

**From Storytelling to Writing:
Transforming Literacy Practices Among Sudanese Refugees**

Working Paper

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Abstract

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 reflects larger issues related to literacy, identity and community for these youth. Theoretical perspectives regarding literacy and narrative as social practice, reflecting participants’ social, cultural, and political contexts, framed this research; these practices can reveal a great deal about issues pertaining to identity and community. Three orphaned young men were focal participants in this research, 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 fieldnotes and interview transcripts for categories such as text type, language, and literacy practice domains; transcripts also were coded for emerging themes using discourse analytical methods. Results indicated that participants engaged with storytelling in three ways, through (1) explicit talk about storytelling, (2) enacted storytelling, and (3) transformed storytelling. 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; these issues also reflected an important tension between orphan identity and maintaining a sense of Sudanese community. Implications for literacy education are discussed.

From Storytelling to Writing:

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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)

This paper presents 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 live in Michigan, and about a quarter of Michigan’s Sudanese refugees are “Lost Boys”. These 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 emerged from a broader study of literacy practices among Southern Sudanese refugee youth (Perry, 2005a, 2005b; Perry, 2007); the broader study was situated within the larger Cultural Practices of Literacy Study (CPLS). The CPLS is a meta-study of literacy practices in several different cultural communities (see Purcell-Gates, 2007).

For the present analysis, I explored three research questions:

- What were the roles of storytelling in the lives of the Lost Boys in Africa?¹ What roles does storytelling play in their current lives in Michigan?
- How have the Lost Boys transformed traditional storytelling as a result of their experiences as refugees?

¹ Although I usually bristle at the use of 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 U.S. encompassed at least three African nations (Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya).

- How does storytelling, and its transformation, relate to issues of identity and community for this group of refugees?

As I will demonstrate in this paper, storytelling played a variety of important roles in the cultures of various Southern Sudanese tribes in their previous lives in Africa, and—as the quotation from Francis Bok in the opening illustrates—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 and narrative (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Gee, 1991, 1996; Hymes, 1996; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Street, 2001a; Wortham, 2001) framed this particular analysis. These approaches to the study of literacy and language use suggest that the types of things people do with languages and literacies are patterned by social relationships as well as cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and identities. Language and literacy practices, including storytelling, therefore are infused with purpose and meaning for individual actors and communities; they are dynamic and malleable; and they are shaped by and respond to political, historical, social, and cultural forces (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Street, 2001a).

Storytelling as a Sociocultural Practice

Why do people tell 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). As a sociocultural practice, storytelling represents a purposeful practice shaped by and closely linked to a community’s

beliefs, values, and attitudes (Heath, 1983; Hymes, 1996). Storytelling also is a generic label that can be applied to a collection of various types of narrative and literacy practices. Storytelling practices are multiple; the genre(s) of storytelling may encompass a variety of narrative activities, either oral or print-based (or both, as this study will demonstrate). These include creating fictional stories, passing on historical community narratives, and sharing personal experiences, among many others (Johnstone, 2001; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Wortham, 2001). And, perhaps most importantly for this study, storytelling practices are dynamic and malleable—practices change as new ones are learned and as old ones are transformed.

Practices such as storytelling 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, narrative 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; these practices are purposeful and embedded in social goals and cultural practices (Heath, 1983; Hymes, 1996; Ochs & Capps, 2001).

What is narrative?

Scholars such as Labov (1972) and Johnstone (2001) offer various definitions of *narrative*. Labov's definition suggests that narrative is based in actuality, that it reflects 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" (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*; the former entails talk representing past events, while the latter involves a narrative with a point. Johnstone's distinction, however, is problematic 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* refers to only actual past events, or whether it can also include fictional narratives as well. For the purposes of this analysis, I use both *narrative* and *story* interchangeably, and I also apply these terms to a variety of storytelling types, including both retellings of actual events as well as fictional and hypothetical narratives. I define a narrative or 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.

