to the brutality of the Boko Haram insurgency and hoped that her text would be the first step toward bringing justice to the survivors. She claims that she set out to give them a voice: "If it's written down, it is fixed. It won't go away. It's part of bringing justice to these women" (Sullivan 2018:n.p.). If the #BBOG hashtag offered "a rhetoric of affiliation" (Sacks 2020:239) through which a global memory of the Chibok girls' kidnapping was constructed, literary testimonial acts as an archival space through which the violence of Boko Haram terrorism is witnessed and monumentalized. By bearing witness to the stories of the victims of Boko Haram terrorism, *A Gift from Darkness* enacts—like the other texts—what Rigney has called a "portable monument" (2004) to the violence of Boko Haram terrorism in the Northeast of Nigeria. Rigney uses the idea of a portable monument to contrast cultural memory media such as monuments and museums that are located and immobile to media such as printed texts which can easily be moved, circulating freely in the global world, galvanizing memory communities where traditional monuments cannot. As a portable monument, testimonial texts are mobile, traveling across languages and cultures, thus making them a powerful agent of cultural memory formation and witnessing. It is these affordances of the testimonial texts that have made them ubiquitous in contemporary memory cultures. Consequently, an understanding of the global dynamics of #BBOG activism must take into consideration these varied texts and their potentialities to act as the guardians of memory (Pisanty 2021) of the Chibok girls' kidnapping while globalizing and cementing those memories. More than monuments and museums—or in their absence—especially in an African context, these texts are also durable, crisscrossing multiple libraries and archives around the world, thus ensuring a long-term perpetuation of these memories in the archive as well as within global public consciousness.

The foregoing discussion delineates the tripartite functions performed by the testimonial narrative texts as the literary component of the #BBOG campaign: First, they document the experiences of the victims of Boko Haram terrorism, thus bearing witness to the violence of Boko Haram terrorism and serving as counternarratives to the denialism of the Nigerian government. Second, they are invested in raising global awareness to the violence of Boko Haram terrorism. And finally, as portable media of memory, they disseminate and crystallize the memories of the survivors, thus contributing to the emergence of the Chibok girls' kidnapping as a site of memory. As these texts are read by the public, taught in high schools and universities, circulated within libraries globally, translated into other languages, and are reviewed in digital and print media, they extend and repurpose the memories of the Chibok girls'

kidnapping long after #BringBackOurGirls has lost its steam on the digital platforms.

### **Mnemonic Solidarity and the Globalization of the Chibok Girls' Kidnapping**

While this discussion has demonstrated the intermedial dynamics that helped to crystallize the Chibok girls' kidnapping as the site of memory of Boko Haram terrorism, there is still an important missing link that must be foregrounded as a concluding reflection. Besides this intermedial phenomenon which ensured the repeated mediatization and remediation of the Chibok girls' kidnapping across mediascapes (thus globalizing the memory of the Chibok event), the potentiality of the Chibok girls' event to conjure up disparate memories of injustices and atrocities across cultures was instrumental to the vociferous reception of the story across the world. The ability of the Chibok case to elicit memories of similar histories of mass disappearance and abduction, sexual slavery, and child soldiering, not to say anything of other recent histories of terrorism since 9/11, is instrumental to its global reception. The cross-cultural and transhistorical references that accompany practices of remembrance are what Michael Rothberg (2009) has conceived as cultural memory's multidirectionality, and this phenomenon is clearly at work in the #BBOG global activism. The circumstances of the Chibok girls' kidnapping afforded it the mnemonic capacity to reactivate similar and previous memories continentally and globally in a manner that instantiates what Jie-Hyun Lim and Eve Rosenhaft have articulated as mnemonic solidarity (2021). It is not just that an event such as the Chibok girls' kidnapping signals other various histories of terrorism and various forms of human rights abuses globally, but it is also, as Yogita Goyal noted, impossible to frame such an event outside the defining template of slavery, given its affinity to global contemporary phenomena such as child trafficking, child abduction, forced marriage, and forced conscription in war (Goyal 2019:2). The slave narrative also provides an existing frame through which such stories can be told and understood. Besides Goyal, African historians have also made similar connections, as Saheed Aderinto and Paul Osifodunrin's historicization of the 1954 kidnapping of children in Lagos, for instance, insists on the impossibility of articulating such an event outside the ghost of Atlantic slavery (2015:101–2, 114) which remains singular in the histories of mass abduction in Africa. The Chibok event, therefore, activates multifarious instances of child abduction not only in Nigeria, but also globally. The global responses to the Chibok girls' kidnapping cannot be detached from its global historical allusions that make it legible to many communities and political contexts transnationally.

