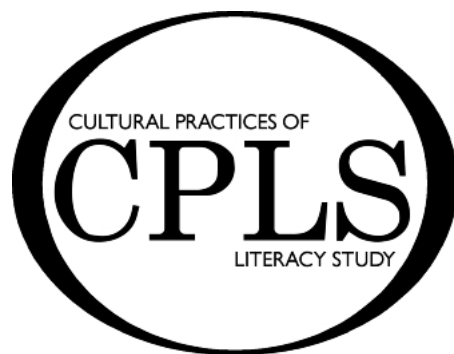


**Sharing Stories, Linking Lives:  
Literacy Practices Among Sudanese refugees**

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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)*

Introduction

This chapter presents a case study of the literacy practices of southern Sudanese refugee youth—the so-called “Lost Boys”—in Michigan. There are approximately 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 come from the group known as the “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, lived for years in the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, and eventually were resettled in American communities. The purpose of this case study was to describe the literacy practices of these Sudanese refugees, both in their current lives in America and in their past lives in Africa.

In a recent article, Luke (2003) lays out an agenda for literacy research. He suggests that literacy researchers should focus their attentions on questions such as:

Which linguistic competencies, discourses and textual resources, and multiliteracies are accessible? How, in what blended and separate domains and to what ends, are different languages used? How do people use languages, texts, discourses, and literacies as convertible and transformative resources in homes, communities and schools? How are

these resources recognized and misrecognized, remediated and converted in school-based literacy instruction? (pp. 139-140).

Street (2001) likewise suggests that an important task of literacy research is to make visible the complexity of local, everyday, community literacy practices. Barton and Hamilton (2000) define literacy as social practice with six propositions that seem especially pertinent to the context of this case study: (1) Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices, which can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts; (2) There are different literacies associated with different domains of life; (3) Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others; (4) Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices, and (5) Literacy is historically situated, and literacy practices are dynamic and changing; and (6) Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making. Examining literacy practices within this framework can lead to insights about the ways in which literacy is practiced and valued in a community, and these insights may, in turn, help educators design literacy curricula and instruction that are more relevant and authentic to that community.

Language use is an especially important component of literacy practices in many communities and contexts. Previous case studies concerning literacies in developing nations have revealed that the various uses or functions of literacy determined the language used for that literacy, rather than vice versa (Herbert & Robinson, 2001; Maddox, 2001; Rogers, 2001; Wright, 2001; Othman-Rahman, 2003). Luke (2003) also suggests that the issues of language rights, language loss, and the redistribution of resources through literacy education are test cases

for democratic education; these issues are also key aspects of identity and community, which have become increasingly important in literacy research.

The purpose of this case study was to illustrate just such a complexity among Sudanese refugees. The study was designed to answer several questions, derived from Luke (2003), about literacy practices among the Sudanese refugees: (1) What does literacy mean to the Sudanese refugees? (2) Which life domains characterize literacy practices for Sudanese refugees? (3) How are different languages used across and within these domains? and (4) In what ways do school literacies match or fail to match those used in the wider community?

Why ask these questions of this particular community? Africans often are stereotyped as illiterate and uneducated; adding the word “refugee” only heightens this misperception. This sort of research, then, is an important step in challenging “dominant stereotypes and myopia” (Street, 2001, p. 7). The answers and insights gained from asking these questions also may help educational institutions, social services, and international aid organizations better serve refugee populations. Refugees continue to come to the United States in large numbers from countries around the globe. While each new community clearly will bring its own literacy practices, studying one refugee community in depth may provide insights about issues of culture, community, and identity in relation to literacies.

### Historical Context of Sudanese Refugees

#### *The Civil War in Sudan*

According to one participant in this study, “Sudan has never been a peaceful country.” There have been many internal wars in the Sudan; the current civil war began in 1983 when the southern Sudanese organized an uprising against the northern-dominated Sudanese government. The current war is the result of centuries of deep ethnic and religious divisions. Northern Sudan

is predominantly Arab<sup>1</sup> and Muslim, while southern Sudan is predominantly comprised of African tribes who are either Christian or animist. The country's government is controlled by the North, 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 1983, the southern Sudanese rebelled against the atrocities of the northern-dominated government by creating the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement and Army (SPLM/A), which has since engaged the government in a civil war. Deng (1995) suggests that this stark North-South dichotomy is the key to understanding the "complicated racial, cultural, and religious configuration of the Sudan" (p. 26).

The war has completely devastated southern Sudan. Two and a half million people have been killed since the beginning of the conflict, and five million people have been displaced as refugees. Militias bomb, pillage and destroy villages and crops, slaughter families, rape women, and capture women and children to be taken to the north, where they are kept as slaves and forced to convert to Islam (Bok, 2003; Yang, 2002). The conflict in Sudan has caused a mass exodus of southerners, many of whom end up in the Kakuma Refugee Camp near Lake Turkana in Kenya. Despite vast oil reserves, southern Sudan is one of the most underdeveloped areas in the world, due to the ongoing civil war (Matheson, 2002). There are no roads, no schools, and no hospitals. A recent news article noted that southern Sudan has "possibly the worst health situation in the world" (Ross, 2004a); diseases that have been eradicated in the rest of the world are making a resurgence in the Sudan, and mysterious new diseases are emerging (Ross, 2004b). The civil war does not only affect southern Sudan, however. One participant in this study

reported, “Although there is no war in the north, the north also remains poor because of the war . . . You have a population that is starving to death. There are no jobs.”

### *The Journey of the Lost Boys*

Tens of thousands of Sudanese children, mainly boys, began a mass exodus from the south in 1987. The group was comprised mainly of boys 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).

And so 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).

After a treacherous crossing of a crocodile-infested river, where thousands of boys drowned, approximately 33,000 Lost Boys reached refugee camps in Ethiopia, where they remained for nearly four years. Following a coup of the Ethiopian government, the refugees were forced back into the Sudan. 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, living either 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 around the United States, from Phoenix, Arizona, to Omaha, Nebraska, to New York City. Over 3,500 Lost Boys have been resettled so far (Yang, 2002), and the United States intends to resettle the rest of the Lost Boys over the next few years. The resettlement program is the result of an agreement between the UNHCR, the U.S. State Department, and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services (U.S. Department of State, 2001). Several other countries—most notably, Canada, Great Britain and Australia—are also participating in the refugee resettlement program.

