

Belonging With the Lost Boys:  
The Mobilization of Audiences and Volunteers  
at a Refugee Community Center in Phoenix, Arizona

by

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## ABSTRACT

In 2001, a refugee group of unaccompanied minors known as the Lost Boys of Sudan began arriving in the United States. Their early years were met with extensive media coverage and scores of well-meaning volunteers in scattered resettlement locations across the country. Their story was told in television news reports, documentary films, and published memoirs. Updates regularly appeared in newsprint media. Scholars have criticized public depictions of refugees as frequently de-politicized, devoid of historical context, and often depicting voiceless masses of humanity rather than individuals with skills and histories (Malkki 1996, Harrell-Bond and Voutira 2007). These representations matter because they are both shaped by and shape what is possible in public discourse and everyday relations. This dissertation research creates an intersection where public representation and everyday practices meet. Through participant observation as a volunteer at a refugee community center in Phoenix, Arizona, this research explores the emotions, social roles and relations that underpin community formation, and investigates the narratives, representations, and performances that local Lost Boys and their publics engage in. I take the assertion that "refugee issues are one privileged site for the study of humanitarian interventions through which 'the international community' constitutes itself" (Malkki 1996: 378) and consider formation of local 'communities of feeling' (Riches and Dawson 1996) in order to offer a critique of humanitarianism as mobilized and enacted around the Lost Boys.

## DEDICATION

Many South Sudanese tell their stories in the hope that action will be taken to alleviate and prevent future suffering. This dissertation is dedicated in that same hope.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Have you heard of the Lost Boys of Sudan?”  
“Do you think I live in a cave? Of course I know about them!”  
- Conversation overheard at a public event where the Arizona Lost Boys Center (AZLBC) sent representatives in 2009.

This dissertation research is concerned with representation, perception and reception of refugees in the United States; and in particular, with the mobilization of humanitarianism among local publics surrounding the Lost Boys of Sudan<sup>1</sup> in Phoenix, Arizona. I posit that the narration of the Lost Boys’ journey is a trauma claim, is part of the process of constructing a cultural trauma, through which suffering is acknowledged, moral responsibility is defined or assigned, and social solidarities are expanded (Alexander 2004). I am interested in the constraints and opportunities afforded to human beings, as social roles are enacted in everyday encounters between Lost Boys and their publics (audiences and volunteers). The label, “Lost Boy” is viewed as a signifier constructed through multiple narratives, projections, representations, and performances. This label grants legitimacy not accessible to other refugees/immigrants because of a particular evocation in the public mind.

The story of the Lost Boys is well known to many U.S. audiences; images and records of their past, as well as the weight of expectation for their roles in rebuilding South Sudan, surround them. I suggest that audiences are emotionally and ideologically primed prior to meeting a Lost Boy, much as Massumi (2002a) describes audiences of (former President) Reagan: media representations transmit an incipience, which is actualized through various channels – family, church, school, etc. The interpretive work is done in various community groups. The story of the Lost Boys, as told by media in the U.S., becomes an “American” story, bolstering particular

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<sup>1</sup> I made an explicit decision to use the name the Lost Boys throughout this dissertation, without the use of quotation marks, to indicate the degree of acceptance with which the community regards and identifies with the name.

nationalist myths and ideologies (Robins 2003, McKinnon 2008) and presenting incomplete or erroneous information about the refugees themselves (Willis 2004), while at the same time, reinforcing the semantic authority (Felman 2002) of the Lost Boys and hailing them as heroic survivors of trauma. These critiques of mass media representation provide a starting point for this dissertation.

This dissertation research examines representation and subject-making from the bottom-up, illuminating and mapping the multiple positions and communities that emerge as issues regarding immigration, race, and cultural expression meet and intersect in the lives of South Sudanese and their local publics through the everyday remaking of the Lost Boys' public image. I seek to unravel and trace these understandings through interviews with Lost Boys, audiences, and volunteers, and through evaluation of my own experiences as a volunteer with the Arizona Lost Boys Center (AZLBC, a nonprofit community center in Phoenix). The main and final aim of this research is to offer a critique of the humanitarianism that is enacted around the Lost Boys.

## **RESEARCH SITE**

Greater Phoenix received more Lost Boys for resettlement than any other city in the United States (History of AZ Lost Boys Center), with 475 Sudanese refugees arriving to Arizona in 2001, according to the Arizona Department of Economic Security. The Arizona Lost Boys Center (AZLBC) was opened in 2003 through the efforts of local volunteers who wanted to assist the Lost Boys, a Leadership Council of South Sudanese, and a grant from the Department of Health and Human Services. When I began volunteering in 2009, the Center was run by a staff of four, nearly all part-time, employees. Between one to three South Sudanese were participating in meetings of the Board of Directors; the remaining, majority of members were local volunteers. The other one or two of the South Sudanese representatives on the Board were Lost Boys from the Leadership Council, a group formed by Lost Boys who are elected by their peers to lead the community.

According to a publicity document “The Story of the AZ Lost Boys Center,” it was the desire of one of the Lost Boys in the Leadership Council to establish a place where “the refugees could hold meetings, get support and education, socialize, and play their music. Phoenix Lost Boys urgently needed a meeting location that would support the communal way of life that is so important to their culture.” The need for a safe social space is highlighted by the fact that the young men frequently attracted police attention or intervention when congregated in groups. Among the Center’s facilities and programs were: a computer room with free Internet access and printing, a game/recreation room, twice-monthly professional development workshops, the “cow room” where ceramic cows were sculpted and glazed, and meeting space for use by Lost Boys, Lost Girls, and the broader South Sudanese community. The Center website was also extensive, with many personal biographies, photos, past accomplishments, and current event listings.

The mission and the target ‘clients’ of the Center have evolved over the years. In the beginning, the Center acted as a safe haven for social gatherings and provided emergency assistance and scholarship funds to the Lost Boys. Over time, as funding sources changed, so did the mission and target clients (in general, government funding is only available for recently arrived refugees; therefore, the Center had to show it was providing necessary services to the population justified in other ways, for example, by assisting the working poor). The Center also began to extend a welcome to include the broader South Sudanese community. The Center had always projected a commitment to accepting and representing members of all Southern Sudanese tribes (there are about sixty; the majority of Sudanese in Phoenix are Dinka or Nuer). Southern Sudanese families and individuals who arrived in the United States during the 1990s tended to interpret the AZLBC as being only for Lost Boys until recent years.

I selected the AZLBC as the home base for this research because it functions as an intersectional site for multiple communities, including the Lost Boys and the broader South Sudanese community, and local publics and supporters of the Lost Boys who live in the Phoenix metropolitan area. The Center functions as a focal point for media contacts; the *New York Times*, *BBC News*, and *National Public Radio* have all contacted the Center when producing stories

about the Lost Boys and the South Sudanese diaspora. Public officials, heads of NGOs, and politicians have also made a point to stop and visit the Center when in town. In this way, the Center serves as a site which not only hosts internal community meetings and negotiations, but which also produces the public image of the Lost Boys and South Sudanese diaspora to wider audiences and communities.

I volunteered at the AZLBC from 2009 – 2011. This research was conducted during a time of multiple transitions: the Center operations were limited by the economic crisis and recession so that several emergency assistance programs were cut, in late 2009 the Board of Directors announced a transition of the leadership personnel positions to be staffed by South Sudanese, and at the end of 2011 the Center itself announced several major changes: a new, more finely targeted mission, a new location in Phoenix, and a name change (the Center exists now as The Lost Boys Center for Leadership Development). The timing of this research turned out to be fortuitous, as during these transitions there were many community conversations wherein the mission, goals, and future direction of efforts were discussed and honed. I participated in three programs as a volunteer: the Cow Project, meetings with the public speakers panel, and the launching of a new micro-enterprise called *So Sudan*. Before I outline each of these programs, it will be helpful to gain a brief overview of the local South Sudanese community, including the young men who identify as the Lost Boys.

**Who are the Lost Boys?** Chapter two will provide contextual information about the Sudanese conflicts that created refugees, and chapter three will provide a more lengthy discussion of the significance of the name “The Lost Boys of Sudan,” as well as detailing local self-representation, but some preliminary clarifying remarks are necessary here. The Lost Boys are the young men, considered orphans or unaccompanied minors, who were resettled to the U.S., Canada, and Australia from Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya in 2001, after living in Kakuma nearly a decade. Official records are that 3,600 Lost Boys and 87 Lost Girls were resettled to the United States in 2001, including 475 Lost Boys to Phoenix. According to staff at the AZLBC, the



broader South Sudanese population in the Phoenix Metro area is estimated to number around five thousand. This population is mostly made up of families who had the means to flee Sudan in the 1980s and 1990s, and who arrived in the U.S. as refugees shortly thereafter. Together with their children, some of whom are now teenagers or adults the same age as the Lost Boys, I refer to this population as the greater South Sudanese community in Phoenix. It became apparent, both through community meetings and through statements made to me by individuals, that the Lost Boys and the South Sudanese families kept distance from each other until recent years. Some volunteers said that the South Sudanese elders and families “wanted nothing to do with the Lost Boys,” while some South Sudanese indicated to me that they felt the AZLBC was for the Lost Boys only.

Let me also note some distinctions among my contacts with the Lost Boys in Phoenix. A small number of young men, about one dozen, took part in the sometimes-paid, sometimes volunteer work of representing the AZLBC at public events. Since my own involvement at the AZLBC was active participation in planning and attending public events, I spent most of my time working alongside these few Lost Boys who were engaged in public presentations, as well as the young men who held staff positions at the Center. During the time I was a volunteer, up to five Lost Boys were employed as staff at the AZLBC in various positions, including Program Manager, Outreach Manager, and managing the Cow Project. Kuol Awan, a Lost Boy, replaced John Vack as executive director at the end of 2009.

Mr. Vack characterized the local Lost Boys to me in the following way: he described three general groups. The first group, he said, are excelling. These young men have graduated with college or advanced degrees, are employed, and leaders in the community. The second group of young men are steadily employed in lower-paying jobs, who had achieved relatively stable lives. The third group are experiencing difficulties ranging from unemployment to problems with alcohol, traffic tickets and/or accidents, or violence. The public speakers panel included young men from the first and second groups. Lost Boys from the third group frequented the AZLBC to socialize and play cards in the “game room”. Mr. Vack and the staff at the AZLBC planned events and

activities specifically to invite and encourage participation of Lost Boys from all three groups. They also introduced me to individuals, including women and elders in the South Sudanese community, with the intent that I gain contacts and learn from perspectives across the community.

**The Cow Project.** South Sudanese children hand sculpt small figures, such as cattle, people, and huts, from riverside clay; these figures become the children's beloved toys. A few Lost Boys who were resettled in U.S. cities showed this practice to their friends and mentors; in Phoenix, Lost Boys and volunteers decided to build a small program whereby the handmade cow figures could be sold to raise scholarship money. This became the Cow Project.

When I began volunteering in 2009, the Cow Project was managed and marketed by two Lost Boys who were paid as part-time staff. As the financial crisis and reduced funding took a toll on AZLBC operations, the Cow Project lost its dedicated staff, and was managed on a periodic contractual basis as needed for special events. The Lost Boys Center for Leadership Development no longer produces cows.

The Cow Project worked in the following way: young men would take home a bag of clay and shape the handmade ceramic cows, which were then glazed and fired at the AZLBC (see Figure 1). Cows were sold online and at local churches, art fairs, and speaking events; the funds were made available as scholarships to the South Sudanese who were attending college (See Figure 2). Scholarship grants from the Cow Project in 2008 totaled almost \$8,000. When I began volunteering, the Cow Project was in full operation, but the scholarship grants had been put on hold due to slowed cow sales and dwindling funds. It was determined in conversations with the staff that I could help the Cow Project team make stronger connections in the surrounding community, and help market and participate at events in order to raise cow sales. My aim was to assist in ways that teach and pass along strategies and skills as well as help introduce the Lost Boys staff to a broader community network.



Figure 1. Diing Arok (right) unpacks new cows, and Mama Achan (left) paints them.



Figure 2. Chol Deng and Diing Arok greet visitors at an art fair.



*Figure 3. Chol Deng shows a finished cow.*

The significance of cows to the Southern Sudanese is difficult to overemphasize. Cattle are integral to Southern Sudanese economy and culture, a trait that is shared by many of the otherwise culturally diverse groups of the region (see Table 1). “At the age of five or six,’ said Mangok Mach, a senior business administration major at New Hampshire, ‘you are taken to the cattle camp to learn how to care for cattle, calves at first. What you know is that cattle are what provide everything for you. They are the one source of life’” (Chanoff 2005). Storytellers often begin the journey of the Lost Boys with the fact that many Lost Boys survived attacks on their villages because they were away at cattle camp, tending to the community’s cows.

Table 1

*Significance of Cattle to the Pastoral Peoples of Southern Sudan*

Aspect of society	How cattle are important
Economy	Cows are fundamental to the economy of the tribes in Southern Sudan. Cows are not only a form of payment (price for one can range from \$500 for a cow to \$1200 or more for a bull); they are living animals that require care and so represent an investment and commitment. It is this commitment that is consecrated when a dowry of cows is paid to a bride's family. Dowry is only accepted in cows, not cash.
Sustenance	Some cows are kept in a hut next to the home for access to milk. The majority of a herd will be kept some distance away in "cattle camp" and watched over by the young men and boys. Cattle are rarely slaughtered for food, except on rare and special occasions. Some of the cattle are revered and considered so important that they will never be slaughtered.
Revered pets	Some cows are loved so much, they are considered to be members of the family. This animal knows his or her name and will come when called. Cows are decorated in many ways: colorful belts, bells, and tassels. Young men compose and sing songs about their cows. Dancers imitate the shape of a cow's horns with their arms held high and curved.
Names	There are hundreds of names for cows based on their colors, patterns of spots, and decorative embellishments. Many of the names of people from South Sudan are also the names that describe different cows.

The Cow Project is significant for several reasons. The ceramic cow is recognized as an important symbol. Local audiences appreciate the opportunity to support the education fund and the South Sudanese community by purchasing a handmade item that is associated with the story of the Lost Boys. For Lost Boys, the Cow Project offers a way to reconnect with a childhood custom and to share cultural practices and stories with local publics, and to represent the pride and dignity with which the cattle herding tribes in Southern Sudan regard their way of life. During my first year as a volunteer, financial issues at the AZLBC spurred the Board of Directors to



consider eliminating important programs and services; the significance of the Cow Project was made evident as community members argued for keeping the program. Most Board members agreed the Project should be maintained, even if it were not profitable.

**The Speakers' Panel.** During my second year as a volunteer with the AZLBC, I shifted to focus on working with the group of young men who act as public representatives. This was a small number of individuals, between six to twelve young men, who made themselves available to speak at local events. The AZLBC received several calls per week from schools, churches, rotary clubs, and similar organizations, seeking guest speakers or group tours of the Center. The public speakers were often positioned by the inviting organization as role models for different audiences. Their stories and perspectives are highly valued as contributions to local communities. The Lost Boys themselves have been characterized as celebrity refugees (Bixler 2005; DeLuca 2009).

Many of the young men have little or no training in public speaking, having developed their skills through experience. Through discussion with staff, it was determined that a monthly group meeting would be beneficial; speakers could share their strategies, experiences, and ask for guidance or advice from each other. At two different events, speakers were filmed and the videos were watched and discussed during our meetings. Topics of discussion ranged from ways to refine presentation skills, to effective storytelling techniques, to story content and ways to respond to difficult questions.

Neither the AZLBC nor the Lost Boys would require a fee for appearing at an event. Usually, an event organizer would make a voluntary donation to the Center, and the speaker would be given a small fee out of this, akin to "gas money" to cover the cost of transportation. Following the transformation of the AZLBC into the Lost Boys Center for Leadership Development, the Center began charging a flat rate for public appearances. This change also reduced the number of engagement requests.

**So Sudan.** In 2011, three women, Amguma Deng, Nyakour Kogooa, and Teresa Alal Marino, began working with Ann Wheat, co-founder of the AZLBC, and a few other volunteers to start a new micro-enterprise they decided to call So Sudan. The name refers to South Sudan, as well as the homonyms *sew* and *sow*. The women make traditional African clothing and beadwork by hand, and hoped to involve other women from the community, who would learn valuable production and business skills. My involvement was minimal, although I attended many meetings as a note taker, did some coordinating to connect the women with a local craft fair, and helped one weekend to transform what had been the AZLBC “game room” into the So Sudan shop, which was open to the public. So Sudan appeared alongside the Cow Project at two AZLBC events, however, they eventually decided to continue their efforts separate from the AZLBC.



*Figure 4.* Amguma Deng, Nyakour Kogooa, and Teresa Alal Marino, founders of So Sudan.

## **METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION**

The methodological framework from which I sought guidance is participatory action research (PAR), which requires immersion and aims to transform individual and group practices through cycles of self-reflection (Kemmis and McTaggart 2005). I found PAR to be compatible

with my desire to engage in collaborative, critical, and practical volunteer work with a community. PAR engages people in examining their knowledge and ways in which they interpret the world, in order to understand how these frames constrain their actions: “participatory action research is directed toward studying, reframing, and reconstructing social practices” Kemmis and McTaggart (2005: 566). The two processes of my dissertation research and the Center activities are parallel and can inform each other through PAR. Ongoing reflection, assessment, and communication allow actors to perform different roles as needs change.

I began volunteering at the Arizona Lost Boys Center in Phoenix, in April, 2009. I had previously volunteered for a short time as a tutor in 2005, and was known as a past volunteer with a local refugee resettlement agency. I explained to staff that I was thinking about volunteering as part of my dissertation research regarding art, cultural expression, and social change, and was invited to help out with the Cow Project at the Center. An early conversation with then executive director, John Vack, outlined other areas where I might also assist: speakers’ panel training, English language or professional skills tutoring, and online social media/social networking development.

I conducted data collection through two means: participant observation and open-ended interviews. The objective of participant observation is to develop a geography of everyday experience and gain a more intimate understanding of a community; the method is closely associated with social anthropology (Kearns 2000). I kept extensive field notes while I volunteered at the AZLBC in Phoenix. In addition to acting as a weekly volunteer at the AZLBC, I attended staff meetings, meetings of the Board of Directors, South Sudanese community meetings, and special events, including speaking events at schools and churches, art fairs where cows were sold, and several more elaborately planned fundraisers. I spent time in the “game room” at the AZLBC, in order to connect with some of the young men who came to the Center to play cards and dominoes, but who did not otherwise engage in representing the AZLBC or Lost Boys at public events. I conducted thirty-three open-ended interviews and transcribed each



interview verbatim. The interviewees included thirteen South Sudanese, ten volunteers from the AZLBC, and ten organizers of events that featured the Lost Boys as public speakers.

I indicated to the staff that I intended to share my observations and writing summaries so that there is transparency, mutual communication, and opportunity for feedback. I spoke up several times during meetings and through daily interactions with staff or Board members, sometimes voicing disagreement or arguing a particular point. I did not establish as strong a reciprocal relationship with the Board of Directors as I did with the AZLBC staff, even though I attended monthly board meetings. There were also several occasions where I did not give input that I thought might not be well received. I have deep respect for the community members, who give their time and efforts to help and assist each other. I may raise some issues within this dissertation that will be considered private or offensive, and I do so with much thoughtfulness and care, with the intention to provide a record of a certain time within a certain community, which welcomed me and encouraged me to dig deep (several South Sudanese admonished me to not shy away from “the dark side” of the Lost Boys). I hope this research will be useful to my dear friends, and to others who are engaged in similar community work.

