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### From Storytelling to Writing: Transforming Literacy Practices among Sudanese Refugees

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## From Storytelling to Writing: Transforming Literacy Practices among Sudanese Refugees

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This paper presents an analysis of the ways in which a community of orphaned Southern Sudanese refugee youth—the “Lost Boys of Sudan”—transformed traditional practices of storytelling as they adjusted to life in the U.S. The result of their experiences as orphaned refugees, this transformation discloses larger issues related to literacy, identity and community for these youth. Theoretical perspectives regarding literacy and storytelling as social practices, reflecting participants’ social, cultural, and political contexts, framed this research. Focal participants were 3 orphaned young men, all refugees from Southern Sudan. Ethnographic methods including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and artifact collection contributed to data collection. Data analysis consisted of coding field notes and interview transcripts for emerging themes and conducting discourse analyses on interview transcripts. Results indicated that participants acted as storytellers and also talked explicitly about storytelling’s cultural importance. Participants transformed the act of storytelling by altering the purposes, audiences, and media for storytelling that they had encountered or told before. Transformed storytelling revealed the importance of both becoming educated in the U.S. and also of maintaining a sense of Sudanese identity and community among these refugee youth. Their stories also reflected an important tension between orphan identity and maintaining a sense of Sudanese community, as well as a focus on educating non-Sudanese about refugees’ experiences.

### Resúmen

Este artículo presenta un análisis de las maneras en que una comunidad de jóvenes huérfanos refugiados del sur de Sudán—“Los niños perdidos de Sudán”—transformaron

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sus prácticas tradicionales de narración de historias durante su adaptación a la vida en los Estados Unidos. Como parte de sus experiencias como refugiados huérfanos, esta transformación revela temas relacionados con la lecto-escritura, la identidad y la comunidad para estos jóvenes. El marco teórico utilizado en esta investigación se basa en la lecto-escritura y la narración de historias como prácticas sociales, reflejando los contextos sociales, culturales y políticos de los participantes. Los participantes fueron 3 jóvenes huérfanos refugiados provenientes del sur de Sudan. Los métodos etnográficos utilizados incluyeron observaciones, entrevistas y recolección de artefactos. El análisis de datos consistió en codificar notas de campo y transcripciones de entrevistas para facilitar el surgimiento de temas. También se llevaron a cabo análisis de discurso en las transcripciones de las entrevistas. Los resultados indicaron que los participantes actuaron como narradores de historias y también hablaron explícitamente acerca de la importancia cultural de esta práctica. Los participantes transformaron el acto de narración de historias alterando los propósitos, audiencias y medios. La transformación de la narración de historias reveló la importancia de la educación recibida en EEUU y la de mantener el sentido de comunidad e identidad Sudanesa entre este grupo de jóvenes refugiados. Sus historias también reflejaron la tensión existente entre la identidad que da la orfandad y la conservación del sentido de comunidad entre los integrantes sudaneses, como también el enfoque que debe tener la educación en las experiencias de personas refugiadas.

#### 从讲故事到书写：苏丹难民读写行为的转变研究

##### 摘要

本文对南苏丹孤儿难民群体“苏丹的迷途男孩”在适应美国生活的过程中如何转变传统的讲故事方式进行了研究。这一转变是由他们的孤儿难民经历造成的，同时反映出与他们的文化水平、自我认同和群体相关的更大的问题来。本研究的理论观点是：读写和讲故事都是社会行为，反应了研究对象的社会、文化和政治背景。研究对象是3个南苏丹孤儿难民。在数据收集中采用了民族志研究方法，包括参与式观察、半结构式访谈和作品收集等进行。数据分析过程包括对观察资料和访谈记录中出现的主题进行编码，并对访谈记录进行语篇分析。结果显示研究对象充当了故事讲述者，并明确地谈论到讲故事的文化重要性。研究对象讲故事行为的转变表现为：他们会改变讲故事的目的、听众和媒介来讲述过去的经历或见闻。这种转变显示出在美国受到教育的重要性以及年轻一代难民保持苏丹身份和群体意识的重要性。他们的故事也反映出孤儿身份和保持苏丹群体意识之间的紧张状态，同时表明他们注重向非苏丹人介绍难民的经历。

##### Résumé

Cette étude présente une analyse dans laquelle une communauté d'orphelins du Soudan du Sud, "les enfants perdus du Soudan," a transformé les pratiques traditionnelles de la narration orale en même temps qu'ils s'adaptaient à la vie aux Etats-

Unis. La transformation résultant de leur expérience en tant que réfugiés orphelins laisse apparaître des questions plus larges reliées à l'acquisition de la lecture-écriture, à l'identité, et au milieu de ces jeunes. Les perspectives théoriques reliées à la lecture-écriture et à la narration orale en tant que pratiques sociales et reflets de contextes socio-culturels et politiques des participants constituent le cadre de cette étude. Les participants visés étaient trois jeunes garçons orphelins, tous réfugiés du sud du Soudan. Des méthodes ethnographiques comprenant l'observation participatoire, des interviews demi-structurés, et des appuis à la narration, ont contribué à l'assemblage des données. L'analyse de données consiste en des notes codées prises sur le terrain et des transcriptions d'interviews afin d'analyser des thèmes émergents et les discours des transcriptions d'interviews. Les résultats indiquent que les participants agissent en tant que conteurs et aussi parlent explicitement de l'importance culturelle de la narration orale. Les participants ont transformé l'acte de raconter en changeant les objectifs, les audiences, et les moyens de raconter qu'ils avaient abordé ou énoncé auparavant. La transformation de la narration orale révèle l'importance de faire des études aux États-Unis tout en maintenant une identité et une appartenance à la communauté soudanaise parmi ces jeunes réfugiés. Leurs histoires reflètent une tension importante entre l'identité de l'orphelin et le maintien du sens de l'appartenance à la communauté soudanaise, ainsi qu'une mise au point de l'enseignement de l'expérience des réfugiés à des non-réfugiés.

Ours is an oral tradition. My people told stories about the raids and slaves—they sang about slavery. But they did not write books or newspaper stories about their suffering. And they certainly did not file reports to international human rights organizations. That is changing, as Dinka refugees move to the West and organize. (Bok, 2003, p. 249)

In this paper, I present an analysis of the ways in which a community of orphaned Southern Sudanese refugee youth—commonly known as the “Lost Boys of Sudan”—transformed their traditional practice of storytelling. There are more than 17,000 southern Sudanese refugees in the United States today (Bok, 2003); of these, approximately 1,000 lived in Michigan at the time of the study, and about a quarter of Michigan’s Sudanese refugees were orphaned youth or “Lost Boys.” The youth, primarily boys, were orphaned by the 20-year-old civil war in the Sudan, made a grueling journey on foot across Africa, and lived for years in the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. Eventually they were resettled in American communities such as the one in Michigan where this study took place.

The analysis described in this paper represents one aspect of my research concerning literacy practices among Southern Sudanese refugee youth (Perry, 2005; Perry, 2007a). This work also is part of the Cultural Practices of Literacy Study (CPLS), a cross-case analysis of literacy practices in various cultural and linguistic communities based at the University of British Columbia. In studying

literacy practices in this community, I examined the various meanings that the orphaned youth ascribed to literacy and literacy practices, the different social activity domains that contextualized their literacy practices, the ways in which the youth used different languages across and within those domains, and the ways in which school literacy practices aligned (or did not align) with the literacy practices of other social activity domains for these young men. In summary, I found that the study's participants ascribed great importance to literacy, in part because they believed education and literacy were the keys to improving both their own personal lives and the collective future of the Sudan. For these marginalized young men, being literate meant having access to power. Several social activity domains<sup>1</sup>—religion, formal schooling, interpersonal communication, and community participation—contextualized most of the literacy practices in which these young men engaged. Community issues shaped literacy practices within these domains, with the notable exception of formal schooling, as participants worshipped together, maintained family and community ties through e-mails and letters, and worked to organize Sudanese refugees in Michigan, the United States, and across the Sudanese diaspora. The literacy practices encountered by these young men in formal schooling, in contrast, reflected a focus on the individual, rather than community. Issues related to language were another important theme in the study's findings. These young men spoke many languages, including English, Dinka, KiSwahili, and Arabic, but most were literate only in English. The participants described English as a language of empowerment for their community, but they also expressed strong beliefs about the need to become literate in their local languages, in order to preserve their cultures and communities (see Perry, 2007a, for further discussion).

For the present analysis, I chose to more deeply explore one theme that emerged in that study—the ways in which traditional oral storytelling practices shaped some literacy practices among the youth in this community. Three research questions guided this analysis:

- What were the roles of storytelling in the lives of the Lost Boys in Africa?<sup>2</sup> What were the roles of storytelling in their current lives in Michigan?
- How have the Lost Boys transformed traditional storytelling as a result of their experiences as refugees?
- How does storytelling, and its transformation, relate to issues of identity and community for this group of refugees?

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<sup>1</sup>For more detailed discussion of social activity domains, see Purcell-Gates (2007).

<sup>2</sup>Although I dislike using the generic term "Africa" to refer to a continent rich with many nations and ethnic groups, I purposely use this term rather than referring to a specific African nation in this paper, because the Lost Boys' lives and experiences prior to relocation in the United States encompassed at least three African nations (Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya).

As I will demonstrate, storytelling played a variety of important roles in the cultures of various Southern Sudanese tribes in their previous lives in Africa, and it is a practice that Southern Sudanese refugees have transformed as they relocate around the world.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical assumptions associated with the field of ethnography of communication (e.g., Bakhtin, 1986; Heath, 1983; Hymes, 1996) and sociocultural and sociolinguistic approaches to literacy, language, and storytelling (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Gee, 1991, 1996; Hymes, 1996; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Street, 2001a; Wortham, 2001) framed this particular analysis. Such approaches to the study of literacy and language use suggest that what people do with languages and literacies is patterned by social relationships as well as by cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and identities. Language and literacy practices, including storytelling, therefore are infused with purpose and meaning for individual actors and communities. Literacy practices are shaped by and respond to political, historical, social, and cultural forces, and, as a result, they are dynamic and malleable (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Street, 2001a).