The mass abduction of schoolgirls by anyone or group, let alone a terrorist group, has a powerful mnemonic currency that is capable of galvanizing the world, as such events elicit many ugly histories and memories across the world, particularly in the era of the global War on Terror.<sup>8</sup> For example, the international outcry against Boko Haram has been framed within the global histories of

forced marriage, sexual violence, and the weaponization of women by both state and non-state actors in violent situations. Consequently, the Chibok girls' kidnapping, vis-à-vis Boko Haram terrorism, was framed as a global problem (Hinton 2014; Bauer 2017; Oriola 2021). It is not surprising, then, that an American popular imagination reckoning with the aftermath of 9/11 and its avowed commitment to the War on Terror would rally around the effort to curtail Boko Haram. Within public and governmental channels, Boko Haram was seen as what a US congressional subcommittee called an "emerging threat to the US Homeland" (Committee on Homeland Security 2011). After all, Boko Haram—which means "Western education is forbidden"—is itself an affront to Western norms and values in the first place.

Moreover, the kidnapping happened the same year that Malala Yousafzai won the Nobel Peace Prize for her struggle against the Taliban terrorist group due to her advocacy for female education. That Malala, like many others, in her letter to the missing Chibok girls, connects her experiences with those of the Chibok girls who were kidnapped for attempting to acquire Western education showcases shared histories and experiences, which in turn galvanized different memory communities in solidarity with the cause of the #BBOG activists. This association underscores the imperative for the #BBOG campaign and the emerging literary, testimonial, and artistic responses to Boko Haram terrorism to be situated within the global discourse on the War on Terror, and for these narratives to be contextualized within the global narratives of terror that have blossomed following the events of 9/11 (Frank & Malreddy 2020). Transhistoricizing memory cultures allows us to recognize and appreciate memorial relations and shared histories as well as shared visions of justice.

Furthermore, even if #BBOG is to be seen as another example of what Teju Cole popularized as the White-Savior Industrial Complex (Cole 2012)—as I myself argued elsewhere (Onah 2022)—it should also be understood within international geopolitics and an awareness of a shared vulnerability in an increasingly globalized world. This is one way to explain the global inter-governmental efforts to combat Boko Haram. But these global dynamics also made #BBOG legible and localizable within different political contexts. Indeed, if the primary goal of America's War on Terror is, according to President George W. Bush, to bring an end to the sexual slavery of girls and women (quoted in Goyal 2019:11), the #MeToo movement brought this war home to the American doorsteps, thus framing both the #MeToo movement and #BBOG within a longer history of sexual violence and feminist activism (Gilmore 2023).

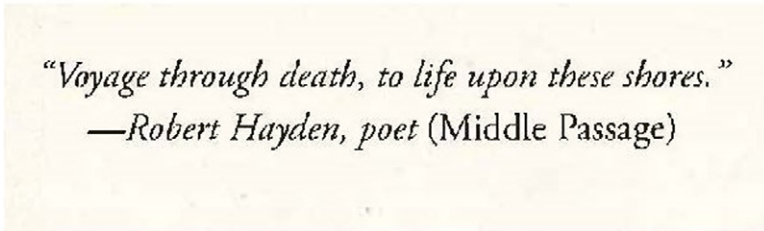
On the African continent, the Chibok girls' kidnapping and the narratives that it elicited can hardly be read in isolation from other conflict situations. In fact, these testimonial narratives are traditionally connected to, and historically premediated by, the notoriously popular African war narrative genres and African child soldier testimonials (Uraizee 2020). But most directly, the Chibok case is seen as a historical reenactment of the 1996 kidnapping of the Aboke girls in Northern Uganda by the Ugandan militant group known as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). As in the Chibok case, the Aboke girls were attending