Finally, I would like to point out that throughout this dissertation, I draw from select media accounts of the Lost Boys’ story (including an episode of the television show *60 Minutes* and several documentary films) in addition to observations from local events and personal interviews. I do not perform a systematic review of mass media accounts, but rather drew from the materials that the Lost Boys in Phoenix used to assist their public presentations.

**My role as an observant-participant and challenges encountered.** Like many in the United States, I first met the Lost Boys on television, in an episode of *60 Minutes*. I was transfixed to see the young men who had survived horrors, and were now in the United States, asking American mentors if it was safe to walk in a public park (“There are no lions?”), laughing at the absurdity of a flushing toilet, and deftly opening a can of food with a giant knife. I probably cried. I hoped with all my heart that they would be met with great kindness and respect. I hated to think

that their hopes and dreams might eventually be met with disillusionment. I did not want these young men to become disappointed by the realities of everyday life in the United States, especially everyday life for the working poor and for racial minorities and immigrants. Would education really be able to save them? Would my fellow audiences listen to and learn from these young men? These were my thoughts, which reflect my own feelings and worries, and I think this is part of the power of the story and signifier of the Lost Boys: audiences identify emotionally with the story and with the Lost Boys, even though our life circumstances may be very different.

This research was undertaken from the perspective of a volunteer. Although I attended South Sudanese community meetings and some church services, and I did meet and become friendly with several South Sudanese elders and youngsters, I did not attempt to gain insider status within the local South Sudanese community. I did not learn Dinka or Nuer language. One question is, since Lost Boys are presenting themselves to an audience, how does that impact the ways that they tell their stories? This might be answered through an insider perspective, but I do not offer one.

My role as an observant participant involved challenges and ethical questions, as well as emotional rewards. The Lost Boys welcomed my presence as a volunteer; any reader who has spent time with the community will recognize and affirm that the South Sudanese are gracious and warmly expressive in their thanks. In keeping with my intent to work alongside community members in ways that they themselves found relevant and effective, I set to work in the Cow Project and with the Public Speakers' Panel. However, it became apparent that although the larger community of Lost Boys adamantly touted the value of these programs, it was difficult to find volunteers among the Lost Boys to staff them and keep them going. We actually had to cancel attendance at some events which expressly invited representatives from the Cow Project.

Part of the problem became clearer to me when I tried to recruit volunteers from among South Sudanese to participate in a photo/storyboard project that was intended for public display. I sat down and spoke with one Lost Boy who had been recommended to head the project. He countered that one of the staff should do the work, since the staff receives pay. Here it emerged

that there was a disconnect between the role of the AZLBC as understood by volunteers, audiences, and staff (some of whom are South Sudanese), and some of the other Lost Boys. The Lost Boys, many of whom struggle with poverty, unemployment, or work multiple minimum-wage jobs, felt they should be compensated for any work performed in service of the AZLBC. Volunteering is fine for rich people, but why should the Lost Boys volunteer their time to make the AZLBC more wealthy? I tried, unsuccessfully it seemed, to locate activities that would draw participation from the larger population of Lost Boys. I pointed out that volunteering or interning to learn new skills is often an important part of the educational experience of local college students; why weren't Lost Boys partnered with mentors at the AZLBC to learn skills necessary for running the Center's programs? I did my best to maintain a presence among the young men who socialized at the Center, not just the few young men who were active in public representation, and I continued to ask questions. The answers they gave me ranged from requests for better computers or services like childcare at the AZLBC, to the request for help to become leaders of their communities. I think that the transition of the AZLBC to the Lost Boys Center for Leadership Development is an earnest and worthwhile effort to assist the young men in their goals and thus to address their trauma claim regarding the conditions of suffering that persist in South Sudan.

Writing this dissertation presented additional challenges. One of the main questions that emerged from my proposal defense, prompted by my supervisory committee, was that, although the Lost Boys clearly benefit from their heightened public image, to what extent might they also be restricted, limited, or captured by it? Scholarly literature regarding refugees and representation is rife with critiques of silenced, voiceless subjects, locked into powerless positions and lacking the ability to address their own needs (discussed in chapter 3, see Malkki 1996, Szczepanikova 2010). I wholeheartedly agreed with Robins' (2003) critique that newsprint coverage of the Lost Boys served to portray to readers a heartwarming picture of our own generosity, while simply using the South Sudanese to reflect idealized "American" values. Yet, I was reluctant to press these questions to the young men, for fear of offending them by insinuating that they are being

exploited<sup>2</sup>. In presenting these questions in my writing, am I betraying the community that trusted me?

I ran into similar trouble regarding the issue of race in the United States. It seemed clear to me this was an important subject, considering the history and current inequalities in this country. However, many of the Lost Boys would laugh through a conversation about race, in a way that seemed to dismiss it as irrelevant. I worried, would I offend the Lost Boys if I insisted upon race's significance? Am I somehow suggesting that the Lost Boys are deluded in their assertions that race does not configure their lives in the U.S.? Am I betraying the kind, generous volunteers by suggesting that white elitism goes unchecked? How can there be the perpetuation of oppression among people who are so *nice*<sup>3</sup>? I think through some of these complexities in chapter five.

Finally, one of this dissertation's main lines of inquiry is reception of the Lost Boys' story; how and when audience identifications promote empathy, understanding and healing, and when is identification more akin to appropriation, misuse, or even exploitation? I am implicated in these questions, too, as someone who is appropriating and retelling a larger story about the Lost Boys' reception as part of earning a doctorate degree. It's true that I stand to personally benefit, yet I pursue this research with another aim and a wider benefit in mind, to examine the ethical implications of the particular type of humanitarianism that is constructed around the Lost Boys. My thoughts are: we all appropriate stories. We take in stories, consume them, retell them emphasizing our own critical elements, and yes, make them our own, because we recognize ourselves in others. This recognition is what makes it possible to extend solidarity. The retellings of a story give it continual life and dissemination. The extreme alternative is the unspeakability trope (Hirsch and Spitzer 2009): the assertion that a tragedy is unimaginable, unfathomable,

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<sup>2</sup> Many – but not all – of the Lost Boys, when asked about the way their story is represented in the media, respond that everything about their history is portrayed, except Sudanese politics (which, many young men said, is very complicated). There seem to be no qualms regarding the nature of truth and representation; they are faithfully one and the same. However, many of these same young men also responded that they do not follow public media representations (newsprint, television, movies, autobiographical books) about the Lost Boys, because they already know the story and do not wish to repeat it.

<sup>3</sup> The quote, "Are these nice men, or are they oppressive? I thought I had to choose. It hadn't occurred to me that you could be both." is from an interview with Peggy McIntosh, a scholar of privilege. See Rothman 2014.

unrepresentable, and thus unrelatable. The important questions to ask, then, to the specter of appropriation are: what happens to authority, autonomy, and voice? This line of inquiry emphasizes questions such as, who has the authority and the means to decide and broadcast the meaning of a story? Although justice may not be within the power of the people telling the story, is their claim at least recognized in the way that they wish, and in a way which addresses the source of suffering?

What emerges here is thus, of course, my version of the story of a particular course in time, based on my experience as a volunteer. Let me state clearly that I do not consider myself immune from or “above” any of the critiques leveled (at conceptions of humanitarianism or otherwise) in this dissertation.

**Describing fixity and flux.** Throughout this study, I employ the vocabularies associated with social constructionism, representation and signification, and nonrepresentational theories of affect. These approaches are not incompatible, although they describe the world from different vantage points and they describe different dimensions of experience and reality. Each of these approaches directs our attention to the different ways that the world (continually) comes into being.

A social constructivist perspective suggests that positions may be identified in a social grid or matrix (for example, gender, sexuality, social class). Positionality tells us about power and belonging, and offers a compelling anthropological explanation for behavior rather than individual psychology (Douglas and Calvez 1990). The world is made through performance, and meaning is reflected or projected through symbolic order onto bodies, landscapes, etc. (Anderson and Harrison 2010). This results in an epistemological problem: the world and its meanings are divided. On the other hand, theorists of affect argue that “constructivist models leave out the residue or excess that is not socially produced, and that constitutes the very fabric of our being” (Hemmings 2005: 549). Nonrepresentational theorists seek to regain an animate understanding of the world, and view the fixity of a pre-formed social grid as limited and partial. For example,

Massumi (2002a) refers to signification and coding as “stop-operations”. Social constructionist models are not wrong, but “their sphere of applicability must be recognized as limited to a particular mode of existence, or a particular dimension of the real (the degree to which things coincide with their own arrest)” (Massumi 2002a: 7).

There are numerous conceptualizations that forefront the nonrepresentationalist ethos. Massumi (2002a) asserts a dynamic unity or continuity in movement. Saldanha introduces viscosity to describe “a concept of space in which fixity can *emerge from* flux under certain conditions” [original emphasis] (Saldanha 2004: 18). And Cresswell’s (2006) discussion of dance is used to bring together and engage both these two ways of understanding the world: “to conceive of representation (context) and non-representation (practice) held together – albeit sometimes in tension – rather than effecting a complete reversal of the earlier disciplinary tradition when signifying (con)texts were privileged over social actions” (Lorimer 2008: 554). Thus, neither representation nor nonrepresentational theories have the upper hand in this study; both are engaged to describe the world of the Lost Boys and their publics.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

Scholarly discussion of public representation of refugees has provided a valuable critique and is the starting point for this research. However, the top-down approach (examination of public media) does not examine how people interpret and apply these representations in their own lives and daily decision-making. This dissertation research examines representation from the bottom-up, exploring and mapping the multiple positions and communities that emerge as issues regarding immigration, race, and cultural expression meet and intersect in the lives of South Sudanese and their local supporters through the everyday remaking of the Lost Boys public image. This research is significant for understanding processes of refugee adaptation, microsocial navigations of race relations in the U.S., and the role of emotions in constituting social relations and community belonging.

The main contribution of this work is the illumination of the conceptual space where an ethical connection is made and where humanitarian action is compelled (following Suski 2012). I have assembled a frame to think through or better understand how the Lost Boys signifier is received by local publics. This was prompted by the questions, why do the Lost Boys attract so much attention, and yet, why is this attention so limited? Why doesn't this attention lead to awareness of other, related issues in the lives of the South Sudanese, or awareness of other groups of refugees or immigrants?

We will proceed in the following course: in chapter two, I situate the story of the Lost Boys in a short geographical description of Sudan, its civil wars, and human rights violations connected with development of oil fields. In chapter three, I briefly summarize arguments drawn from bodies of literature regarding representation of refugees, political implications of emotion and affect, and the social construction of moral obligation, or the preconditions to humanitarian action. Then I proceed through two chapters where I introduce and analyze my observations: in chapter four, I present the narrative of the Lost Boys as a trauma claim and evaluate ways that the story is told and received, and in chapter five, I investigate performative aspects of public and everyday interactions and the social roles that Lost Boys and volunteers take on. The final chapter draws all of these elements together through the concept of contingent communities of feeling, aligned in terms of the various understandings of the Lost Boys signifier, in an effort to scrutinize the ethical character of humanitarianism that is enacted around the Lost Boys.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE SUDANESE CIVIL WARS AND THE ORIGIN OF THE LOST BOYS

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in 2011 as part of a peace negotiation in 2005, ending a series of civil wars and internecine conflicts that had pitted not only Sudan and South Sudan against each other, but also many of the Southern Sudanese ethnic groups against each other as well, resulting in social fragmentation and the deaths and displacement of millions. “These protracted internal conflicts have caused the death of over 2.5 million Sudanese since 1983 and the displacement of more than 5 million others” (Jok 2007: 15). Sudan is a country of nearly 200 major ethnic and linguistic groups, plus another 300 smaller groups, all belonging to various religious traditions (Jok 2007). Accounts of the civil war (1956 – 2005) usually explain its origin in terms of conflicts for resources, enacted and understood through the prisms of race and religion. Sudan’s borders, along with other African countries, were drawn by European imperialists without regard to the cultural complexity, settlement and seasonal migration patterns, or historical relations of the people. There is a history of “centuries of exploitation and slave-raiding by the ‘Arab’ North against the ‘African’ South” (Johnson 2003: 1). It is also generally agreed that violence has been an instrument deployed to capture and maintain control over oil-producing areas (located in the South); oil revenue has funded the purchase of sophisticated military equipment used (by the North) to attack and remove people from the land. This chapter outlines the physical and cultural geography of Sudan and South Sudan, gives a basic account of important historical events concerning the civil wars and South Sudanese independence, reviews documented human rights abuses associated with the development of oil fields in South Sudan, and describes the activities of several groups in the United States, who pushed for legislative and humanitarian efforts to assist in Sudan. These lines of inquiry are all important to understand the journey of the war-orphaned children, some of whom became known as the Lost Boys of Sudan.



## PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

The North and South of formerly unified Sudan exhibit distinct physiographic features. North Sudan is hot and dry, with less than seven percent arable land. The arid desert is subject to periodic, persistent droughts. The relatively flat terrain is cut by the Nile River. South Sudan is quenched with seasonal rainfall based on the annual movement of the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone. The terrain ranges from flat plains in the north to highlands in the south, where rainfall is also heaviest. The soils are much more fertile and support widespread cattle pasturing, as well as subsistence agriculture. The White Nile, flowing from the uplands in the south, feeds a vast flood plain including permanent swamp and seasonal wetlands, called the Sudd. This name is derived from the Arabic term *sadd*, which means barrier or obstacle. The Sudd takes up more than fifteen percent of the total land area of South Sudan, and did serve as a barrier, impeding Arab and European expeditions to the south (Human Rights Watch 2003).

Ethnic groups in (north) Sudan include approximately seventy percent Sudanese Arab, and also the Fur (for whom the Darfur state is named), Beja, Nuba, and Fallata minorities. There is also a group of nomadic Arabs, living in a stretch of the Sahel extending through Chad and Sudan known as the Baggara, and a branch of the Baggara Arabs known as the Missiriya. These groups are frequently mentioned in South Sudanese accounts, as their traditional living areas border each other and sometimes overlap, causing conflicts over grazing lands and access to water. Arabic and English are official languages. The majority religion in the north is Sunni Islam with a small Christian minority. Historical contact with several major civilizations (Egyptian, Christian, Arab-Islamic) left “long traditions of literacy, state-building, and centralized administration” (Akol 2007: 1) in the northern areas. South Sudan is populated mostly by Nilotic pastoralist groups; more than sixty different nationalities have been identified (Akol 2007). The largest groups are Dinka (thirty-six percent) and Nuer (sixteen percent), and smaller populations include Shilluk, Azande, Bari, Kakwa, Kuku, Murle, Mandari, Didinga, Ndogo, Bviri, Anuak, Lndi, Bongo, Lango, Dungotoni, and Acholi. Official languages are English and Arabic (though local

variations of Arabic are spoken), and there are also hundreds of local dialects, including of the Dinka and Nuer languages. Religions are a mix of indigenous and Christian.

Oil fields are located in South Sudan, in close proximity to the border region with the north. The north has benefited economically from oil production, as revenue sharing with the south only began in 2005. The economies of Sudan and South Sudan are both highly dependent upon oil revenues. There are two oil pipelines; they run through the north to Port Sudan on the Red Sea. South Sudan, on the other hand, ranks as one of the least developed countries in Africa and has very little infrastructure.

## **THE SUDANESE CIVIL WARS**

Historical accounts of Sudan point to the earliest unified governance of the territory under Turco-Egyptian rule from 1820. The Mahdi Revolution brought together various populations (mainly northern, and the main group was the Baggara Arabs) to put an end to the Turco-Egyptian regime in the 1880s, just as the British were digging themselves deeper into the region; the British consolidated administrative rule in Sudan (1898-1956). However, national unity has not emerged organically, and has often been enforced through violence upon the various populations, as explained by Jok (2007):

Since Sudan became a self-governing nation state in 1956, it has faced many significant political challenges in its effort to maintain its territorial unity. Like most Sub-Saharan African nations, it has been hard to convince the Sudanese people of various nationalities that they belong to this post-colonialist structure. Although the assigning of ethnic groups to bounded regions was an effect of previous colonial strategy, groups in question came to be intensely loyal to these ethnic regions, more so than they are to the state, and the state has had to use harsh measures to bring the various peoples into its fold. The result is that many ethnic territories have serious grievances with central government, and the government has responded to these with extreme violence in order to subdue this dissent (Jok 2007: 39).

Accounts also point to Egyptian and British strategies that maintained centralized power by pitting local factions against each other (Donkor 2008). This is a strategy that was utilized many times by the North during the civil war.

The Nilotic peoples of the south, meanwhile, had endured years of exploitation. “The Dinka, having just emerged from a world ‘spoiled’ by the ravaging raids of Arab slavers, had memories to keep and grievances to nurse. As children, we were still frightened into silence by such exclamations as, ‘there come the camels’” (Deng 1972: 137) whose riders would steal children as slaves. Under British rule, a Southern Policy was devised with the dual aims to end slavery and to give the South a chance to develop economically and culturally on its own terms (while contact between the North and South was discouraged, Christian missionaries were allowed entry into the South). The Southern Policy was widely criticized as failing to achieve its aims and, instead, actually increasing the isolation of the south. “The implementation of the Southern Policy widened the gap between the north and the south even further, creating a negative effect on the south as a whole. The policy restricted economic and cultural interaction between north and south and did not provide the south with alternative means of economic and cultural development” (Donkor 2008: 36). According to Deng (1972), the hidden, actual purpose of the Southern Policy was to keep the populations “backward” so that they would not become a political threat. This was conducted under the guise of cultural protection: “The notion of the ‘Noble Savage’ added to the policy of preservation. Although some Southern tribes were judged harmless and were receiving more modern benefits than others, the whole of the South remained a museum of nature” (Deng 1972: 138).

In 1947, in preparation for leaving a united, independent Sudan, the British administration scrambled to reverse the Southern Policy. The new, integrative approach was perhaps too little, too late to achieve a coherent, inclusive government. Independence was “thrust upon the Sudan by a colonial power eager to extricate itself from its residual responsibilities. It was not achieved by a national consensus expressed through constitutional means” (Johnson 2003: 29). It is also suggested that Sudanese independence was constructed as a check against Egyptian influence (Johnson 2003). Another scholar suggests the following:

My reading of the process is that it absolved the British of guilt if the Africans ended up not managing their systems well, because they established those systems themselves. With little to work with, the new leaders of the “new” Sudan, like leaders in other emerging African states, did what they knew best—they adopted the outlook, mentality, and practices of the colonial masters. They did not dismantle the exploitative structures that the colonialists put in place nor did they modify those structures to suit the particular needs of a young, soon to be independent country. They disregarded the fact that the institutions that supported the colonial state would not necessarily work for an independent, non-exploitative state (Donkor 2008: 38).

Sudan became an independent country in January 1956, under a system of unitary governance, with power firmly concentrated in the hands of northerners. Southerners asked for federal status within the united Sudan, but instead “the rapid increase of Northerners in the South as administrators, senior officers in the army and police, teachers in government schools and as merchants, increased Southern fears of Northern domination and colonization” (Johnson 2003: 27). A mutiny of Southern soldiers several months earlier, in 1955, had already begun a military revolt, the *Anyanya*, that became the main Southern-separatist guerilla army of the first Sudanese civil war (1955-1972). The civilian population suffered greatly, and many refugees fled to the northern urban areas seeking protection and finding a precarious life of forced assimilation. For this reason, one Dinka historian noted that, “to a Southerner, a cycle has been completed: the civil war recalls the days of the slave raids” (Deng 1972: 140).