Narratives, identity, and community

In thinking about the relationship between culture, identity, and agency, Holland et al. (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). They also view individual identities as social products that reflect “imaginings of self in worlds of action” (p. 5). As sociocultural texts, narratives play an important role in shaping both individual and collective identities (Bruner, 1996; Johnstone, 2001; Wortham, 2001). Bruner suggested that humans swim in a sea of stories and that “it is through our own narratives that we principally construct a version of ourselves in the world, and it is through its narrative that a culture provides models of identity and agency to its members” (Bruner, 1996, p. *xiv*). Likewise, Ochs and Capps (2001) suggest that narrative interaction “facilitates a philosophy of life and a blueprint for living” (p. 154). Because it reflects culture

and shapes identity, narrative storytelling embodies a powerful form of sense-making; Johnstone (2001), for example, suggested that making sense of the world through narrative is quintessentially human. This theme, that narratives 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 narratives, in particular, can illustrate the ways in which narrators make sense of the world. These narratives “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 argue that communities require the same learning of collective narratives. Yet, families and communities grow, divide, and change—and storytelling practices therefore must also evolve.

Methodology

The larger study of which this analysis is a part explored issues of literacy within culture and literacy as social practice; ethnographic methods of data collection such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and artifact collection are particularly well-suited to exploring such questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Hymes, 1994). I collected data across a variety of sources—researcher observations in a variety of sites, interviews with several focal

participants, and collection of various artifacts—in order to promote validity of the research findings through triangulation (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Systematic coding of data and subsequent data organization using both matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and the AtlasTi qualitative software program allowed me to analyze patterns in participants' storytelling practices. Because this particular analysis relied heavily on the participant interviews collected during the course of the study, I used discourse analytic methods to analyze the data (Gee, 1991; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Tusting & Ivanič, 2004).

Role of the Researcher

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 Southern African nation of Lesotho as a Peace Corps Volunteer. As a tutor, I have officially been paired with three Sudanese students, one of whom served as a focal participant in the present analysis. However, due to the close-knit nature of the Sudanese community, I also found myself frequently volunteering as an unofficial tutor and community mentor for the roommates and relatives of my tutees. In this unofficial role, I have been called upon to help with various events such as driving members of the Sudanese community to doctors' appointments, helping them fill out job applications, providing limited technical assistance for computer problems, coaching Sudanese refugees who are practicing for their drivers' licenses, or making phone calls to utility companies on the behalf of refugees. In December of 2003, Chol² (a focal participant in this study) also asked me to serve as a member on the board of the newly-formed Southern Sudan Relief and Rescue Association, a local group comprised of both Americans and Southern Sudanese who work together to help Sudanese refugees. I have served on this board since that time.

² Participants' names have been changed.

I established my role as an academic tutor and community mentor well before this research project began, which allowed me to gain more genuine access to the literacy and storytelling practices of the Sudanese community. While I am clearly not a member of the Sudanese refugee community myself, I have 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 16th celebration, which serves as a memorial day marking the beginning of the current civil war in Sudan.

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, 2000). Formal observations occurred over approximately seven months, with at least two visits per week. Observations typically lasted 1-2 hours. The majority of these observations occurred in the homes of focal participants, whom I visited as an academic tutor and community mentor. Some observations also took place during large-scale community events to which I was invited, such as graduation parties and Sudanese holiday celebrations. During these observations I noted texts, literacy events (Heath, 1982; Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000), participant structures of those events, and the language of the event and/or text.

Interviews

To understand participants' experiences and perspectives, I used a semi-structured interview protocol, developed for the overall CPLS project, which guided both the observational

phase of the research as well as the interview phase. Semi-structured, yet open-ended interviews such as these have the ability to produce focused data while simultaneously allowing the interviewer to either probe particular responses more deeply or expand the focus of the interview (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). I interviewed three focal participants (described in the next section), each at least once; one participant was interviewed three separate times, while another was interviewed twice. I audiotaped and then transcribed each interview. Because of my unfamiliarity with the African context of participants' past lives, I often used question prompts that were not strictly part of the CPLS interview protocol in order to obtain important contextual information from participants. For example, I asked questions such as "What were shops like in Kakuma?" or "How did you find out about the opportunity to come to the U.S.?" These interviews provided the basis for the discourse analysis used in this particular analysis.

Artifact Collection and Analysis

Because textual artifacts such as community event programs, homework, and photographs may afford particular insights into social practices surrounding literacy and storytelling (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000), I collected sample written texts that seemed representative of practices reported by informants whenever possible. I typically photocopied and returned these artifacts to the owner, although I kept the originals in some cases—when the participant did not intend to keep the original, when the text was a public text (e.g. a celebration program), or when I was the recipient of the text (e.g. a personal note). I analyzed these texts to determine what they revealed of significance in relation to the research questions and used them to triangulate data sources for the final interpretations.