### Storytelling as a Sociocultural (Literacy) Practice

Why do people tell (or write) stories? As Ochs and Capps (2001) suggest, "Human beings narrate to remember, instill cultural knowledge, grapple with a problem, rethink the status quo, soothe, empathize, inspire, speculate, justify a position, dispute, tattle, evaluate one's and others' identities, shame, tease, laud, entertain, among other ends" (p. 60). Like print literacy, storytelling represents a purposeful sociocultural practice shaped by and closely linked to a community's beliefs, values, and attitudes (Heath, 1983; Hymes, 1996). Storytelling is also a general label that can be applied to a collection of various types of practices. That is, genre(s) of storytelling may encompass a variety of storytelling activities, either oral or print-based (or both, as this study will demonstrate). These activities include creating fictional stories, passing on community histories, and sharing personal experiences, among many others (Johnstone, 2001; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Wortham, 2001). Some of these storytelling activities involve print literacy practices, as people write stories in the form of novels, memoirs, and other written forms. Other storytelling practices, such as those found in many cultural communities in Sudan, do not involve any print literacy at all. In this analysis, I define storytelling as a sociocultural practice that may or may not involve print literacy practices. Because all practices change as new ones are learned and as old ones are transformed, the practice of storytelling is also

dynamic and malleable. For example, practices that were once only oral may change to include written forms of storytelling.

Practices are invisible because they connect with beliefs, attitudes, values, social structures, and power. Practices must therefore be identified through visible events (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000), such as literacy events (Heath, 1983). Likewise, storytelling practices must be identified through storytelling events, through what individuals and communities *do* with stories and how they *talk* about storytelling. Context plays an important role in shaping these practices (Hymes, 1994). Storytelling practices also differ across cultures, because they are purposeful and embedded in social goals and cultural practices (Heath, 1983; Hymes, 1996; Ochs & Capps, 2001).

### What Is Story?

Discourse analysts such as Labov (1972) and Johnstone (2001) offer various perspectives on stories and storytelling. Labov, for example, uses the term *narrative*. His definition suggests that narratives are based in actuality, reflecting past events: “We define narrative as one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred” (Labov, 1972, p. 359). Johnstone (2001), however, suggests that this definition has created confusion among later scholars, who used the term *narrative* to mean both (a) talk that represents an actual past sequence of events, as well as (b) talk meant to engage a listener in a narrative retelling. Johnstone attempts to resolve the confusion by distinguishing between *narrative* and *story*. For Johnstone, *narrative* entails talk representing past events, while *story* involves a narrative with a point. Johnstone’s distinction is problematic, though, in that she uses the first term to define the second. Although she says she uses the idea of *story* as it is commonly used outside the world of discourse analysis, it is unclear from her definition whether *story* only refers to actual past events, or whether it can also include fictional narratives as well. For the purposes of this analysis, I chose to use the term *story* exclusively, because my participants primarily used that term, and I wished to reflect their voices and their experiences. I define *story* as a sequence of at least two events—actual, fictional, or hypothetical—that are reported orally, in print, or through a combination of both. I also refer to a variety of types of stories, including retellings of actual events as well as fictional and hypothetical stories.

### Stories, Identity, and Community

In thinking about the relationship between culture, identity, and agency, Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) suggest that individuals and communities “are caught in the tensions between past histories that have settled in them

and the present discourses and images that attract them or somehow impinge upon them” (p. 4). Holland and her colleagues also view individual identities as social products that reflect “imaginings of self in worlds of action” (p. 5). As sociocultural texts, stories play an important role in shaping both individual and collective identities (Bruner, 1996; Johnstone, 2001; Wortham, 2001). Bruner wrote that humans swim in a sea of stories through which we “construct a version of ourselves in the world” and through which a given culture provides “models of identity and agency to its members” (p. *xiv*). Likewise, Ochs and Capps (2001) proposed that narrative interaction (i.e., the telling of one’s stories) “facilitates a philosophy of life and a blueprint for living” (p. 154). Because it reflects culture and shapes identity, storytelling embodies a powerful form of sense-making. Johnstone (2001), for example, noted that making sense of the world through stories is quintessentially human. This theme, that stories shape identities and provide cultural models, directly reflects the words and beliefs of participants in this study, as I will demonstrate.

Because identities are linked to the dynamism of culture, they are not static. Rather, they are malleable composites that respond to and appropriate from historical, cultural, social, and political situations and events (Holland et al., 1998). Likewise, Wortham (2001) suggests that autobiographical stories in particular can illustrate the ways in which the storyteller makes sense of the world. These stories “presuppose a certain vision of the social world and position the narrator and audience with respect to that social world and with respect to each other” (p. 9). Telling stories is one way in which storytellers may position themselves in relation to their families, their communities, and the larger world. In a recent speech, author Salman Rushdie (2005) stressed the significance of storytelling for families, suggesting that stories symbolize one badge of family membership. Rushdie argued that becoming part of the family involves learning the family’s stories, and I suggest that communities require the same learning of collective stories. Yet, families and communities grow, divide, and change—and storytelling practices therefore must also evolve.

### Research in Literacy and Storytelling

Much ethnographic research has documented the literacy practices of immigrant and refugee communities in the United States and other English-speaking nations. These studies provide data to support the theory of multiple literacies, and they demonstrate that literacy practices are closely connected with issues of power and marginalization (see, e.g., Perry, 2007a, 2007b; Dyer & Choski, 2001; Gregory & Williams, 2000; Herbert & Robinson, 2001; Sarroub, Pernicek, & Sweeney, 2007). One interesting aspect of literacy practices in these various communities involved the ways in which immigrants and refugees blended, appropriated, or drew from a variety of practices in their own communities and



the mainstream community to accomplish certain goals. For example, in their study among a Bangladeshi community in London, Gregory and Williams (2000) demonstrated that Bangladeshi children blend, or syncretize, the literacies from their home, community, and school contexts. Other researchers describe this process as border-crossing (Zhang, 2007), or importing and exporting practices from different contexts (Collins, 2007). These studies suggest, therefore, that literacy practices change over time, and that participants are active agents in that change (Perry & Purcell-Gates, 2005).

Storytelling has been identified as one important practice among many marginalized communities, especially those that are new to the U.S. context, such as refugee communities. African refugees are coming to the United States in greater numbers; some of these refugees have had few opportunities to become literate, or they come from communities that value oral practices more highly than literate practices. Arthur (2003), for example, noted that in Somali culture, “The spoken rather than the written word is of central importance” (p. 262). Oral practices such as storytelling, singing songs, and reciting poetry are important methods of entertaining, teaching traditional values, and passing on genealogy and history in Somalia and Sudan (Arthur, 2003; Singleton, 2001), as well as in other cultures. In their study of Hayder, a teenage Kurdish refugee from Iraq, Sarroub, Pernicek and Sweeny (2007) found that storytelling revealed much about Hayder:

At the beginning, we did not know what to make of Hayder’s stories, but the more time that Todd spent with Hayder, the more we began to understand that these stories were integral to his identity—a male, refugee, ELL student who seemed to be trying to understand how the world worked in the United States. (p. 671)

Regarding formal schooling, the extant literature regarding storytelling and literacy contains many descriptions of storytelling and its uses in the classroom, from preschool to adult education programs (e.g., Arrastfa, 1995; de Barros, 1991; Horn, 2005). This body of literature contains few empirical studies of storytelling and literacy, especially in out-of-school contexts. However, as research into the literacy practices of various cultural communities has become more common, literacy researchers have documented the ways in which oral storytelling relates to print literacy development. Much of this body of research, however, has examined storytelling among young children who are emerging into reading and writing. Drawing upon a Bakhtinian dialogic framework, Dyson (1993, 2003) demonstrated the ways in which young children draw from cultural resources such as popular music, movies, and television programs and “re-mix” them in their writing at school. The children in her studies appropriated these resources as they worked to make sense of schooled literacy practices. Other researchers, such as Au (1980) and Heath (1982, 1983), described the

ways in which storytelling practices differed across cultural communities and the implications these differences held for children in school. Au noted that Native Hawaiian storytelling practices often involve patterns of overlapping speech, in which multiple storytellers contribute to a story. Her research found that incorporating similar practices in early literacy instruction improved Native Hawaiian children's literacy development. In a similar vein, Heath's ethnographic study of literacy in Roadville, a White working-class community, and Trackton, a Black working-class community, not only found differences in the ways in which each community enacted storytelling, but it also found that the storytelling practices in Trackton differed greatly from those valued in formal schooling. The results of these studies suggest the importance of understanding the role of storytelling in different cultural communities.

Research has documented that important connections exist between storytelling practices and literacy practices. Many existing studies, however, tend to characterize storytelling as an oral practice, and as a result, to contrast it with print literacy practices. While researchers such as Au (1980), Heath (1983), and Dyson (1993, 2003) do point to connections between storytelling and literacy development, their work focuses on young children. In addition, many of the existing studies also tend to treat storytelling practices as frozen in time, often as a practice that existed in immigrants' home countries. As a result, there is a need to examine the ways in which storytelling may change over time, the ways in which new contexts may transform practices, and the ways in which storytelling connects with literacy. This study, therefore, examines the ways in which storytelling practices changed among a group of orphaned young adult refugees from the Sudan.

### STORIES FROM SUDAN: HISTORICAL CONTEXTS AND FOCAL PARTICIPANTS

#### The Civil War in Sudan

The Lost Boys' orphanhood and refugee status are the direct result of a civil war that has been ongoing in the Sudan since 1983, when the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement and Army (SPLM/A), a coalition of Southern Sudanese, organized an uprising against the Northern-dominated Sudanese government. Deep ethnic and religious divisions contributed to this civil war, although this particular conflict is just one manifestation of centuries of complex strife.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>It is important to understand, however, that this war is different from the recent conflict in Darfur, which has received a great deal of media attention in the West/global North. Darfur is in a completely different region of the country, although the ethnic, cultural, and political issues in each conflict are similar.