The Addis Ababa agreement (negotiated in Ethiopia by the northern Sudanese government and the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement or SSLM) brought an end to the war in 1972. Both northern and southern representatives had stipulated preconditions prior to meeting: the north required a unified Sudan, while the southern delegation demanded regional autonomy. Sudan remained intact, with a Southern Regional Government. However, there were several issues which remained sensitive and which ultimately became triggers for a second civil war (which began in 1983). These included (according to Johnson 2003) demarcation of the border lines, integration of southern military personnel (some of whom opposed unification) into new government security forces, a series of economic troubles and confrontations over northern-set economic policies, and the discovery of oil in southern lands in the mid-1970s. One event that

is often cited as the main or final precursor to the second civil war was the declaration of *shari'a* law over the entire country by President Nimeiri in 1983. Southern rebels formed a new military force, the SPLM/A (Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army) which, "following the lead of its Ethiopian and Soviet backers, endorsed a united, secular, socialist Sudan" (Human Rights Watch 2003: 92). The SPLM/A leader was John Garang, a Dinka. Another rebel military, *Anyanya II*, had as its goal a secessionist movement, and the people were predominantly Nuer.

It was this phase of the war that begins many of the Lost Boys' personal stories. Their accounts tell of Baggara and Missiriya, armed and encouraged by the North to seize territory or cattle, riding in on horseback, camelback, or in Toyota trucks and raiding the villages of South Sudan. Most adults were killed, houses were burned to the ground, and girls were killed, raped, or kidnapped. In general, young boys survived because they were away from the village, tending the cattle, but there are also eyewitness accounts by children who were at home and who ran to hide when the raid came.

During this time, the USA supported Sudan's President Nimeiri as part of a Cold War balance-of-power strategy. Ethiopia and Libya supported the Southern People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which was unified under the Dinka leader John Garang. The SPLA housed its main military training camps in Ethiopia. Citing economic neglect by the north, "many non-Southerners including the Nuba of central Sudan and the people of Southern Blue Nile [state] joined the SPLA in large numbers" (Jok 2007: 87). However, there are also accounts of Southerners joining the rebel military alliance simply to try and protect their homelands:

Many recruits joined the SPLA at this time not because of a general grievance with the North, but in order to get training and equipment so that they could protect themselves from attacks by government militias raised among such peoples as the Baggara and the Murle [who were armed by the Northern government]. The SPLA policy of taking new recruits to Ethiopia for training and reorganization was not always popular, and it also left the home areas of the recruits vulnerable. The guerrilla outfit among the Bul Nuer refused to be moved by the SPLA to Ethiopia because it had taken up arms specifically to defend the Nuer against Missiriya incursions (Johnson 2003: 69).

Over the years, and in waves, survivors of these raids gathered themselves together and began walking east, towards Ethiopia and the SPLA military camps. The children were told (by adults

and each other) that they would find safety and security, even schools, and perhaps their parents in Ethiopia. President Nimeiri fell in a popular uprising in 1985, and a series of governments followed, until Omar Hassan el Bashir seized control in a military coup in 1989. Bashir remains President today (he has since passed elections in 1996, 2000, and 2010), although he faces international arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court at the Hague for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity conducted since 2003 in the Darfur region of western Sudan.

In 2005, with significant assistance and encouragement from the U.S., a comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) was signed. The accord included a ceasefire, increased autonomy for the South, and a referendum on Southern independence to be held in 2011. John Garang, former leader of the SPLA, became the Vice President, but he died a few months later in a helicopter crash and was replaced by another Dinka leader, Salva Kiir. In 2011, the referendum on secession passed overwhelmingly, and South Sudan became the world's newest country. Salva Kiir became President and Riek Machar, a Nuer (and former leader of a break-away group from the SPLA) became Vice President. There remain several border disputes to be settled (including the area surrounding the town of Abyei, in an oil-rich zone, and the Nuba mountains), as well as ongoing ethnic tensions. In particular, minority groups in South Sudan voice concern regarding Dinka domination. Further, Riek Machar is well-known for a raid he led in 1991 on the town of Bor, where thousands of Dinka were massacred under his command. To this day, there has not been a systematic, widespread, or institutionalized attempt at truth and reconciliation—neither between the North and South, nor between the peoples of the newly emerged South Sudan.

## **THE IMPACT OF WAR ON SOUTHERN SUDANESE SOCIETY**

There is a gap between the overarching geopolitical events that are manipulated by those in power, and the history told in personal stories. There is a gap because the people at the bottom can't reach up, yet their lives are structured and intervened upon by the actions and decisions of others. There are

...two levels of thinking about the conflicts: the political organizational level dominated by the leaders, and the war experience as lived by everyday people. There is clear demarcation and a strong debate between those who make war decisions and those who do the fighting on the one hand, and the people who live under difficult war-induced conditions on the other... The civilian rural population is drawn into the conflicts in ways that disempower them because the decision-making process regarding going to war does not involve them, but their leaders expect they will support the war... Many [rural civilians] like to think that the decision as to how to deal with the consequences of the war—whether to participate in it, relocate, or remain passive—is still within their scope of power (Jok 2007: 36-38).

In conducting interviews with civilians affected by war, Jok (2007) found that these ordinary Sudanese discussed “how families and communities could best live with the realities of the war, because they usually have very little control over the making of the decisions leading to war. What emerges from these interviews is that war takes on its own dynamics once it has started” (Jok 2007: 36). Further, Jok asserts that the resilience of everyday people seems to depend on both the cause and duration of region-specific conflicts.

The communities and social structures of South Sudan have fragmented, enduring various forms of violent attack for generations. Jok (2007) details ways in which the war violence has leaked into every corner of community and family life in South Sudan, leading to an increased militarization of society and a normalization of everyday violence, including domestic.

In addition to reports of mass rape, the use of women as war trophies and other forms of sexual violence, Sudan has attracted attention for the use of child soldiers, unpaid militias who consider rape and abduction of women and girls as forms of payment, the conditioning of young soldiers to violence over many years, violent humiliation of the enemy’s female population, and the reproduction of such violence within the soldier’s families and communities, all of which reveal gender differentials and hierarchies in the war experience (Jok 2007: 18).

Yet, southern Sudanese society had already undergone traumatic changes in earlier generations. Writing in the early 1970s, one Dinka scholar notes the widespread economic, social, and cultural changes in southern Sudan over recent generations. He makes the distinction that “economic, but not developmental, changes have been rapid” (Deng 1972: 161) since independence. Colonialism compelled a transition from cattle to a cash economy, from hunting and gathering when food was running low to a reliance on Arab trade markets. Communities

witnessed an increase in rural-to-urban migration for jobs, or for security from North-South hostilities. The British-built educational system required children to be sent away from home for instruction that was culturally irrelevant and set them at odds with traditional ways of life. Another scholar notes that, "By the late 1960s, a state of impasse had been reached, with neither side having the necessary resources to effect a complete military solution. The army controlled the towns, the *Anyanya* the countryside. Many towns had lost much of their population. Schools and health centers had long ceased to operate, and indeed, many of the facilities had been destroyed. Roads and bridges were similarly destroyed, and economic activity had ceased in much of the region. The south had, in fact, completely atrophied" (Rogge 1985: 40). These are some of the societal changes apparent in the early 1970s after the first civil war. Writing more than 40 years later and following the second civil war, Jok (2007) asserts there has not been development of institutional structures with the ability or authority to address victimization and injustice.

There is no question that the communities which have experienced such horrendous violence at the hands of the state have been debating their own ways to come to terms with life under conflict. Some of the questions that come up in such discussions include where the victims' families might bring a case against the perpetrators of violence, how they might be able to escape more of this recurrent violence, and a search for understanding as to why they fall victim to a war where they cannot even begin to explain how it involves them... The communities affected by war are frustrated by a series of studies that do not seem to contribute anything to their lives by way of stopping death and destruction (Jok 2007: 207).

The main source of funding that enabled this violence was oil revenues.

## **OIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN SUDAN**

Oil exploration was ongoing but fruitless through the 1960s in the Red Sea area of northern Sudan; however, oil production outside Sudan justified opening a refinery at Port Sudan on the Red Sea in 1964. In 1974, Chevron, a U.S.-based multinational oil company, bought and explored concessions in southern Sudan. Oil was discovered in 1978; the first oil fields, Unity and Heglig, were developed by Chevron in Unity State and South Kordofan State. The general area of the Muglad Basin remains the major oil-producing region today. This region is home to Dinka and Nuer peoples who move their settlements and pasture their cattle seasonally, according to water



availability, and is also close to Baggara nomadic territory. Cattle raids by the Baggara on Nuer and Dinka communities were periodic, but not devastating. "Usually a tribal conference resolved this conflict, sometimes at central government insistence. But the feuding did not dominate relations. Negotiated access for Baggara cattle to Dinka and Nuer watering spots was more common than raids before the war" (Human Rights Watch 2003: 87).

In 1983, *Anyanya II* attacked a Chevron facility, killing three employees. Chevron suspended operations in Sudan, and pulled out of the south the following year (Chevron eventually sold off its Sudan holdings in 1992). Meanwhile, *Anyanya II* (southern secessionists, mainly Nuer) and the SPLA (advocating a united, secular Sudan, mainly Dinka), with two different visions for the governance of southern Sudan, were clashing. *Anyanya II* was driven by the SPLA from Ethiopia, and began accepting arms from the Sudanese government in Khartoum (Human Rights Watch 2003). At the same time, Khartoum also began arming local Baggara:

To prevent further rebel threats to oil development, state and Umma party authorities started arming Baggara cattle-owning nomads, the western and northern Kordofan and Darfur neighbors of the Nuer and Dinka, with automatic weapons. These authorities were non-nomadic Baggara in many cases. The Baggara served as a proxy, a cheap and deniable counterinsurgency tool for the government. They serve the same purpose today. The Baggara were able to loot southern cattle with impunity and push the Nuer and Dinka off their land. Most Nuer and Dinka were still armed only with spears (Human Rights Watch 2003: 93).

Here we find the root of the human rights concerns regarding oil development in Sudan: the Nuer and Dinka peoples were removed from their lands in order to clear the way for oil exploration and development. Civilian displacements have taken place in two waves (the mid-1980s and the late 1990s) according to development of inhabited oil concessions areas (Human Rights Watch 2003). The Khartoum government paid for weapons to fight the war with oil revenues. Khartoum also often used "militant Islamic discourse to attract large numbers of radical recruits into militias" (Jok 2007: 186). Multinational oil companies began to bear complaints for their role in supporting human rights abuses:

The scramble for Sudanese oil reserves and prospects by such disparate countries as Canada, China, Malaysia, Sweden and others sharpened the clear rift between international market interests and the micro-level politics of indigenous groups' claim to ownership of resources. These countries were quickly accused of putting their financial interests before human security in Sudan, especially as those who live in the oil regions were quick to use race and religion as the loci for the contest over oil revenues. The foreign oil companies and their mother countries were implicated in facilitating the government's war machinery because they allowed Khartoum to use the oil-related facilities such as the all-weather roads and aircraft landing fields they had constructed to stage attacks, again both the civilian population in the oil areas—in order to make way for these foreign oil companies—and the opposition forces operating within the oil region of Upper Nile (Jok 2007: 16).

U.S. companies had been barred from doing business in Sudan since 1997 (Office of Foreign Assets Control 2013); however, in the late 1990s many activist groups in the U.S. became concerned that other oil companies were undermining the purpose of the economic sanctions. One such company that became a target of attention was Talisman, a Canadian oil company. Under pressure from university students and faculty, NGOs, and activists, many shareholder institutions sold their stakes in Talisman. "For the first time in the U.S. since apartheid South Africa, these demands started a debate about the use of financial markets to achieve political goals" (Jok 2007: 186).

A novel human rights strategy emerged, which appeared to be the brainchild of Roger W. Robinson, Jr., chairman of the William J. Casey Institute, a conservative think-tank. Robinson was previously in President Reagan's National Security Council. The strategy was capital market sanctions: the idea that foreign companies—in the oil business in Sudan—should not be allowed to raise money in U.S. capital markets (Human Rights Watch 2003: 491).

This movement that emerged in the late 1990s was gathering momentum but still controversial. In June 2001, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Sudan Peace Act, which included language on capital market sanctions. However, "the September 11 attack on the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon intervened. At the request of the U.S. President, this and other contentious legislation was postponed" (Human Rights Watch 2003: 495). The next year, Talisman issued shares through the Toronto Stock Exchange rather than the NYSE. President George W. Bush eventually signed a reworked Sudan Peace Act in 2002, without the capital market sanctions. Within two weeks, Talisman Energy announced it was pulling out of Sudan. Several oil companies remained: China National Petroleum Company, Petronas of Malaysia,

Lundin Oil of Sweden, OMV of Austria, Gulf Petroleum Company of Qatar, the multinational TotalFinaElf, and Sudapet Limited, Sudan's state-owned company. The oil concessions areas contain regions that have yet to be developed.

## **RELIEF WORKERS NAME THE LOST BOYS**

At the onset of the second civil war in the mid 1980s, southern Sudanese from Equatoria, Upper Nile, and Bahr el Ghazal came under attack. Survivors gathered together to make the long walk to Ethiopia. The personal stories of the Lost Boys contain many of the same details. Here is a description of the experience of one boy, named Kuol Jok: "As he fled his village and began an extraordinary exodus he was seven years old. He walked for several weeks eating leaves and sometimes even dirt to survive. When the group he was traveling with had to cross a river, he said many children who could not swim were drowned" (Moumtzis 2001: 22). Survivors arrived at four Ethiopian refugee camps (Assosa, Dimma, Itang, and Pinyudo) during 1987-1988 and were referred to as "walking skeletons" in several newspaper accounts that were widely distributed in the United States (Bixler 2005: 238). It is estimated that 20,000 youths began the trek, and that about 17,000 children made it to the camps in Ethiopia (Children's Rights Project and HRW/Africa 1994). The camps also housed families and southern Sudanese of all ages; by 1990 it was estimated that the camps housed 380,000 Sudanese refugees (Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 1998). Arriving refugees built shelters and received minimal food aid and medical care from international relief workers. The young boys who arrived unaccompanied, without family relations, were housed together in teams with older boys serving as their organizers and leaders. It was during this time that relief workers and media reports began to refer to the unaccompanied male children as Lost Boys. Reports rarely mention female survivors; the absence of girls generally receives one or two lines to explain there were few female survivors because "girls' work did not include tending cattle in cattle camps away from the villages" (Children's Rights Project and HRW/Africa 1994: 9), meaning that they were more likely to have died or to have been taken as slaves during the raids.

The camps in Ethiopia were originally military bases and training sites for the SPLA, and at first, the numbers of arriving refugees exceeded the humanitarian capacity of the camps; it was estimated that 30 people died each day at one time (Rule 1988). The SPLA maintained their overt military operations in locations that were separate from the main living areas, so as to benefit from humanitarian support in the refugee camps. However, there are reports that the SPLA also used the refugee camps as a military “recruiting” center, sometimes replenishing the numbers of soldiers by coercion or force: male unaccompanied children “were removed from the camps for military service when the needs of the SPLA demanded, including to fight with its Ethiopian government host’s army against Ethiopian rebels; many Sudanese boys who fought were under fifteen years of age. Other under-fifteens were given military duties such as guarding checkpoints and prisoners” (Children’s Rights Project and HRW/Africa 1994: 7). There are also accounts of children abducted from Sudanese villages and taken by force to Ethiopia by the SPLA:

While some started out on their journey to Ethiopia enthusiastically, others were taken against their will. In late 1991, a journalist interviewed a chief of a village in the Sobat basin of Upper Nile province who said that in 1989 twenty-nine twelve-year-old boys had been taken from that village by force by the SPLA. Since then, none of their parents had heard from them (Children’s Rights Project and HRW/Africa 1994: 9).

The militarization of life in the camps was not limited to explicit training of recruits in specialized areas; in fact, militarization became a normal part of everyday life throughout the camps and was couched in terms of maintaining organization and order. Young boys could be recruited into the military by an act as simple and random as being told by a soldier to watch his gun (Jal 2009). A Dinka or Nuer child could not refuse the direct command of an adult. One report points to historical context for understanding the recruitment of male children into the military:

There is a history in northeast Africa of military slavery, in which ‘gun-boys’ were a source of soldiers... the commercial companies/armies formed to exploit the ivory and slave potential of the White Nile made use of young boys as well. These ‘gun-boys’ were slave boys who, starting at the ages of about seven to ten, worked as gun bearers for individual soldiers. Every contractual soldier had at least one, some had two or more, and many slave-soldiers themselves had ‘gun-boys’. The boys’ service to the soldiers was part of their training, and when they grew older they became soldiers themselves. They were the most regular though no the most numerous source of military slaves (Children’s Rights Project and HRW/Africa 1994: 12).

Recall that the southern Sudanese people in these refugee camps are culturally heterogeneous; they hail from different regions of central and south Sudan, speak different languages, and, while they share similar ways of life, also exhibit variation in their specific cultures (for example, different cuisines, scarification practices, ritual and religious practices, and so on). In some personal accounts (Scroggins 2002; Jal 2009) it is suggested that mixing of youth from different regions in close living quarters or through military training was an intentional practice meant to build a politically unified future generation. There was pressure to forego the initiation rituals that mark individuals with tribal- and clan-specific scarification (see chapter five for more on the significance of scarification and initiation). In 1988 the SPLA and *Anyanya II* joined forces.

In May, 1991 the Ethiopian government collapsed. The dictator Mengistu Haile Mirium, who supported the SPLA, was overthrown. At least 100,000 southern Sudanese, along with the SPLA, escaped Ethiopia under sudden attacks of artillery fire. Personal accounts (including Deng, Deng, and Ajak 2005; Eggers 2006) provide harrowing details of the forced evacuation, where many thousands died. An uncounted number died from gunfire, and many drowned or were attacked by crocodiles in the Gilo River, which blocked the only escape route. The survivors headed west, back into Sudan. Again the walkers were subject to hunger and military strikes. This time, there were also temporary transit stations set up by the United Nations to provide some shelter and nutrition. Finally, in 1992, the survivors reached Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. The SPLA also sent some unaccompanied minors to fight in Sudan, and some of these boys were able to escape and make their way to Kakuma. Estimates for the number of Lost Boys who arrived at Kakuma range from 10,500 (Children's Rights Project and HRW/Africa 1994) to 12,000 (Moumtzis 2001). "By the time their trek ended, many of the boys had walked distances of 2,000 kilometers, or the equivalent of hiking from Paris to Rome" (Moumtzis 2001: 22). A boy whose story we have followed since he was seven years old would now be aged twelve.

At Kakuma, the Sudanese refugees were provided one meal a day and rudimentary shelter. Schools were started for the children; stories commonly describe how the Lost Boys

learned to write in the dirt together while gathered underneath a tree (Moumtzis 2001). There is also growing concern “that some 200 unaccompanied girls who were part of the group of unaccompanied minors who had arrived in Kenya in mid-1992 have been forgotten in the search for durable solutions. Many are living with foster families in Kakuma camp” (UNHCR 2002: 9). Their lives are described as that of “unpaid servants: they cook, clean, and gather firewood for their foster families” (Stark 2003: 277).

In 1999, following a recommendation by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the U.S. State Department, international aid workers began the process of interviewing unaccompanied minors for resettlement in the U.S., Canada, and Australia and preparing them with classes to ease the cultural transition. Resettlement began in 2001; over the next year, 3,600 Lost Boys and 87 Lost Girls made the journey to settle in the U.S. (that year, according to the United Nations Statistical Yearbook, just under 490,000 Sudanese refugees were resettled in other countries, mainly within Sub-Saharan Africa; many more remain at Kakuma). The Lost Boys at this time were aged from their late teens to their mid-twenties. Kuol Jok, who was seven years old when his village was attacked, would now be aged twenty-one. It was the largest resettlement of children to the United States since the Vietnam War (Moumtzis 2001). But the unaccompanied minors were not the only Sudanese refugees to resettle in the United States that year; in 2001, nearly 6,000 Sudanese resettled in the U.S. (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2012), without the media attention that shone on the Lost Boys.