Discourse Analysis

During the interview transcription process, I divided both my own interview questions/prompts and the participants' responses into idea units, lines, and narrative stanzas, following Gee (1991). This method of transcription allowed me to examine the narrative structure of participants' responses (Labov, 1972; Ochs & Capps, 2001). I used Labov's (1972) criterion for minimal narrative—at least two clauses that are temporally ordered—to identify narratives in the interview transcripts. I also looked for other elements of narrative structure, including abstracts, orientations, evaluations, and codas (Labov, 1972), as well as tellability and moral stance (Ochs & Capps, 2001). In addition, I used capital letters to indicate words that participants stressed, which allowed me to analyze topics and themes of importance (see Appendix A for the transcription conventions used in this study). These transcription methods and the AtlasTi software also allowed me to categorize the relevant content of the interviews into (1) talk *about* stories and storytelling, (2) personal narratives, and (3) hypothetical narratives or *irrealis* (Ochs & Capps, 2001).

In addition, 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. For example, in analyzing issues of identity and community, I examined participants' pronoun usage in order to determine how participants positioned themselves in relation to the Sudanese community, particularly in terms of storytelling practices.

Historical Context of Sudanese Refugees

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 fueled this civil war, although this particular conflict is just one manifestation of centuries of strife.³ Northern Sudan is predominantly Arab⁴ and Muslim, while southern Sudan is predominantly comprised of 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 of 2005, however, the Sudanese government and the SPLM signed a new peace accord that outlines an agreement for power-sharing between the North and the South and that makes 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 now express the hope that this accord will finally bring peace to the region.

The war and its aftermath have completely devastated southern Sudan. Since 1983, this war has claimed at least two and a half million lives, and it has 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

³ 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.

⁴ 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).

Tens of thousands of Sudanese children began a mass exodus from the South in 1987 in an attempt to escape the war. Boys mainly comprised this group for two primary reasons: First, boys fled their villages in reaction to news that the armies on both sides were abducting boys and forcing them to fight. Secondly, many young boys were away from home, tending to herds of animals in remote cattle camps, when militias descended upon their villages, destroying the villages and slaughtering their families (Yang, 2002).

These “Lost Boys”—so called because they reminded a journalist of the orphaned boys in *Peter Pan*—walked. They 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).

Only 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, which all of the Lost Boys were able to attend. Beginning in November, 2000, the U.S. State Department began to resettle these refugees in the United States. Over 3,500 Lost Boys have been resettled so far (Yang, 2002), and the United States intends to continue resettling Lost Boys over the next few years.

The first and largest wave of Lost Boys arrived in Michigan in December, 2000. Those under the approximate age of 18 were placed with foster host families and enrolled in local high schools. Some of those above the age of 18 attended local high schools or the community

college, or they studied for their GED degrees. Two local social service agencies took official responsibility for the refugees, and many were “adopted” by families from local churches who served as community mentors, helping the refugees adjust to life in America, complete their educations, and find employment.

Focal Participants: Chol, Ezra, and Francis

I chose three focal participants for this study, using criterion-based, reputational sampling (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The criterion for participation in this study involved Lost Boys who attended an institution of higher education, and I relied heavily on Chol, my key informant, 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 also known him for several months at the beginning of the study. Chol introduced me to Ezra during the course of the study because he believed that Ezra could offer important perspectives for my study.

At the time of the study, Chol was approximately 19 years old.⁵ He is a member of the Dinka tribe, the largest African tribe in the Sudan. Chol graduated from high school in 2002 and now attends a local private university, where he is majoring in business administration. Although still a young man, Chol has gained a great deal of respect in the Sudanese refugee community. He is often asked to organize community events, and he was elected to serve as a representative to the Sudanese refugees’ local governing board. This committee represents the community, mediates disputes, and organizes community events.

Ezra, approximately 26 during the study and also from the Dinka tribe, attends the local state university, where he is majoring in linguistics and public policy. He has also simultaneously taken courses at the local community college. Ezra is deeply religious, and he sometimes serves

⁵ As is common for many refugees, most of the Lost Boys do not know their birthday or their exact age.

as a pastor in a local Christian church, where he occasionally performs services in the Dinka language. In the Kakuma Refugee Camp, Ezra 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, approximately 19 or 20 at the time of the study, is from the Madi tribe, the smallest tribe in the Sudan, unlike most of the Lost Boys in Michigan, who are Dinka. He attends the local community college, where he is majoring in pharmacy. Francis says he enjoys science classes, and he has also enjoyed taking auto mechanics courses; he wants to keep his job options open. Like many of the Sudanese refugees, Francis has worked at a variety of jobs in order to pay for college and for his car. He has worked at McDonald'sTM and at an auto dealership.