The decision to come to America was not an easy one for the refugees, particularly since they knew nothing about the country or the culture. One participant, Chol<sup>2</sup>, said that the American organizer had to make several trips over two years to convince groups of Lost Boys to apply to come to America: “She went there [to the Kakuma Refugee Camp] and talked to us and said, ‘American people need you to go there.’ We said, ‘No, we don’t want to go.’”

Chol described the southern Sudanese community as distrustful of American motives for wanting the Sudanese to come, a distrust stemming from the Sudanese government’s implicit sanction of the slave trade in their native country. “We said, ‘Maybe you are going to sell us away.’ The community said, ‘No, maybe you are going to be given to the Arab people.’ . . . Even me, I said, ‘I don’t want to go!’”

*Focal Participants: Chol, Ezra, and Francis*

Chol is approximately 19 years old. He doesn’t know his birthday and doesn’t know his exact age—none of the Lost Boys do. Like most southern Sudanese, Chol’s skin is a deep, deep black; and at about 6 feet tall, he is considered short for someone from the Dinka tribe, who are

on average the tallest people in the world. Like most Sudanese refugees, the intensity of his black skin and his rail-thin height cause Chol to stick out in Michigan. Chol graduated from a local high school in 2001 and now attends a local private university, where he is majoring in business administration. Like many Sudanese refugees, Chol works two to three jobs in order to help pay for his education; these jobs have included working in the state university's dining halls, janitorial services in office buildings, and the private university's library. Although Chol is still a young man, he 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. Chol's hard work has also helped him pay the traditional bride price to his fiancée's family, and Chol looks forward to the day, a few years hence, when his bride will be able to join him from Africa.

Ezra, approximately 26, is well over 6 feet tall, and he has a long scar running the length of the crease of his smile. Ezra's two lower front teeth are missing, a symbol of a traditional rite of passage in the Dinka tribe. He 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 serves as a pastor in a local Christian church, where he often performs services in the Dinka language. In the Kakuma Refugee Camp, Ezra was 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, sports a shiny, bald head and speaks English with a crisp staccato. He also 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's<sup>TM</sup> and an auto dealership. Francis is from the Madi tribe, the smallest tribe in the Sudan, rather than the Dinka tribe, the largest tribe, from which most of the rest of the Sudanese refugees in Michigan come.

In addition to these focal participants, much information about the Sudanese culture and the refugee experience came from the book *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. He was also forced 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.

#### *Refugee Camps Provide First Experiences with Schooling*

For this group of southern Sudanese, their first experiences with formal schooling came in the refugee camps. They had had little access to schooling in Sudan, and what few schools were available in the south were taught in Arabic. As far back as the late 1930s, it was the government's official policy to promote Islam, the Arab culture, and the Arabic language in Sudanese schools. Deng (1995) describes a memorandum stating that education in the Sudan should emulate the Islamic character, and that the Arabic language and religious instruction should receive the greatest possible attention in all schools. The educational institutions in Sudan

also systematically discriminated against non-Muslims; Chol described the experience of an uncle who attended the university in Khartoum, and who failed all of his classes until he pretended to convert to Islam and took on a more Arab-sounding name. Suddenly, Chol's uncle found himself at the top of his class.

Opportunities for schooling were relatively more plentiful before the beginning of the current war. Ezra explained that many schools were established in the south prior to the war. "After 1972, the Addis Ababa agreement<sup>3</sup>, there was a relative peace for a period of ten years, a decade, before the war broke out in '83. These schools were established either by the church, or church mission, or by the government." However, schools were still few and far between.

Francis Bok explains the situation in *Escape from Slavery*:

I did not go to school. No one in my family had any formal education; I don't think I knew what a school was or what happened there. I had heard the word "school," but all it meant to me was a place that some kids from the village had been sent to in Juba, the capital city of southern Sudan (2003).

Not surprisingly, literacy levels among southern Sudanese were quite low, due to such limited opportunities for schooling. For record-keeping, southern Sudanese rely on their memory, according to the informants for this study. "When I was young," Chol said, "I never read anything. Whatever has been told to me, I have to keep in my mind." He gave the following example:

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 . . . I have this many cows." He don't forget the cows, all the things. . . . No paper written, but only in his mind.

In fact, the participants in this study seemed to pride themselves on their memories: “I have a good memory,” Francis stated during an interview about his past life in Africa. Chol explained:

When someone tells you something in my dialect, you cannot forget it. . . . If somebody talks to me here, we can talk until tomorrow. If you ask me what I’m saying yesterday, I can tell you from the beginning to the end. I [don’t] write it down.

In fact, participants suggested that southern Sudanese villagers sometimes took a rather dim view of the written word. “The [spoken] word is very important. They don’t consider writing a lot. They are still talking, because whatever somebody said, we accept as true, instead of writing,” Chol explained. He estimated that “about 95% don’t read and write” in southern Sudan.<sup>4</sup> Ezra said, “Not very many people in the villages could read and write. No, the people who knew how to read and write were either civil servants or teachers. So, they live in the village, but they work for the government.”

#### *Language and Literacy Education in Kakuma Refugee Camp*

Yang (2002) observed that the southern Sudanese youth were deeply committed to their academic studies in the Kakuma Refugee Camp. The UNHCR set up schools in the camp, which were free for refugee children. The schools were based upon the Kenyan educational system: primary school went from Standard 1-8, with students taking a national exam to obtain their Kenya Certificate of Primary Education, and then high school culminated in another exam leading to the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education. According to participants, the schools recently added preschool and kindergarten classes, which Francis says is a “very, very good program” because “kids are able to speak English right now.”

Proficiency in English was very important for Sudanese refugee children in Kakuma, because English was the medium of instruction in the schools. Students were also taught

KiSwahili, the national language of Kenya, as a second language. Because English and KiSwahili were the official languages of schooling, few southern Sudanese children had the opportunity to become literate in Dinka, the local language spoken by the majority of the refugees, or other local dialects. Churches in the camp offered the only opportunity for local language literacy instruction. Chol explains, “In the school, they taught us English and KiSwahili. At church, they taught us Dinka, not English.”

Limited funding for Kakuma schools caused severe shortages of educational materials and supplies; often, there were not enough textbooks to go around for each student, and students often could not take the limited textbooks home to study. However, Kakuma does have some libraries, which help support refugees’ academic development. Chol said that his high school classes would go to the library “two times a week, during chemistry teaching or biology, because the biology books were very limited, so they were in the library. . . . The library is very big. It can take a lot of students.” Francis described the library as having “newspapers, magazines, all sorts of things. We have *Newsweek*.” The large libraries were funded by international donor agencies, according to Francis. Individual churches also had libraries, which were intended to help students with their academic studies. It was this sort of church library that Ezra’s grant proposal supported.