school at St. Mary's College Secondary School in Aboke, Uganda, when 139 of them were kidnapped from their dormitories. These shared histories are not only obvious in the testimonial narratives that emerged out of the Aboke girls' case but were constantly underscored by different commentators and activists who saw in Chibok a repeat of the Aboke event (Akinremi 2014; Namirimu 2014). No wonder Ugandan women themselves marched in solidarity with #BBOG (Emerut 2014). In one of the most visible instances of "mnemonic solidarity from below" (Lim & Rosenhaft 2021:1) on the African continent, the parents of the Aboke girls, through its Concerned Parents Association (CPA), penned a solidarity letter to the parents of the Chibok Girls, emphasizing shared traumas and concerns. These global and continental historical affinities made the Chibok girls' case easily legible, resonating across national, historical, and cultural borders. It is through the memory of the Aboke girls, for instance, that the Chibok girls' case was localized in the state of Oklahoma (Hinton 2014).

These shared histories were also explicitly explored by the various creative responses bearing witness to Boko Haram terrorism, thus artistically linking the Chibok girls' kidnapping in particular and Boko Haram terrorism in general to other histories of (sexual) violence and oppression using a multidirectional, transnational, and transhistorical paradigm. Nwaubani, for example, situates her novel within the Western cultural memory of stolen children that dates back to the Middle Ages. By invoking Robert Browning's "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" as the epigraph to *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree*, Nwaubani not only demystifies the Chibok girls' kidnapping as a singularly African phenomenon but also centers it within global histories of violence against children. In this way, the stolen children of Chibok share mnemonic solidarity with their forebears in precolonial Africa, colonial Australia, Canada, the United States, and postcolonial Latin America (Whitlock 2015). Contemporarily, the #BringBackOurGirls campaign was, in fact, used as a window through which to campaign for the rescue of other kidnapped children in Israel (Moster 2014), while Pardis Sabeti, through her music video "Around the World," uses the #BBOG platform to resist histories of abduction, disappearances, and human trafficking, which disproportionately affect women and girls globally. In fact, the campaign vis-à-vis the Chibok girls' kidnapping happened the same year that forty-three male students were abducted from their school in Mexico, gesturing to the global history of abduction and disappearance.

Within a Black Atlantic context, the Nigerian-Canadian poet Titilope Sonuga, in her poetry collection *This is How We Disappear* (2019), uses the Chibok girls' case to memorialize global histories of mass abduction and disappearance, focusing especially on African diasporic communities. Enacted within the *longue durée* of "enforced displacement and violent abduction" of Africans, the Chibok event and its contemporaries evoke the specter of the Middle Passage (Mayer 2000:556). In that context, the Chibok girls' kidnapping must be contextualized and understood in the wake of historical violence that conditions and attends to Black life globally (Sharpe 2016). As the analysis so far has shown, African and African diasporic cultural texts continue to make such connections, insisting on a Black diasporic historicity of the Chibok case. This is what is aesthetically foregrounded in the intrusion of the Chibok case in the Afrodiasporic *Black Panther*,

*To the stolen girls of Chibok, Nigeria. May you awaken with  
the heart of Phoenix Okore and may your powerful flames  
illuminate your swift journey home.*



**Figure 5.** The Dedication pages of *The Book of Phoenix* by Nnedi Okorafor (2015).

and in Nnedi Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix* (2015), when the author dedicates the novel to the memory of the Chibok girls (see Figure 5). It is instructive that the dedication is immediately followed by an excerpt from Robert Hayden's poem, "Middle Passage."

Taken together, the fact that the Chibok girls' kidnapping event can be adapted, recontextualized, and appropriated to speak to different histories and cultures affords it the potentiality of a global (memory) event. Its ability to travel across spaces, time, histories, and memory cultures—its capacity to stimulate and integrate intersecting histories across cultures—endowed it with the mnemonic clout to evolve as the site of remembering the violence of Boko Haram terrorism, as well as other systems of terror, the world over. It is these mnemonic affordances of the Chibok girls' kidnapping, coupled with the intermedial dynamics that the event garnered, that coalesced to turn this event into a global memory phenomenon.