In addition to these focal participants, much information about the Sudanese culture and the experiences of refugees came 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 he now works with the Boston-based American Anti-Slavery Group.

Storytelling: A Diverse Collection of Practices

Storytelling occurred on a variety of levels in this study. First, participants *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.

The second type of storytelling, *enacted storytelling*, 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 narrative during our first interview together:

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.

The final type of storytelling in this study was the practice of *transformed storytelling*. Transformed storytelling involved participants telling narratives whose purpose, audience, and medium differed significantly 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—and this type of storytelling provides the focus for the rest of this paper. Although I refer to it as a separate type, transformed storytelling encompassed both *talk about stories* and *enacted storytelling*. Both of the previous transcript excerpts also are examples of transformed storytelling, because they represent changes in the audience and

purpose of storytelling from that which traditionally occurred among Southern Sudanese. Rather than using stories to pass on Sudanese history and culture to Sudanese children, these young men used stories to educate the wider world about the situation in Sudan and about their experiences as refugees. Transformed storytelling was 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 U.S. This transformed storytelling in many ways reflected their status as orphans who are in diaspora around the world, yet who also very much belonged to a cultural community and who have actively sought to maintain that community. This type of storytelling also occurred when Lost Boys found that they could use their voices to actively critique the world around them—particularly the political situation in the Sudan.

Stories Read and Heard

In their lives, particularly their previous lives in Africa, participants encountered 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 encountered 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 fictional genres, including novels, poetry, plays, and short stories. This curriculum 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.

Religion provided another important domain for storytelling practices. The Bible was an important community text, and participants regularly encountered Biblical passages in both Dinka and English. Participants also listened to sermons in church, and Ezra occasionally preached in church 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.”

Stories Written and Told

Participants also wrote and told 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 narratives 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 narrative.

Although some of the Lost Boys engaged in fictional writing (and school courses sometimes required this sort of writing as well), Francis was the only participant in this study who wrote fictional stories on his own time. Francis described a powerful experience where 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 (), 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. I asked Francis where the ideas for his plots came from and 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.”

Participants' stories often encompassed *irrealis* (Juzwik, 2006; Ochs & Capp, 2001), hypothetical stories that were based in reality but that did not represent actual past events. These stories sometimes described a generic scenario, such as what typically happened 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 hypothetical stories to help me understand life in Africa. For example, he used the following story 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 of this sort, and he also frequently used 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 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.

The most common type of stories, however, during both the semi-structured interviews and my observations, were personal narratives that described participants' own experiences as orphaned refugees. 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.

Similarly, Chol 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.

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 more easier for you. That can help you pursue your education.

Speakers at various community events also engaged in storytelling that described their refugee experiences, usually in English. Although Sudanese community members typically comprised much of the audience at these events, Americans were usually present as well. At the annual May 16th celebration in 2003, for example, the first speaker talked—in English—about the New Sudan movement and about the significance of the May 16th date, which commemorates the beginning of the civil war when the SPLA rose up against the government. At Ezra's own graduation party, several speakers told stories that described the educational opportunities available to Sudanese in the U.S., urging other Sudanese to follow Ezra's example.

Participants' experiences as refugees clearly provided the basis for their storytelling in the U.S. In many respects, this represents a shift from the storytelling that refugees experienced in Africa, and I suggest that it is precisely the participants' experiences as refugees that afforded 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 one that is becoming increasingly concerned about warfare and human rights violations in Africa.

Transformed Storytelling: Issues Revealed through Storytelling

As the quotation from Bok (2003) at the beginning of this paper suggests, Sudanese refugees are active participants in the transformation of their storytelling practices. These transformations have occurred in three areas: *who* the stories are for, *how* the stories are told, and *why* they are told. Although I list each as a separate type of transformation, changes in the

audience and medium of storytelling clearly cannot be separated from the changes in the purposes of storytelling that have also occurred in this community. A close discourse analysis of two interview excerpts demonstrates that these transformations relate to a tension between issues of orphanhood and community. They also illustrate the ways in which participants position themselves in relation to their community and as agents who use storytelling as critique.