### **U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN SUDAN: A CONVERGENCE OF INTERESTS**

A convergence of disparate interest and advocacy groups focused attention on crises in Sudan throughout the 1990s. Boas (2007) makes clear that this attention, while remarkable, was not enough to change refugee admission policy alone. Rather, a particular set of historical circumstances also aided the case, including a drop in foreign-policy related refugee admissions from communist countries after the end of the Cold War, a search for large, easily-identifiable groups in protracted refugee situations, and a movement to address the historical lack of African

refugee admissions. Finally, this convergence of humanitarian interests was also met with political electoral interests in the United States (through the conservative Christian movement that supported President George W. Bush), and national security interests to eliminate the threat of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism, especially following September 11, 2001.

Relations between the United States and Sudan have been fraught almost from the beginning. "When Sudan achieved independence in January 1956 the United States was one of the first countries to recognize the new state and establish a permanent diplomatic mission in the capital. Yet, when the Arab-Israeli war broke out in 1967, Sudan broke its diplomatic ties with the United States because of the latter's relations with Israel" (Donkor 2008: 17). Diplomatic ties were re-established in 1971; however, in 1973, the U.S. embassy in Sudan was attacked by Palestinian terrorists who killed U.S. diplomatic personnel. The embassy was closed, then re-opened in 1974. In 1987 the embassy was closed again following the bombing of the Pan-American jetliner over Lockerbie, Scotland by Libyan-supported terrorists. Diplomatic relations were considered important; as mentioned earlier, the U.S. saw Sudan as an essential buffer against communist and Soviet interests in the region (Donkor 2008: 17).

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the U.S. government "focused on a slew of concerns that became the basis for U.S.-Sudan relations. These concerns included Sudan's development of biological and chemical weapons, support for terrorism, dictatorial government, and human rights violations" (Donkor 2008: 17-18). Sudan was becoming more aligned with extremists and a supporter of Islamic fundamentalists. In 1990, Sudan was one of the few countries in the world which supported Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. In the early 1990s, Sudan began allowing any Muslim into the country without a visa. Osama bin Laden, and, it is thought, hundreds of suspected terrorists and Islamic extremists entered Sudan during this time (Weiner and Risen 1998). The policy of U.S. President Clinton's administration developed into a firm stance to isolate Sudan. In 1993 the U.S. State Department placed Sudan on its list of states that sponsor terrorism. The U.S. also began applying sanctions, "cutting off its arms trade with Khartoum" (Donkor 2008: 18). In May 1996, at the request of Saudi Arabia and the U.S., Sudan

expelled Osama bin Laden, who left for Afghanistan. On August 7, 1998 the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, were struck by suicide bombers in trucks; hundreds of people were killed and thousands wounded. About two weeks later, U.S. President Clinton ordered targeted cruise missile attacks in Sudan (on the Al Shifa pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum which was suspected of manufacturing chemical weapons) and on suspected Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. The following year, a federal grand jury formally indicted Osama bin Laden and twenty other Al Qaeda operatives for the embassy bombings (CNN Library 2013).

There was a growing public consciousness of humanitarian concerns in Sudan and the Horn of Africa during the 1980s and 1990s. The arrival of thousands of Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia in 1987-1988 followed on the heels of the 1983-1985 famine in that same country. News of the Ethiopian famine reached a wide Western audience through the celebrity concert fundraisers of Live Aid and USA for Africa in 1985. One image that has come to symbolize both the devastation in Sudan and Western witnessing/helplessness/callousness is the Pulitzer Prize-winning photo taken by South African photojournalist Kevin Carter outside a relief/feeding area in southern Sudan in 1993. The image shows an emaciated southern Sudanese child curled on the ground, a vulture perched and waiting close in the background. *The New York Times* immediately printed the photo, and the following year, Carter won a Pulitzer and committed suicide.

Religious Christian conservatives in the United States “began in the 1990s to develop greater concern with religious persecution in other countries, [and] put Sudan at or close to the top of its priority list, describing the situation there as ‘genocide’” (Human Rights Watch 2003: 478). Initially, Christian groups were more interested in advocating for humanitarian aid to refugees in Sudan, and pushed for diplomatic action to negotiate a peace agreement. “The Midland Ministerial Alliance, located in the hometown of U.S. President George W. Bush, and Samaritan’s Purse, run by the son of the well-known evangelical Christian Billy Graham, are two Christian organizations that have been particularly active in advocating for peace in the Sudan” (Boas 2007: 450-451). The annual Department of State report on proposed refugee admissions (issued in July 2000) casts the crisis in Sudan in terms of religious persecution, suggesting that



“religious interests strongly influenced the U.S. government’s decision to resettle the Lost Boys” (Boas 2007: 452).

There was also a growing anti-slavery movement in the U.S., with grassroots campaigns to raise money in order to buy people who were enslaved in Sudan and set them free. “A lobbying group that focused on Congress, and was frustrated by the U.S. State Department, was the Boston-based American Anti-Slavery Group (AASG), a group created in 1995. It began its work on Sudan that year by focusing attention on why U.S. African-American Congressmen and other leaders did not take a position on ‘black African slavery’ in Sudan” (Human Rights Watch 2003: 485). The anti-slavery movement “pressured the U.S. government to maintain a harder line on Sudan, including increased sanctions and ‘non-lethal’ support for the rebel SPLM/A, despite its bad human rights record” (Human Rights Watch 2003: 478). The anti-slavery movement at times coincided with the religious conservative movement; slaves were often “described as ‘Christians’ enslaved by Arabs or Muslims” (Human Rights Watch 2003: 478).

As for congressional support, there were a few leaders who took an interest in Sudan:

There were only a handful of Congressmen interested in Sudan in the mid-1990s: Congressmen Donald Payne (D-NJ), Tony Hall (D-OH), and Congressman Frank Wolf (R-VA) stood out in their efforts to rouse Congress to the plight of the Sudanese. In 1999, a few more members of the U.S. Congress began to devote time and interest to Sudan, in response to pressure from U.S. conservatives and religious groups who believed that the Muslims of Sudan were persecuting the minority Christians of Sudan in a “genocidal war” and were enslaving southern Christians in the course of the war. One was newly- elected Congressman Tom Tancredo (R-CO), in whose district schoolteacher Barbara Vogel was already raising money for slave “redemptions.” Another was freshman Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS), who was one of the most outspoken senators on Sudan. An important supporter of peace in Sudan was Senator Bill Frist (R-TN), who had gone to southern Sudan with World Vision in his capacity as a medical doctor during the 1998 famine. He was appointed Senate Majority Leader in 2002 and took another trip in his medical capacity to southern Sudan in 2003, discomforting U.S. officials concerned about his safety in the south despite the ceasefire. He was said to lead Senate opinion on Sudan (Human Rights Watch 2003: 485).

According to one analysis, the Refugee Act of 1980 “created a more structured format in which NGOs could bring their concerns to the table at an annual Congressional hearing on refugee admissions” (Boas 2007: 442). Following the end of the Cold War, these organizations also had more room to argue for humanitarian admissions (as there were fewer refugees admitted from

communist countries). At the same time, “NGO leaders, human rights activists, and U.S. Government officials have become increasingly aware of the problem of protracted refugee situations worldwide, particularly within Africa” (Boas 2007: 443). A protracted refugee situation, currently two-thirds of all refugees, is defined as 25,000 people or more from the same country who have sought refuge in another country for at least five years (Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration 2011). There was growing concern that certain refugee camps were becoming warehouses for long-term settlement under harsh conditions, rather than the short-term emergency assistance that they were meant to provide.

The Congressional Black Caucus, an organization representing the African-American members of the U.S. Congress, during the mid-1990s appealed to Congress on the issue of African refugee resettlement to the U.S. A small number of members held influential positions on committees, namely the House Judiciary and International Relations Committees, “two of the most influential committees on refugee resettlement issues” (Boas 2007: 444). Members were taken on trips to Sub-Saharan Africa by a coalition of refugee resettlement organizations known as the InterAction Commission on Migration and Refugee Affairs (CMRA). They saw the cause as an issue of parity and representation, noting that those in position to make decisions regarding resettlement were often of European descent. “In 1998, following CMRA’s third trip to Africa, the number of resettlement spots allocated to African refugees jumped significantly, from 7,000 in 1998 to 12,000 in 1999, suggesting that the CBC was successful in its advocacy” (Boas 2007: 445).

The convergence of disparate interest groups on the issue of Sudanese refugee resettlement was noted by the director of Human Rights Watch:

‘There was a very interesting convergence of Left-Right bedfellows regarding refugees in Sudan that you rarely see in other parts of political Washington, D.C. The Congressional Black Caucus, which is overwhelmingly Democratic and liberal, and the Christian Evangelical Right, which is overwhelmingly White Republican, both took a very strong interest in Sudanese refugees’ (Boas 2007: 451).

Concerning activism by religious groups, the case of the Somali Bantu highlights the lack of Islamic religious organization advocacy. The Somali Bantu were also recommended for

resettlement in 1999 by the UNHCR. They had lived for a decade in Dadaab refugee camp in northern Kenya, and had endured generations of persecution. However, their case is an interesting foil to that of the Lost Boys in terms of advocacy by U.S. interest groups, because there were no grass roots movements advocating for the U.S. resettlement of the Somali Bantu.

In contrast to the Sudanese Lost Boys' resettlement, religious groups and religiously-affiliated politicians do not appear to have played a large role in the United States' decision to resettle the Somali Bantu. Because the Somali Bantu are mostly Muslim, their persecution did not elicit the same popular uprising of support from Christian organizations in the United States that accompanied news of persecution in the Sudan. There are notably no Muslim organizations among the NGOs responsible for refugee resettlement in the United States. Although some Muslim organizations have tried on occasion to enter the U.S. refugee resettlement arena, they have faced difficulty due to a lack of national networking. As a result, religious organizations and politicians made few, if any, efforts to advocate for resettlement of the Somali Bantu to the United States (Boas 2007: 453).

Another interesting foil in terms of advocacy is to compare the position of the Congressional Black Caucus, which as noted, argued specifically for resettlement of Sudanese refugees into the United States, and the public position taken by Louis Farrakhan, leader of the mainly African-American religious movement the Nation of Islam, in the 1990s. Farrakhan "was a defender of the Islamic government of Sudan even after meeting with southern Sudanese who appealed to him as Africans to condemn the Sudanese government's persecution of them. The U.S. African American community was split on the Sudan issue until Farrakhan faded out on the issue in the late 1990s" (Human Rights Watch 2003: 486).

The administration of President George W. Bush took office in January, 2001 and early on, expressed intent and interest in resolving the conflict in Sudan and aiding refugees there (Human Rights Watch 2003). President Bush appointed Senator John Danforth as a special envoy for peace in Sudan. Senator Danforth pushed to reinvigorate the efforts of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a trading bloc of countries in the Horn of Africa. The IGAD initiative focused on a unified Sudan, but also held to the right of self-determination for people of South Sudan, separation of religion and state, and recognition and protection of fundamental human rights in the country's future constitution. The role of the United States and the international community in pressing Sudan and Southern Sudanese

representatives to broker a peace agreement is emphasized in several accounts (Deng and Khalil 2004; Human Rights Watch 2003).

President Bush, it is understood, was likely influenced by the conservative Christian interest in Sudan. However, his father George H. Bush had visited Sudan in the early 1970s while Bush was US ambassador to the United Nations and the UN Security Council (chaired by Sudan) was meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Bush accepted an invitation to visit Khartoum as the guest of the Sudanese government. This visit apparently was influential. A Sudanese government official wrote:

Bush, in spite of the absence of diplomatic relations between the two countries, accepted an invitation to visit Khartoum and acquaint himself with our efforts towards solving the Southern problem. We were then in the process of organizing a conference on the rehabilitation of Southern Sudan refugees. His role in sensitizing both US governmental and non-governmental agencies to Sudan's efforts to restore peace is undeniable (Khalid 1985: 305).

According to this source, it was information divulged by George H. Bush that led to the discovery of oil fields in the southern region and established contacts between Sudan and Western oil companies:

George Bush again played an important role, not only in apprising exploration companies about the potential of the Sudan but also in making available to us vital new information discovered by remote sensing and relating to the hitherto untapped important resources in the South and Southwest. In the past all efforts in oil exploration had been concentrated in the Red Sea area (Khalid 1985: 306).

After the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, U.S. foreign policy became focused on response to terrorism and on eliminating threats represented by Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. Recall that Sudan was already on a list of countries that sponsored terrorism. "The Sudanese government and individual Islamists in the Sudanese government had hosted and done considerable business with Osama bin Laden when he lived and invested in Sudan between 1990 and 1996" (HRM 2003: 503). Following September 11, "the Sudanese government immediately and publicly announced its cooperation with the U.S. on terrorism" (Human Rights Watch 2003: 503).

## **THE CURRENT SITUATION IN SOUTH SUDAN**

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed by representatives of the government of Sudan and the SPLM was a series of agreements covering the issues ranging from power and wealth sharing, security arrangements, to disputed border areas and Southern self-determination, beginning with the Machakos Protocol in July, 2002, and culminating with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January, 2005. The CPA also set terms for a referendum, held in January 2011, in which the people of southern Sudan voted overwhelmingly to become independent.

As of this writing, South Sudan is suffering again from a conflict. Fighting broke out in December, 2013 between rival factions of the military (SPLA) (see Downie 2013 for a coherent explanation of the complicated political backstory). President Salva Kiir said that Riek Machar, the former Vice President who was fired in July, 2013, had attempted a coup d'etat. The opposing viewpoint is that Kiir fired Machar with an eye to eliminate a political rival in preparation for the next elections in 2015. Violence quickly erupted between soldiers, mainly following tribal lines (Kiir is Dinka and Machar is Nuer), but escalated to include wholesale attacks on civilians and the destruction of entire villages. In a span of just a few months, thousands of people have been killed, more than half a million people are reported in flight, and according to the statements of a United Nations official, both sides are committing mass atrocities, including sexual violence and recruitment of children to battle (Kulich 2014). SPLA soldiers have been photographed with supplies that were intended for children and donated by relief agencies (Katz 2014). When the Lost Boys say that they tell their story in order to prevent a repeat of history, these recent events should be kept in mind.

## CHAPTER 3

### REPRESENTING REFUGEES AND THE MORAL WEBS OF HUMANITARIANISM

Refugee studies has evolved over more than fifty years as a policy-oriented, reflexive field of study that is problem-centered and does not take its subject as an ontological given (Black 2001). The category 'refugee' is a legal construct that may reflect political agendas and international relations more than the protection needs of forced migrants themselves. In this sense, refugee studies serves as a concern through which to examine the operations of state power (Soguk 1999; Ong 2003). Scholars note the often ambiguous or seemingly arbitrary differentiation between economic migrants and forced migrants; in some cases these decisions are shown to exhibit racial dimensions (Johnson 1998). While refugee and migration discourses have been central in the territorial and ideological construction of states, scholars also point to a marked absence of refugee histories. Refugees "were paradoxical figures: marginal to most social discourse (and to official histories), but who, at key moments, had enormous ideological significance" (Marfleet 2007: 141). Marfleet further declares that refugees' own narratives have so often remained ignored because of their great power to disrupt: "When refugees and their descendants speak, they challenge national narratives and the political and socio-cultural arrangements which continue to endorse them. This is one key reason why state authorities, agencies and academics ignore refugees past and present" (Marfleet 2007: 144).

A review of literature pertaining to representation of refugees finds that refugees are portrayed as a pathological problem in need of fixing by states or aid structures, refugees lack narrative authority to control their own stories and experiences in the public sphere, and depictions of refugees are often apolitical, universalized, and stripped of historical context. Public representations of refugees matter because representations are both shaped by and shape what is possible in public discourse and everyday relations. Representations contribute to a "social imagination of refugeeness" (Malkki 1996: 377) and have presented the refugee as an "ahistorical, universal humanitarian subject" and thus, as a "mute victim" (Malkki 1996: 378). The unintended consequence of these "standardizing discursive and representational forms" (Malkki

1996: 386) is that refugees are not represented on their own terms. Refugees lack authority in representing their own experiences and in affecting policy decisions. In this chapter, I outline scholarly criticism of representation of refugees and highlight the significance of public representation in terms of mobilizing affects and emotions, which in turn play a role in reinforcing political legitimacy and the preconditions for humanitarian action. This will enable further discussions detailing ways the story of the Lost Boys is interpreted in chapter four, the social positions and roles navigated by Lost Boys and volunteers in chapter five, and the communities of feeling that emerge around the Lost Boys in chapter six.

## **REPRESENTATION OF REFUGEES**

Scholars point to the system of sovereign nation-states (Soguk 1999; Haddad 2003) and the refugee aid structure (Malkki 1996; Szczepanikova 2010) in positioning refugees “as objectified problems in need of fixing or repair” (McKinnon 2008). Refugees are depicted as “an anomaly requiring specialized correctives and therapeutic interventions” (Malkki 1992: 33). Here again we note the paradoxical position of refugees: while refugees are presented as a problem that requires fixing (by states or the non-governmental aid structure), their presence assists in justifying the existence of such structures as the solution. These “paradoxical implications of refugee presences... refer to contingent moments of history when the presence of refugees has become both a ‘problem’ to be addressed and a ‘resource’ to be employed in the service of discursive yet converging social and political practices of representation that constitute the realities (the images, identities, subjectivities, and relations) of the sovereign territorial state” (Soguk 1999: 15). Refugees thus occupy a site at the intersections of power relations, a site of modern statecraft, and a site of productive problematization: “The referentiality of refugees partakes in legal, economic, cultural, and political activities that attribute ontological antecedence to and privilege the citizen as the a priori proper agent adequate to the task of domestic community, the state as the facilitator of the conditions of community and their protector, and the

sovereign territory of the state as the exclusive space where the domestic community becomes possible” (Soguk 1999: 16).

Academic literature characterizes refugees as non-speaking or silenced subjects as a result of their position (Malkki 1996; Harrell-Bond and Voutira 2007; McKinnon 2008). In a survey of the difficulties in communicating with detained persons (in the North) and occupants of refugee camps (in the South), Harrell-Bond and Voutira (2007) critique the early history of refugee research and find that rather than presenting refugees “as persons with skills, capacities, and histories that contributed to their host societies,” refugee voices have become “distorted and progressively inaudible” (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 2007: 295). The refugee aid structure, which makes and implements policy decisions, often does so without consulting or honoring refugees’ own requests, resulting in an objectification and silencing of refugees (McKinnon 2008). “Refugees suffer from a particular kind of speechlessness in the face of the national and international organizations whose object of care and control they are” (Malkki 1996: 386).

More broadly, refugees often lack narrative authority to relate their concerns on their own terms, or to control their own public representation (Kushner, 2006; Nyers, 2006; Pittaway et al 2010). This is true even as there has been an increased use of refugee narratives and voices in media, more often in the publications of humanitarian organizations rather than for policy decisions (Nyers 2006). Non-governmental organizations that are positioned to assist or aid their refugee clients, mediate refugees’ relations with the state and also the wider public through media representations. Through these unequal power relations, refugees’ stories are appropriated: “Although promotion of refugees’ narratives of persecution, flight, and asylum in publications of humanitarian organizations, academic studies and the media has gained momentum in recent years, these testimonials do not necessarily provide opportunities for refugees to assert their (often collectively conceived) political agency” (Szczepanikova 2010: 462). Refugees are often “lacking resources of public communication (and sometimes an educated cadre and/or relevant language skills),” and so “most are unable to contest these characterizations in ways that can be observed by the wider society” (Marfleet 2007: 142).