Due to limited resources, basic literacy instruction in the Kakuma Refugee Camp’s primary schools typically took the form of repeating after the teacher and copying from the chalkboard. According to Francis:

The teacher may write something on the board and then pronounce it. That’s the kind of reading, basically . . . you repeat after the teacher, then you go and do some writing on the ground. You write on the ground because there is a lot of shortage of stationery.

Ezra described the high school system:

The system is not like your system here [in America], where you take a certain course in a certain semester, then take another course. No, all courses are year-round courses.

When you go to high school, in the first year you are required to take 12 subjects year-round. . . . The same in Form 2. That way, when you go to Form 3, the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, you choose the subjects that you want, and the minimum is always 8. Then, you take them continuously. Out of these 12, there are compulsory subjects that you have no option.

Maths is one of them. English is one of them, and English as a subject is divided. There is comprehension part, there is summary part, there is composition part, and there is literature. So, you take English as a compulsory subject, maths, and KiSwahili. . . . Then, you have to take at least 2 sciences, either biology or chemistry or physics. . . . Then, you have to choose from the other groups of subjects, three at least.

#### Role of the Researcher

I first began working with the Sudanese community in May, 2002, shortly after returning from two years of living and working in the tiny southern African kingdom of Lesotho as a Peace Corps volunteer. When I heard that Lutheran Social Services was looking for tutors for Sudanese refugees, I immediately volunteered my time. I wished to maintain my connection with Africa and Africans, because I wanted to continue working with Africans in the areas of education and literacy. I also wanted to extend my Peace Corps service by continuing to work for the betterment of Africa and Africans, because I believe they are all too often overlooked by the developed world. As a result, I have worked as a paid tutor with Lutheran Social Services since the summer of 2002, and in that capacity, I have officially been paired with three Sudanese students. 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 official students. In December of 2003, Chol 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.

In my official tutoring capacity, I typically spend from 2-6 hours a week offering homework help, particularly in the area of English. In my unofficial role as mentor, I am often 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 technology problems, coaching Sudanese who are practicing for their drivers' licenses, or making phone calls to utility companies on behalf of the Sudanese.

My role as an academic tutor and community mentor was well established before this research project began, which allowed me to gain more genuine access to the literacy practices of the Sudanese community. While I am clearly not a member of the Sudanese refugee community, 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 performing research observations, and 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<sup>th</sup> celebration, which serves as a memorial day marking the beginning of the current civil war in Sudan. This previous work within the community encouraged the Sudanese to participate in my research; they told me several times that they wanted to help me with my work because I had been so helpful in theirs.

Context, Culture, and Community Shape Literacy Practices Among Sudanese Refugees

*Literacy Means Access to Power, and Power Will Help the Southern Sudanese*

Analysis of the data (see Introduction for methodology) revealed that literacy and education are highly valued among the Sudanese. The participants in this study tended to view literacy as something essential to their lives. They equated literacy with education and with access to power. To Chol, literacy “means writing, it means reading, it means learning. It means everything—a lot.” For Francis, “Literacy basically refers to gaining access to education or to any other thing like that which is essential for one’s living.” For Ezra, literacy is more than just reading and writing; it means preserving his Dinka culture and identity:

People have to know how to speak the language and how to write it in order to keep it, to make it a living language. If it exists as an oral or spoken language, without it being written, then chances are it will [become] extinct. But if it is written, then it is preserved, so knowing how to read and write is very important to keep the language alive.

Ezra also explained that his generation of Sudanese refugees views literacy as an important tool in the struggle against inequality and injustice in the Sudan. “The young generation,” he said, “especially people of my age who did not grow up in Sudan, who started their education outside of Sudan, who were victims of war, think that they need to read and write.”

Sudanese refugees frequently expressed a belief in the importance of education. David, a non-focal participant, believed that literacy and education are crucial for his future. “I pray to God to get an education,” he reported. David believes the problems of Sudan are a consequence of having an illiterate, uneducated population. Many of the Sudanese participants equated education with improving Sudan’s lot. Becoming educated, they believe, is one of the most important duties they have to those left behind in Africa. In *Escape from Slavery*, Bok (2003) described the two great dreams in his life as “to get an education and to do something that would

help our people by telling my story” (p. 187). A speaker at a welcoming party for a newly arrived Sudanese family likewise urged the U.S. to bring over more young Sudanese refugees so that they can obtain an education. He said that it is difficult to fight a successful war without education, and that “being here is another part of the war.” This speaker emphasized to the listeners that Sudanese refugees must learn as much as they can here in the U.S. so that they can return to the Sudan and help to rebuild their native country. “The only way we can help them is to have an education,” Ezra said at his own graduation party. Speakers at every Sudanese celebration I attended emphasized the importance of education in their speeches.

*From Storytelling to Writing: Transforming Literacy Practices*

A link between the southern Sudanese tradition of storytelling and the desire to write memories of war, slavery, and the refugee experience emerged from data analysis. Storytelling is an important aspect of traditional culture in the southern Sudan, and this tradition shaped many current literacy practices among the refugees in the United States. In Dinka culture, storytelling is a form of traditional education in the Sudan. According to Ezra,

Storytelling is an important aspect [of our culture] . . . To keep the history of the community and the culture and the customs, you pass them from one generation to another through storytelling. . . . It was through storytelling where people came to learn about culture, the customs, about the traditions, about the norms, about the values.

Because there was no way; you could not find them in a book.

While storytelling is still an important part of the Sudanese culture for participants, most expressed the belief that it does not happen much in the United States due to the lack of older generations. Francis explained that in Africa, storytelling happens in the evenings, when people sit together and share stories. “People tell a lot of stories,” he said, “but here, now, we don’t



learn. We don't tell any stories like that." Ezra believed that this lack of traditional storytelling was a direct result of the war: "Most of these things were passed down from generation to generation, but due to the war, there is now a generation gap."

