

Stupid Cult

Kris King – March 27th 2012

<http://www.rantinaminor.co.uk/2012/03/stupid-cult/>

Despite being totally with it, up-to-the-minute, and “down wiv’ da kids” – the kind of guy people always come to for “the word on the street” when either Huggy Bear or the Highways Agency road-painting crew are unavailable – I didn’t become fully aware of the whole “Kony 2012” video phenomenon until I saw Charlie Brooker’s segment covering it on “10 O’Clock Live” on Wednesday night. As a dedicated denizen of Twitter ([follow me now](#), you bastards!) I’d naturally heard of the video, knew what it was about, and was vaguely aware of Invisible Children, the organisation responsible for producing it, but I hadn’t looked any further into the details. As the segment unfolded, Invisible Children, and its co-founder Jason Russell, were starting to come across rather scarily like the kind of sinister, child-recruiting religious cult they were condemning Joseph Kony for running, only with fewer guns and more dance numbers. Raves and I wondered to each other how long it would be before clean-cut, god-humping, goody-two shoes Russell would be caught either huffing poppers while getting felched by a gay prostitute, or perhaps [running around the street in his underwear with his cock out, wanking at passing traffic?](#) “About 12 hours” was the answer, apparently.

In the interests of blogular honesty, and out of fairness to the apparently leaky bucket of concentrated loon juice that is Jason Russell, I should probably say that it’s not totally clear at this point whether or not he actually pulled out his pious, petrified penis, pointed it at the passing public, and played it like a portable, pentecostal pipe organ. What is clear, however, is that Russell was found naked on a street corner, hitting the pavement, ranting nonsense (including shouting “iPhone Siri!” and telling no-one in particular that they were the devil), and has since been detained for psychiatric evaluation. What is also clear is that when his wife released a statement blaming the incident on extreme exhaustion and dehydration [she had obviously never bothered to look up what the symptoms of exhaustion and dehydration were](#) (either that or she figured the public were dumb enough not to question it). But what is most clear of all is that I managed to successfully bang out 13 alliterations involving the letter P in a single sentence and you haven’t even applauded yet ... bad minions!

Before I go any further I should perhaps take a moment to look at the issue that brought Jason Russell to worldwide attention, namely that of Joseph Kony and his Lord’s Resistance Army. The LRA is a Ugandan guerilla group that combines nationalism, christian fundamentalism, and a cult of personality based around Kony (who believes himself to be both a medium and god’s voice on earth), all topped off with ambitions for the establishment of a theocratic state, and liberally sprinkled with the abduction of over 60,000 children for the purposes of sexual slavery and soldiering. It probably, therefore, wouldn’t come as much of a surprise to learn that Kony is wanted for war crimes by pretty much everyone with a conscience, although he has thus far evaded all attempts to track him down. He was last seen in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where, presumably, he was being protected from discovery by the cumulative power of the crosses drawn in oil on the chests of his young soldiers that, he says, will shield them from bullets.

Thankfully, however, this budding centrefold for “Psychotic Bastard” magazine, and undoubted future recipient of the George W. Bush Memorial “Delusional Nut Sack Of The Year” Award, can’t hide forever, and with the “Kony 2012” video having spread faster than the sense of sphincter-tightening panic amongst members of the Phelps family when trapped overnight in a leather bar for gay soldiers, he might as well just hand himself in at the nearest police station. After all, when governments, civil authorities, or even the armed forces fail to apprehend the head of a designated terrorist organisation, the obvious solution is to employ the services of a camp christian choreographer with a copy of Adobe Premiere. I’m fairly sure that, had he not died in 1987, Bob Fosse would eventually have been called upon to assist in the capture of Osama Bin Laden by staging a few musicals the moment it was felt everyone’s favourite bearded terrorist had evaded US forces for too long. And before you put your hand up, yes, I *know* that it shouldn’t be a “memorial” award because Governor Gump himself is still alive, but I’m ever hopeful, and who the hell are you to

trample on my dreams?