**Acknowledgments.** I wish to acknowledge the various scholars who have offered critical feedback on the earlier drafts of this article. Special appreciation also goes to the three anonymous readers and the ASR editors for their painstaking productive engagement with the work.

**Author Biographies.** Chijioko K. Onah is a PhD candidate in the Literatures in English Department at Cornell University. He specializes in African and African Diaspora Literature and Environmental Humanities. His publications have appeared in journals such as *ASAP/J*, *Matatu: Journal for African Culture and Society*, *African Literature Today*, and *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*. He recently co-edited a special issue of *Matatu* journal on Civic Dissent and Violence in Nigerian Literature, Films, and Media. He is also currently editing a special issue of *The Global South* journal focused on the toxic ecologies of the Global South. Email: [Cko34@cornell.edu](mailto:Cko34@cornell.edu)

## Notes

1. One of the primary contentious issues on the Chibok Girls incident is the number of girls kidnapped by Boko Haram. Though they were attending school and writing their final examination,

neither the journalists, the activists, the school, nor the government were able to say exactly how many girls were kidnapped. It became the point of the heated debate on this incident as a mere political gimmick masterminded by the Northern opposition to discredit the Southern President Goodluck Jonathan's re-election bid—a view that fueled denial of the event for a long time, especially in the Southern part of the country. This confusion has remained in the archive today as various scholars use various numbers. What is sure is that they were above 200, but 276 seems to be the most widely accepted figure in scholarly literature.

2. Even though the testimonial genre is often historicized within Holocaust memory, I make this point to show an alternative genealogy of the genre that is peculiar to the African and African diasporic narrative tradition. This article envisions a study of African and Black Atlantic memory culture that centralizes the history of the Middle Passage.
3. This concern is because there were many popular attacks by the group before the Chibok case in 2014, including some that affected members of the international community. Prominent among them are the Christmas Eve attack that killed at least 38 persons in Jos (December 2010), the bombing of the United Nations building in Abuja, in which 23 persons were killed and over 100 injured (August 2011), and the killing of 100 people in Damaturu, Borno State (November 2011), among others.
4. Testimonies can never confirm “I prove,” but are rather akin to “I swear” (Jacques Derrida, quoted in Jensen 2020:70), thus affirming their mediatedness as a memory medium.
5. John Sekora's critique of the slave testimonial writing tradition for its collaborative practice in which a white amanuensis documents and writes the testimony of a Black survivor is emblematic of the problematic power dynamics that underlie the production of the testimonial genre, especially within minority groups. This tradition is replicated in various other contexts, such as Native American collaborative writing, Latin American and various African testimonials, and Child Soldier narratives.
6. Elham T. Hussein (2021:67), in discussing two Moroccan prison memoirs, theorized the use of photographs on the covers of testimonial texts. What is clear, though, is that the use of photographs to lend authenticity to not just testimonial literatures but auto/biographical writing in general is not unique to African testimonial narratives. It is a universal practice.
7. Written as a travelogue and a political reportage, Wolfgang Bauer's *Stolen Girls: Survivors of Boko Haram Tell Their Story* (2017), makes strong political claims concerning the global implications of Boko Haram terrorism, especially given that he was writing primarily for a Western audience. On the second page of the narrative, the author affirms that his interest in these stories is to “shed light on the unimaginable crimes” committed by a group that in a few years “had killed even more people than ISIS.” Equating Boko Haram with ISIS is not accidental. He capitalizes on the West's investment in the War on Terror to argue that Boko Haram portends even greater danger and deserves concerted international action. This is most explicit in the epilogue, where he registers his angst on the silences of the international community, including the ordinary citizen in Europe who would ask him: “What's that got to do with us?” (145). Part of Bauer's narrative and political strategy, therefore, is to implicate his audience in the tragedy of Boko Haram while making a case for how Boko Haram terrorism affects not just the Northeast of Nigeria, but the world in general. Aiming for an affective identification from his readers, he reminds them that “we cannot hide any longer. The world has become smaller. ... [T]he shock waves of distant bombs also reach us in an ever-shorter time span,” as the Middle East example and the refugee crisis exemplify. According to Bauer, “If we refuse to look at the blood spilled by others, we will soon be looking at our own blood. We can begin to confront these terrorists successfully only when we listen to their victims: the women” (17).
8. I am consciously situating this event within global histories of violence as a push back against the tendency to see these histories as particularly African—part of the endless stories of savagery coming out of the world's “heart of darkness.” None of these issues is peculiar to Africa. These are global problems, and we must acknowledge their global genealogies and imbrication.