Although participants in this study did not tell many traditional stories, storytelling was nonetheless a powerful motivator for many of their literacy practices. Many times, Chol expressed the desire to publish the memories he had of his own personal experiences as a refugee, and he began to write down portions of his autobiography. Ezra explained that he sometimes gave speeches about his experiences and the situation in the Sudan, and he spent time in libraries researching material to include in those speeches. In *Escape from Slavery*, Bok (2003) describes over and over again the powerful need he felt to share his story: "My story, however, was all I had with me, the only remnant of my past" (p. 105). Once Bok started giving speeches about his experience, "I began to understand how powerful words could be" (p. 198). For many of these displaced Sudanese refugees, storytelling is being transformed from a way of passing down cultural traditions within their own ethnic group to a way of educating the wider world about their experiences, both through speeches and written texts.

#### *Schooling and Community: Key Domains Shape Sudanese Refugees' Literacy Practices*

Five key life domains contextualize literacy practices among the Sudanese: (1) school, (2) religion, (3) interpersonal communication, (4) community information and news; and (5) community organization. With the exception of school (the importance of which has been described above), each of these domains is community-oriented in focus. Schooling in the United States typically is an individual pursuit, something that individuals undertake to better themselves or "get ahead". Although group work is encouraged in some situations in classrooms, students are largely expected to do their own work, and they are evaluated and assessed as

individuals. It is interesting to consider that the participants in this study have transformed some aspects of schooling into a community-oriented domain; for the participants in this study, individual schooling has become part of a duty to the larger Sudanese community, particularly those left behind in Africa.

*Religion.* Religion plays a central role in much of southern Sudanese culture (see Figure 1). Deng (1995) suggests that there is a close link between southern Sudanese religious beliefs and identity, regardless of whether those religious beliefs are Christian or traditional animist. In fact, he suggests that many southern Sudanese adopted Christianity precisely because it complemented their traditional cultural, spiritual, and moral values. Bok (2003) states that approximately 20% of southern Sudanese identify as Christian, and he frequently cites God as the power which helped him to survive and escape enslavement.



*Figure 1.* Ezra delivering a prepared speech.

The critical role of religion as it contextualized literacy practice was also observed among participants in this study. Participants read the Bible, the *Oxford Bible Companion*, church pamphlets, church bulletins, and other religious texts, and they wrote notes from sermons heard in church, the sermons themselves, and articles for church bulletins. During numerous observations, I noticed English Bibles lying on participants' desks or beds; Ezra, who worked as a Bible translator in the Kakuma Refugee Camp, had an entire shelf of religious texts, most in English. In separate visits, Chol shared Dinka religious texts with me—a passage from the Bible, and a religious pamphlet (see Figure 2). Participants' speech was also peppered with Biblical references, indicating their deep knowledge of that text. In one informal conversation, David asked questions about anthropology, world cultures, and current events which he related to Biblical history. For example, he talked about the fact that Iraq was once Babylon. Ezra referred to the Bible many times in a speech he gave at his graduation party, quoting several passages from memory. During interviews, participants also described a number of literacy practices that center around religion. For example, Chol has a little notebook that he takes with him to church, in which he writes down important messages from the pastor. Ezra reads the Bible for at least 20-30 minutes each day.

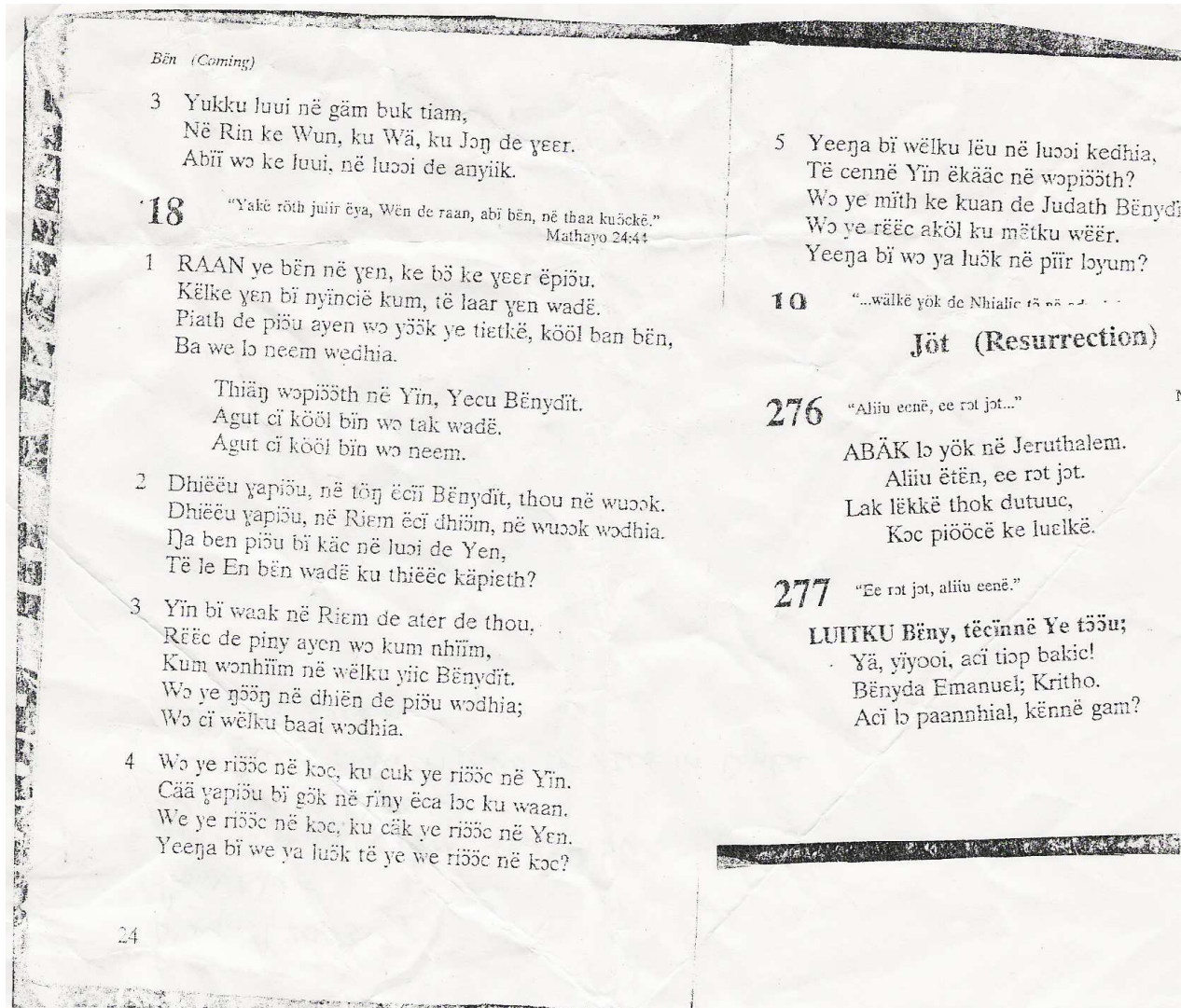


Figure 2. An example of a page from the Dinka Bible, used by Sudanese refugees. Note the interspersion of English.