Northern Sudan is predominantly Arab<sup>4</sup> and Muslim, while southern Sudan predominantly comprises African tribes whose religious beliefs are either Christian or animist. The Arab North controls the country's government, and it has systematically worked to subjugate the African South by imposing Muslim *sharia* law, making Arabic the official national language, and turning a blind eye to the traditional practice of enslaving southern Sudanese (Bok, 2003; Deng, 1995). In January 2005, however, the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A signed a peace accord that outlined an agreement for power-sharing between the North and the South and that made provision for an eventual election so that the South may determine whether or not to remain part of the Sudan (Embassy of the Republic of the Sudan, 2005). Many Southern Sudanese people then expressed the hope that this accord would finally bring peace to the region. Sadly, Dr. John Garang, the longtime leader of the SPLM/A and the newly instated vice president of Sudan, died in an airplane crash on July 30, 2005. Commonly held beliefs that only Garang could have preserved the peace accord, subsequent renewal of ethnic violence, and the ongoing conflict in Darfur have significantly dampened the community's optimism regarding peace.

The civil war and its aftermath completely devastated southern Sudan. The war has claimed at least two and a half million lives and displaced five million others as refugees. Militias bombed, pillaged, and destroyed villages and crops, slaughtered families, raped women, and captured women and children to be taken to the North, where they were kept as slaves and forced to convert to Islam (Bok, 2003; Yang, 2002). The conflict in Sudan caused a mass exodus of Southerners, many of whom ended up in the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya.

### The Journey of the Lost Boys

Tens of thousands of Sudanese children began to flee from the South in 1987 in an attempt to escape the war. Boys primarily comprised this group for several reasons. First, boys fled their villages in reaction to news that the armies on both sides were abducting boys and forcing them to fight. Second, many young boys were away from home, tending to herds of animals in remote cattle camps, when militias destroyed their villages and slaughtered their families (Yang, 2002). In contrast, girls tended to be at home when the militias arrived and were much more likely to be killed or captured and sold as slaves or concubines (McKelvey, 2003).

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<sup>4</sup>Most Northern Sudanese are not ethnically Arab, but they have been "Arabized" culturally, they are lighter-skinned than their southern counterparts, and they consider themselves to be Arab (Deng, 1995).

These orphans walked over 1,000 miles:

In the weeks and months of their journeys, traveling mostly at night to avoid being bombed from the air or captured by ground troops, lions were a constant threat. The boys began to form close-knit groups, a new sense of family following the loss of their own. They traveled across Saharan desert, into jungles, over mountains and through swamps—all studded with land mines. (Yang, 2002, n.p.)

Only about 7,000 of the original group survived to reach the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya in 1992 (Yang, 2002). These refugee youth lived in Kakuma for nearly a decade, residing with Sudanese foster parents or in group homes with other orphaned youth. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) opened schools in the camp. Beginning in November 2000, the U.S. State Department began to resettle these refugees in the United States. Nearly 4,000 Lost Boys were resettled by 2001 (International Rescue Committee, 2007), and the United States has continued to resettle more—although in greatly reduced numbers due to security fears following the attacks of September 11, 2001.

The first and largest wave of Lost Boys arrived in Michigan in December 2000. Two local social service agencies took official responsibility for the refugees. Those under the approximate age of 18 were placed with foster families and enrolled in local high schools. Some of those older than 18 attended high schools, community colleges, or studied for GED degrees. Many youth over 18 were “adopted” by families from local churches who served as community mentors, helping the youth adjust to life in America, complete their educations, and find employment.

Chol, Ezra, and Francis<sup>5</sup>

At the time of this study, Chol was approximately 19 years old.<sup>6</sup> He is a member of the Dinka tribe, the largest African tribe in the Sudan. Chol graduated from high school in 2002 and then attended a local private university, where he majored in business administration. Although still a young man, Chol gained a great deal of respect in the Sudanese refugee community. He was often asked to organize community events, and the community elected him to serve as a representative on the Sudanese refugees’ local governing board. This committee represented the community, mediated disputes, and organized community events.

Ezra, approximately 26 during this study and also from the Dinka tribe, attended a state university, where he majored in linguistics and public policy. At the same time, he took courses at the local community college. Ezra was

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<sup>5</sup>Participants’ names have been changed.

<sup>6</sup>As is common for many refugees, most of the Lost Boys do not know their birthday or their exact age.

deeply religious and sometimes served as a pastor in a local Christian church, occasionally performing services in the Dinka language. In the Kakuma Refugee Camp, Ezra had trained as a Bible translator, and he worked with a team to translate parts of the Old Testament into Dinka. He also taught in the primary schools in the camp, where he was part of a team that wrote the first primary school textbooks in Dinka. Ezra also successfully wrote a grant proposal to fund a library at his church in Kakuma.

Francis, 19 or 20 at the time of the study, was from the Madi tribe, the smallest tribe in the Sudan, unlike most of the Lost Boys in Michigan, who are Dinka. He attended the local community college, where he majored in pharmacy. Francis explained that he really enjoyed his science classes but that he also took auto mechanics courses because he wanted to keep his job options open. Like many of the Sudanese refugees, Francis worked at a variety of jobs in order to pay for college and for his car. He worked at McDonald's and at an auto dealership.

In addition to these focal participants, I gleaned much information about the Sudanese culture and the experiences of refugees from the autobiography *Escape from Slavery*, written by Francis Bok, a southern Sudanese refugee from the Dinka tribe. Bok was captured in a slave raid at the age of seven and taken farther north, where he was forced to care for his captor's livestock. His captors forced him to convert to Islam and to learn to speak Arabic. Bok managed to escape after 10 years of enslavement. He was resettled in America and now works with the Boston-based American Anti-Slavery Group.

### Participant Selection

The stories of Chol, Francis, and Ezra provide the focus for this analysis. In selecting these three young men, I relied heavily upon Chol, my key informant within the Sudanese community, to suggest appropriate participants and to negotiate access to those individuals. I had worked with Chol as an academic tutor for over a year before the study began. Francis was Chol's roommate, and I had known him for several months at the beginning of the study. Chol introduced me to Ezra because he believed that Ezra could offer important perspectives.

I chose these three young men as focal participants from the broader community of Lost Boys using criterion-based, reputational sampling (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Criteria for participation in the study included being an orphaned youth who attended an institution of higher education. I chose to focus on youth who were enrolled in higher education for several reasons. In one way, I had little choice in the matter: The age range of most of the Lost Boys in Michigan determined that I would be studying college-age students. Because one of the research questions for the initial study concerned literacy practices and schooling for the refugees in the United States, it was important for me to

select participants who were currently experiencing formal schooling. By the time I began my research, few of the orphaned youth were still enrolled in high school; most had already graduated. I also chose to limit participation to those who were enrolled in postsecondary schooling in order to study a community of youth who were bounded by similar characteristics and experiences (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

People who are unfamiliar with Sudanese refugee communities often wonder why I did not include orphaned girls in my research. While so-called “Lost Girls” do exist, they are few and far between, particularly in the U.S. Many Lost Girls lived in the Kakuma camp, where they had been taken in by foster families who often expected them to provide domestic help, and who may have reaped the benefits of the girls’ traditional bride price for marriage, in which a groom gave cattle or money to the bride’s family as part of the marriage agreement (McKelvey, 2003). Because they were living with families and were allegedly being cared for, they often were not eligible for resettlement. Of the approximately 4,000 orphaned Sudanese youth resettled in the United States in 2001, only 89 were girls (Beshkin, 2004; McKelvey, 2003). Chol, for example, knew of only three or four Lost Girls who lived in the area at the time of this study, and they were minors who were living with foster families. Including these Lost Girls was impractical for another reason: Sudanese cultural traditions discourage young, unmarried women from socializing with young, unmarried men. Because of these traditions, and their small numbers, young female Sudanese refugees were very much on the periphery of the community of orphaned Sudanese youth in Michigan.

## METHODOLOGY

### Researcher’s Role in the Community

I first became involved with the Sudanese community in May 2002, when I began working as a paid tutor with Lutheran Social Services after returning from two years in the Peace Corps in the African kingdom of Lesotho. I not only wished to extend my service by working with African communities in the United States, but my experiences in Africa were foundational to my interest in researching issues related to literacy and culture, and they are an important part of my positionality as a researcher. I was paired with three Sudanese students, including Chol. Due to the close-knit nature of the Sudanese community, the roommates, relatives, and friends of my students soon began asking me to serve as an unofficial tutor and community mentor. They called on me to help with such things as chauffeuring to doctors’ appointments, filling out job applications, providing technical assistance for computer problems, coaching individuals for

their drivers' exams, or making phone calls to utility companies. In December 2003, at Chol's request, I joined the board of the Southern Sudan Relief and Rescue Association, a local group composed of both Americans and Southern Sudanese who work together to help refugees.

I established my role as an academic tutor and community mentor well before this research project began. While I clearly was not a member of the Sudanese refugee community myself, I held a legitimate role in that community through my work as a tutor and mentor. I was able to enter participants' homes for reasons apart from conducting research. In return, community members often invited me to participate in community events such as graduation parties, welcoming parties for newly arrived refugees, and the annual May 16 celebration, which serves as a memorial day marking the beginning of the current civil war in Sudan. In addition, my prior experiences in Africa helped connect me to participants in ways that differed from their relationships with other Americans. For example, I could knowledgeably converse about African cultures and customs such as the bride price. Indeed, when one community member once introduced me to another, he added, "She lived in Africa, so she understands." This position and my multiple roles within the community likely allowed me to gain more genuine access to the literacy and storytelling practices of the Sudanese community.

### Observations

Throughout this study, I observed the environments within which the southern Sudanese youth lived, read, and wrote, following the traditions of literacy ethnographers such as Heath (1983), Street (2001b), Purcell-Gates (1995), and Barton and Hamilton (1998). I conducted formal observations over approximately seven months, with at least two visits per week. Observations typically lasted one to two hours. The majority of these observations occurred in the homes of focal participants. Some observations also took place during large-scale community events to which I was invited, such as graduation parties and other celebrations. In addition to noting general contextual and cultural information, I specifically documented texts, literacy events (Heath, 1982; Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000), participant structures, and the language of the event and/or text.