Additionally, the classification of people as uprooted or displaced leads to a pathologization of refugees themselves rather than the situations that forced them to flee. “Our sedentarist assumptions about attachment to place lead us to define displacement not as a fact about sociopolitical context, but rather as an inner, pathological condition of the displaced” (Malkki 1992: 33). Pointing to the scholarly and political depictions of post-World War II refugees, the labeling of refugees thus exhibits the connection between territorial belonging or rootedness, the system of nation-states, and a particular moral order. “Refugees’ loss of bodily connection to their national homelands came to be treated as a loss of moral bearings. Rootless, they were no longer trustworthy as ‘honest citizens’” (Malkki 1992: 32).

Visual representations of refugees have been characterized as exhibiting an “anonymous corporeality” (Feldman 1994: 407, quoted in Malkki 1996) and as “sea” or “blur of humanity” (Lamb 1994 quoted in Malkki 1996). “Refugee images [are] represented in and through the vocabularies of ‘invasion,’ ‘flood,’ and ‘plague,’” (Soguk 1999: 16). There is a focus on helplessness, especially of women and children. Helplessness is connected to the constitution of speechlessness: “helpless victims need protection, need someone to speak for them” (Malkki 1996: 388). At the same time, depictions often make an appeal to universalism, emphasizing commonality through the idealized family of humanity (Barthes 1980; Malkki 1996; Nyers 2006), which also has the effect of deleting personal agency and narrative.

Depictions and discourses surrounding refugees are depoliticized and stripped of historical context (Malkki 1996; Harrell-Bond and Voutira 2007). The case in point I will draw from is Malkki’s (1996) description of a group of Hutu refugees in Mishamo, Tanzania. This group of people “had come to appropriate the [refugee] category as a vital, positive dimension of their collective identity in exile” and as a “historicizing condition that helped to produce a particular political subjectivity;” while the camp administrators seemed beholden to an unattainable ideal image of the refugee as a sufferer stripped down to bare life, a “victim whose judgment and reason had been compromised by his or her experiences” (Malkki 1996: 384). Camp administrators seemed unwilling to comprehend a real refugee as anyone other than “an ideal

figure of which any actual refugees were always imperfect instantiations” (Malkki 1996: 385). The situation carried grave consequences as refugees’ fears of forced repatriation were ignored or dismissed. Some camp administrators actively dismissed the Hutu refugees’ accounts as just “stories” and the refugees themselves as “unreliable informants” or “dishonest, prone to exaggeration, even crafty and untrustworthy” (Malkki 1996: 384). Further, “their bodies were made to speak to doctors and other professionals, for the bodies could give a more reliable and relevant accounting than the refugees’ ‘stories’” (Malkki 1996: 384). In response, Malkki (1996) calls for a “radically historicizing humanism”:

It is a historicizing (and politicizing) humanism that would require us, politically and analytically, to examine our cherished notions of mankind and the human community, humanitarianism and humanitarian ‘crises,’ human rights and international justice. For if humanism can only constitute itself on the bodies of dehistoricized, archetypal refugees and other similarly styled victims—if clinical and philanthropic modes of humanitarianism are the only options—then citizenship in this human community itself remains curiously, indecently, outside of history (Malkki 1996: 389).

One recent account that attempts to honor refugees’ own narratives does so through attending to embodied illness narratives. Medical personnel in Cairo, Egypt were treating recently arrived Sudanese refugees at a health clinic, and “perceived that there were many physical complaints in the absence of readily observable organic dysfunction” (Coker 2004: 19). Medical staff were dissatisfied with the general term “somatization disorder,” which did not adequately describe the refugees’ symptoms nor was it helpful in providing treatment to the refugees. Rather, attention to the refugees’ own self-descriptions found that they “considered themselves to be ill on many levels, and expressed this distress largely through the medium of the body” (Coker 2004: 34). Further, the embodied pain constituted a narrative that followed the experience of social disruption: “their pain was historicized, moving through the body and stopping at various locations, only to move on to another spot later on, sometimes years later” (Coker 2004: 20). The refugees were narrating their experiences of totalizing loss through embodied illness talk.

Pain, in this analysis, needs to be listened to not just for what it communicates about the state of the physical body, but what it communicates about the social and moral realms as well. Through their embodied metaphors and illness talk, the Southern Sudanese refugees in Cairo are communicating a message about the existential crisis in which their community is embroiled. They have literally lost their country, their society, and their traditions. They are physically constricted on all sides. Their cultural practices are lost to them, they fear the total annihilation of their identity as Southern Sudanese, an identity which is partially constructed through the very situation in which they find themselves—that is, attacked and marginalized by virtue of their skin color, religion, and place of origin—but which is informed by strong ties to cultural practices and the place from which they have been violently separated (Coker 2004: 35).

The politics of self-representation, then might ask, when are a peoples' stories told or listened to on their own terms? When are people seen as the legitimate narrators of their own stories? "The freedom to speak out or be visible suggests a correlation between identifiable self-representation and social capital" (Vivienne and Burgess 2013: 288) and may also be connected to cultural citizenship.

## **REPRESENTING THE LOST BOYS**

**The Name.** First, as asserted in the previous chapter, let us recognize that the Lost Boys exist as a result not only of the civil war in Sudan which rendered thousands of children into orphans, or the cultural practices which grouped the surviving boys together while sending the girls to be integrated into families and thus ineligible for resettlement. The Lost Boys are also an abstract conceptual product; a signifier or projection that is summoned to represent a category of people who are, actually, culturally and linguistically diverse, and who struggle internally over issues of belonging and exclusion.

One way that a signifier is produced is through the name itself. For example, Chinyaeva (1995) examines early development of international refugee policy in the 1920s through the experience of Russian émigrés in Eastern Europe, shedding light on the significance of terminology. The Russians rejected the term "refugee" for its permanent connotation, and chose to identify instead as temporary émigrés who did not intend to stay nor assimilate in the host countries. Similarly, Palestinians in refugee camps in Lebanon in the mid-1960s referred to

themselves 'returners' (*al-a'idin*), rather than refugees (*laja'een*) (Peteet 1995). While the term 'refugees' "implied a passive acceptance of the status quo and suggested the possibility of resettlement elsewhere," to refer to oneself as a 'returner' evokes a political dedication, "contingent on an active commitment to struggle" and indicating "an adamant refusal to accept a deterritorialized existence and identity" (Peteet 1995: 177).

The Lost Boys of Sudan have also eschewed the "refugee" label and its attendant political and policy implications, and have come to a rather resigned, yet humorous acceptance of the name given to them by foreign aid workers. However, this is not the only name they have collectively known. While living in the refugee camps of Ethiopia, which were run by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), many of the children underwent military training. The soldier-trainers called the children *Juac Amer*, or "Red Army". This name was, according to several young men, fashioned after the Red Army of the Soviet Union (so-called in the time between the Russian Revolution and the end of WWII), as South Sudan received some funding and military training from the former Soviet Union. Later, when the child survivors relocated to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, which was administered by foreign aid workers, they recall being labeled as "unaccompanied minors," the UNHCR term for orphaned children or those separated from their families. The name "The Lost Boys of Sudan" as given and used by foreign aid workers in Ethiopia had caught on by the early 1990s. It was picked up and repeated by news media telling the story of the young men who began arriving in the United States (as well as Australia and Canada) in 2000 and 2001. Those who are familiar with refugee resettlement operations will recognize the term "unaccompanied minors," but the Lost Boys name identifies them and sets them apart as a *distinct group* of unaccompanied minors.

Of these labels, it is "The Lost Boys" that stuck, though not without controversy. Robins (2003) and McKinnon (2008) both point to the naturalization of gender restriction and the racial implications in the U.S. of referring to a Black man as a "boy". As we will see in chapter five, the Lost Boys seem to easily allow those racialized significations associated with African American identity to slide off of them, like water off a duck's back, saying that, "We don't share that history".

However, they have also internally discussed use of the name, in small group conversations and also in an impassioned debate amongst themselves at a national conference (when one young man told me this, I wondered, do they really have a choice? According to Saussure 1974, although a signifier may seem to be freely chosen, language is always an inheritance from the past, which its users have no choice to accept). The name for some highlights issues of belonging and exclusion – some resettled South Sudanese youth escaped through Uganda or Egypt; are they Lost Boys? What of the young people left behind at Kakuma? What of the next generation of South Sudanese youth living in the U.S., some of whom are already teenagers? Are they Lost Boys and Girls? This becomes significant when there are benefits such as scholarship funds or other assistance made available to the community, with restrictions that it must be used to support Lost Boys.

At the same time, they recognize the attention and attraction that the label raises. One young man compared the Lost Boys name to the popular television show *American Idol* in terms of fastening attention and granting celebrity status, while several others summed up their bemused resignation, saying that they will still be known as Lost Boys at ninety years of age, and even their children will be known as children of the Lost Boys. Meanwhile, others in the South Sudanese community in Phoenix, including families who left South Sudan in the 1980s and 1990s, have come to adopt the label for themselves, seeing in it a declaration of their loss of culture, family members, and home. As one South Sudanese woman told me, “We all lost. I myself am lost, I am a Lost Woman, because I left my country a long time ago. I was like a Lost Boy, too; that’s why I came here [to the AZLBC]” (Personal interview, January 15, 2010).

Of course, the Lost Boys’ name hails from the lost boys in J.M. Barrie’s story of Peter Pan. The lost boys were those, who, according to Peter Pan himself, “fall out of their perambulators when the nurse is looking the other way,” and who live in Neverland with Peter Pan as their captain (Barrie 1950: 38). The story of Peter Pan was also alluded to in the case of an earlier resettlement of unaccompanied minors: between 1960 and 1962, about 14,000 children were

separated from their Cuban parents and airlifted to Miami, in attempt to rescue them from ideological indoctrination. This effort was named “Operation Pedro Pan” (Gonzalez Mandri 2008).

Yet, audiences and volunteers of the Lost Boys in Phoenix rarely mention Peter Pan when considering the meaning and origin of the name. To them, the Lost Boys name represents their loss of country, culture, parents, and childhood. As one volunteer relayed, “I guess anybody being lost makes you feel sad. It’s a very compelling, emotional sounding name” (Personal interview, February 4B, 2010). Audiences report that they are compelled to think of the young men as children who had to rely on each other in order to survive. On the television program *60 Minutes*, one young man, Abraham Nial, declares, “I have been called a lost boy. But I’m not lost from God. I’m lost from my parents” (McKay 2003). This statement is often quoted by volunteers and event organizers, and highlights the faith that is a regular centerpiece in representing the story of the Lost Boys.

Thus, the Lost Boys name can be understood as part of the representational schema that produces the Lost Boys as a signifier. To comprehend its power, one only need to consider, what if the Lost Boys had somehow retained the original label, and arrived in the United States as the Red Army? Rather than conjuring emotional images of childhood, loss, survival, and hope, the Red Army name would certainly highlight militaristic aspects (which, for some of the young men, is just as much a part of their story), while also drawing attention to Cold War geopolitics and proxy wars. Perhaps this would have highlighted the consequences of U.S. and Soviet involvement and arms sales in different conflict zones. Would the same U.S. volunteers have come forward, drawn to assist the young men from the Red Army?

**Media coverage.** The Lost Boys have received considerable media coverage since their initial arrival in the United States in 2000, including in newspaper, television, documentary films, and personal memoirs. The young men attained “a kind of celebrity status” (Bixler 2005: 95) and were often met and assisted by scores of well-meaning volunteers in scattered resettlement locations across the country. Many volunteers nation-wide had become aware of the Lost Boys

through media attention (Bixler 2005), and several volunteers in Phoenix told me they'd heard about the Lost Boys through print news media, which featured updates on the Lost Boys that they followed regularly, and through television shows such as *60 Minutes*, *Touched By an Angel*, and *7<sup>th</sup> Heaven*. Media descriptions of refugee populations are important especially "if information about cultural differences allows social service agencies to design 'culturally appropriate' programs and motivates community members to provide assistance to new arrivals" (Willis 2004: 273). Additionally, "educating the host community about a refugee population limits resentment and prejudice about why this population has come to the US and why they deserve assistance" (Willis 2004: 285). Instead, scholarly reviews of print media (Willis 2004 covered Nebraska published items while Robins 2004 covered national news articles) assert that coverage of the Lost Boys contained limited and even erroneous information, and served to propagate particular "American" myths and values rather than educate readers about refugees.

A textual analysis of national news articles reveals a lack of historical and political context that would describe the conditions that created Sudanese refugees. Rather, "narrative elements... situate the Sudanese refugees resettled in American cities as blank slates, 'Lost Boys' coming from a situation beyond understanding that is timeless and ahistorical" (Robins 2003: 34). Nebraska news items cast the Lost Boys into one category, rather than describing the complex linguistic and cultural make-up of the Southern Sudanese populations from which the young men hailed. "After reading most of the news articles, one would not understand that refugees from Sudan are not homogeneous, but instead are culturally diverse" (Willis 2004: 283). This cultural diversity has significant implications for community cohesion in resettlement:

Nebraska's refugee coordinator noted that the 'Sudanese have developed a more fragmented network than other immigrant groups' but failed to understand how fragmentation can be linked to tribal variation and the associated language and subsistence patterns. Iowa's refugee coordinator suggested that the Sudanese should 'put together an umbrella organization' because it would demonstrate 'a high degree of cooperation, organization and some astuteness in terms of how you make yourself accepted and known in the mainstream community'. Yet without a common language and social system, it would be impossible to work collaboratively even if all wished to do so (Willis 2004: 280).

National news items tended to appropriate the young men's story in order to present a human-interest narrative with its actual emphasis on the merits of U.S. society.

The articles in this study are more than human-interest feature stories about refugees coming to the USA. Rather, they construct and reconfirm what Americans believe are their best qualities. Overwhelmingly, media coverage of this evocative story naturalizes and reaffirms a certain version of Americans and American life: that Americans are kind and generous people, and that individuals will prevail – if they have 'the right stuff' (Robins 2003: 39).

Narrative authority of the refugees is usurped. Articles that purport to deliver information about the Sudanese are subverted to reflect an enhanced image of US society back to the readers, while information about the refugees themselves is curbed. So, too, in Nebraska published items: "In describing the US context as one where refugees from Sudan 'find themselves light years ahead', the skills and cultural adaptations of the refugees are diminished" (Willis 2004: 280).

In addition, Robins (2003) points to an assumption of unidirectional change inherent in the news items; the Lost Boys are expected to adapt to and learn from the host society, but there is not a reciprocal supposition that the hosts could learn something of value from the Southern Sudanese cultures. "The stories set up an unquestioned expectation that the Sudanese will change in the USA, to be gauged by how well they embrace its cultural products... That the USA could learn from the 'Lost Boys' disappears in the valorizing of American values" (Robins 2003: 41). This assumption of unidirectional change goes hand-in-hand with the notion of the US as a post-racial society and land of opportunity. Obstacles due to embedded racism, and racist violence in the USA are not discussed. "The Sudanese 'Lost Boys' are shown as coming to a mostly color-blind land of opportunity in which they can pull themselves up by their bootstraps by embracing the American way, thus eliding the realities of being a black man in the USA" (Robins 2003: 34).

## **AFFECT, EMOTION, AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION**

This section draws from literature that emphasizes the significance of affect and emotion in constituting emotional connections and group identity (Nunn and Gutberlet 2013), group



organizing and social control (Clough 2012; van Wijnendaele 2011), and in spurring humanitarian action (Zarowsky 2004; Suski 2012). In addressing “why the suffering of some humans compels humanitarian action, and the suffering of other humans goes unaddressed” (Suski 2012: 135), I will examine the connections between representation, affect and emotion, and the growth and enactment of “moral webs” (Zarowsky 2004) that are part of the preconditions for the emergence of humanitarianism (Haskell 1985).

Let us begin with a brief description of the appearance of emotion and affect in scholarly literature, and distinguish between the uses of the two terms. Emotion is said to involve conscious perception of affect (Conradson and McKay 2007 cited in van Wijnendaele 2011). While emotion is associated with nameable, identified states (such as joy, anger, sadness, etc.), affect is associated with precognitive, “unqualified intensity” (Massumi 2002 and cited in Thrift 2004) that is involuntary, autonomic. “Affect broadly refers to states of being, rather than to their manifestation or interpretation as emotions” (Hemmings 2005: 551).

Affect can be understood “as a form of thinking, often indirect and nonreflective” (Thrift 2008: 175). This sensing and thinking is done with the body and is therefore associated with movement rather than cognition: “affect is thinking, bodily—consciously but vaguely, in the sense that is not yet a thought. It’s a movement of thought, or a thinking movement” (Massumi 2002b: 109) that may be felt in the flush of skin, or perhaps as a vague discomfort, or a surge of energetic compulsion, prior to the mind’s attention (the mind can also direct attention elsewhere, and dismiss the body’s hunches). Here the focus is on the continuity of movement and change, on the charge and modulation of potential, rather than positionality, or coordinates in a social field/grid. Position is understood as “secondary to movement, and derived from it” and positionality as “an emergent quality of movement” (Massumi 2002: 7-8). This way of thinking helps us to better discuss what is taking place when an audience comes together to hear the story of a Lost Boy, and what happens when audiences and individuals are moved to respond. We will consider the intensities that propel audience responses and that shape these interactions; the capacities to affect and be affected; the spaces of affect: “And similarly, all manner of the

spaces which [affects] generate must be thought of in the same way, as means of thinking and as thought in action (Thrift 2008: 175). Affect is thus “a different kind of intelligence about the world” (Thrift 2008: 175) and can be marshaled or engineered for political objectives (Thrift 2004).

Affect has also been described as a kind of background: “While we do not consciously notice it we are always involved in and caught up with whole arrays of activities and practices. Our conscious reflections, thoughts, and intentions emerge from and move with this background ‘hum’ of on-going activity” (Anderson and Harrison 2010: 7). The idea of a ‘background’ or *Hintergrund* appears in Wittgenstein (1975), and has been expanded by Searle (1983): “the background is a set of nonrepresentational mental capacities that enable all representing to take place” (Searle 1983: 143, quoted in Anderson and Harrison 2010). Searle argues that meanings are context-based and not self-interpreting; the background of taken-for-granted “practices, dispositions, ways of behaving and general know-how” (Searle 2009) allows for shared meanings. Searle (2009) compares the background to Bourdieu’s exposition of *Habitus* (see also Anderson and Harrison 2010: 10). The capacity to affect and be affected is undergoing constant change and fluctuation; thus affect can also be thought of as “a margin of maneuverability,” as the freedom, excess, or remainder in every present situation (Massumi 2002b: 106), or it can also be understood as abduction, as being “drawn in by the situation, captured by it, by its eventfulness” (Massumi 2002b: 109).

Searle mentions Wittgensteins’ reference to “ungrounded ways of acting” as examples of the Background. In this case, he says, not everything has to be hypothesized in order for us to do it. Kids do not have to prove the existence of a ball or field in order to play: they just act. This quality of “ungrounded ways of acting” which utilizes Background knowledge is crucial to understanding non-representational theories of affect. Studies of the affective dimensions of social life challenge “the epistemological priority of contemplation, cognition and representation; nonrepresentationalists foreground different – practical and tacit – knowledges” (van Wijnendaele 2011: 83).