## References

- Adebayo, Sakiru. 2020. "This Uprising Will Bring Out the Beast in Us: The Cultural (After)Life of 'Beasts of No Nations.'" *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 32 (3): 270–85.
- . 2023. *Continuous Pasts: Frictions of Memory in Postcolonial Africa*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Adejunmobi, Moradewun. 2020. "Abiola Irele and the Publicness of African Letters." *Journal of the African Literature Association* 14 (1): 72–89.
- Adenekan, Shola. 2021. *African Literature in the Digital Age: Class and Sexual Politics in New Writing from Nigeria and Kenya*. Rochester, New York: Boydell & Brewer.
- Aderinto, Saheed, and Paul Osifodunrin. 2015. "'500 Children Missing in Lagos': Child Kidnapping and Public Anxiety in Colonial Nigeria." In *Children and Childhood in Colonial Nigerian Histories*, Saheed Aderinto, ed., 97–121. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- African Union, 2019. "Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram." *The Africa-EU Partnership*. <https://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/en/projects/multinational-joint-task-force-mnjtf-against-boko-haram>
- Ahmed, Sara. 2004. "Affective Economies." *Social Text* 22 (2): 117–39.
- Akinremi, Adeola. 2014. "For Chibok Girls, I Travelled to Uganda." *All Africa*. <https://allafrica.com/stories/201405161038.html>.
- Anyaduba, Chigbo Arthur. 2021. *The Postcolonial African Genocide Novel: Quests for Meaningfulness*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Bauer, Wolfgang. 2017. *Stolen Girls: Survivors of Boko Haram Tell Their Story*. Translated by Andy Spyra. New York: New Press.
- BBC News. 2014. "#BBCTrending: Five Facts about #BringBackOurGirls." *BBC Trending*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-27392955>.
- Berents, Helen. 2016. "Hashtagging Girlhood: #IAmMalala, #BringBackOurGirls and Gendering Representations of Global Politics." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18 (4): 513–27.
- Beverly, John. 2004. *Testimonio: On The Politics Of Truth*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bolter, J. David, and Richard Grusin. 1999. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Channels Television. 2014. "Chibok Girls: First Lady Breaks Down in Tears." *YouTube*. Accessed February 18, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMwikuoAMj0>.
- Chiluwa, Innocent, and Presley Ifukor. 2015. "'War against Our Children': Stance and Evaluation in #BringBackOurGirls Campaign Discourse on Twitter and Facebook." *Discourse & Society* 26 (3): 267–96.
- Cole, Teju. 2012. "The White-Savior Industrial Complex." *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/>.
- Committee on Homeland Security. 2011. "Boko Haram Emerging Threat to the U.S. Homeland." *U.S Government Publishing Office*. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CPRT-112HPRT71725/html/CPRT-112HPRT71725.htm>.
- Davies, Carole Boyce. 2008. *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Erlil, Astrid. 2009. "Remembering across Time, Space, and Cultures: Premediation, Remediation and the 'Indian Mutiny.'" In *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, edited by Astrid Erlil and Ann Rigney, 109–38. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- . 2011. *Memory in Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- . 2023. "Literary Memory Activism." In *The Routledge Handbook of Memory Activism*, edited by Yifat Gutman and Jenny Wüstenberg, 411–16. London: Routledge.
- Erlil, Astrid, and Ann Rigney, eds. 2009. *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Frank, Michael C., and Pavan Kumar Malreddy. 2020. *Narratives of the War on Terror: Global Perspectives*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gilbert, Catherine. 2018. *From Surviving to Living: Voice, Trauma and Witness in Rwandan Women's Writing*. Montpellier, France: Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée.