### Interviews

To understand their experiences and perspectives, I interviewed Chol, Francis, and Ezra on several different occasions. I interviewed Chol three times, Ezra twice, and Francis once. I audio-taped and then transcribed each interview. With each participant, I used a semi-structured interview protocol that guided both the observational and interview phases of the research. The interview protocol was designed to elicit information regarding literacy practices in the home and community and the literacy practices in school (e.g., "What kinds of things do

you read in your life?" or "What kinds of things do you write for school?"). In addition, the questions explored these practices both in the U.S. context and in the participants' African contexts (e.g., "When you were a child, what kinds of things did people in your family read regularly?"). Because of my lack of familiarity with the African context of participants' past lives, I also asked questions in order to obtain important contextual information from participants (e.g., "What were shops like in Kakuma?" or "How did you find out about the opportunity to come to the United States?").

### Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study involved analyzing emerging patterns through coding, theme analysis, and discourse analysis. For coding and analysis, I utilized the AtlasTi qualitative data analysis software program. AtlasTi is a useful tool for the qualitative analysis of textual, graphical, audio, and video data (AtlasTi Scientific Software, 2007). In addition to allowing for interactive coding of a wide variety of data materials, AtlasTi's various features allow for different types of data analysis and model-building.

The first level of data analysis involved identifying literacy events in my field notes and coding each event for texts and languages used, participant structure of the event, and the social activity domain in which the event took place. I also used these codes with the transcribed interviews, as participants described their own literacy practices and those of their communities. A second level of coding involved identifying emerging themes in both the field notes and the interview transcripts. I identified themes such as "identity," "keeping culture," and "sermons/religion." After identifying storytelling as an important theme in the data, I looked again at instances that had been coded for this theme and developed more specific sub-codes, such as "learning from stories," "traditional stories," and "stories for wider world." Themes often were marked by key words in participants' responses. For example, I applied the code "identity" to Ezra's response, "They have to keep their identity." Other themes, however, I inferred from participants' responses. When Chol explained why elders told stories in the Kakuma camp, I coded his specific statement, "A lot of the stories, they help us a lot," as "learning from stories."

Much of the data for this analysis emerged from the semi-structured interviews. As a result, I utilized methods of discourse analysis with each transcript to more deeply explore issues surrounding storytelling (Tusting & Ivanič, 2004). I re-transcribed each interview. Following Gee (1991), I divided both my own interview questions/prompts and the participants' responses into idea units, lines, and stanzas. This method of transcription allowed me to examine the narrative structure of participants' stories and/or responses (Labov, 1972; Ochs & Capps, 2001). I identified stories by searching for elements of story structure, including abstracts, orientations, evaluations, and codas (Labov, 1972), as well



as tellability and moral stance (Ochs & Capps, 2001). I used capital letters to indicate words that participants stressed, which allowed me to analyze topics and themes of importance (see Appendix for transcription conventions). Combining these transcription methods with identified themes brought me to a higher level of coding, in which I was able to categorize the relevant content of the interviews into (a) talk about stories and storytelling, (b) personal narratives, and (c) hypothetical narratives or *irrealis* (Ochs & Capps, 2001).

I also used critical discourse methods (Fairclough, 1999, 2004; Gee, 2004; Rogers, 2004) to analyze the relationship between what was said, how it was said, and the larger ideologies the discourses represented. Critical discourse analysis identifies a text as part of a social event that exists within a network of social practices (Burns & Morrell, 2005; Fairclough, 2004). Because of its emphasis on context and the situated nature of practice, critical discourse analysis is also a particularly useful tool for looking at change (Burns & Morrell, 2005). Following Fairclough, I combined close linguistic analysis with an examination of some of the contextual aspects of the stories. For each participant, I performed a close reading of the sections of their interviews that dealt with storytelling. In these analyses, I examined issues of word choice, pronoun usage, active versus passive voice, and whether the participant used present or past tense to describe storytelling in the community. I then compared these close readings with the themes that had emerged during open coding. Ezra, for example, spoke about the importance of maintaining Dinka culture. As I will describe in more detail in the results section, Ezra spoke almost exclusively in third person, describing what is happening to others and what others should do to maintain their culture. His words situate storytelling within a network of Dinka socio-cultural practices—one practice that may be crucial in maintaining cultural community. In analyzing issues of identity and community, I also examined participants' pronoun usage to determine how participants positioned themselves in relation to the Sudanese community, particularly in terms of storytelling practices. For example, Francis' comment, "People tell a lot of stories, but here, now, we don't learn," illustrates the tension Francis feels between the Sudanese community in Africa and the community of refugees in the U.S. and shows how he positions himself in relation to those communities. In addition, his words suggest the significance of the change in storytelling over time, as I will describe in the results section.

### STORYTELLING: A DIVERSE COLLECTION OF PRACTICES

The results of this analysis suggest that storytelling played an important role in participants' lives, and it also shaped many of their literacy practices. Storytelling occurred for these young men in a variety of ways. In this section, I will describe

two areas of storytelling, *talk about* storytelling and *enacted* storytelling. First, participants often talked explicitly about storytelling, typically in response to questions I asked during semi-structured interviews. One example comes from my third interview with Chol:

K: So that's [storytelling] something that still happens here. Is it as common as it is in Africa to tell stories here?

C: It's common, but we don't—people go to work . . . In Africa, there's not a lot of work, so people gather together to tell stories.

Enacted storytelling, on the other hand, occurred when participants told various types of stories to me, either during our interviews or informally during times we spent together. For example, in response to an interview question regarding how he felt about learning how to read and write, Ezra told me this personal story:

I like—I, I don't know how I felt about it, but I saw it necessary for me to be able to read and write, because—maybe partly because I was there by myself, alone, and I have seen many professionals, and I admired what they do and their positions, and the kind of life that they were living. I was so desperate, living by myself without any parents, without any relatives, without any older person to give me advice and guidance—so, I felt that as long as I live and as long as God keeps me alive and lets me breathe, I would do anything I could to become one day a professional like some of the people that I saw there.

Many stories, such as this one told by Ezra, conveyed aspects of participants' experiences as orphaned refugees. As such, they were an important way in which the refugee youth in Michigan helped me, and others in the United States, understand their experiences and their perspectives. Significantly, however, this type of story—and the audience to which it was told—represented a shift in storytelling practice, a theme I will return to later in this analysis.

### Stories Read and Heard

Francis, Chol, and Ezra often spoke about stories and storytelling during our interviews, as well as during my observations in their homes—they told stories about telling stories in their culture. Their explicit talk about storytelling revealed the importance of storytelling in their lives, particularly their previous lives in Africa. Participants reported encountering a variety of types of stories in both oral and print formats. These types of stories included traditional stories and histories in the community, literature stories in school, and religious stories in church.

Participants talked most explicitly about traditional stories in their communities in the Sudan and in the Kakuma Refugee Camp. For example, Ezra explained:

Storytelling is really an important aspect. I don't know about other cultures in Sudan, because each ethnic group has its own unique culture and way of doing things, but in the Dinka that is very important, because remember we—up to today, until maybe the 1900s, there were no people in the Dinkaland who go to school, because school at the time was not there. The community was very much a pastoralist community. To keep the history of the community and the culture and the customs, you pass them from one generation to another through storytelling.

According to Francis, traditional storytelling often happened in the evenings in Africa, when groups of Sudanese gathered together to share stories: “There’s a lot of stories told normally in the evenings. There it’s different, of course, people sit together and tell stories.”

Participants also described encountering a variety of story formats through the official school curriculum in Africa. Ezra explained that the required literature courses in the Kakuma high schools explored a variety of genres, including novels, poetry, plays, and short stories. The curriculum also included units on “oral literature,” utilizing traditional African stories as official texts for study. For Ezra, encountering these familiar traditional stories as texts in a literature class was a powerful experience:

I did not know this until I was doing literature in Kenya, oral literature, when I came to realize some of the stories, although different versions of the stories that I had been hearing, being classified. For example, in oral literature, we have fables, we have tricksters, we have etiological tales or explanatory tales, we have myths, we have legends. So, some of the stories were not true, they were just merely a matter of literature. And they were meant to teach something about the society, that was the intent.

According to participants, religion provided another important domain for storytelling practices. The Bible was an important community text, and participants regularly encountered Biblical stories in both Dinka and English. Participants also reported listening to sermons in church, and Ezra occasionally preached there himself. Churches in Kakuma also provided the only means by which Sudanese could learn to read and write in their local languages, because the Kakuma schools used English as the official medium of instruction and taught only KiSwahili, the official language of the host nation of Kenya, as a language subject. Chol, for example, talked about attending language classes at his church, which provided him with some storybooks in Dinka. According to Chol, these books used traditional stories about a popular character named Chol Mong to

teach Dinka literacy: “Another book was about Chol Mong. Another book is about alphabetical Dinka, the alphabet. Some books are about stories, Dinka stories—cows, how to take care of your animals, your cows.”

Therefore, Chol, Ezra, and Francis encountered a variety of stories in the Sudan and in the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. For these young men, storytelling not only offered an important oral method of passing along important cultural and historical information, but it also provided a meaningful context for literacy learning.

### Stories Written and Told

The Sudanese youth in this study did not just hear or read stories, they also acted as storytellers themselves. Francis, Ezra and Chol described writing and telling various types of stories, especially after they moved to the United States. These stories included literature-type stories, such as plays; hypothetical stories, such as those used to explain what life was like in Africa, and personal stories that described participants’ own experiences as orphaned refugees. Ezra’s story about striving for an education, included earlier, is one such example of a personal story.

Although some of the youth engaged in fictional writing (and school courses sometimes required it), Francis was the only participant in this study who reported writing fictional stories on his own time. Francis described a powerful experience in which his U.S. foster mother had taken him to see a play:

My foster mom did take me to a place in Okemos, like—they have a church (*unclear*), band, singing, and also some plays being performed related to religion. I liked them. They covered a wide range of aspects, but they were very good. I went only once. My mother promised to take me for another, but—.

In his free time, Francis began writing scripts for plays; he said he did this because he “was idle.” One play he wrote, “Corey Gets Married to Melissa,” dealt with the challenges facing romantic relationships. When I asked Francis where the ideas for his plots came from, he replied, “Normally when I am idle, I come up with a lot of ideas. It just came automatically in my mind. I normally observe what is happening in the surrounding and then I just turn it into writing.”