On the other hand, scholarly work in emotions tends to be grounded in more representational or structural thinking. Emotions “have to be understood as generated by, and expressive of, the particular socio-cultural context in which [people] live” (van Wijnendaele 2011: 83). Although emotions may be felt, identified, and claimed by individuals, they are also expressive of the particular “feeling rules” of a given socio-cultural context (Hochschild 1983). Emotions tell us something about peoples’ “social worlds, their relationships with others, and the social rules and structures that enable or disable them to feel in particular ways” (van Wijnendaele 2011: 83).

Geographies of emotion “focus principally on the relational aspects and the power dimensions inherent in emotions (van Wijnendaele 2011: 78). Thus, “emotion can be seen as part of the ongoing discursive production of subjects and power relations” (Harding 2009: 268). For example, van Wijnendaele (2011) recognizes through participatory action research with gang-related youth in El Salvador that emotions such as hatred, apathy, and fear play a role in reproducing “a deeply entrenched, enduring culture of violence” (van Wijnendaele 2011: 83) and in maintaining oppression. Similarly, “experimenting with new ways of ‘doing’ and ‘feeling’ seemed to facilitate, to some degree at least, new ways of ‘thinking and ‘understanding’, rather than the other way around” (van Wijnendaele 2011: 85).

Another participatory action research project focuses on the role of representation and the “emotional and economic impacts of stereotyping upon immigrant communities” in Salt Lake City, Utah (Cahill 2010: 155). Finding that the dominant discourses on immigration privilege whites’ fears of immigrants, Cahill and participants seek to reframe the immigration debate in terms of the everyday, embodied experiences of local youth, representing and humanizing their fears and struggles. We are reminded that, “struggles for social justice are not just about rights, but about psychic and emotional well-being” (Cahill 2010: 159).

Emotions and affective fields are a productive site for discussion of group organizing, community formation, and social control. Nunn and Gutbertlet (2013) show that shared emotions, such as a sense of empowerment, serve to align individuals in a Sao Paulo, Brazil recycling

cooperative with a collective identity. A focus on the *feeling* of empowerment rather than empowerment as an ontological status also allows for a more complex understanding of the “ephemeral and contingent nature of empowerment and the way that counter-hegemonic movements can exist concordantly with regimes of control” (Nunn and Gutberlet 2013: 3). Writing about Somali refugees in Hurso, Ethiopia, Zarowsky (2004) asserts that “expressions of anger and passion and... rhetorics of demoralization” were voiced by individuals on behalf of their community, and serve to forge community and political legitimacy by strengthening moral ties (Zarowsky 2004: 190). Indeed, emotions “form a rich moral array through which and with which the world is thought and which can sense different things even though they cannot always be named” (Thrift 2008: 175). Meanwhile, among activists and demonstrators planning to protest at the 2008 Republican National Convention in Minnesota, Clough (2012) finds that “the emotional connections between radical activists have become the targets of both social movement strategies for growth and police strategies for social control” (Clough 2012: 1667).

Taking notice of emotions and affects is one way to recognize the sometimes fluid, sometimes solid boundaries of belonging. Ahmed (2004) argues that “emotions play a crucial role in the ‘surfacing’ of individual and collective bodies through the way in which emotions circulate between bodies and signs... [suggesting] that emotions are not simply ‘within’ or ‘without’ but that they create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds” (Ahmed 2004: 117). In considering the work of humanitarian emotions as configuration, we can reflect on “how [a particular emotion] may situate us in social and political contexts” (Suski 2012: 133-134). Affective intensities, as well, “might explain why certain ideologies take hold and not others,” or how “ideologies are internalized and naturalized” (Harding and Pribram 2002: 412).

Emotions are central to “creating, recognizing, reinforcing, and mobilizing the moral webs on which both individual and collective survival depend” (Zarowsky 2004: 189). This brings us to the association of emotion with motion and movement, with the impulse to act upon witnessing suffering or pain in others:

Early philosophers of morality... note how the act of imagining another's experience of suffering can inspire moral action to respond to that suffering. Belief in the power of emotion to move us speaks to the etymological source of 'emotion' in the concept of movement. Emotion can stir or agitate us. We can be 'moved' to tears when we view human suffering (Suski 2012: 124).

However, witnessing suffering can also produce indifference, and emotions do not always impel action. The act of emoting might feel very satisfying and could be interpreted as absolution, or reward enough: *I'm a good person because I care*. In addition, benevolent emotions "operate as instruments of power to the extent that they render others the perpetual objects of 'our' generosity" (Chouliaraki 2010: 113). In the age of mobile apps which allow users to broadcast their good deeds and fundraise through daily activities such as exercise, we have entered an era of post-humanitarianism, which Chouliaraki argues, "situates the pleasure of the self at the heart of moral action" (Chouliaraki 2012: 4). Sympathy has also come under scrutiny:

Sympathy has become quite suspect in the contemporary political landscape. Sympathy is often conceived of as capable of building an ethical connection, while at the same time maintaining a relationship of power that prevents a 'real' social connection between humanitarian and sufferer. 'Bleeding hearts' may be meaningful to those who experience them, but they do not inherently bring justice to those who suffer exploitation (Suski 2012: 125).

Although they may be powerful, it is not necessarily particular emotions (such as pity, anger, or sympathy) that have the power to galvanize. Here, some scholars grapple with the political potential of feeling. The danger of not engaging the political is a "failure to operate as an agent of moral education" (Chouliaraki 2010: 121). Perhaps these emotional terrains are spaces where political awareness may unfold. "The mobility of humanitarian emotions is not located in some kind of trigger moment, but instead in the social space of ethical connection itself" (Suski 2012: 135). As Suski suggests, "humanitarianism puts us into a space where the political relationship between injustice, suffering, and emotion is configured" (Suski 2012: 135).

Once again, how is humanitarianism mobilized? Suski concludes, "we can begin to answer these questions by paying close attention to humanitarian narratives, and to the social and political construction of victims and suffering" (Suski 2012: 135). We need to examine the

mutual construction of subjects, the web of power relations and moral feeling, and how they are all produced within this contingent field of emotions and affects. “Emotional responses are culturally and historically produced in specific cultural and historical contexts and power relations and power, as a web of unequal relations, works through specific articulations of emotions” (van Wijnendaele 2011: 83). Drawing from Foucault (1986), Harding and Pribram assert that discourse “compels and constrains what can be thought, spoken, and enacted” (Harding and Pribram 2002: 413) and, they add, what can be felt. Discourse indicates what kind of emotional response is culturally permissible, what feelings are appropriate to express in a given context. This implies a regimen of emotional management (Hochschild 1983). Discourse configures subjects. “The ways in which the subject acts emotionally are also part and parcel of the reproduction of these specific categories of subjects and the power relations that constitute them. The produced subject, whose production is ongoing and never complete, acts within horizons that constitute the very potential for acting” (Harding and Pribram 2002: 421).

The social conventions which channel and limit sense of moral responsibility, and at the same time, the emotional and moral connections between individuals and communities, are culturally and historically contingent, as was recognized and articulated by Malkki (1996) in her study of Hutu refugees in Tanzania and the established practices of humanitarian representation and intervention:

These practices are embedded in long and complicated histories of their own—histories of charity and philanthropy, histories of international law, peacekeeping, and diplomacy, histories of banishment and legal protection, histories of empires and colonial rule, histories of civilizational and emancipatory discourses and missionary work, histories of World Bank and other development initiatives in Africa, and much more. These humanitarian representational practices and the standardized interventions that go with them have the effect, as they currently stand, of producing anonymous corporeality and speechlessness. That is, these practices tend to actively displace, muffle, and pulverize history in the sense that the Hutu refugees in Mishamo understood history. And they tend to hide the political, or political-economic, connections that link television viewers’ own history with that of “those poor people over there” ( Malkki 1996: 389).

In describing why different ethical distinctions exist in any given time period, Haskell (1985) uses the example of the early abolitionist movement. Abolitionists who were compelled to act met a set of preconditions; they were aware of the horrors of slavery and they comprehended their own

causal relationship to slavery. However, “all humane action entails ‘selectivity’” (Haskell 1985: 352). How could the abolitionists be moved to action against slavery, while ignoring the conditions of the factory laborer or live-in servant? How could they be blind to other forms of economic and social oppression? Was this a result of self-deception? Haskell explains, no:

Abolitionists did not need to hide anything from themselves. All of us, no matter how humane, disown responsibility every day for known consequences of our own acts (and omissions) that are far more horrifying than those the abolitionists disowned when they chose to help slaves rather than wage workers. Keeping a clear conscience in spite of being causally involved in the suffering of others does not require self-deception. ...What enables us all—the abolitionists in their day and you and me in ours—to maintain a good conscience, in spite of doing nothing concretely about most of the world’s suffering, is not self deception but the ethical shelter afforded to us by our society’s conventions of moral responsibility (Haskell 1985: 352).

Thus, humanitarianism actually serves as a mask or an alibi for other forms of oppression, and we are soothed by social convention. As Barthes stated, “I rather fear that the final justification of all this Adamism [or universalism] is to give to the immobility of the world the alibi of a ‘wisdom’ and a ‘lyricism’ which only make the gestures of man look eternal the better to defuse them” (Barthes 1972: 102).

This contextual understanding is useful to explain the limits of social obligation to humanitarian action. “Whatever limits we do set can therefore always be challenged and made to look arbitrary or ‘selective’ by insistent questioning—for they are finally nothing more than conventions” (Haskell 1985: 355). At the same time, both proximity and technology can increase our sense of what is possible to accomplish, and our sense of power to do so. New technology “can change the moral universe in which we live. Technological innovation can perform this startling feat, because it supplies us with new ways of acting at a distance and new ways of influencing future events and thereby imposes on us new occasions for the attribution of responsibility and guilt” (Haskell 1985: 356). If we can save others by the push of a button, “then a failure to act would become indefensible” and “notice that this drastic change in our operative sense of responsibility could be brought about without any change at all in our ethical convictions” (Haskell 1985: 356).

As part of discussing the effect of new technologies on broadening our sense of humanitarian possibilities, Haskell invents a term to describe “the full range of practical know-how about cause-and-effect connections” (Haskell 1985: 357), the manipulative techniques, or ways of intervening in the course of events. He calls this “recipe knowledge”. Recipe knowledge is fundamental to whether humanitarian action is deemed possible and morally necessary. “Neither causal perception nor feelings of moral responsibility can exist in the absence of appropriate recipes” (Haskell 1985: 357). New recipes “can extend moral responsibility beyond its former limits” (Haskell 1985: 357). I will return to and further articulate these preconditions in Chapter six, *Communities of Feeling*.



## CHAPTER 4

### EXPANDING THE 'CIRCLE OF THE WE': THE STORY OF THE LOST BOYS OF SUDAN

It is by constructing cultural traumas that social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering but “take on board” some significant responsibility for it. Insofar as they identify the cause of trauma, and thereby assume such moral responsibility, members of collectivities define their solidary relationships in ways that, in principle, allow them to share the sufferings of others. Is the suffering of others also our own? In thinking that it might in fact be, societies expand the circle of the we. By the same token, social groups can, and often do, refuse to recognize the existence of others’ trauma, and because of their failure they cannot achieve a moral stance. By denying the reality of others’ suffering, people not only diffuse their own responsibility for the suffering but often project the responsibility for their own suffering on these others (Alexander 2004: 1).

In this chapter, I review ways the story of the Lost Boys is told and interpreted, and investigate ways in which the story is part of a collective trauma process (Alexander 2004), wherein a narrative is repeated in order to claim an injustice, moral responsibility is assigned or defined, and social belonging is expanded. It is through this process that important questions are collectively asked, not asked, or ignored. I will be thinking through the nature of the Lost Boys’ trauma claim and the way moral responsibility for suffering is assigned, based on meanings and lessons emphasized by local South Sudanese and gleaned from the story by local audiences.

I use the concept of cultural trauma not to discuss the collective identity of the Lost Boys, but the extent to which local audiences identify with and extend solidarity to the Lost Boys, and the extent to which audiences ‘take on board’ the suffering of the South Sudanese. This examination sheds light on taken-for-granted values and norms, with implications, for example, to an understanding of the United States’ identity as a nation of immigrants, as the land of opportunity, as an upholder of human rights and humanitarian efforts, and as a post-racial or colorblind society. As discussed in chapter three, refugee narratives both endorse and have power to disrupt national ideologies and their supporting political and socio-cultural structures (Marfleet 2007).

Clearly, the Lost Boys’ story operates and creates coherence at multiple scales, from the international to the personal, while also intersecting with several principal narratives, including the war on terror, the plight of child soldiers and humanitarian efforts in eastern Africa, and emerging

as a Christian faith narrative. Although the story of the Lost Boys is told in multiple ways, one telling predominates. The dominant narrative, set by public media, focuses on the Lost Boys' lives before and immediately after resettlement, emphasizing faith, perseverance, and mutual care and community obligation; while leaving aside the geopolitics of oil, the Lost Boys' struggles to adapt to life in the United States, and masking issues of race relations in the United States.

## **CULTURAL TRAUMA**

**The trauma process.** Cultural trauma, as explained by Alexander (2004), "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander 2004: 1). Traumatic events have a disruptive impact on individual and collective sense of wellbeing and security. "Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis" (Herman 1992: 51, quoted in Holton 2011).

Individual trauma and collective trauma are distinct, in that collective trauma disrupts the social bonds and communal identity of a people:

By individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively... By collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with 'trauma.' But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared... 'We' no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body (Erikson 1976: 153-154).

Certainly, this is the case with the Southern Sudanese, who have endured cultural disruption, civil strife, and war for generations. These events have torn apart families and shattered ways of life.

In the memoir of one Southern Sudanese man, who reflects upon his loss of culture and identity, he remarks, “In a strange way, I was trying to become a Dinka in America; I was learning my customs among the Dinka of Iowa” (Bok 2003: 179-180). Although his story is distinct from most Lost Boys, because he was kidnapped and held as a slave in the North for most of his youth, his experience of cultural and social loss is not unique. His thoughts speak to the social rupture that interned millions of people in refugee camps for decades. Southern Sudanese in Phoenix often spoke of similar experiences of loss. For example, one person told me a story about returning to South Sudan and waiting at the airport to be picked up by family members. Although they are family, they did not recognize each other (Personal interview, January 15, 2010).

Collective trauma does not emerge naturally or inherently from events themselves; rather, it is a “socially mediated attribution” that is accomplished over generations through a trauma process (Alexander 2004: 8). Trauma must be articulated and represented repeatedly in order to make its way into public consciousness. The trauma process involves the following: the emergence of carrier groups “with the resources, authority, and interpretive competence” (Alexander 2004: 27) to give voice to suffering with a persuasive, compelling narrative; they broadcast a trauma claim. Moral responsibility for suffering is defined and/or blame is assigned and accepted by the perpetrators. Over time, the lessons of the trauma are memorialized and commemorated in public form. Wider publics identify and share in the suffering, thus extending social solidarities, and institutionalizing a new sense of moral and communal responsibility.

Victor Turner (1957, 1974, 1980) wrote about a similar process, which he called social drama. A social drama begins with some public transgression of a taken-for granted standard of behavior or custom that arouses factions of a society into crisis. Thus, a social drama illuminates values and norms that are normally unquestioned. “The social drama is a limited area of transparency on the otherwise opaque surface of regular, uneventful social life” (Turner 1957: 93). Although Turner initially developed the idea of the social drama while living in Ndembu villages in central eastern Africa, he eventually came to believe in the universality of the structural form. The social drama is “a spontaneous unit of social process and a fact of everyone's

experience in every human society” (Turner 1980: 149). A social drama is composed of four phases: breach, crisis, redress, *and* reintegration or recognition of schism. Turner argues that this processual or developmental order is not the order of a story (although stories are often told *about* social dramas) and is not the result of “post-hoc emplotment,” but is “the consequence of shared understandings and experiences in the lives of members of the same changing sociocultural field” (Turner 1987: 36). According to the developing theory of cultural trauma, these experiences and understandings become shared through representation.

Representation is key in the process of constructing a cultural trauma. In fact, “direct experience of an event is not a necessary condition for its inclusion in the trauma process. It is through time-delayed and negotiated recollection that cultural trauma is experienced, a process which places representation in a key role” (Eyerman 2001: 12). In order for trauma to pierce collective awareness, “social crises must become cultural crises. Events are one thing, representations of these events quite another. Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity’s sense of its own identity” (Alexander 2004: 10). This collective consciousness takes place through the trauma process. A spiral of signification takes place; this is an intensification of communication and identification as issues are repeated through public representation (Hall and Jefferson 1976/1993).

Over time, a cultural trauma is integrated and reclassified through various social institutions: religious, aesthetic, legal, scientific, mass media, and state bureaucracy are given as examples (Alexander 2004). These arenas re-interpret, reclassify, and mediate the master narrative accordingly. The Lost Boys are not the sole tellers of their story; their accounts are prefaced and complemented by the many media representations in circulation. The processes of routinization, institutionalization, and commemoration have “profound normative implications for the conduct of social life. By allowing members of wider publics to participate in the pain of others, cultural traumas broaden the realm of social understanding and sympathy, and they provide powerful avenues for new forms of social incorporation” (Alexander 2004: 23-24).

A prime example of cultural trauma is the role of the 1961 trial of Nazi Adolph Eichmann in constructing the meaning of the Holocaust. This trial brought forth survivors who testified in public for the first time. People who had not experienced the war conditions themselves began to understand the paralyzing conditions within which the victims had found themselves. "Some Israelis began to grasp that, rather than constituting a different breed of Jews, they were simply generationally and geographically lucky" (Lipstadt 2011: 196). The testimony of survivors "demonstrated that heroism came in many forms, and that those who went to their death without fighting were not, ipso facto, weaklings" (Lipstadt 2011: 196). Further, as wider publics began to identify with the victims, they became traumatized themselves. "Dalia Ravikovitz, a young Israeli writer, observed that the trial transformed the Holocaust into 'an exploding hand grenade; each of us has been struck by his private splinter'" (Lipstadt 2011: 197).

Jeffrey Alexander (2004) details how, through cultural work of symbolic extension and psychological identification, the Holocaust became a shared traumatic experience, "a generalized symbol of human suffering and moral evil, a universalized symbol whose very existence has created historically unprecedented opportunities for ethnic, racial, and religious justice, for mutual recognition, and for global conflicts to become regulated in a more civil way" (Alexander 2004: 197). But the Holocaust was not always understood this way; a generation passed before the public began to identify with Jewish victims. At the time of the concentration camp discoveries, "the starving, depleted, often weird-looking and sometimes weird-acting Jewish camp survivors seemed like a foreign race" (Alexander 2004: 199). The concentration camp survivors seemed repugnant, dehumanized. This echoes Malkki's (1996) observations that depictions of refugees are often depersonalized; rather than individual stories and humanizing details, accounts depict masses of flesh/humanity. These mass depictions make personal identification, both on an individual and collective level, less likely. Early representations of concentration camps (when the veracity of their existence was not also being questioned) depicted events as generic,

unfortunate, but otherwise unremarkable atrocities of war. The Eichmann trial is noted as one of the first public events that called survivors as witnesses to tell their own stories, prompting a shift in public consciousness.

Holocaust survivors did not talk about their past, and when they did, they were not listened to. Their memories were sealed in muteness and in silence. Their stories were often kept secret even from their families. The emotional explosion triggered by the Eichmann trial and by the revolution in the victims it dramatically and morally effected publicly unlocked this silence. Now, for the first time, victims were legitimized and validated, and their newborn discourse was empowered by their new roles not as victims but as prosecution witnesses within the trial. I argue that a new moral perception was made possible precisely by this change of role and change of status... Ultimately, the acquisition of *semantic authority* by victims is what the trial was about (Felman 2002: 127).