Traditional Storytelling

Traditionally, community members—particularly children—from the same ethnic group comprised the audience for storytelling in Africa, and storytellers typically were parents, elders, or teachers. According to Chol, “In Kakuma, the old people, they tell stories like ‘a long time ago.’” 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, 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 reflects Rushdie’s (2005) suggestion that families are about storytelling,

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.

Sudanese children also encountered stories as printed texts in the schools in Kakuma. When I asked Francis whether adults read stories to children in Africa, 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." 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." Audiences for storytelling in Africa largely consisted of people who shared a frame of reference with the storyteller. That is, stories were told to people whose cultural background and whose personal experiences resembled those of the storyteller.

Purposes for traditional storytelling largely involved passing on the history, culture, and customs of the community, but they also included an entertainment function, as Ezra explained: "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."

Excerpt from Interview with Francis

A close discourse analysis of an excerpt from my interview with Francis illustrates the tensions that may have facilitated the transformation of storytelling for this community. I asked Francis to describe texts that community members read when he was a child:

I K: What kind of THINGS did they read?

F: They have to, LIKE—/ there are a LOT of LITERATURES in different DIALECTS. Each and every tribe has a literature,/ STORIES.

K: Are they written-DOWN stories?

5 F: YEAH.

People TELL a lot of stories,/ but here, now,/ we don't LEARN.

We DON'T TELL any stories like that.

There's a LOT of stories told normally in the EVENINGS.

THERE it's different, of course,/ people sit together and tell stories,/ STUFF like THAT.

Francis' response to my question highlighted significant differences in storytelling practices between the U.S. and Africa. He began line 9 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 U.S. In line 6, he used the phrase "here, now" which directly contrasted with his emphasized "THERE" in line 9. 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 line 6: "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. I believe that Francis most likely 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 had 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..." Francis 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 directly corresponds with his tell/don’t tell dichotomy. That is, “*people tell*” (line 6) and “*people sit together and tell stories*” (line 9), but “*we don’t LEARN*” (line 6) and “*we DON’T TELL any stories like that*” (line 7).

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. These 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* and *now*—again, emphasizing the dichotomy 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 8: “There’s a LOT of stories told normally in the EVENINGS.” This use of passive voice suggests that it is not Francis who tells stories; it is others who do so.

Francis’ use of voice and tense relate to his sense of identity, particularly in relationship to the larger Sudanese community. That is, Francis’ story illustrates his sense of himself as a non-storyteller, positioned outside the community of storytellers. The use of passive voice in line 8 foregrounded 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. I also

maintain that Francis' use of the we/they dichotomy serves to connect his identity to the community that is *here* and *now*, rather than to the community that was *there* in Africa.

This excerpt from Francis' interview also hints at *why* storytelling has been transformed among the Lost Boys 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 background 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 aimed their stories at the wider world, a world which did not know much about their experiences or their frames of reference. This change 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 had many opportunities to share their personal experiences with new audiences, in both written and oral formats. When the Lost Boys came to America, social service organizations often placed them as foster children with American families, who wanted to know about participants’ lives and experiences. And, as Bok (2003) described in *Escape from Slavery*, human rights organizations and social activists also were interested in hearing about Sudanese refugees’ experiences—and in encouraging refugees to share their stories with the wider world. Bok 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 educating the world about atrocities in Sudan. He described one speech he gave in opposition to Sudan's election to the UN Security Council:

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 their life experiences was also a powerful motivator to engage in 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 visits to his home, Chol expressed to me 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), and this experience allowed him to share his life story with his classmates, most of whom were U.S. citizens.

Place Figure 1 about here

Ezra's writing, much like Bok's, also served to educate a wider public about refugee issues. For example, he described an article he wrote 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.

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 these 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, as I have demonstrated.

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; like Bok, Ezra frequently traveled to give speeches about the situation in Sudan and about his own personal experiences. Chol also used his experiences as the basis for many oral presentations he had to give in various college classes he took. However, participants also used print media to convey their stories, such as when Ezra wrote articles for local newspapers or when Chol wrote out his autobiography. Bok's book exemplifies this as well. Digital media also provided an important 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 website brings them together and shares their thoughts and ideas and experiences.