In 2004, Jason Russell co-founded [Invisible Children Inc.](#), the non-profit organisation established specifically to raise awareness of the LRA and Joseph Kony in the hope of stopping the abuse and abduction of children, as well as bringing Kony to account for his crimes. Additionally operating as a charity, Invisible Children receives donations and sells merchandise to raise money for their cause which it promotes through internet-distributed films like "Kony 2012". Although praised by many for casting a spotlight on the problems in Uganda, the group has been criticised for its oversimplification of a complex issue, their manipulation and exaggeration of the facts (particularly in regards to the scale of abductions by the LRA), their support for the Sudan People's Liberation Army and the Ugandan Army (both of whom are known to have committed similar atrocities), and the fact that the attention they have now brought to the region may do harm to US troops already deployed there in ostensibly secret operations.

The group has also been criticised for its use of funds, an understandable concern for anyone who has ever indulged so much as a passing glance at their videos; slickly produced, and with set-ups that wouldn't look out of place in a reasonably well-budgeted Hollywood movie, Invisible Children's films seep cash from almost every frame, making one wonder just exactly how much money they have left to spend on actually getting the job done once they've jizzed away the bulk of it on self-promotion. In an effort to counter such claims, the group posted a breakdown of their finances on their website, stating that only 16% was spent on admin costs, with more than 80% going towards its "mission" (a rather vague, perhaps even disingenuous, way of deflecting criticism since it doesn't clarify whether or not their "mission" is simply "make and star in some awesome videos, and hopefully help a few African kiddies when we've got 5 minutes free"). While this criticism is pretty much par for the course when it comes to high-profile awareness-raising, there is something else here that many people, myself included, find both irritating and worrisome; in all this, Invisible Children's Jason Russell is very, very visible.

Taking the now [\(in\)famous "Kony 2012" video](#) as an example, a full five minutes of its thirty minute run time is devoted to bigging up Jason Russell, his history of activism, and the birth of his son (who, in one stomach-emptyingly self-aggrandising moment for Russell, is cast as the poor, frightened child who stares up at the hero, eyes glistening with a hope that's trying so hard to hold back the fear, and is reassured with the "Don't worry, I'll get the evil bad man" line that signifies the beginning of the final act where Saint Daddy Jason rescues all the world's children, kills the warlord with the power of his undeniable heavenly radiance, and shepherds the planet into a new era of peace, love, and happy, perfect children who have hope in their hearts, flowers growing out of their bottoms, and a never-ending gratitude towards the Lord of the Dance Routine who they will worship as a god). Throw in any of the other nearly 300 videos Invisible Children has produced and you realise quickly that it's less about charitable activism and more like being a cult of personality built around Jason Russell and his ego.

As a brief introduction to just how big of an opinion Russell has of himself, check out [this interview he did with PMc Magazine](#). Done that? Good, now quickly change the T-shirt you've just vomited all over and we can continue. I don't know about you but the first question I found myself asking is what kind of ego-fapping wank-bag gives *himself* the nickname "radical"? And how big of a self-important tit do you have to be to say that you're going to "redefine international justice" and "If Oprah, Steven Spielberg and Bono had a baby, I would be that baby"? With his stated mission and his unfailing ability to put himself front and centre of everything, it's patently obvious that he has a massive superhero complex, but there are signs that it gets perhaps a shade or twelve darker than that. Watch the videos for ["The Fourth Estate"](#) and ["Fourth Estate Details"](#); can anyone say "inviting children to a rally that's got more than a touch of the Hitler Youth about it"?