The Holocaust began to be understood as the Holocaust only through coding, weighting, and narrating the Nazis and the mass killings as a moral evil, and advocating the betterment and purification of society through redemption for the mass murder of Jews. "These shifting cultural constructions are fatefully affected by the power and identity of the agents in charge, by the competition for symbolic control, and the structures of power and distribution of resources that condition it" (Alexander 2004: 204). The Holocaust survivors gained authority over their own life stories and public representation; there is now a generally accepted sense that there is a moral benefit in listening to the story of a survivor (I will discuss what Byford 2014 terms the American culture of Holocaust memorialization further in the following chapter).

So this process traumatizes the wider population through recognition and identification, but the aim is to heal social rupture, extend social solidarities, and construct a new, broadened sense of moral bearing. "Experiencing trauma' can be understood as a sociological process that defines a painful injury to the collectivity, establishes the victim, attributes responsibility, and distributes the ideal and material consequences. Insofar as traumas as so experienced, and thus imagined and represented, the collective identity will become significantly revised" (Alexander 2004: 22). Let us investigate how Phoenix audiences are receiving, identifying with, and incorporating the story of the Lost Boys as part of the trauma process. We start with the Lost Boys as the emerging carrier group.

**Carrier groups.** Turner (1980) briefly mentions the concept of “star groups” or those for whom we feel most emotional concern:

Social dramas occur within groups of persons who share values and interests and who have a real or alleged common history. The main actors are persons for whom the group has a high value priority. Most of us have what I call our “star” group or groups to which we owe our deepest loyalty and whose fate is for us of the greatest personal concern. It is the one with which a person identifies most deeply and in which he finds fulfillment of his major social and personal desires (Turner 1980: 149).

Alexander, following Weber, cites “carrier groups” as the “collective agents of the trauma process... [who] have particular discursive talents for articulating their claims—for what might be called ‘meaning making’ – in the public sphere” (Alexander 2004: 11).

The idea of the Lost Boys as a star group or carrier group within the United States makes sense; they are sought after as public speakers and role models in many different contexts. Local audiences valorize the Lost Boys as survivors of unimaginable trauma, who maintain positive attitudes and an admirable work ethic. Some of the Lost Boys themselves used the phrases ‘rising stars’ and ‘fallen stars’ to refer to those in the community who had either achieved success or were struggling with problems such as alcohol abuse or violence. The Lost Boys are recognized as possessing the moral and semantic authority to tell their own story and impart the lessons of their survival. This sets a mutually-agreed-upon “definition of the situation” (Goffman 1959) between audiences and Lost Boys who engage in public presentations.

Throughout this chapter and the next, I will draw from field notes and personal interviews to show how the Lost Boys relate their personal stories and manage their public representation. The young men reference universal claims to common humanity and make appeals to shared values. The public speakers adopt a generous and obliging stance in public presentation, which is non-threatening and accommodating to various audience interpretations. Overall, the Lost Boys who act as public representatives are flexible and welcoming; they do not contest or agitate for a critical political stance. The young men typically adopt a speaking style that is gentle and quiet, gracious, and portrays humility. They often make adept use of humor.

The Lost Boys are also uniquely positioned to serve as representatives. By striving to adapt in the U.S., the young men as a group are non-threatening to taken-for-granted ways of life, including consumer culture and the idea of a colorblind society. The image of the Lost Boys supports the notion of the U.S. as a nation of immigrants, yet without the quandary that the story of an undocumented migrant might compel; the Lost Boys are legal immigrants who tend to frame their stories as being about hardship and God rather than political (and contestable) refugee status.

Yet, even within this role of a nonconfrontational, grateful and gracious refugee, the Lost Boys and their stories do present cultural and ethical challenges to their audiences. In this way, the Lost Boys match Massumi's description of a star player: one who plays against the rules, not by breaking them, but by playing around them: "adding minute, unregulated contingencies" and thus modifying "expected mechanisms of channeling field-potential" (Massumi 2002a: 77). I also argue that the story itself has a presence and a kind of agency; many audiences reported first meeting the Lost Boys, and following their stories over the years, through media accounts. Here Massumi's (2002a) discussion of incipience and actualization is helpful. "For [media transmissions] to have any *specific* effect, they must be determined to have that effect by apparatuses of actualization and implantation that plug into them and transformatively relay what they give rise to (family, church, school, and chamber of commerce, to name but a few)" (Massumi 2002a: 44). I suggest that audiences are primed prior to meeting a Lost Boy; ideological framing work is performed through the numerous small communities or "apparatuses of actualization and implantation" which introduce audiences to Lost Boys.

Massumi argued that Reagan's audiences had, "in their eagerness (or at least willingness) to play their social roles, worked themselves into a state of heightened receptivity... marked by autonomic repetition of assigned lines and a susceptibility to becoming-other, on cue" (Massumi 2002a: 55). I think of the woman who approached the Lost Boys at an art fair, hand outstretched, murmuring, "bless you, bless you," with tears in her eyes. She had never before met these particular young men, but a religious passion immediately surfaced upon recognizing them



as Lost Boys of Sudan. Audiences and volunteers spoke with earnest vigor and emotion, asking how they might help the Lost Boys and also how they might act to alleviate suffering in Sudan. “All the world will be a stage, with Reagan in the leading role as carrier of a dehumanizing contagion” (Massumi 2002a: 55). In this case, the Lost Boys become a carrier group of a *humanizing contagion*. Now let us look more closely at the popular presentation of the story of the Lost Boys.

**Narrative: the trauma claim.** Through the trauma process, carrier groups construct and disseminate a collective narrative which addresses injustice and requires remedy. By giving voice to suffering, this narrative acts as a claim or demand: “It is a claim to some fundamental injury, an exclamation of the terrifying profanation of some sacred value, a narrative about a horribly destructive social process, and a demand for emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution” (Alexander 2004: 11).

Through her research with South Sudanese refugees in Kakuma, Kenya, Holton (2011) observed that the Dinka communities she lived with had constructed a collective trauma narrative, and she also refers to the story of the Lost Boys as a communal faith narrative. Holton and others emphasize the plural, communal pronoun *we*. “While Western talk therapy demands a focus on the individual experience for narrative to be beneficial, the Lost Boys are bound to the communal experience. By collectively giving voice to their experience, they not only enter into the suffering together but out of its depths bring new meaning” (Holton 2011: 128-129). Goodman’s (2004) interviews with Lost Boys resettled in the U.S. found that a notion of collectivity and the communal self were a key coping strategy that helped the Lost Boys to survive. “Each participant located himself predominantly as part of the group of refugee boys, telling his story with the group voice, mainly using the pronouns *we* and *us*, and only rarely using the personal pronouns *I* or *me*. A sense of shared experience and collective coping enabled survival” (Goodman 2004: 1183).

Throughout the two years that I volunteered and conducted research with local South Sudanese, the story of the Lost Boys was most frequently presented as a communal narrative.

There is a sense that the story belongs to all the Lost Boys, regardless of tribal identity, and extends to the displaced people of South Sudan. Other community members, including elders and mothers, also adopted the Lost Boys label at times, indicating a sense of belonging and connection. Oftentimes, when interested parties would approach the Lost Boys' booth at a community event, they would mention seeing a documentary or having read one of the memoirs. The young men who were representing the community would nod their heads and say, "Yes, yes, that was me," or "Yes, that is my story, all of us!" The Lost Boys made no distinction regarding ownership of the story; the same plight had happened to them all.

At one speaking event, the Lost Boys were introduced as "The Lost Boys of Darfur". Darfur is in northwestern Sudan, and the Darfuris are predominantly Muslims. The young men had a good laugh at the geographic error after they left the event. However, upon consideration, they decided that this mistake was fortunate, as it had brought attention to the genocide occurring in Darfur. They did not mind being associated with a people with whom they did not share language or religion. Rather, they said, the attacks on the Darfuri villages were the same attacks endured by the people of the South.

Holton suggests that, drawing from communal spiritual traditions of healing, the Lost Boys' story gives voice to suffering from within the community and demands justice (Holton 2011). This understanding of justice must be qualified, as it was outside the reach of refugees to change the course of the war. Instead, the communal narrative provides a moral frame, which has a psychological benefit.

The function of this justice is seen not in its effectiveness to move or change the larger society but in its ability to provide a moral frame in the midst of unspeakable injustice. Though this may have little power to obtain restitution in the broader sense, it lessens the likelihood that many Lost Boys will be left to question their own culpability for the tragedy that has befallen them (Holton 2011: 131).

Aside from providing a protective moral frame, public acknowledgement of social breach is an integral part of repairing that rupture. It seems clear that public recognition of suffering is an essential early step toward recovery from a communal breach, such as a collective trauma.

Restoration of the breach between the traumatized person and the community depends, first, upon public acknowledgment of the traumatic events, and second, upon some form of community action. Once it is publicly recognized that a person has been harmed, the community must take action to assign responsibility for the harm and to repair the injury. These two responses—recognition and restitution—are necessary to rebuild the survivor's sense of order and justice (Herman 1992: 70).

The aim of the cultural trauma process is re-integration (Alexander 2004), or a healing of the social schism (Turner 1980). What might recognition and restitution look like for the Lost Boys and South Sudanese community in Phoenix? How do audiences recognize the suffering of the South Sudanese, and in what ways are social solidarities extended? What moral lessons are being drawn from this story? Now we are ready to begin our journey into the story of the Lost Boys, as told to and with local Phoenix audiences.

### **SURROUNDED BY A STORY: CIRCULATION AND REFLECTION**

Due to extensive media coverage, including television shows, published memoirs, documentary films, and newspaper coverage, the Lost Boys are well-known to local audiences. In this way, the story has a presence, and the story can enter a room and the minds of the listeners before the Lost Boy who is going to tell it. The young men are surrounded by this story; it precedes them, so that they sometimes need to exercise strategies to provide privacy for themselves. The prevalence of the story also prepares or primes audiences prior to meeting a public speaker. Audiences seem to hear and want different lessons from the story, and they may be holding these lessons at the ready, to emphasize them if the speaker does not.

The story of the Lost Boys is circulated through different contexts, told in different ways, reflecting different images to different audiences. Let me give an example. The young man to whom I would like to refer, asked me to not reveal his identity. As part of his story, he tells about feeling left behind in Kakuma refugee camp, while many of his friends were resettled in the U.S., Canada, or Australia. One day he was so despondent that he wrote a plea to God, folded up the paper, and hid it within the wall of his hut. He did this while alone. Later, while watching a

televangelist program on the camp TV set, he heard the preacher speak to him directly. The preacher called him by name, let him know he'd get a new home soon, and that he should not give up hope. The young man was astounded, and could only imagine that God had answered his prayer through this televangelist. The young man indeed received notice shortly thereafter that he would be resettled to another country. This story is available through public media. However, other versions of the same young man's story are also disseminated through public media, with no mention of God or miracles, but instead hailing the assistance of international refugee organizations. Whether one is reading NGO materials or religious materials will determine which version of the story one is exposed to; these are sort of parallel tracks or parallel discourse communities. I suggest then, that the Lost Boys are represented in a way as multidimensional beings, as polysemic, simultaneously inhabiting multiple versions of their own story, and who are perceived by various communities of listeners in very different ways. (In chapter five I make a similar statement; that the Lost Boys can be "recognized" and treated differently if they are presumed to be South Sudanese or African American).

While there are multiple tellings and receivings of the Lost Boys' story, the dominant narrative conveys the horrors endured by the children and offers redemption in faith, perseverance, and mutual care and obligation found in community. The dominant narrative is apolitical, and contains very little historical context that might orient audiences into a critical perspective. If there is an attempt to discuss the motives behind the attacks on the boys' villages, there is no mention of oil fields; rather, race and/or religion are more likely to be referenced. Yet, this gives only a pretense of context.

When the young men in Phoenix tell their stories, they generally focus on the Lost Boys' childhood and the long walk to Ethiopia, and early years in the U.S.; most often, speakers would introduce their talks by showing segments of a *60 Minutes* television episode that dates back to the arrivals of the first Lost Boys in the United States. Reliance on the video allowed the public speakers to present a harrowing account of their journey while also maintaining a degree of emotional distance. I will present the story, as the Lost Boys tell it, through the video segment.

The *60 Minutes* episode opens:

In Peter Pan, there were lost boys who fought off pirates and crocodiles before flying off to Never Never Land. In Sudan, thousands of lost boys fought off crocodiles and other dangers we can barely imagine and, as *60 Minutes II* first reported 18 months ago, are happily flying off to a new life in the United States (McKay 2003).

Segments of the video are shown by speakers who travel to area schools, and also to groups who come to tour the AZLBC. After the video, a speaker will tell some personal details about his own experience, and then open the discussion to audience questions. According to the young men who act as public speakers, the most frequently-asked question is some variation of, "How did you survive?" or, "How did you keep your faith?" I noted that audiences most often asked to hear the first impressions of the young men regarding their arrival in the U.S., asking, "What was the most difficult change you had to make," or, "What was the most strange about the U.S.?" One Lost Boy said that for a long time, it seemed to him that the location of the sun's rising and setting were reversed.

The *60 Minutes* video can arouse controversy, and it seems, deep feelings of shame for some of the Lost Boys; in April 2010, a group of school children on a field trip were watching the video at the AZLBC. A Lost Boy entered the room and began angrily yelling criticisms of the video; he was quickly removed by other Lost Boys. During a meeting of the public speakers at the AZLBC, Kuol Awan, director of the Center, addressed use of the video. Noting that the footage was almost a decade old, and showed Lost Boys within their first few months while they were still learning and adapting to life in the U.S., Mr. Awan said, "It is also up to you to move away from that story. We're not ignorant now."

The *60 Minutes* video focuses on young men in Kakuma, Kenya during the time that the first groups of refugees were leaving to settle in other countries, including the United States, and it tells the story of the Lost Boys survival, from attacks on their villages, to the journey by foot through Sudan to Ethiopia, from Ethiopia back through Sudan and to Kenya. The video shows some of the first resettlement flights to the United States, and early stories of adaptation to the new environments in various United States cities.

As Robins (2003) found in a survey review of early news articles, Africa is portrayed as a “blank darkness” and the ‘Lost Boys’ as coming from “outside of time or history” (Robins 2004: 35-36). The transcript of the *60 Minutes* video segment quotes the following: “An American at the camp who helps prepare the boys for their journey says many have never been exposed to lights or to a fork or a knife or to a TV. ‘It’s a group that’s lost in time,’ he says” (McKay 2003). Through voiceovers and interviews with young men, some of the more difficult and explicit details of the journey are told: children surviving the months-long trek by drinking urine, or eating mud. Many died of starvation, exhaustion, and attack by animals and the Northern military forces.

**Media accounts: a unidirectional story.** The *60 Minutes* video tells about the young men arriving in different cities in the US, highlighting some cultural contrasts and the sharp learning curve faced by the young men. A segment shows Joseph Taban, a Lost Boy, learning how to drive in the new car of his American mentor, Joey McLiney. Joseph loses control of the car and drives off the street, and down a grassy slope. Audiences generally laugh at this scene; no one was hurt. There are several scenes in documentary films and other television shows that portray some of the early misunderstandings and mistakes as the Lost Boys became acquainted with life in the United States. These could be productive, critical moments for audiences to see U.S. culture and society anew. Within the South Sudanese community, there are mixed reactions to the staying power of these encounters that are not only preserved, but also often brought out and shown. During one interview, a Lost Boy said:

You know I laugh at those movies sometimes... it's fun. And there are parts that are stupid in it [laughing]. There really are. And you know, you wouldn't believe that they are reality, unless you know that... I think some of us now, when you show it among the Lost Boys, some of them will say, “Why do you show that again?” I'll be like, “Well, you've got to be reminded [laughing] of who you were, nine years or ten years ago”. So some will: “Oh you don't need to show that anymore, because it make people look dumb!” I say, “Yes, you were dumb when you came here!” So definitely, you've got to look back at that; it's good to look back at that (Personal interview, October 29, 2010).

Another young man made a side remark to me following a meeting where we had discussed the possibility to make short videos (interviews, skits about relevant issues) to post online or to share within the community. The young man said that he thought the other community members

would be reluctant to make videos, for fear of saying or doing something at which everyone else would laugh. He said that others were still, years later, making fun of one Lost Boy for a scene in a film where his lack of experience in the U.S. was displayed.

A specific example of a scene that some find painfully embarrassing is found both in the 2003 documentary, *Lost Boys of Sudan* and also in the 2006 documentary *God Grew Tired of Us*. Both films show scenes of young men confronted for the first time with airplane meals during their initial flights overseas. Both films show individuals tasting and eating butter straight from the packet. In the 2006 film, one of the young men explains to the camera that he cannot tell what he is eating: “It tastes like soap, you know, that small one... Is that meat? Is that milk? Is that cheese? I cannot tell.”

These scenes provide a moment to question Western food practices and for Western audiences to consider our disconnection from our food sources. As the Lost Boys encounter packaged airplane and grocery store food (as one young man says at a grocer’s meat section, “Everywhere I see meat and nowhere do I see a cow”), Americans encounter our food practices and consumer-selves in a cultural mirror that could refuse naturalization. Instead, if packaged butter is seen as natural or taken-for-granted, the moments can also be taken as embarrassing for Southern Sudanese as it exposes their lack of acquaintance with processed and packaged foods.

Robins’ (2003) review of early newspaper coverage of the Lost Boys’ arrival in the U.S. asserts the unidirectionality of the story. “The stories set up an unquestioned expectation that the Sudanese will change in the USA, to be gauged by how well they embrace its cultural products” (Robins 2003: 40). Democracy is conflated with capitalism and “freedom is exemplified by the bountiful choice of products” at the shopping mall (Robins 2003: 41). “In sum, many of these stories perpetuate an assumption that change can happen in only one direction, from the ‘there’ of Africa to the ‘here’ of contemporary America. That the USA could learn from the ‘Lost Boys’ disappears in the valorizing of American values” (Robins 2003: 41).

This narrative then becomes, as journalist Mark Bixler declared in his account of the arrival of the Lost Boys in the U.S., an *American story*.

The story of these young men from southern Sudan is in many ways emblematic of the experience of so many other refugees resettled in the United States. It is an American story in the most literal sense because most of the book is set in the United States, following newly arrived refugees for their first two years in this country. The narrative also reminds us that the United States is and has been a nation of immigrants, where most people can trace their ancestry to another part of the world. In addition, it is an American story in its embodiment of themes that run through so much of American culture, history, and literature. These include the emphasis on individual freedom and the idea—to often dismissed as a myth—that despite its disparities and imperfections, the United States offers even its most vulnerable newcomers the opportunity to achieve through sacrifice and hard work (Bixler 2005, xvi).

The *60 Minutes* video offers a strong statement regarding the US as the land of opportunity, where hard working individuals who subscribe to the ‘bootstraps’ mentality and who maintain a positive attitude can achieve the American Dream. “‘He’s living the American dream,’ says his mentor, McLiney. ‘He’s already got jobs, he’s self-sufficient. You’ve taken someone literally in the Stone Age and dropped him into a modern civilization and said after four months you’re on your own. And he is, and he’s fine. It’s the most remarkable thing I’ve ever seen’” (McKay 2003).

The Lost Boys are presented as fully subscribing and adhering to the idea of bettering one’s position through persistent hard work. One young man in the film *God Grew Tired of Us* (2006) describes upon arrival to the U.S. that even as he is enjoying greater comforts, he thinks of family members in Sudan and commits to working to become self-sufficient in order to provide for them and meet their expectations that he will take advantage of American opportunities.