Newer purposes for storytelling still involved passing on history and culture, but to a different audience, one without a shared framework for understanding. These new purposes for storytelling included both the purpose of passing on information about the Sudan and refugee experiences to Westerners, and the purpose of critique and persuasion. Ezra's article in the local newspaper and Bok's speech in front of the U.N. 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

- 1 E: So there are PROBLEMS with ORAL communication or ORAL FORMS of keeping things,/ because if there are NO EXPERTS or if the OLDER people who are much informed about certain issues are no longer THERE,/ then the NEW people will not know anything,/ and they will be LOST.
So, NOW the TRANSFORMATION of the society,/ the NEW generation will NOT KNOW anything about the OLD generation and so there will be a CUT.
So, this group will be a different group,/ although they will CLAIM by their mouth that they are DINKA,/ they DON’T BEHAVE like Dinka.
There’s nothing important about it.
- 5 The IMPORTANT THING about a CULTURE is not only SAYING the NAME, of the culture like Dinka,/ but to BEHAVE in a culture, that is critical.
We have the CULTURE of that particular community, of that particular group.
I think 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.
That is IMPORTANT.
But they have to KEEP their identity.

This particular segment of Ezra’s discourse was the second half of a long response to my question: “Is it important for people to be able to read and write in Dinka as well as in English?”

The first part of Ezra’s response discussed his belief in the connection between language and culture, which led into the narrative above.

This excerpt from Ezra’s speech is an example of what Ochs & Capps (2001) refer to as *irrealis*. That is, this is a hypothetical narrative that contains clauses that are temporally ordered—the older generation are lost, and therefore the younger generation 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 line 1; this sort of “imagine if” beginning marks his narrative as *irrealis*.

Ezra’s narratives typically were much longer than those of either Chol or Francis, and they often contained other elements of Labov’s expanded definition of narrative, 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 this hypothetical narrative. The orientation indicates that the narrative will be about the new generation of Dinka (line 1), 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, coexist in lines 8 and 9: “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 narratives, and these moral stances clearly identified the importance of Sudanese identity and community to Ezra.

Ezra’s use of pronouns and subjects/objects in his response highlighted that this is a hypothetical narrative, and they also reveal how Ezra positioned himself in relation to the community at large. He used third person throughout the story, using “they” several times. In contrast to his extensive use of third person, Ezra used the first person collective “we” in only one line (line 6). He used the first person in line 7, “I think,” but this use described his opinion, not what he actually did or does himself. It is significant that what follows the “I think” is a discussion of what other people should do. Although Ezra used first person to set up the sentence, the actual topic of discussion is not Ezra himself, but rather the good of the community. Ezra reinforced this topic by immediately returning to third person and insisting that “*they* have to KEEP their identity.”

As with Francis, Ezra's use of pronouns and subjects/objects also illustrates how he positioned himself in relation to the rest of the community. Despite the fact that Ezra himself is an orphan and is therefore 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" (line 1 and line 2) and who "will be a different group" (line 3). Only after he distanced himself from the negative consequences of being an orphan did Ezra use first person, and this use stressed his group membership: "*We* have the CULTURE of that particular community" (line 6). He then followed this affinity with the community by discussing the importance of learning about other cultures and of maintaining cultural identity at the same time. Ezra therefore positioned himself in four different ways throughout his narrative. In line 1, he first distanced himself from the group of orphans who "will be LOST" (which is perhaps a significant reference to the label "Lost Boys"), and then identified himself with the culture of the community in line 6. In line 7, he positioned himself within the community, but simultaneously positioned that community in relationship to other cultures that the group needs to learn "to interact and intermingle with". Finally, in line 9, he once again distanced himself from the group by referring to them as "they", thus bringing his positionality full circle to the beginning of the narrative.

One particularly important function of Ezra's narrative, one that is strongly connected to the narrative element of moral stance (Ochs & Capps, 2001), is the element of teaching or preaching that exists in this narrative, illustrated by lines 5 and 7. In these lines, Ezra explicitly stated the point of his story—the importance of maintaining cultural identity, and also of understanding other groups' cultural identities. Ezra's continued use of third person and the ways that he positioned himself and the topic of his narrative suggest that Ezra viewed this particular

narrative as a lecture or sermon. Ezra presented his argument as a moral imperative—we 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 (line 7).

Ezra's appropriation of the discourses of teaching and preaching in his storytelling is not surprising, given his deep religious faith, his training as a Bible translator, his previous work as a teacher, 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.