*Interpersonal communication.* Interpersonal communication is another very important life domain for literacy practices among the Sudanese refugees. Participants used a variety of texts in this domain, including letters, email, notes, and phone messages. In interviews, participants frequently referred to these texts, which they used to stay in contact with other southern Sudanese refugees, both in the United States and around the world, in the Kakuma

Refugee Camp and in other resettlement countries. “I write people here,” Chol explained. “I wrote to many people, like in the different states, different boys, guys who were in Kakuma. I write to them. Especially I use email for that.” Likewise, Francis stated that email “is the easiest way to communicate at times, because to call a person in Africa costs five dollars, but the Internet is free of charge.” Participants explained that although only government officials and NGO workers had access to the Internet in the Kakuma Refugee Camp, refugees sometimes traveled to Nairobi to use the Internet or to make phone calls. Indeed, I observed participants reading emails from refugees in Kakuma on several occasions. Often these readings were a community affair, with several Sudanese gathered around the computer screen or with the recipient reading the message aloud.

*Community information.* This community focus was also seen in the last two domains that contextualized print literacy practices for the Sudanese refugees: community information/news and community organization. The domain of community information/news exhibited the greatest variety of texts used by the participants. Participants wrote texts such as newsletter columns, letters to the editor, letters passing on community news, and postings to discussion boards on Sudanese-oriented websites such as Sudan.net. Participants also read each of these texts; in addition, they also read listserv emails from organizations such as the UN News Service, international news websites, emails, community bulletin boards, and books about the situation in Sudan and the Kakuma Refugee Camp. Chol talked about his community writing:

I write also about Sudan. I write any information that I get from Sudan, and then I write many letters. Then, I take it to be corrected, and then send it to the Lost Boys. So then the Lost Boys, they can read it—what’s happening . . . information about the war.

According to Ezra, the Internet has become a very important source of information and news about the Sudanese community:

It is where I write a lot, because I read about almost every day, maybe two or three times a day, about Sudan and about the peace talks that have been going on in Nairobi. And 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.

Like the other key literacy domains, the domain of community information/news was important both in the United States and in the Kakuma Refugee Camp. Chol explained that an important literacy routine for many refugees in Kakuma was to check the information board in the camp, where letters from displaced family members or other significant community information was posted:

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 . . . it's the only means of communication with people around the world.

Some participants also wrote for the local news media while in the camp. Ezra said that he frequently contributed to the *Kakuma News Bulletin*, where he "was just expressing myself on some issues that I think are pertinent to the community."

*Community organization.* The final key domain for literacy practice, community organization, cotextualizes reading and writing that revolve around community organizing, planning and implementing community events, and activism within the community. The distinction between the domains of community information/news and community organization is therefore somewhat blurred; however, I believe that they are indeed separate domains due to

their slightly differing intentions or foci. Texts used within the domain of community organization include letters, meeting notes, community newsletters, invitation letters, descriptions of committees, business ledgers and organizational schemas. Deng (1995) suggests that Sudanese tribes highly value leadership in their communities, and this was exemplified by several participants in this study. Chol, for example, was viewed as a community leader, despite the fact that he is only about 19. Many of Chol's literacy practices revolved around this leadership role. He was frequently nominated by the community to sit on organizational committees for important community events, and he also was elected to serve on the main Sudanese refugee governing board that represented the community, mediated disputes, and offered assistance to community members. Chol's leadership role required him to write notes during meetings (often re-typed on the computer), write and send letters to the refugee community, and to contribute columns to the local refugee newsletter (see Figure 3). Similarly, Ezra described his dream of starting a non-profit organization to organize Sudanese refugees and to provide assistance for those still in Africa; he explained that he had received help from a lawyer to get the organization up and running.





## OTHER NEWS FROM AFRICA

### KENYAN OPPOSITION ALLIANCE ANNOUNCES PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

KENYA, OCTOBER 22

Kenya's opposition alliance has named Mwai Kibaki, a former Vice President, as their candidate for the presidential elections expected to be held in December.

Kibaki, the official opposition leader in parliament, heads an alliance of more than 12 parties known as the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC).

The ruling Kanu party has announced Uhuru Kenyatta as its candidate to replace Daniel arap Moi, who is constitutionally bound to leave office after 24 years in power.

### BURUNDI PEACE TALKS DELAYED

DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA, OCTOBER 21

Talks to secure a cease-fire in the nine-year Burundi civil war were postponed due to the absence of the chief mediator, South African Vice President Jacob Zuma. Mr. Zuma is expected to arrive on October 22.

Most of the parties in the war—the Tutsi-controlled government and the two largest Hutu rebel groups, had arrived in the Tanzanian capital of Dar es Salaam on October 21.

Pierre Nkurunziza, leader of the rebel group Forces for the Defense of Democracy (FDD), said that the FDD is now ready to negotiate with the

government. "We must start real negotiations between the real belligerents," he said.

The assassination of Melchior Ndadaye, the democratically elected Hutu president, in October 1993 sparked off the civil war. At least 200,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed in the war.

Figure 3. Chol regularly contributed columns to this monthly newsletter for the local Sudanese refugees. His columns typically focused on issues concerning the war and other problems in the

Sudan, what that country required to resolve its conflicts and rebuilt the nation, and other similar issues that were important to the Sudanese community.

Community organization also involved literacy in the Kakuma Refugee Camp. Ezra successfully wrote a grant proposal that provided funding for a small library that was attached to his church. He also worked together with several other refugees to produce the first Dinka textbooks for primary school children. Chol explained that community organizing occurred on a much larger scale in Kakuma, particularly in reference to the challenges of life in the camp: “A lot of people make a strike. They go in the road, shouting and what, and then the community writes the problem. They need food, they need water, they need clothes, they need everything.” He said that community leaders often composed letters, which they sent to the UNHCR and to other NGOs.