Like many others, including Charlie Brooker (who always manages to express this stuff far more amusingly than I can, damn it), I got the deeply unsettling feeling that I was watching a recruitment video; one that had been cleverly designed to help bring together many thousands of children who would act as a fighting force to "spread the word" and help Jason Russell fulfil his "mission". When you add to that his comments in the PMc Magazine interview about creating a school called "The Academy", you wonder what kind of agenda Russell really has here, and whether, like Joseph Kony, there's some goddy goodness involved. If you can stand to watch [Russell's appearance at Liberty University](#), you'll know the answer is a bible-blowing, christ-tonguing "hell-fucking-yes". Invisible Children might not be an out-and-out christian organisation, but under the direction of Jason Russell it *undoubtedly* has a religious agenda, and it's one that many have quite reasonably described as "stealth evangelism".

Now, there will naturally be those of you who think I'm being just a tiny bit cynical, perhaps even hostile, towards someone who has done far more than I could hope to achieve in doing some real good in the world – saving people, saving *children*, from a tortured life of pain, misery, and unbearable suffering – when I could instead be showing some positive energy by helping this man and his noble cause. There's no doubt that Joseph Kony and his ilk are the kind of evil, stubborn shit-stains in humanity's knickers that I, and everyone else, would *love* to see scrubbed out so that the rest of us may enjoy clean, comfy, fresh-smelling pants in which to go about our lives ... but am I really the only one to notice that Jason Russell, with his carefully crafted image, his "Fourth Estate" youth camps, his sense of christian righteousness and evangelical desire to save, and the kind of highly-manipulative videos that would prompt Hitler's chief propagandist, Joseph Goebbels, to genuflect in awe, is really himself just a truck-load of guns short of Kony's own religious militia?

Would it be particularly outlandish of me to suggest that Invisible Children, under the auspices of Jason Russell, are in serious danger of becoming the next in a long line of religious cults? Is it that big of a leap to imagine, *really*? One could argue it either way, but if we look at [what constitutes a cult](#) you can see there is at the very least a semblance of a case to be made.

1. It uses psychological coercion to recruit, indoctrinate and retain its members

You might think this one would be pretty hard to argue, but I don't believe it is. Coercion doesn't have to be specifically negative and overt, as it is when some of the more traditional cults tell followers their families are holding them back because they're filled not just with cider and pies but also with devils and lies; force and intimidation can also be employed quite effectively by simply applying it in a more subtle way. One example would be to, say, produce videos that use emotive imagery and language to psychologically guilt you into getting behind an issue in principle, then using songs and hit music video techniques and visuals to sell you on the idea of joining the cause because of how damn cool it all looks, and how you don't want to be the only one amongst your friends not getting involved.

2. It forms an elitist totalitarian society.

You only have to watch the videos for "The Fourth Estate" to see this one is a no-brainer. The idea of being "invited", special, *chosen*, to help shape the "new revolution", is a classic cult trick. "Come with us, we're going to change the world, and we only want the supremely talented and gifted among you" is the kind of sales pitch that gets a cult leader laid every day by a different wife, and an army of loyal Kool Aid drinkers.

3. Its founder leader is self-appointed, dogmatic, messianic, not accountable and has charisma.

Check on the first one, and Invisible Children's habit of painting the issues as entirely black and white happily checks the second. Jason Russell has yet to declare himself a deity, or at least a messenger to one, but he's been carefully positioning himself through Invisible Children as a saviour to all the little Ugandan kiddies, so it's only a matter of time before he goes from saviour of children to redeemer of all the world's people through the forgiveness of their sins. Whether he is, or considers himself, accountable to anyone for anything remains to be seen once he's been released from the hospital following psychiatric evaluation for his naked meltdown, but one thing that can be seen right now is that the guy *definitely* has charisma (or, at least, he has the look of someone who should be on a poster adorning millions of teenage girls' bedroom walls).

4. It believes 'the end justifies the means' in order to solicit funds recruit people.

It is impossible for Invisible Children to, at this point, claim to be unaware of how both the Sudan People's Liberation Army and the Ugandan Army have been accused of many of the same crimes for which they condemn Joseph Kony, and so their decision to ally with and support them is a tacit admission that they're prepared to partner with some deeply unsavoury people if it helps them get the job done. In terms of fund-raising and recruitment it seems they're happy to spend huge wodes of cash on inculcating mainly children through the use of music videos, youth camps, and huge rallies that have a vaguely Orwell-cum-Nuremberg feel to them. We won't even get into how [Invisible Children accepts funding from anti-gay christian hate groups](#) like National Christian Foundation, or how Uganda has been trying to enact [laws directly inspired by American evangelicals](#) that would make being gay a capital offence.