- Gilmore, Leigh. 2023. *The #MeToo Effect: What Happens When We Believe Women*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gitelman, Lisa. 2008. *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Goyal, Yogita. 2019. *Runaway Genres: The Global Afterlives of Slavery*. New York: NYU Press.
- Gutman, Yifat. 2017. *Memory Activism: Reimagining the Past for the Future in Israel-Palestine*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Habila, Helon. 2017. *The Chibok Girls: The Boko Haram Kidnappings and Islamist Militancy in Nigeria*. London: Penguin Books.
- Hinton, Carla. 2014. "Ugandan Nun Says Nigerian Girls' Kidnapping Is Part of Global Assault on Women." *The Oklahoman*. <https://www.oklahoman.com/story/news/2014/05/17/ugandan-nun-says-nigerian-girls-kidnapping-is-part-of-global-assault-on-women/60824610007/>.
- Howard, Emma. 2014. "Bring Back Our Girls: Global Protests over Abduction of Nigerian Schoolgirls." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/07/bring-back-our-girls-global-protests-abduction-nigerian-schoolgirls>.
- Howie, Luke. 2015. "Witnessing Terrorism." *Journal of Sociology* 51 (3): 507–21.
- Human Rights Watch. 2014. "Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp:" *Boko Haram Violence against Women and Girls in Northeast Nigeria*. Human Rights Watch.
- Hussein, Elham T. 2021. "Bearing Witness and Documenting Suffering in Two Moroccan Prison Memoirs: *Tazmamart: Cell 10* and from *Skhirat* to *Tazmamart: A Round Trip Ticket to Hell*." *Journal of the African Literature Association* 15 (1): 65–77.
- Huyssen, Andreas. 2003. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ibrahim, Patience, and Andrea Claudia Hoffmann. 2017. *A Gift from Darkness: How I Escaped with My Daughter from Boko Haram*. Translated by Shaun Whiteside. Boston: Little Brown Book.
- Iheka, Cajetan. 2021. *African Ecomedia: Network Forms, Planetary Politics*. Durham, North
- Jensen, Meg. 2020. "Testimony." In *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, edited by Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja, 66–78. London: Routledge.
- Kaplan, Brett Ashley. 2023. "Introduction." In *Critical Memory Studies: New Approaches*, edited by Brett Ashley Kaplan, 1–7. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Kassim, Abdulbasit, and Michael Nwankpa, eds. 2018. *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kennedy, Rosanne. 2020. "Trauma and Cultural Memory Studies." In *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, edited by Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja, 54–65. London: Routledge.
- Lejeune, Philippe. 1989. *On Autobiography*, edited and with a foreword by Paul John Eakin, Translated by Katherine Leary. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Liebermann, Yvonne. 2021. "Born Digital: The Black Lives Matter Movement and Memory after the Digital Turn." *Memory Studies* 14 (4): 713–32.
- Lim, Jie-Hyun, and Eve Rosenhaft, eds. 2021. *Mnemonic Solidarity: Global Interventions*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mayer, Ruth. 2000. "'Africa as an Alien Future': The Middle Passage, Afrofuturism, and Postcolonial Waterworlds." *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 45 (4): 555–66.
- Moster, Miriam. 2014. "#BringBackOurBoys Meets #BringBackOurGirls." *Times of Israel*. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/bringbackourboys-meets-bringbackourgirls/>.
- Murphy, John. 2016. "Big Tweets: How Social Media and Conventional Media Interacted in Reporting Massive News Events." University of Hertfordshire.
- Mwesigire, Bwesigye Bwa. 2021. "What Is Literary Activism? (Or Who Keeps the Housekeepers' House?)." *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies* 7 (1–2): 10–22.
- Namirimu, Esther. 2014. "Bring Back Our Girls: The Capture of Chibok Girls Brings Bad Memories of the Capture of Aboke Girls." *Human and Health Rights-Uganda*. <https://humanandhealthrights.blogspot.com/2014/05/bring-back-our-girls-capture-of-chibok.html>.
- Ndlovu, Mphathisi. 2018. "Speaking for the Dead: Testimonies, Witnesses and the Representations of Gukurahundi Atrocities in New Media." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 30 (3): 293–306.