#### *Mismatches Between In-School and Out-of-School Literacies*

The school-based literacies of the participants in this study often do not reflect those that exist within their community lives. School literacies, as experienced by the informants for this study, both in the Kakuma Refugee Camp and in the United States, tend to focus on purposes of certification and credentialing. For example, Ezra explained that the majority of the texts funded by his grant proposal in Kakuma were books to support academic studies which ultimately led to certification exams:

There are other books, we call them learning books, written by experts who have experience on the subject matter of the KCPE (Kenya Certificate of Primary Education). So, if you want to excel, if you want to succeed on your national exam, then you go out of your area of the textbooks that are designed for your class and read wider outside. The

same thing when you are in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, they call it—in high school, 12<sup>th</sup> grade, your last year—you sit for another exam. They call it Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education, KCSE. So, candidates for both KCSE and KCPE read other books that are not necessary textbooks for the class.

Likewise, Ezra reported that in Kakuma, exam-related materials received preferential treatment for limited typing and copying resources:

Especially during exams, the instructor would write the handwritten exams and then take it to the typist. In high school, they have only one typing machine, so the typist has to type each sample for each subject, and then they take it to the UNHCR compound where it can be reproduced with the machines there.

Certification and credentialing played an important role in the participants' current experience of literacy in schooling in the United States. When asked about what he finds difficult about school literacy, Francis responded:

General maths was hard. Organic chemistry, too, was very hard, but I passed it, but I did not do good in maths. I was having four classes or five . . . I did not pass my maths, so I have to take it to get associate's [degree] in chemical technology. Otherwise I can't take my two physics classes. . . . I'm trying to get an associate's degree in chemical technology . . . to go and work for a pharmaceutical company.

Ezra also indicated the importance of credentials in American education for the southern Sudanese refugees. He explained that shortly after he arrived in the United States,

I passed the GED, and I was given my GED diploma right away. So when I came here, the same thing happened to me at [the local] community college. I did not get any remedial or developmental classes at LCC. I was tested and I was placed . . . right away.

... 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.

Ezra's statement also suggests that many southern Sudanese refugees struggle somewhat when they enter the U.S. schooling system. Many are required to take what Ezra calls "remedial classes"—that is, basic English classes, despite the fact that they have been educated in and have communicated in English for about a decade. On many occasions, I observed Chol's roommate, John, struggling with worksheets for his ESL class. Sometimes, John asked me for help—and even I (a native speaker of English!) occasionally struggled to ascertain the answers these decontextualized skill-and-drill pages were looking for. Like many Sudanese refugees in this community, John was required to complete these "remedial" ESL courses, despite the fact that he could engage in lengthy, in-depth conversations in English. And, like many, John could not complete higher-level courses until he had passed the ESL certification requirements.

Certification and credentialing are therefore of high importance to the southern Sudanese refugees. If students succeed in Kakuma schools, they receive Kenyan Certificates of Primary and Secondary Education; schooling in the United States results in high school diplomas and other degrees. In contrast, out-of-school literacies had a very strong community focus for Sudanese refugees, both in Africa and in the U.S. Literacies in the domains of religion, interpersonal communication, community information/news, and community organization all involved methods of linking lives within the community.

Although analysis revealed that the participants used literacy in a rich variety of ways in their daily and community lives, they clearly equated literacy with education and schooling. For Chol, literacy “means learning.” Similarly, Francis described literacy as “gaining access to education”, both inside and outside of formal school settings. And Ezra explained, “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.”

The mismatch between in-school and out-of-school literacies can be illustrated further by the disparity in the types of texts used in each context. Texts *read* in the school domain include textbooks, course syllabi, homework packets, newspapers, Internet websites, and reference books; texts *written* in this domain included class notes, research papers, emails, and essays. Participants used a much larger variety of texts in the four other, more community-oriented domains of religion, interpersonal communication, community information/news, and community organization. For example, texts *read* and *written* within these domains included the Bible and other religious texts, sermons, listserv and Internet discussion board postings, websites, email, newsletters, newspapers, magazines, articles for various news media, meeting notes, a variety of books, and all sorts of letters.

A further mismatch can be seen in observations of Sudanese refugees who function quite well with English and who use English for a variety of authentic literacy practices in the U.S. context, but who struggle with decontextualized worksheets for required ESL classes. Schools in the Kakuma Refugee Camp, at the very least, appeared to do a slightly better job of incorporating community literacies in the school domain by allowing students to read the Bible in their local languages. Schools in the U.S., unless they are church-supported, are not allowed to include religious material, thus depriving many students of a vital and relevant text in the course of

literacy instruction. There is growing evidence of the effectiveness of including this sort of authentic text in literacy instruction as well as authentic purposes for reading and/or writing them (Purcell-Gates, Degener, & Jacobson, 2002; Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall & Tower, 2003; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, in press).

### Language Issues Shape Print Literacy Practices for Sudanese Refugees

#### *Language, Literacy, Religion, and School Intertwined into a Whole*

The boundaries between language, literacy, religion and schooling are blurred among the southern Sudanese refugee community. In many cases, religion determined opportunities for schooling for refugees, which in turn determined the languages and literacies refugees learned and practiced. For example, Ezra explained that “my academic work is all in English, because I started my education in English. But, I’m a teacher for Dinka, so if I’m teaching in the church, then I use Dinka.”

Religion and schooling were clearly linked for Sudanese in Africa. Historically, schools in southern Sudan were built and run by Christian missions (Deng, 1995), and “southerners saw the Christian mission as a source of literacy” (p. 207). Christian missions not only taught English to the southern Sudanese, but they also provided the only opportunities for southern Sudanese to become literate in their local languages. Public schools throughout the Sudan promoted Islam and taught Arabic. Religion, therefore, often determined whether or not one could attend school, because Christian students were reluctant to attend the Islamized public schools. Religion also determined which language one learned, since public Islamic schools taught Arabic and Christian schools taught English and local languages. As Ezra explained,

There were church schools where Dinka was taught, but not in public schools, only in church schools. In public schools, Islam is taught. Churches in general [teach local language literacy], even churches in Khartoum also teach how to read and write.

Language and literacies traveled both ways across the border between religion and schooling in Africa. Religious-oriented schools provided refugees with opportunities to learn languages and literacies, and public schools in the Kakuma Refugee Camp also brought religion into the daily routines of the school. Religious literacies played a prominent role at the beginning of the school day, according to Chol: “During the school prayer in the morning, for the whole assembly in the morning, then a student can—each student has a duty to read the Bible.” Students took turns leading the morning prayers and reading passages from the Bible, and this was the only time during the day when students were allowed to speak in their native languages. Chol clarified that, for the morning prayers, the language “doesn’t matter. People will just come and pray. She [the prayer leader] can pray in her language. After prayer, say ‘amen,’ then people say ‘amen.’”