In addition to Francis’ fictional writing, participants’ stories also often encompassed irrealis (Juzwik, 2006; Ochs & Capp, 2001), hypothetical situations that were based in reality but that did not represent actual past events. These stories sometimes described a generic scenario, such as what typically occurred during a wedding in Africa, or they described a possible future scenario, such as what might happen if the Lost Boys did not learn to read and write in their native languages. Chol frequently used generic-scenario stories during interviews

and also during our everyday conversations to help me understand life in the Sudan and the refugee camp. For example, Chol often told hypothetical stories to illustrate the importance of memory in his culture, which relied on oral communication rather than written documents:

In Africa, when an old man or a woman needs to die, he can mention all the things for his entire life since he was very young. "I need my children to remind this person to do . . . I have this many cows." He don't forget the cows, all the things. . . . No paper written, but only in the mind.

Like Chol, Ezra used hypothetical stories in this manner, and he also frequently told those that described possible future scenarios. An important, recurring theme in Ezra's hypothetical stories involved the need for the Dinka people to learn to read and write in their own language, in order to help preserve their culture and their Dinka identity:

Like, the situation we have now in Sudan, where because of war people have been made to go to different parts of the world. So, the children who are being brought here would not necessarily know Dinka culture, would not know language, but if it is written, they would not know much about it, but they would know that they are Dinka. And so, at some point in time, if they are conscious and rational and they want to find something out about themselves and about their community, if it exists in written form they will go to it.

In one way, Ezra's hypothetical story sounds a warning regarding what may be happening to the Dinka culture and language. A critical examination of this story, however, shows that Ezra offers literacy as a possible solution—writing down the language, history, and customs may help to preserve the Dinka way of life. Ezra's story, therefore, connects to larger sociocultural issues among the Sudanese community, partially explaining why storytelling is being transformed within this community.

The most common type of stories the youth told, however, were personal ones that described participants' own experiences as orphaned refugees. These stories offer important glimpses into the refugee experience. For example, when I asked Francis how old he was when he left Sudan, he told this story:

I think I was six or four. . . . Very young. Some of the boys were carried by—they have people like, how do you call them? Like here, we are being taken care of, like our caseworkers. We have some like that who just help the young people during the time of the war. There were a lot of people helping young kids who were struggling.

Many of the participants' stories provided information about the importance of literacy in the refugees' lives. Chol, for example, told the following story about

a regular literacy ritual in the Kakuma camp that involved checking the Red Cross message board:

I go there because maybe my brothers in Khartoum, maybe they send letters to Red Cross. So, you go there every day and check. Maybe someone sends you a letter. So that is where people find the letters. It's the only means of communication with people around the world.

On the surface, Chol's story offers a glimpse of daily life in the refugee camp, and of literacy's place within those routines. However, this brief story also suggests deeper, and more significant, themes: being orphaned and separated from home and family, the hope that long-lost loved ones might somehow be able to make contact, and the shift toward written texts as "the only means of communication"—a major move for a community that traditionally relied upon oral methods.

In fact, many of these personal stories similarly revealed participants' beliefs in the importance of literacy. When I asked Ezra whether he felt that his experiences with reading and writing in Africa prepared him for the kind of reading and writing he had to do in America, he told the following story, which reflected upon the challenges that many other refugees faced when entering the U.S. school system:

My ability to read and write has prepared me enough to be where I am now. There are some of my colleagues who graduated with me together, who were my classmates, but now they are still—some of them are still taking remedial classes. Though we came together, and some of them came ahead to America, but they have not yet graduated from college. They have not yet finished their (two year) program, and that has to do with their level of reading and writing. So, I think it does help when you know how to read and write, things can be easier for you. That can help you pursue your education.

Similar beliefs regarding literacy and education appeared to be widespread in the community. Like the participants in this study, speakers at various community events engaged in storytelling that described, usually in English, their refugee experiences. Although Sudanese community members typically comprised much of the audience at these events, Americans were usually present as well. At the annual celebration on May 16, 2003, for example, the first speaker spoke—in English—about the New Sudan movement and about the significance of the May 16 date, which commemorates the beginning of the civil war when the SPLA rose up against the government. At Ezra's graduation party, several speakers told stories that described the educational opportunities available to Sudanese in the United States, urging other Sudanese to follow Ezra's example.

Participants' experiences as refugees clearly provided the basis for their storytelling in the United States. Often, the purpose of these stories was to explain their experiences as refugees. In many respects, this represents a shift from the storytelling that refugees experienced in Africa. Not only did refugee experiences provide the content for these stories, but those very same experiences also may have facilitated the transformation. That is, the Sudanese youth in this study found themselves not only cut off from their families and from previous generations, but they also found themselves resettled in a foreign culture—a culture that did not share the same stories, but one that often was eager to hear about their experiences and that is becoming increasingly concerned about warfare and human rights violations in Africa. As a result, many of the stories Sudanese youth told in this new context represented *transformed storytelling*.

#### TRANSFORMED STORYTELLING: ISSUES REVEALED THROUGH STORYTELLING

Transformed storytelling involved participants telling stories whose purpose, audience, and medium differed in important ways from those of the traditional storytelling they had encountered or enacted before. Transformed storytelling occurred in a variety of settings, including the semi-structured interviews in this study. This type of storytelling provides the focus for the rest of this paper. Transformed storytelling appeared to be a product of the refugees' experiences—of being orphaned, of journeying to and living in refugee camps, of coming to America, and of attending schools in both Kenya and the United States. In many ways, transformed storytelling seemed to reflect their status as orphans who are in diaspora around the world, yet who also very much belonged to a cultural community and who have worked hard to maintain that community. This type of storytelling also occurred when the youth found that they could use their voices actively to critique the world around them—particularly the political situation in the Sudan. Rather than using stories to pass on Sudanese history and culture to Sudanese children as had previous generations, these young men reported using stories to educate the wider world about the situation in Sudan and about their experiences as refugees.

The results of this study suggest that, instead of being a completely separate category, transformed storytelling encompassed both talk about stories and enacted storytelling. Thus, transformed storytelling was a super-ordinate category that included other types of storytelling. My analysis showed that transformed storytelling had different purposes, audiences, and media of communication from that which traditionally occurred among Southern Sudanese. Transformations appeared in three areas: who the stories were for, how the stories were told,

TABLE 1  
Comparison of the Audiences, Media, and Purposes for Traditional Storytelling  
and Transformed Storytelling

	<i>Traditional Storytelling</i>	<i>Transformed Storytelling</i>
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members of same ethnic/linguistic community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Outside world”—People outside ethnic/linguistic community</li> </ul>
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oral stories</li> <li>• Local languages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oral and written stories</li> <li>• English</li> </ul>
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To teach/pass on history, traditions, values, beliefs of community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To inform about experiences</li> <li>• To call others to act</li> </ul>

and why the stories were told. Table 1 compares these areas for traditional and transformed storytelling.

In this section, I describe the ways in which the orphaned youth have transformed storytelling. I also provide a close and critical analysis of two interview excerpts in order to demonstrate the ways in which these transformations relate to a tension between issues of orphanhood and community. These passages help to illustrate some of the reasons why storytelling may have been transformed in this community. The analyses also illustrate the ways in which participants positioned themselves in relation to their community and as agents who used storytelling as critique.

### Traditional Storytelling

To understand the ways in which these young men transformed the practice of storytelling, it is important to understand the nature of storytelling in the participants' lives before they came to the United States. Participants reported that storytelling performed specific functions in Southern Sudanese cultures. Traditionally, community members from the same ethnic group, particularly children, comprised the audience for storytelling, and storytellers typically were parents, elders, or teachers: “In Kakuma, the old people, they tell stories like ‘a long time ago,’” Chol explained. As Francis described earlier, family and community members often gathered in the evenings to hear stories. Ezra explained that young people comprised an especially important audience for stories: “So, you reach a certain age, then you consult or you will be told by your parents, your grandparents about your grandparents [*sic*], your grand-grand-grandparents—who they were, where they come from, what they have done, and all those.” Ezra also confirmed that community elders were the ones who held stories and passed them down as a form of education:



You have to consult with an elder, sit down and talk. There were things that were important to you as a male to learn from male older people, and then also the same thing was true for the girls. You go talk to female older persons or older women, to talk about the history and the things that are important for a lady.

Traditional storytelling, therefore, offered an important avenue for learning about family and community, as well as gender roles and other important cultural information. This purpose for traditional storytelling connects with Rushdie's (2005) suggestion that families are about storytelling, and that stories are a badge of family membership, and that becoming part of the family involves learning the family's stories. I propose that the same holds true for communities as well.

Participants reported that, in addition to oral storytelling, Sudanese children also encountered stories as written texts in the schools in Kakuma. When I asked Francis whether adults read stories to children, he explained that adults read "a lot of like fun literatures and stories. Basically they tell a lot of stories and things, but mostly that's being done by teachers. The parents, other people tell stories, but through spoken word, oral." Francis' explanation echoes Chol's earlier emphasis on the distinction between oral and written stories, and it also hints at the role of formal schooling in introducing the youth to written stories. Chol also confirmed that teachers read stories to students, particularly in English and literature classes: "[Teachers] read aloud, and then after reading they make a speech about what they read."

Chol, Francis, and Ezra's comments suggest that purposes for traditional storytelling largely involved passing on the history, culture, and customs of the community. However, Ezra added, "Actually, storytelling was not only about passing the traditions and the customs, it was not only just the way of imparting culture from one generation to the next generation. Storytelling also involves telling some stories about some animals, like literature." The participants' explanations also suggest that audiences for storytelling in the Sudan and Kakuma primarily consisted of people who shared a common frame of reference with the storyteller. That is, stories were told by community elders or teachers, and they were told to people whose cultural background and whose personal experiences resembled those of the storyteller.