5. Its wealth does not benefit its members or society.

[According to some reports](#), barely one-third of Invisible Children's funds are spent "on the ground" –

the rest presumably goes on administration, film production, and the enormous energy bills required to power the artificial sun that shines out of Jason Russell's arse. I think it would be fair to say that, while a small part of society in Uganda does get some benefit from the group financially, the group itself benefits to an immeasurably greater degree. As for its members, well, aren't they the ones joining, doing the work, spreading the word and raising the money? I don't imagine they're seeing any of that "dancing in the street set-piece" budget for themselves.

Whether or not we're witnessing the birth of a potential new religious cult with Invisible Children and Jason Russell is, I admit, so wide open to debate you can park a bus in the gap; it is, after all, early days yet and, although the signs do seem rather ominous (in the same way that the formation of a Conservative/Lib-Dem government in 2010 felt "troubling"), the group haven't exactly authorised construction of a compound fenced in barbed-wire and fortified with armed guards (also, and to the best of my knowledge, Russell has yet to proclaim his divinity and embark on a programme of impregnating every young woman eager to bear the sacred Russell child who will unite the world in peace and christianity-themed musicals). Were it not for the youth camps (I actually feel slightly uncomfortable saying those words) and "The Fourth Estate" seeming ever more like some purpose-built, Orwellian nightmare of an institution whose role is to give the easily malleable brains of trusting children a damn good washing ("MiniRinse"?), or the professed agenda of covert ministering, I would happily write off Jason Russell as a god-bothering charity-worker who seems unable to engage in any kind of altruism without being a massive, emotionally-blackmailing attention-whore about it.

It's not that I have a problem with his religion, the youth gatherings, the activism, the videos, etc.; atheist organisations do those kind of things too (well, apart from the religion, obviously). The problem I have is that Jason Russell and Invisible Children seem to be doing *all* of those things in the same physical and temporal space, and they're not being completely transparent about it; as you'll have seen, Russell explains in his Liberty University appearance that to avoid non-christians thinking you might have an agenda to convert them, you should approach them with a second agenda to hide that first agenda behind a façade, whether it be one of friendship or of some cause with an aim to do good. He also states in that same video that he thinks of Invisible Children not as a charity but as a business. If he's not fronting the 21st century's newest religious cult, then he is at least a disingenuous, and incredibly pushy salesman for his religion (and what is a religion if not mostly a cult with a dead leader?).

You could applaud Jason Russell's efforts to bring an important issue in to the spotlight (although he seems all too willing to keep shoving the issue over a bit so he can catch as many photons of attention as possible for himself), but similarly you could also applaud Jim Jones for practically desegregating religious worship in America, for setting up day-care centres and food kitchens for black inner-city residents, for helping black unmarried mothers, for getting black junkies off the streets, and for educating black children (he and his wife even adopted a few). I'm not saying Jason Russell is about to persuade 900 people to drink Kool Aid laced with cyanide and valium before using a bullet to put a parting in the back of his "radical" hair, I'm merely pointing out that when one allows oneself to be dazzled by the spotlight of good deeds it makes it that much harder to objectively assess what's going on behind the stage curtain.

Think of those shitty plays about "issues" you had to endure in school, put on by local groups who only really wanted to show off in front of an audience but figured they'd have to have some kind of social or moral message "for the kids" so the school would let them get their foot in the door. Jason Russell is no different, and it would not be too controversial to suggest he might be cynically exploiting the issue of Kony and the LRA to further his own religious agenda. Do not make the mistake of letting your attention be diverted; right now he's mostly just an annoying twat – don't let him become a stupid cult.