#### *Print Literacy is Tied to English*

*Lack of Dinka texts.* Print literacy for the participants in this study therefore is more closely linked to the English language than it is to Dinka or other local languages. The focus on English literacy exists for two primary reasons, according to the participants. First, the printed texts available to southern Sudanese in Africa were written primarily in English; few texts beyond the Bible and other religious writing were available in local languages. Ezra explained the lack of printed texts in Dinka: “There is nothing much done in the Dinka literacy development. . . . Now, attempts are being made to develop it, but at times that is met by limitation of resources and also lack of people who are competent or well-trained to read.” Ezra

himself believes passionately in the need to develop written materials in Dinka so that members of that tribe can be literate in their own language.

Low levels of local language literacy. Second, although all of the Sudanese refugees who participated in this study are literate in English, few are literate in their local languages. This lack of local language literacy is due to the fact that schooling in the Kakuma camp took place in English and KiSwahili, rather than in Sudanese local languages. Churches offered night classes in local language literacy, but Chol explained that those literacy classes were primarily attended by “people who need to be the pastors, who need to read the Dinka Bible, who need to read to interpret some other languages into Dinka language.”

*Preference for English.* Although the Sudanese participants in this study usually choose to communicate orally with each other in Dinka (or infrequently in Arabic), either in face-to-face conversations or over the telephone, they nonetheless typically choose to use English for written communication with other southern Sudanese. As Francis explained, “English has become the easiest way for me to communicate with people.” Participants in this study preferred English as a means of communication for several reasons: (1) Arabic carries a powerful stigma among the southern Sudanese participants; (2) English is a *lingua franca* among southern Sudanese who may speak different local dialects; and (3) many southern Sudanese are not literate in Dinka or other local languages.

#### *Arabic Carries a Powerful Stigma for the Southern Sudanese*

Although many might wonder at the preference for a colonialist language like English among the southern Sudanese, participants revealed a strong resistance to Arabic, the alternative language used as a *lingua franca* in the region. Most of the participants are fairly fluent in Arabic, and some can read and write it, although they indicated that they prefer not to. For the



southern Sudanese, Arabic carries a stigma of religious oppression, cultural assimilation, war, slavery, and genocide. As the official language of the Sudan, Arabic is the language of the dominant northern part of that country, and it has been systematically used to oppress and exclude southern Sudanese from full citizenship in the Sudan. As David explained, “If you don’t know Arabic, you are nothing” in the Sudan. Northern Sudanese use Arabic as a method of affirming their Muslim identity (Deng, 1995), and it has also been used as a means of forcing southern Sudanese to assimilate into that identity. Ezra explained the government’s language, religious, and cultural agenda thus:

It [Arabic] has been forced on people. The government uses—it is the vision of the government of Sudan to Arabize the country. The government has persistently used Arabic as its policy to promote the vision. It has also used Islam to promote the vision. It has also used the culture, because the three go together—Arab culture goes together with language and also with religion, with Islam.

Because Arabic is the language of the northern Sudanese, it is linked in the minds of the southern Sudanese with slavery, oppression and forced religious conversion. Bok (2003) describes an incident where he attempted to speak to another enslaved Dinka boy:

Don’t ever talk to me in Dinka,” he warned. “Not even a ‘hello’. It will get me in trouble. You, too. They will beat us if we talk Dinka. They think we’re planning to do something wrong, to escape” (p. 60).

The participants in this study reflected the effects on the language attitudes of southern Sudanese who have been oppressed by the use of Arabic: “It’s [Arabic] a bad thing. It steals our language away in our minds,” said Chol. Therefore, participants viewed Arabic rather than English as the

colonizing language in the Sudan, and they did not believe that English carried the same negative stigma attached to Arabic.

*English is an Important Lingua Franca*

Although the majority of southern Sudanese speak Dinka, not all do. In this study, Francis was the only non-Dinka speaker; he speaks Madi. As noted above, he finds communication much easier in English, since he does not share a local language with most of the other refugees. English is therefore a particularly useful *lingua franca* for southern Sudanese. Not only is English the primary medium of communication for the southern Sudanese in America, but it was also the main language used in the Kakuma Refugee Camp, which shelters refugees from across eastern Africa: “I think the diversity in the group in Kakuma, and even within the Sudanese community itself, made it difficult given that there are different languages being spoken by different ethnic groups within the community,” Ezra explained. “It was not possible for the groups to use any particular local language other than English.”

Participants all expressed a belief that fluency in English is vital. Chol said, “English is important to communicate with many people around the world.” He also stressed the importance of English as a medium of communication with other Africans in Africa: “Most of the eastern Africans, they speak English . . . It’s better to speak English so that you can communicate with other African people.” English is not only a *lingua franca* among Africans who do not share a local language, but it is also a medium of communication for southern Sudanese who speak the same language, but who are not literate in that language. As described above, many southern Sudanese are not literate in their own languages, and they must therefore use English in written communication with each other. Finally, English is an important *lingua franca* for southern

Sudanese who are refugees because they have been resettled primarily in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Australia, which are all English-speaking countries.

Some of the participants in this study also expressed a belief that written correspondence must be conducted in English for reasons of national and international security. Chol believed that he was supposed to write letters in English

because the people who are in the post office, they couldn't read things if I write Dinka. .

. . Maybe there is another virus or what [in reference to the anthrax attacks of 2001]. If

they have to open the letter, they have to know what it says in the letter.

Francis similarly described the method by which the Red Cross mediated postal communication from the Kakuma Refugee Camp to the Sudan. He believed that the Red Cross required letters to be written in English:

If you write in a different language, they may tear up the paper, the message, because the Red Cross is not allowed to—there are some conditions for them. If you write in a different language, they may consider this is like you are communicating maybe in some spy language. Some of these letters or messages may go to government-controlled areas .

. . so, they don't allow people to write in different languages.

Ezra, however, indicated that these beliefs were false. He had both written and received letters in English, Dinka, and Arabic, all mediated by the Red Cross, and he explained that the Red Cross employed people who could translate in the event of a problem. It is interesting to note, however, that Francis' statement (as well as the vignette about the slave children above) indicate a strong belief that communication is monitored and that language choices can help protect one from suspicion and danger.