#### Excerpt from Interview with Francis

Elders or teachers passing on community history and cultural traditions provided one of the most important purposes for telling stories in Sudanese communities, participants suggested. However, due to their status as displaced orphans, the Lost Boys had little access to elders in the refugee camp or in the United States. A close, critical analysis of an excerpt from my interview with Francis illustrates

this tension, which may have helped facilitate the transformation of storytelling for this community. I asked Francis to describe texts that community members read when he was a child:

- K: 1 What kind of THINGS did they read?  
 F: 2 They have to, LIKE—  
 3 there are a LOT of LITERATURES in different DIALECTS.  
 4 Each and every tribe has a literature,  
 5 STORIES.  
 K: 6 Are they written-DOWN stories?  
 F: 5 YEAH.  
 6 People TELL a lot of stories,  
 7 but here, now,  
 8 we don't LEARN.  
 9 We DON'T TELL any stories like that.  
 10 There's a LOT of stories told normally in the EVENINGS.  
 11 THERE it's different, of course,  
 12 people sit together and tell stories,  
 13 STUFF like THAT.

Francis' response to my questions highlighted significant differences in storytelling practices between the United States and Africa. He began line 11 with an emphasized "there" effectively making Africa the subject of his sentence. Francis set up two contrasts in his response that relate to differences between the contexts of Africa and the United States. In line 7, he used the phrase "here, now" which directly contrasted with "there" in line 11. In relation to the here/there contrast, Francis also set up a contrast between telling and not telling stories, again emphasizing the words "tell" and "don't tell" in consecutive lines. In addition, he contrasted the idea of telling stories with not learning in lines 6–8: "People TELL a lot of stories,/ but here, now,/ we don't LEARN." The meaning of "learn" in this context is vague; it could mean learning how to tell stories, learning the content of the stories themselves, or learning from the stories. Francis may have meant "learn" in each of these senses simultaneously, because learning how to tell stories involves learning the content of those stories, and the stories often contained morals or teaching points, as Ezra explained to me.

Francis' use of pronouns, voice, and verb tense also set up important contrasts in this excerpt. Each of these speech elements relates to the ways in which Francis positioned himself in relation to storytelling and to his community. Francis' pronoun usage sets up an us/them dichotomy. My initial question about the practices of Francis' childhood community—"What kinds of THINGS did they read?"—likely sparked this response, because Francis began with "They have to . . ." He then switched from using pronouns to talking about "people" in general. For example, he used the phrase "each and every tribe," and he also

referred specifically to “people” twice after that in order to explain what goes on in African storytelling. However, Francis contrasted “people” with “we”: “People TELL a lot of stories,/ but here, now,/ we don’t LEARN.” What is interesting about this us/them dichotomy is that it corresponds with his tell/don’t tell dichotomy. That is, “people tell” (line 6) and “people sit together and tell stories” (line 12), but “we don’t LEARN” (line 8) and “we DON’T TELL any stories like that” (line 9).

In addition, the us/them dichotomy also corresponded with Francis’ switches between first and third person voices. He began by using third person, switched to first person partway through his second response, and then returned to third person. His switches also indicate a shift in time and place. Francis used third person to indicate what happened in Africa “then,” and he used first person to talk about what happens (or, in this case, does not happen) “here, now”—again, emphasizing the difference between Africa and “here,” a dichotomy that existed in both time and space. Finally, Francis mainly used active voice in his responses. His only use of passive voice occurred in line 10: “There’s a LOT of stories told normally in the EVENINGS.” His use of passive voice suggests that it is not Francis who tells stories; it is others who do so.

A critical reading suggests that Francis’ use of voice and tense may relate to his sense of identity, particularly in relationship to the larger Sudanese community. That is, Francis’ story suggests a sense of himself as a non-storyteller, positioned outside the community of storytellers. His use of passive voice in line 10 foregrounds the stories as the subject, but the subjects of his other statements have to do with either “people” or “we.” In each case, the subjects of Francis’ sentences are plural; Francis does not refer to what he, himself, does in relation to storytelling, but rather talks about the larger community. Both subjects—“we” and “people”—reflect this community orientation. Francis’ use of the we/they dichotomy may serve to connect his identity to the community that is here and now, rather than to the community that was there in Africa.

Critical discourse analysis is a useful tool for looking at change and transformation (Burns & Morrell, 2005). Thus, this excerpt from Francis’ interview hints at why storytelling has been transformed among the refugee youth in Michigan. Francis’ words remind us that the Lost Boys have been separated from their families and communities, displaced from their original cultural context, and exposed to new cultures, communities, and practices. These refugees themselves have been transformed through the process—they speak new languages, engage in new cultural practices, and interact with people whose backgrounds and experiences are unlike their own.

### Transformed Storytelling

As the Lost Boys began to resettle in other countries, the audience and purpose for their storytelling changed. Instead of telling stories to other Sudanese, they

began telling their stories to the wider world, a world which did not know much about their experiences or their frames of reference. This change probably began in the Kakuma Refugee Camp, when teachers and other adults encouraged youth to write about their experiences. When I asked Chol about the kind of writing students did for school in Kakuma, he explained, “They write about war or life. They write about our life. They write about the life in Kakuma, the kind of essays they would write.” Chol further explained that the teachers:

take a lot of stories, the good stories, to the . . . refugee center. And then those lovely stories can be typed, and then when other people from around the world asking about the refugees, the life of refugees, they can be given to them.

Francis and Ezra also described similar programs in Kakuma that encouraged youth to write about their experiences. Francis recalled that many of the Lost Boys had been very good at writing poetry—“something related to the war, whatever”—in Kakuma. The children’s writings generated international interest, according to Francis: “Some of them, they are published. There is an organization of English or British, I think, they published them. They can be collected, and some Chinese—no, Japanese—student, they collected some of these poems. They have been published in books.” Ezra also described a specific program that developed Kakuma youth as writers:

Especially, we have a program in Kakuma. I don’t know whether they have it now, but they used to have it. The program that was designed is known as Youth Program. It’s a drama kind of thing, where people act as actors and actresses. And people write—those people, some of them, not all of them, but some of them—have learned how to write poetry and to write short stories, or something that at least they can present to the audience, or something that they can act out by the transcripts of what they want to present.

The Lost Boys continued sharing their experiences with the wider world after they resettled in Western countries. Participants reported many opportunities to share their personal experiences with new audiences, in both written and oral formats. When the Lost Boys came to the United States, social service organizations often placed them as foster children with local families who wanted to know about the boys’ lives and experiences. Human rights organizations and social activists also expressed interest in hearing about Sudanese refugees’ experiences, and they encouraged refugees to make their stories public (Bok, 2003). Bok, for example, began educating Americans when one of his teachers encouraged him to write a paper about Sudan: “It was my opportunity to educate the other students about a country they hadn’t even heard of—even though it was the largest nation on the largest continent” (Bok, 2003, p. 214). Bok then joined the American Anti-Slavery Group in Boston, where he began sharing his personal stories as a way of educating the world about atrocities in Sudan. In

protest of the Sudan's election to the U.N. Security Council, Bok shared his experiences in a speech at the United Nations:

I presented myself as a living example of why Sudan was in no position to be a power in a world body devoted to peace. Once again, I could not believe what I was doing. Here I was, an official UN Refugee standing outside the organization's headquarters in New York City, speaking on who should and should not be part of its most important ruling body. (pp. 214–215)

This excerpt illustrates the shift in purpose for storytelling—refugees were not simply preserving their experiences through stories, but were actively using those experiences to push for change. Storytelling, in this example, is closely linked to political purposes.

For participants in this study, sharing life experiences was also a powerful motivator to engage in print literacy practices. When I asked Chol what he wrote now, he responded, “I write about myself and the way of my life. I write about my life.” During several of my visits to his home, Chol expressed his desire to write his autobiography “so that I can't forget it.” He also wanted to publish his autobiography “and put a photo with it” in order to share his story with others. One of Chol's college classes offered him an opportunity to get started on writing this autobiography (see Figure 1). It also allowed him to share his experiences, “a devastating story,” with his classmates, most of whom were U.S. citizens and were unfamiliar with the situation in the Sudan. Like Francis' interview excerpt, Chol's autobiography also emphasizes orphanhood; he writes about being “lonely without my parents” and about living with other refugees “who were without parents.”

Educating a wider public about refugee issues was an important motivation for Ezra's storytelling as well. One time when Ezra and I talked, for example, he told me the following story, in which he remembered writing for a newspaper about a program sponsored by a local social services agency:

I have [done] writing where I feel it is necessary. Like, I remember last year, I don't recall, but it might have been in September or October or November, I wrote short article that was published in [local newspaper]. I wrote to the editor, and I was talking about a program that is Refugee Community Interpreting Program that is offered by Lutheran Social Services of Michigan. I was impressed to hear that Lutheran Social Services does have that program, but I was disappointed at the same time when I learned that they train people for 30 hours, for I don't know how many—four weeks, or something—and then they just send them to the community, and they don't do anything there. So, I thought instead of training people and send them in the community where they seem idle, it would be wise if the Lutheran Social Services can make that a program that will employ these trained interpreters to work in the community.

University Colloquium  
September 16, 2003

### Autobiography

My name is [REDACTED]. I am a Sudanese by nationality. My autobiography is a devastating story because of the largest civil war in Africa and the world. This war has dispersed many Sudanese people around the world. The war separated me from parents in 1986, and I have learned and experienced problems and many other consequences from it. I have seen many people dying, drowning and starving. I am a survivor of that war. In 1986 I escaped to Ethiopia, where I learned the life of being a child refugee in that country. I was lonely without my parents. There was a lot of sickness. In 1988, then things changed a little bit. I first attended school. It let me learn alphabetical letters, how to read, and how to write. Again, in this country, there was a civil war. That civil war forced us out again to run back to the Sudan in 1991. From that experience, I learned that I had to run from the enemy. From this, I experienced a lot of things. We were very thirsty. There was no water or food on the way when we were running. We walked many miles, many thousands of miles, back to the Sudan. That experience impacted my life.

In 1991, the Sudanese enemies started bombing the displaced people in Sudan. That led us to run to Kenya in 1992. Again, I experienced the life of refugees. It is a hard life, because we were walking many miles to the Kenyan border. Then we were welcomed at the Kenyan border by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). We were taken to a place called Kakuma Refugee Camp, where many refugees from Africa live. It is in the northern Kenya district of Turkana. The non-governmental organizations were starting to help the refugee minor boys and girls from the Sudan, those who were without parents. In 1993, I started primary school. That was another learning experience. From there, I went to school until I reached Standard 7, then I sat for the examination. That gave me a certificate, which was my first achievement in my life. In 1998, I first attended Secondary School in Kenya. This continued until 1999, when I started my plans to come to the U.S.