Discussion: Implications

Before World War II, the philosopher Walter Benjamin declared that “the art of storytelling is coming to an end” (Benjamin, 1968, p. 83). Benjamin hinted that the rise of print literacy and a focus on “the dissemination of information” (p. 89) were killing storytelling. Storytelling, as the results of this study show, is still alive and well. While traditional storytelling may no longer appear in the same forms as in years past, print literacy and the information age have contributed to storytelling's evolution, rather than to its death. The case of Sudanese refugees' transformation of storytelling represents a powerful example of how individuals and communities negotiate the differences between, appropriate from, and transform cultural practices.

The results of this study highlight how this group of orphaned youth has forged their way through a changing world on their own. Living in and adapting to a foreign land without parents and family, they must find ways to maintain their identity and relate to their community, and as the results of this analysis show, the practice of transformed storytelling helps these young men to do so. These findings also illustrate that many of the Lost Boys feel 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 are using narrative to do precisely what scholars propose is the most important function of narrative—to construct their identities and to relate to and navigate the world (Ochs & Capps, 2001). I have argued that the Lost Boys are also using these stories to construct community, and perhaps even to continue to construct a new sense of family. Families contain stories about themselves, as Rushdie said, and I argue that the Lost Boys are developing a new sense of family as they transform their stories and share their collective and individual experiences with the wider world.

A close reading of these passages has shown that common themes ran throughout participants’ responses, and these themes highlight issues of community and identity. These excerpts about storytelling 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 reveals that these participants negotiate issues of orphanhood, identity, and community in different ways. They position themselves in the community in various ways, 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 in different ways; 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.

The participants' treatment of storytelling illustrates important themes that arose again and again throughout this study in terms of literacy, education, and community. Storytelling appeared to be deeply connected to community, both in the act of telling stories and in the stories' content. Storytelling in Africa was a communal and cross-generational event, where elders passed on history and collective wisdom to future generations. For many of these displaced Sudanese refugees, storytelling is being transformed 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, they are transforming storytelling from an event that happens in the local community to one that is shared with the global community.

One important implication of this study is that storytelling can be a politically powerful tool. Participants told stories not just to educate the wider world but also to compel the world *to act*. Many of the stories told by these refugees critiqued those in power—they critiqued the government of Sudan for human rights abuses and corruption, and they critiqued the powerful in America for failing to act, doing too little, or 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.

What does this imply for education, particularly for literacy education? Bruner (1996) argued that the institution of education has largely marginalized narrative, particularly in the realm of the arts: “surely education could provide richer opportunities than it does for creating the metacognitive sensitivity for coping with the world of narrative reality” (Bruner, 1996, p. 149). The goals of education often focus on preparing young people to enter the world, preparing them to be productive members of their communities and of society in general. Helping young people develop their identities and position themselves in relation to their community seems to be an important element of education. Increasingly, educators believe that students also must be able to view the world through critical lenses that allow them to understand and question social, cultural, and political structures and forces.

Incorporating the stories of young people, particularly of youth like the Lost Boys, could offer rich learning opportunities, both for the tellers of stories and for their audiences. The participants in this study clearly felt a need to tell their stories, and much of the wider world clearly feels that their stories need to be heard. The recent media attention to the crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan not only shows the public’s desire to learn about world issues, but it also illustrates the power of stories to spur action.

The youth writing programs offered in Kakuma might provide important models of ways in which formal educational institutions in the West could utilize student experiences to help youth deal with issues of identity and community, and to enhance academic achievement at the same time. Both Ezra and Chol provide examples of how storytelling practices can be used to enhance academic literacies. Ezra frequently used libraries and the Internet to research issues that faced the Sudan in order to prepare for public speeches he gave about his experiences, and Chol often used his own experiences as resources for projects he needed to complete for his college

coursework. Encouraging young people to tell their own stories, rather than simply reading the stories and histories of others, may offer more authentic learning opportunities for students and may motivate them to engage more deeply in school literacy practices.

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Figure Caption

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

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
- (empty parents) indicates speech that could not be heard
- ... indicates omitted dialogue

Figure 1.

Nuer Nuer
 University Colloquium
 September 16, 2003

Autobiography

My name is Nuer Nuer. 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 Eastem 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 Eastem 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 Davenport, and then I enrolled in Davenport 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 Davenport University, focusing on my career, learning a lot of things, targeting my goals.