*The Need for Local Language Print Literacy*

English is clearly important for oral and written communication for the Sudanese refugees, but some of the participants in this study also felt strongly about the need to develop print literacy in Sudanese local languages as a way of both preserving their cultural identity and resisting the northern-dominated Sudanese government. Ezra feared that the lack of print literacy development in Dinka would spell the end of his culture: “If you don’t have the language, you don’t have the culture. Your language is your culture.” According to Ezra:

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.

The lack of community experts and elders is particularly difficult for the participants in this study, who are orphaned and who are therefore missing much of the cultural and traditional knowledge of prior generations. Deng (1995) explains that the Dinka people consider orphanhood to be an exceptionally deprived condition; it is therefore not surprising that the refugees might keenly feel the need to preserve their heritage in written form.

Some participants viewed local language print literacy as a means to resist the Sudanese government and to gain access to power in their native country. Ezra expressed indignation that the literate north of the Sudan was the one to write the history of his country:

There is no illiterate history of Sudan [meaning that only literate people control what is historically documented in print]. The history written is the biased one, written by the northern part of the country, so they have written it from their perspective. They are the people who are victimizing the other part of the country, and they should not be the ones to write it.

As described above, participants in this study believe that obtaining an education is one way of helping southern Sudanese left behind and of aiding the rebellion; Dinka print literacy is one very concrete way that the southern Sudanese can resist northern domination and assimilation. Chol explained that on the South's side of the war, "everything is communication in Dinka. Everything. Radio, what. For the army, it's Dinka . . . it confuses them [the government army] because they don't understand Dinka a lot!"

### Insights and Implications

This case study has used the literacy research agenda outlined by Luke (2003) as a framework to study the literacy practices among southern Sudanese refugees, and the results of this study paint a complex picture of literacy use in that community. Two of Barton and Hamilton's (2000) elements of literacy as social practice seem especially pertinent to this study: (1) Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices, and (2) Literacy is historically situated, and literacy practices are dynamic and changing. Each of the key domains for literacy practices of southern Sudanese refugees, both in the United States and in Africa, are embedded within the broader social goals of maintaining community and were purposeful toward that end. These literacy practices are historically situated within the contexts of life within the Kakuma Refugee Camp and as refugees spread around the world. These practices are also dynamic and changing as refugees incorporate the relatively new communicative technology (new to them, at least) of the Internet, and as they transform traditional storytelling practices into print literacies.

### *Connection between Language and Literacy*

This study among southern Sudanese refugees also illustrates that the connection between language and literacy may be more complicated than previous studies indicate. Although the

context for a participant's literacy practice often determined which language was used (e.g. an editorial column for a U.S. newspaper required the use of English), schooling also played a significant role in determining languages used, since many participants did not have an opportunity to learn literacy in their local languages, due to the language policy of the schools in the Kakuma Refugee Camp. English therefore is the "default" language for most participants' literacy practices.

Luke's (2003) suggestion that the issues of language rights, language loss, and the redistribution of resources through literacy education are test cases for democratic education seems especially pertinent in the case of southern Sudanese participants, who feel strongly about the need to protect and preserve their native languages. They want to tell their stories and their histories, and they want to do this in their local language—Dinka. One important implication from this is that curriculum and policy developers may want to consider that it is equally important to develop both local language and English literacies for Sudanese refugees. The UNHCR and other NGOs may want to investigate ways in which they can either incorporate local language literacy instruction into Kakuma schools or provide support for churches or other organizations that make such literacy instruction available. Refugee organizations in the United States may want to develop similar programs.

### *Issues of Identity and Community*

This study also highlights the increasing importance of issues concerning identity and community in literacy research. The participants in this study feel a strong need to maintain connections with the larger southern Sudanese community, which is now spread across the globe. Literacies of interpersonal communication, community information/news, and community organization within the southern Sudanese community serve this important function. The

emerging need among Sudanese refugees to share their stories with the larger world is also part of this issue of identity and community. As a cultural practice, storytelling has been transformed into a new literacy practice for the southern Sudanese refugees, and it is a transformation that has linked the southern Sudanese community to the global community.

Finally, this study addresses Luke's (2003) question about the ways in which school-based literacies interact and transact with out-of-school literacies. While participants in this study have been largely successful in school, their overall literacy practices do not reflect those that are practiced in schools. Recent research in adult literacy programs indicates that matching literacy instruction to authentic<sup>5</sup>, real-world purposes for literacy leads to positive changes in students' literacy practices. Students in classes that incorporated authentic purposes for literacy into literacy instruction not only read more often, but they also read and wrote more complex texts (Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, in press). Although researchers are still exploring the ways in which in-school and out-of-school literacy practices interact, it appears to be generally beneficial for school-based instruction to incorporate authentic texts and authentic purposes for reading and writing whenever possible. Schools, both in the U.S. and in refugee camps such as Kakuma, therefore may want to pay greater attention to the local literacies practiced by the communities that they serve. In the particular case of the participants in this study, school literacy instruction could be more authentic and more relative to refugees' lives by incorporating community literacy practices such as interpersonal communication, community organization, and community information/news into literacy instruction. Each of these domains contains powerful motivations for participants to practice various literacies, and incorporating them into school literacy instruction may help to make schooling a more meaningful and a more successful experience for refugees.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Northern Sudanese are not ethnically Arab, but they have been “Arabized” culturally, and they are lighter-skinned than their southern counterparts (Deng, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Some Sudanese refugees prefer to be called by their Sudanese names, while others go by their Christian names, which are more American-sounding. In assigning pseudonyms, I have honored participants’ choices.

<sup>3</sup> The Addis Ababa agreement granted regional autonomy to southern Sudan, creating conditions of relatively peaceful and harmonious interaction between the north and the south for nearly a decade (Deng, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Organizations such as UNICEF and the World Bank report that, as of 2000, the overall adult literacy rate in the Sudan was about 57%, with 69% of adult men and 46% of women considered literate. It is useful to remember, however, that these rates are averaged across the country as a whole; rates are likely much higher in the relatively more developed northern part of the Sudan as well as in urban areas, compared to rural villages in the southern Sudan. Organizations also report that literacy rates are currently on the decline in the Sudan, due to the civil war.

<sup>5</sup> Authenticity is defined as using texts that are either identical or very similar to those texts that occur in students’ daily lives, and using those texts in purposeful ways that reflect students’ actual uses of those texts outside of school. Examples of authentic literacy practices that easily translate to instructional contexts include reading a newspaper article or website for information, writing a letter, and reading instructions for how to do or make something.