In 2000, I came for asylum in the U.S.A. This led me to learn many things about cultures and ideas, about different people, different continents, the different life from the refugees. Then in the U.S., I first joined [REDACTED] High School in Lansing. I learned about new students, a new school, a new system. I made many new friends, and did many activities in school. The school placed me in the ninth grade, but the next week they put me in the tenth grade, and the next week they placed me in the eleventh grade. That is where I stayed that year. In 2002, I graduated from [REDACTED] High school, and I experienced the second achievement in my life. I have my diploma from a U.S. school. In 2002, I was awarded a Presidential Scholarship by [REDACTED], and then I enrolled in [REDACTED] University. I learned about a new student environment and the college system. That put me to the highest level. Finally, I am a second year student at [REDACTED] University, focusing on my career, learning a lot of things, targeting my goals.

FIGURE 1 Chol's autobiography, a college writing assignment.

Just as the audience for storytelling shifted as Sudanese relocated, so too did the medium of storytelling change in two important ways—in who told stories, and in the way those stories were told. Storyteller roles had to change out of necessity as a result of the war, when the youth lost their connections with older generations. Each of the participants reiterated to me that they did not have much access to older people anymore, and they felt that this endangered the continued existence of traditional storytelling. Without traditional storytellers, Sudanese youth had to fill this role. According to Chol, some learned how to tell traditional stories from the few available elders in the refugee camps, and they entertained others with these stories. Sudanese youth also have become storytellers as they share their personal experiences with the world.

Not only has the role and responsibility of storytelling been shifted from elders to youth, but these new storytellers have also transformed the methods of storytelling. In sharing their experiences with the wider world, the Lost Boys still use oral forms of storytelling. Ezra, for example, frequently traveled to give speeches about the situation in Sudan and about his own personal experiences. Chol used his own story as the basis for many oral presentations he had to give in various college classes he was taking. However, these young men also used print media to convey their stories, such as when Ezra wrote articles for local newspapers or when Chol wrote his autobiography. Digital media also provided an important, and new, conduit for sharing stories. Ezra described websites that he regularly contributed to, such as Gurtong.org and Sudan.net, that provided information about Sudanese issues and also connected Sudanese refugees around the world through discussion board postings:

I write a lot to the news media and also I express my opinions, because we do have a website for the Sudanese who are outside Sudan in the West here. That Web site brings them together and shares their thoughts and ideas and experiences.

Transformed storytelling also involved new purposes for telling stories. Newer purposes still sometimes involved passing on history and culture, but to a different audience, one without a shared framework for understanding. New purposes included both passing on information about the Sudan and refugee experiences to others around the world, and critique and persuasion. Ezra's story about his article in the local newspaper and Bok's speech in front of the United Nations both served this second purpose. Both stories offered critique—of an ineffective social services translation program in the first case, or a nation's abysmal human rights record in the second. Both stories attempted to persuade listeners/readers to act—either to modify the ineffective program, or to keep the Sudan off the U.N. Security Council. Many of Ezra's stories, in particular, took on these functions of critique and persuasion in addition to education, and the

themes of his stories often dealt with issues of Sudanese identity and community, as I will describe in the next section.

#### Excerpt from Interview with Ezra

Ezra told me the following hypothetical story in response to my question: “Is it important for people to be able to read and write in Dinka as well as in English?” His story was the second part of a very long response, the first part of which discussed his belief in the connection between language and culture. Then, he began to describe a scenario that might occur if the Dinka did not become literate in their local language. An analysis of this hypothetical story also suggests some of the reasons why the Lost Boys are transforming storytelling.

- E: 1 So there are PROBLEMS with ORAL communication or ORAL  
FORMS of keeping things  
2 because if there are NO EXPERTS  
3 or if the OLDER people who are much informed about certain  
issues are no longer THERE,  
4 then the NEW people will not know anything,  
5 and they will be LOST.  
6 So, NOW the TRANSFORMATION of the society,  
7 the NEW generation will NOT KNOW anything about the OLD  
generation  
8 and so there will be a CUT.  
9 So, this group will be a different group,  
10 although they will CLAIM by their mouth that they are DINKA,  
11 they DON'T BEHAVE like Dinka.  
12 There's nothing important about it.  
13 The IMPORTANT THING about a CULTURE is not only  
SAYING the NAME, of the culture like Dinka,  
14 but to BEHAVE in a culture, that is critical.  
15 We have the CULTURE of that particular community, of that  
particular group.  
16 I think there is NOT ANY culture in the world that is superior to  
any other culture,  
17 so it is VERY IMPORTANT for each group of people to KEEP  
their CULTURE  
18 but then LEARN not only to be self-centered in their culture,  
19 but also LEARN other cultures  
20 and learn to appreciate OTHER CULTURES  
21 and LEARN to interact and intermingle with other cultures.  
22 That is IMPORTANT.  
23 But they have to KEEP their identity.



Ezra's story is an example of what Ochs & Capps (2001) refer to as *irrealis*. That is, Ezra's is a hypothetical story that contains clauses that are temporally ordered—the older generations are lost, and therefore the younger generations will not know their culture. Ezra used generic or hypothetical starters for several idea units in the beginning of this response. For example, he used “there are” and “if there are” in lines 1 and 2. This sort of “imagine if” beginning marks his narrative as *irrealis*.

Ezra's stories typically were much longer than those of either Chol or Francis. They often contained other elements of Labov's expanded definition of narrative or story, including abstracts, orientations, complicating actions, and evaluations. Ezra's abstract in line 1—“there are PROBLEMS with ORAL communication or ORAL FORMS of keeping things”—sets up the topic of his hypothetical story. The orientation indicates that the story will be about the new generation of Dinka (line 7), while the complicating action is the “cut” between the old generation and the new, which results in a potential loss of identity. The evaluation and the coda, which signals the end of the story, occur in lines 22 and 23: “That is IMPORTANT./ But they have to KEEP their identity.” Ezra's evaluation and coda convey a strong sense of moral stance (Ochs & Capps, 2001), a feature common among his stories. These moral stances clearly identify the importance of Sudanese identity and community to Ezra.

Ezra's use of pronouns and subjects/objects in his response suggest that what he is telling is a hypothetical story; they also reveal the ways in which Ezra positioned himself in relation to the community at large. He uses third person throughout the story, using “they” several times. In contrast to his extensive use of third person, Ezra uses the first person collective “we” in only one line (line 15). He uses the first person in line 16, “I think,” but this use described his opinion, not what he actually did or does himself. It seems important that what follows Ezra's “I think” is a discussion of what other people should do. Although he uses first person to set up the sentence, the actual topic of discussion is not Ezra himself, but rather the good of the community. Ezra reinforces this topic by immediately returning to third person and insisting that “they have to KEEP their identity.”

A critical examination of Ezra's use of pronouns and subjects/objects illustrates the way he positioned himself in relation to the rest of the community, and is similar to Francis' positioning. Although Ezra himself is an orphan and cut off from older generations, he continually refers to people in that situation by using third person. Ezra appears to want to distance himself from those who “will not know anything” (lines 4 and 7) and who “will be a different group” (line 9). Only after he distances himself from the negative consequences of being an orphan does Ezra use first person, and this use stressed his group membership: “We have the CULTURE of that particular community” (line 15). He then follows this affinity with the community by discussing the importance of

learning about other cultures and at the same time maintaining cultural identity. Ezra therefore positions himself in four different ways throughout his narrative. In line 5, he first distances himself from the group of orphans who “will be LOST” (which is perhaps a significant reference to the label *Lost Boys*) and then identifies himself with the culture of the community in line 15. In lines 15–17, he positions himself within the community, but simultaneously positions that community in relationship to other cultures that the group needs to learn “to interact and intermingle with.” Finally, in line 23, he once again distances himself from the group by referring to them as “they,” thus bringing his position full circle to the beginning of the story.

A particularly important function of Ezra’s story, one strongly connected to the narrative element of moral stance (Ochs & Capps, 2001), is the element of teaching or preaching that exists in this story, illustrated by lines 13–23. In these lines, Ezra explicitly states the point of his story—the importance of maintaining cultural identity but of understanding other groups’ cultural identities. Ezra’s continued use of third person, and the ways in which he positions himself, and the topic of his story suggest that Ezra viewed this particular instance as a lecture or sermon. Ezra presented his argument as a moral imperative—we Dinka must preserve our culture and our identity, or else we will be lost. His argument also contained a mini-sermon about tolerance and understanding:

There is NOT ANY culture in the world that is superior to any other culture,/ so it is VERY IMPORTANT for each group of people to KEEP their CULTURE but then LEARN not only to be self-centered in their culture,/ but also LEARN other cultures and learn to appreciate OTHER CULTURES and LEARN to interact and intermingle with other cultures. (lines 16–21)

Ezra’s appropriating the discourses of teaching and preaching in his storytelling is not surprising, given his previous work as a teacher, his deep religious faith, his training as a Bible translator, and his status as an occasional pastor in the community church. His advocacy for Dinka language print literacy also indicates his deep concern for the preservation of Dinka identity.

The words Ezra and Francis employ connect their stories with larger issues, discourses, and practices of the Sudanese community. A critical reading of Francis’ and Ezra’s interview excerpts suggests that issues of community and identity were important to these young men. The excerpts also illustrate participants’ understandings of the larger constraints that face their community, constraints largely contextualized by the fact that the Lost Boys are a community of orphans who have been resettled in foreign lands. The words *orphan* and *community* typically evoke opposite images—of utter aloneness and abandonment on the one hand, and of togetherness and support on the other. Yet, a discourse analysis of these excerpts suggests that these participants negotiate issues of

orphanhood, identity, and community in different ways. They are able to actively negotiate their positions in the community, at times affiliating themselves with the broader Sudanese community, and, at other times, distancing themselves from that community. These participants understand that issues of identity are at stake, but they also recognize that structural constraints affect them; they are living far from their homelands, they have few (if any) community elders to consult, and they conduct much of their new lives in a language that is not their own.