- Nwaubani, Adaobi Tricia, and Viviana Mazza. 2018. *Buried Beneath the Baobab Tree*. New York: Katherine Tegen Books.
- O'Brien, Edna. 2019. *Girl: A Novel*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Okorafor, Nnedi. 2015. *The Book of Phoenix*. New York: DAW.
- Onah, Chijioke K. 2022. "Remembering the Dead: Testimonial Narratives and the Politics of Memory in the Representation of Boko Haram Terrorism." *Postcolonial Text* 17 (2 & 3).
- . 2023. "Decolonizing Trauma Studies: The Recognition-Solidarity Nexus in Uwem Akpan's *Say You're One of Them*." *African Literature Today* 41: 132–44.
- Oriola, Temitope B. 2021. "Framing and Movement Outcomes: The #BringBackOurGirls Movement." *Third World Quarterly* 42 (4): 641–60.
- Pereira, Charmaine. 2018. "Beyond the Spectacular: Contextualizing Gender Relations in the Wake of the Boko Haram Insurgency." *Meridians* 17 (2): 246–68.
- Pisanty, Valentina. 2021. *The Guardians of Memory: And the Return of the Xenophobic Right*. New York: CPL.
- Rigney, Ann. 2004. "Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans." *Poetics Today* 25 (2): 361–96.
- . 2005. "Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory." *Journal of European Studies* 35 (1): 011–028.
- . 2012. *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2015. "Cultural Memory Studies: Mediation, Narrative, and the Aesthetic." In *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, edited by Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen, 65–76. London: Routledge.
- . 2016. "Differential Memorability and Transnational Activism: Bloody Sunday, 1887–2016." *Australian Humanities Review* 59: 77–95.
- Ross, Suzanne. 2019. "Exclusive Interview with Nigerian Journalist Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani on the Fifth Anniversary of the Chibok Kidnappings." <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/teachingnonviolentaction/2019/04/exclusive-interview-with-nigerian-journalist-adaobi-tricia-nwaubani-on-the-fifth-anniversary-of-the-chibok-kidnappings/>.
- Rothberg, Michael. 2009. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Sacks, Susanna L. 2020. "Evan Mawarire's #ThisFlag as Tactical Lyric: The Role of Digital Speech in Imagining a Networked Zimbabwean Nation." *African Studies Review* 63 (2): 238–57.
- Said, Edward W. 1975. "The Text, the World, the Critic." *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 8 (2): 1–23.
- Sekora, John. 1987. "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative." *Callaloo* 32: 482–515.
- Sharpe, Christina. 2016. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Smith, Daniel Jordan. 2015. "What Happened to the Chibok Girls?: Gender, Islam, and Boko Haram." *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 13 (2): 159–65.
- Sonuga, Titilope. 2019. *This Is How We Disappear*. Los Angeles: Write Bloody North.
- Sturken, Marita, and Lisa Cartwright. 2018. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Suhr-Sytsma, Nathan. 2022. "Forms of Interreligious Encounter in Contemporary Nigerian Fiction." *African Studies Review* 65 (3): 669–91.
- Sullivan, Meghan Collins. 2018. "Patience Ibrahim Thought No One Would Care About Her Story As A Boko Haram Captive." *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/01/21/579500374/patience-ibrahim-thought-no-one-would-care-about-her-story-as-a-boko-haram-captive>.
- Uraizee, Joya. 2020. *Writing That Breaks Stones: African Child Soldier Narratives*. Lansing: Michigan State University Press.
- van Dijck, José. 2007. *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Watt, Evan. 2014. "100 Days Blog: #BringBackOurGirls Vigils Held around the World." *Theirworld*. <https://theirworld.org/news/100-days-blog-bringbackourgirls-vigils-held-around-the-world/>.

- Whitlock, Gillian. 2015. *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yékú, James. 2022. *Cultural Netizenship: Social Media, Popular Culture, and Performance in Nigeria*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Yékú, James, and Ayobami Ojebode. 2021. "From Google Doodles to Facebook: Nostalgia and Visual Reconstructions of the Past in Nigeria." *African Studies Review* 64 (3): 498–522.

---

**Cite this article:** Onah, Chijioke K. 2024. "#BringBackOurGirls: Transnational Activism and the Remediation of the 2014 Chibok Girls' Kidnapping in Nigeria." *African Studies Review* 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2024.13>