### STORYTELLING, LITERACY, AND THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

The results of this study highlight how one group of orphaned youth has forged its way through a changing world. Living in and adapting to a foreign land, without parents and family, these young men must find ways to maintain their identity and relate to their community. The practice of transformed storytelling may help them to do so. The participants in this study clearly felt disconnected from the practice of traditional storytelling; they “don’t learn,” as Francis said. Yet, as they have spread around the world and resettled in new places, these young men have continued to tell stories—new and different ones, but stories nonetheless. These refugees appear to be using stories to do precisely what scholars propose is the most important function of storytelling—to construct their identities and to relate to and navigate the world (Ochs & Capps, 2001). The Lost Boys are using stories to connect with their Sudanese communities, with their U.S. communities, and even with global communities. In order to do so, however, these youth have needed to utilize print literacies. These young men have transformed storytelling from an oral practice to a written one.

Storytelling among Michigan’s Lost Boys provides a potent example of the importance of context in shaping literacy practices. Literacy practices are always situated within a specific time and place, and, because of this, they change according to context (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). The participants’ frequent reminders about differences in literacy practices between the Sudan and the United States highlight this point: In the Sudan, participants and their families relied heavily on oral methods of communicating and remembering. As Chol described, “No paper written . . . only in the mind.” However, once these youth became displaced from their families, written forms of communication became necessary—the bulletin board in Kakuma where letters were posted was, according to Chol, “the only means of communication with people around the world.”

The stories told by these young men also illustrate the ways in which literacy practices, including storytelling, are purposeful and embedded within broader

social practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). In the Sudan, storytelling served many important purposes, including preserving history and transmitting cultural traditions. Some of these purposes changed, though, as the young men lost access to elders, and as they resettled in other countries. For many displaced Sudanese refugees, storytelling is transforming from the old way of educating children and passing down cultural traditions within their own ethnic group into a way of educating the wider world about their experiences, both through speeches and written texts. In this way, the young refugees are transforming storytelling from an event that happens in the local community to one that is shared with the global community.

Ever since they first began walking from Southern Sudan, the Lost Boys have been sharing their experiences with the wider public. Newspapers and magazines documented the youths' journey across eastern Africa, their lives in the refugee camp, and their adjustment to the United States. Documentaries, such as *The Lost Boys of Sudan* (Mylan & Shenk, 2003), continue to bring their stories to new audiences. Bookstores now prominently feature books written by and about Southern Sudanese refugees, such as *Escape from Slavery* (Bok, 2003), *God Grew Tired of Us: A Memoir* (Dau & Sweeney, 2007), *They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky: The True Story of Three Lost Boys from Sudan* (Deng, Deng, Ajak, & Bernstein, 2005), and *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (Eggers, 2006). The Lost Boys want to tell—and write—their stories, and the world wants to hear and read them.

One important implication of this study is that storytelling can be a politically powerful tool. Ezra, Chol, Francis, and the other Lost Boys who are publishing their stories are sharing them not just to educate the wider world, but also to compel the world to act. Many of the stories told by these refugees critique those in power—they critique the government of Sudan for human rights abuses and corruption, and they critique the powerful in the United States and around the world for failing to act, for doing too little, or for making poor decisions. As Bok (2003) indicates, Sudanese refugees now recognize the power of stories to not only preserve history, but also to change its course.

Language and literacy are always related to and shaped by power structures within the context in which they are used (Bourdieu, 1991; Canagarajah, 1999). Yet, individuals also have agency within those contexts: They may resist, adopt, appropriate, or critique different literacy practices (Perry & Purcell-Gates, 2005) in different ways. The Lost Boys appear to be appropriating the practice of storytelling as one method of critiquing those in power. By sharing their stories, they are helping others understand the atrocities and injustices that have occurred in the Sudan. Their stories may, in fact, be having an impact, as nations around the world put pressure on Sudan's government to end the crises in Darfur and other regions of Sudan—pressure that, unfortunately, came too late for the Lost Boys and their families.

As they resettle in the United States and are exposed to new literacy practices, these refugee youth increasingly are appropriating print literacy practices as one way of sharing their stories with the world. These young men were born into families who had little experience with literacy. In the refugee camp, the youth learned to read and write, but they had access to very few written materials beyond their textbooks. When they resettled in the United States and other Northern countries, these young men encountered a world that is immersed in print. Ever resourceful, these Lost Boys have appropriated literacy practices to maintain their connections with each other, and to educate the wider world about their experiences. In so doing, they have transformed their traditional practice of storytelling as a method of communicating with the global community.

#### Implications: Literacy Education

This ethnographic study examined storytelling within a specific cultural community, in a particular context, focusing on three individual participants within that community. As such, the results of this study cannot be broadly generalized to all refugees, or even to all Sudanese refugees. Storytelling, and its connection to print literacy practices, will vary from community to community, and even within communities. Nevertheless, the results of this study do offer important insights for literacy education, particularly for refugee youth. First, storytelling, whether traditional or transformed, may offer an important motivation for refugees to engage in print literacy practices. Refugees can draw upon traditional oral stories or their own experiences in order to write in school. Chol, for example, often wrote about his own experiences when he was required to do expository writing for academic assignments, as Figure 1 illustrates. In fact, Chol's autobiography was the most extended and successful piece of writing I had seen him independently complete at that point. Sharing their own stories and personal experiences, thus, can provide refugee students with a meaningful context to engage in literacy and second-language learning.

The participants in this study were particularly motivated to tell and write their stories as a method of educating the wider world and persuading others to act. Storytelling was an important literacy practice for these refugees, and it was a practice that gave them legitimate reasons to engage with reading and writing and to develop their English language abilities. It also was a practice that primarily occurred outside of formal educational contexts. One important insight from these findings is that educators should find or create authentic opportunities for refugee students to share their stories. Authentic literacy instruction involves providing opportunities for students to write for real audiences and real purposes, beyond learning to read and write or earning a grade (Purcell-Gates, Degener, & Jacobson, 2001). For example, Chol began writing his autobiography for a school assignment, but he hoped to publish it in a magazine. A perceptive

teacher might have noticed this desire and helped Chol find an authentic outlet for his writing. Similarly, Ezra often shared his stories and experiences in his free time by sending letters to the newspaper editor, posting to Internet websites and discussion boards, and writing pieces for his church bulletin. Educators could, and should, develop assignments that encourage refugee students to write for similar public venues.

Sharing personal experiences and talking or writing about the situation in the Sudan appeared to be empowering for Ezra, Chol, and other Sudanese refugees. Refugees like Ezra, Chol, Francis, and the many published Lost Boy writers, frequently used their stories to critique both the government of the Sudan for its atrocities and governments of various Western countries for failing to act. These young men came from a land in which free speech was dangerous, but their migration to the United States allowed them to speak and critique in new and important ways (Perry & Purcell-Gates, 2005). One important insight for education from this finding is that creating authentic literacy learning opportunities can be used as a method of empowering refugee students, helping them to gain or re-gain their own voices after experiencing trauma and tragedy. Authentic literacy instruction could therefore be used, perhaps in combination with social studies instruction, to empower refugees to work for peace and social justice.

One important caution: These insights may seem to imply that storytelling and the sharing of personal experiences are crucial for *all* refugees. This is not the case. Not all refugees want to—or even should—share their stories. People have the right to choose if, when, and how they share their experiences. The Lost Boys who participated in this study, and the many who are authoring books and starring in documentary films, are eager to share their stories and believe it is important to do so. Not all Lost Boys feel the same way, however. Many do not feel comfortable sharing their stories with those who could not possibly fathom what they experienced, others do not want to relive painful and traumatic experiences, while others simply want to move on with their lives or integrate into U.S. culture and society. No refugee should be forced to share his or her story with others, and educators must exercise sensitivity and discretion in using storytelling in their classrooms.

#### DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This project involved a small ethnographic case study with findings that are limited to a specific group. More research, therefore, is needed to explore the connections between storytelling and print literacy. Future research should continue to investigate the ways in which storytelling practices vary across communities, as well as the ways in which they may be used to enhance literacy and second-language instruction for refugee and immigrant communities. Research

has documented that storytelling varies across communities (e.g., Heath, 1983), yet much still remains to be learned about ways in which storytelling connects to print literacy in different cultural communities. The results of this study indicate that storytelling also can vary within a community as well as across communities. For example, the Lost Boys' storytelling practices differed from those of their elders in many ways, due to circumstances and context. Exploring the variation in storytelling practices within communities, and the implications this variation may have for literacy education, can add to our knowledge about the complexity of storytelling practices.

The findings of this study suggest that storytelling could, and did, provide motivations to engage with print literacies in various ways for the Lost Boys. They also used storytelling in their academic writing. The focus of this particular study was to document and examine home and community practices, rather than explore the relationship of storytelling to formal schooling. Understanding what impact storytelling might have on literacy achievement and/or second-language learning in schools, as well as ways that storytelling may be utilized effectively in schools to increase academic achievement and literacy and language learning, remains to be explored in educational research.

Finally, this study examined literacy and storytelling practices among refugees who spoke at least some English and who were already literate in one (and often more than one) language before they arrived in the United States. Not all immigrants and refugees have opportunities to attend school, become literate in any language, or learn English before coming to this country, however. Storytelling might provide one avenue for language and literacy learning for such refugees, as it has been documented to do for young children (Dyson, 1993, 2003), but research is needed to understand the ways in which storytelling might be utilized for beginning language and literacy instruction for refugees.

Stories, and the act of telling or writing them, may be extraordinarily powerful for the Lost Boys and other refugees like them. As Bok (2003) explains in *Escape from Slavery*, "My story . . . was all I had with me, the only remnant of my past" (p. 105). Sharing their stories may offer refugees an outlet for dealing with painful memories or emotions, it may help educators and other non-refugees understand refugees' experiences, and it may help empower refugees and others to act—"to do something that would help our people by telling my story" (Bok, 2003, p. 187).

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#### APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS USED (FOLLOWING GEE, 1991)

- Lines divided by sentence (lines are indented on subsequent lines)
- / indicates separation of idea units
- CAPS indicate "focused" or emphasized material

- -- indicates self-interruption
- (text in single parens) indicates transcriptionist doubt
- (*unclear*) indicates speech that could not be heard
- ... indicates omitted dialogue

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