Even though we are now in United States we are eating well, we are sleeping well. We think a lot of our brothers, mothers, and fathers. And even now, we don’t feel comfortable. So, I’m worried about them. But they are very happy. If I will be self-reliant, self-sufficient, to support myself and to stand on my own feet, then I will see. I will even send them something so that they can survive with it.

I support and agree with Robins’ assessments of early newspaper coverage. Scholarly discussion of public representation of refugees (see chapter three) has provided a valuable critique and is the starting point for this research. These widely disseminated public representations predispose audiences to particular and ideological understandings of the Lost Boys’ story. However, the top-down approach (examination of public media) does not examine



how people interpret and apply these representations in their own lives and daily decision-making. In undertaking this dissertation research, my aim was in part to see how identification takes place in everyday relations between Lost Boys and audiences/volunteers.

**Audience identification: an “American” story.** For many local audiences, the Lost Boys are unusual acquaintances. Many audiences and volunteers reported, for example, that the Lost Boys were their first and only acquaintances who are refugees, or Africans, or even friends who speak with an accent. An integral part of the trauma process is that wider audiences or publics begin to identify with the trauma claim voiced by the carrier group. In order to instigate identification, the trauma claim itself must appeal to shared values. “Typically, at the beginning of the trauma process, most audience members see little if any relation between themselves and the victimized group. Only if the victims are represented in terms of valued qualities shared by the larger collective identity will the audience be able to symbolically participate in the experience of the originating trauma” (Alexander 2004: 14). This helps to explain the dominant narrative’s appeal to such wide-ranging values as faith and overcoming adversity. However, the story is often flipped as Robins (2003) pointed out, or appropriated to hold a mirror to “American myths” and “American values,” thus obscuring what the Lost Boys themselves might want to convey. Let us think through these complexities.

Audiences emotionally identify with the story and seem to apply it to their own circumstances, whatever those circumstances might be. Audiences report that they draw inspiration from the story; it motivates and comforts them. One interview participant related her own struggles with recovery from alcohol abuse to the Lost Boys’ struggles with PTSD. Several others identified their protective attachment towards the Lost Boys to be akin to their feelings for their own children. Other young adults discussed the emotional power of hearing a story about children who survived hardship with minimal or no help from adults. One young girl, who had invited a Lost Boy to speak at her Sunday church service, began to cry as she related the Lost Boys’ story to her church congregation. Her mother told us later that it was the daughter’s idea to

invite a Lost Boy to speak at church. She clearly felt a strong affective identification, even as she did not articulate or explain its origin to the audience.

I started to notice, at speaking events, that the person or people who had extended the speaking invitation to the Lost Boys would also often deliver an impassioned introduction or closing thoughts at the event, sometimes highlighting or summarizing certain aspects of the story to the audience. Interviews with event coordinators also revealed various interpretations of the story: the story was being used to motivate troubled teenagers, to show a neighborhood that there are Black people and immigrants who are striving to adapt to the 'American way of life' and become 'productive members of society', and to show undocumented children that 'other people have problems, and can overcome them, too'.

Oftentimes at an event, the organizer will introduce the speaker while emphasizing certain parts of the story, or will offer a condensed version of the story of the Lost Boys. It is the many tellings, reflections, and projections that make up the meanings of the story and the Lost Boys signifier. Since the meaning of the story is in part constructed by audience interpretations, retellings, and emphases, and audiences may understand and retell the story in different ways, then examination is helpful to understanding the meanings that audiences draw from and recreate.

One aspect of the story that is often highlighted by audiences is the sense of responsibility and care that the child survivors showed each other. Audiences in Phoenix expressed being deeply moved by the thought of children, separated from their parents and other adults, undertaking this journey together. The *60 Minutes* narrator describes the Lost Boys' journey as "the 'Lord of the Flies' in reverse," describing how the older boys (for example, Joseph Taban at age 11) cared for and protected the younger boys. One Lost Boy in Phoenix tells how the children would sleep together in a pile, with the older boys at the outside. Everyone knew that the children on the edges of the pile were most susceptible to attack from lions. If, upon waking during the night, one found oneself at the outer edge, a child would attempt to wiggle back into the center without disturbing the others.

Another aspect that audiences remarked upon is the overcoming of extreme adversity. It is key to consider how this is conveyed. One Lost Boy related an incident where he was part of a group of Sudanese speakers at a children's school. After hearing their story, one of the children asked the young men, "How did you survive?" He said that another in the speakers' group answered, "We were strong." The young man said that answer had always troubled him, and he wished he had thought to speak up at the time. He said the answer did not seem true to him, and in fact seemed a harmful example to give to children. Other Lost Boys began to add their views: one remarked that the answer completely overlooked the fact that many along their journey had not survived, and that millions of people had died as a result of the war. Were they somehow weaker? Was it somehow their own fault that they did not survive? These thoughts were troubling and the answers were unsatisfactory. Yet, interpretations vary. Another Lost Boy told me, "So the past has taught you, you know, what didn't kill you will make you stronger" (Personal interview, February 6, 2010). As the Lost Boys question and debate how to represent their story, they are working out the nature of victimization and suffering, and thus the nature of potential redress, that is relayed in the trauma narrative. Is the moral lesson that the Lost Boys survived because they were strong, and they were made stronger by surviving adversity? Or does the moral lesson include the senseless loss of life of families, friends, and communities?

Audiences draw inspiration and motivation from the accounts of adversity. When asked what aspects of the story are the most meaningful, one volunteer commented:

I think that the fact they've seen so much tragedy, like I can't even imagine seeing my family dying around me. I can't. I mean, that to me... and the thing about being left behind, and the isolation, feeling that as such a young child. And just the fact that they persevered, when so many people, I mean talking to people I know here, would have been like, "Well I just would have sat down and died. I wouldn't want to deal with that at all, I would have given up." And they didn't give up, they went through, and they never give up. Even though they're here, they are still working to better their lives (Personal interview, January 16, 2010).

Audiences and volunteers take the story and apply it to their own lives. This is not a criticism; this shows that the story touches people deeply; audiences open up to the story and to the young

men who tell it and are in it. This is how compassion compels us to recognize common humanity; this is a step in the process of the moral lessons of a story being transmitted to others.

One audience member discussed a renewed perspective on the petty, everyday discomforts of middle-class life in the U.S.:

I think [the story] inspires people over here. People come up and tell me, “I came in complaining,” and they feel like, “Gosh I don’t have anything [to complain about], look at what [the Lost Boys have] been through.” Very uplifting, they inspire me all the time. Wow, how can they be like this? They really enjoy a celebrity status because everybody wants to be like that, but we, as a nation, are big complainers. Why am I complaining about waiting in line at the grocery store, or traffic, when these boys went through all this as young men? They are smiling, not complainers, they are not asking for anything; they want to share their story. We want to be like them. We don’t want to suffer persecution to get that way, but we want to have that inner drive and spirit they have that is so missing in our culture (Personal interview, February 8, 2010).

Many volunteers and audience members alike spoke to me about a kind of shock or surprise at seeing their middle-class life anew after learning about or becoming close to Lost Boys. They make statements about driving a car a few blocks (being too lazy to walk), and hearing that the Lost Boys walked one thousand miles. The comments above about traffic and grocery store lines were common. During my own volunteer experience, I realized I often said, “I’m starving” before suggesting we break for lunch<sup>4</sup>. I would wince as soon as I’d said it. On the one hand, it can seem insensitive and banal to come away from a war story with such mundanities; on the other hand, these are personal responses that I think carry their own merit, and for some audiences, these insights can and do lead to more direct critique of U.S. society and culture.

**Missing pieces of the story.** However, it is also clear that the broad appeal of an apolitical narrative comes at the cost of certain important elements of the Lost Boys’ story. The Lost Boys understand that different groups want to hear different emphases; for example, church groups will want to hear their stories as faith narratives (audiences often ask the speaker how he kept his faith), while school groups will often emphasize the importance of education (audiences will highlight the Lost Boys’ saying, “Education is my mother and my father”). Yet the Lost Boys

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<sup>4</sup> Many of the Lost Boys eat only one meal per day, as was customary under conditions of scarcity, including in Kakuma, Kenya. They told me they forget to eat, or do not recognize when they are hungry. Many suffer from illnesses such as diabetes or stomach ulcers, and have been told by doctors that they need to learn to eat meals more often.

rarely discuss historical context and politics of Sudan/South Sudan (including the geopolitics of oil) or their experiences as child soldiers, except in rare cases to specific, receptive audiences. The Lost Boys emphasized to me that these elements are often missing from their story. By my own assessment, missing elements also include a political awareness of U.S. policy on immigration and refugees, a recognition of widespread racial inequalities in the U.S., and the living conditions and opportunities open to the working poor.

On the other hand, I began to think is not so crucial *whether* these elements are included, but *how* they are incorporated into the narrative. Here we encounter affect as maneuverability, as degrees of freedom (Massumi 2002b). Next, I will discuss a couple of examples that show how the narrative is channeled in regards to the background of affect, from which available next movements are drawn. This will allow us to discuss how staking claims to suffering and defining a sense of moral obligation are connected to and intertwined with the politics of belonging.

**Religion, politics, and 9/11.** The story of the Lost Boys is understood by local audiences in several ways as a Christian narrative, and as noted in chapter three, politically active religious groups on both the right and left in the U.S. have been moved to support the Lost Boys and Southern Sudanese. Religion was apparently one factor in attracting the attention of powerful groups within the US, who urged action. One journalist asserts that the (George W.) Bush administration began paying increasing attention to the Sudanese civil war because of activism among domestic constituencies:

The evangelical Christian right and the Roman Catholic church, both of which the White House is courting for the next presidential election, are at odds. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops has urged the White House to deal with all parties in the Sudan to try to quickly end the fighting. But the evangelicals are just as urgently recommending that the United States arm the Christian rebels in southern Sudan so they can press their fight for separation from the northern government, which is Islamic and has been fighting to extend Islamic law throughout the country (Perlez 2001).

The *60 Minutes* episode frames the Sudan conflict mainly in terms of religion: “Before their arrival in America, the lives of the Lost Boys had been one long saga of war and suffering caused by the Islamic fundamentalists of northern Sudan who had destroyed their homes and

killed their parents” (McKay 2003). The television episode identifies the South Sudanese, including the Lost Boys, as Christians who are suffering attacks by Northern Muslims. Following September 11, 2001, the threat of terrorism transferred to the United States and Islamic fundamentalists became a shared antagonist:

But then came Sept. 11, and the Lost Boys who thought they had left a life of terror far behind found that it had followed them to America. [Lost Boy] Abraham's boss, Mary Williams, was with him that morning. “I think they had a better grip on what happened than I did,” she said of the Lost Boys. “Because this is something totally foreign to me. I don't understand random acts of terrorism on that scale. They did. And they do” (McKay 2003).

The Lost Boys became a resource to those in the United States who sought to understand the traumatic disturbance of the 2001 terror attacks.

[Lost Boy] Joseph [Taban] and his mentor Joey McLiney had talked about Islam before Sept. 11. “I had talked to him about Muslims and he had given me a pretty negative response,” says McLiney. “And I wanted to tell him in the United States it's different, you need to think this way and that way. And basically on Sept. 11, I was re-educated because it wasn't a surprise to him.” (McKay 2003).

In this way, a particular image of the Lost Boys dovetails with the emotional regimes of post-9/11, as explained by Hochschild (2001). An emotional regime consists of a set of feeling rules (“rules about how we imagine we should feel”) and framing rules (“rules about the way we think we should see and think”), which together “shape how we see and feel about everyday reality” (Hochschild 2001: 118). The post-9/11 emotional regime is “associated with the smooth functioning of the nation state system, its monopolization of the means of violence and the pre-eminence of its leaders as makers of the emotion-rules” (Hochschild 2001: 118). In the aftermath of September 11, this emotional regime lent authority and justification (or even a mandate) for military action in Iraq and Afghanistan. There is, today, momentum for additional military intervention in Northern Africa to curb Islamic fundamentalist movements (this is in contrast to another common reaction, that South Sudan should ‘fix their own problems themselves,’ a view voiced by several Lost Boys).

Following 9/11, people turned to national authority figures for protection and for guidance on how to feel, for a reassuring sense “that we live in an environment where things make sense” (Hochschild 2001: 121). Scholars have documented use of ‘the politics of fear’ in public media

discourse to achieve certain goals (Altheide 2006) including justification for military strikes through manipulation and emotional appeals (Van Dijk 2006). Fear is cultivated within the U.S. media, justifying surveillance and vilification of Muslim Americans. At the same time, the story of the Lost Boys offers an alternative perspective, a reaffirmation of the U.S. as a nation that is humanitarian and open to immigrants (even though, in immediate response to 9/11, further refugee admissions to the U.S. were frozen for three months). Can the pieces of a story be rearranged to support any particular ideological approach?<sup>5</sup> As Hochschild points out, “one of the real challenges ahead of us is to be architects of a set of feeling rules which prevent people of color from becoming the scapegoats of 9/11” (Hochschild 2001: 126).

In general, the Lost Boys and their audiences veer away from overtly political interpretations of their story. In November, 2009, the AZLBC was asked to participate in a week-long international fair at a local college. A panel of Lost Boys was invited to speak. There were about 60 students present in the auditorium; many were Iraqi refugees who had fled the U.S.-led war. A young Iraqi man stood up to ask the first question following the presentation. He asked why Africans continue to have such large families when they are poor and cannot feed themselves. There was an awkward moment and then one of the Lost Boys began to respond, directing his comments to address the civil war in Sudan, which he asserted was the main cause of poverty and starvation in southern Sudan. “I was never hungry as a child until the war,” he said. Then an older Iraqi man stood up and began a passionate argument that, as Iraqi refugees, they were forced out of their country because of invasion by the United States, and not through internal strife, like in Sudan. It seemed as though he was attempting to discredit the Lost Boys’ situation by saying that the South Sudanese were at fault for this internal conflict, in comparison to Iraq, which was invaded by the U.S. in response to the 9/11 terror attacks. He seemed to be asking for recognition of the Iraqi refugees’ situation by aggressively questioning and demeaning that of the Lost Boys. He turned his back to the Lost Boys on the auditorium stage and faced the

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<sup>5</sup> One of the questions raised by critics of non-representational theory is, if any ordering is always volatile (Anderson and Harrison 2010: 21), then why does the world seem so stable? What makes things stick? “What accounts for things staying more or less the same?” (Cresswell 2012: 103).

audience of students, alternately pounding his fist into his hand and forcefully pumping it in the air while speaking. After a few short moments, one of the college instructors interrupted. She stood up, responding loudly, regaining authority over the situation, so that the man quieted down and took his seat.

The instructor reminded the class that the Lost Boys had been invited to tell their story; she invoked the positive and polite attitude of the young men and asserted that the class should welcome and honor them, and that other groups would be honored at other times and other events. With the focus and parameters of the discussion redirected, the question and answer session continued. The discussion was thus directed away from politically-engaged evaluations regarding the details and events that created refugees in different countries, and channeled toward an emphasis on personal stories of faith, overcoming adversity, and transforming anger and loss into hope.

Yet this redirection from geopolitics to the personal is also political and ideological; it subsumes a critical politics into an idea of proper personal comportment, and into an image of a thankful refugee. The admonition to honor the Lost Boys came at the expense of critical discussion and evaluation of U.S. military action in Iraq. The image of an angry Iraqi was redirected to become an image of a polite and grateful Lost Boy and, by extension (even if unintentionally), the United States from a dishonest military aggressor to a gracious humanitarian nation. Humanitarianism is the mask that hides our ideological avoidance of the political.

**Affect and the politics of belonging.** All of these points are working in or take place within a background of affect, which may not register consciously in peoples' thought processes, but which may rise to be keenly felt at some moments. Let us imagine the event as part of a soccer game, where the Iraqi is attempting to kick the ball of conversation into the goal to make a didactic point, and the instructor who interrupts and redirects the discourse is a referee. Both are using words and gestures in attempts to channel affect and sway the momentum of moral feeling in the audience. Massumi's description of a soccer player readying a kick is apt here; the Iraqi "is



reflexively (rather than reflectively) assessing the potential movement of the ball. This involves an instantaneous calculation of the positions of all the players of the field *in relation to each other* and in relation to the ball and both goals” (Massumi 2002a: 74). Everything is ungrounded: “each term is a variable rather than a constant” (Massumi 2002a: 74). The Iraqi makes his points and changes the course of conversation. The kick repotentializes or “reorganizes the entire field of potential movement” (Massumi 2002a: 74). However, his kick goes too far and attracts the attention of the referee, who reasserts the rules of the game: the Lost Boys are here to be honored.

We may consider the agency of the players as they prepare to kick, making an instantaneous and autonomic synthesis of “separate perceptual impressions into a global sense of the intensity” (Massumi 2002a: 74), or we may consider the agency of affect. In considering affect, we ask, what were the possible courses of action, the ways of behaving and the ways to channel the discussion that seemed like appropriate responses, which would have appeared to the players as plausible kicks? Thinking about the agency of affect curiously dampens the agency of individuals; individuals simply make the best choice out of those moves that were already potentialized as reasonable by previous events and modulations. The plausible course of action, the action which would resonate as most reasonable, was already decided by the politics of belonging.

Let us look at another example that shows the resonance of belonging: at one public event during the question and answer session following the main public speaker’s address, there was some discussion surrounding emotional, psychological, and spiritual recovery from trauma; the discussion was led by a Holocaust survivor, speaking directly to the Lost Boys. This meaningful and nuanced conversation was cut short by one audience member’s sudden declaration, “But you’re free now! You’re in America!” The audience burst into simultaneous applause, several people nodding their heads in affirmation. I personally related more to the trauma discussion, so I was surprised that the freedom comment roused such a strong response from the audience. It was like tapping into an underground stream that suddenly carries everyone

along. I was reminded of the old saying, “Let’s run it up the flagpole and see if anyone salutes it”. It was very clear to me at that moment: audiences relate to the story of the Lost Boys on a gut level as it reflects back to us a positive image of “America”. We’ve flipped the story.

Affect is likened to our “margin of maneuverability” (Massumi 2002b). “Affect is like our human gravitational field, and what we call our freedom are its relational flips. Freedom is not about breaking or escaping constraints. It’s about flipping them over into degrees of freedom. You can’t really escape the constraints” (Massumi 2002b: 222). The discussion continues:

No body can escape gravity. Laws are part of what we are, they’re intrinsic to our identities. No human can simply escape gender, for example. The cultural ‘laws’ of gender are part of what makes us who we are, they’re part of the process that produced us as individuals. You can’t just step out of gender identity. But just maybe you can take steps to encourage gender to flip. That can’t be an individual undertaking. It involves tweaking the interference and resonance patterns between individuals. It’s a relational undertaking. You’re not acting on yourself or other individuals separately. You’re acting on them together, their togetherness, their field of belonging. The idea is that there are ways of acting upon the level of belonging itself, on the moving together and coming together of bodies *per se*. This would have to involve an evaluation of collective potential that would be ethical in the sense we were talking about before. It would be a *caring* for the relating of things *as such* – a politics of *belonging* instead of a politics of identity, of correlated emergence instead of separate domains of interest attracting each other or colliding in predictable ways... It’s a pragmatic politics of the in-between. It’s an abductive politics that has to operate on the level of affect (Massumi 2002b: 222-223).

The gravitational field of “American” ideology has abducted the story of the Lost Boys. This ideological capture resonates as natural and right to audiences. A story that should be about suffering and war over oil lands in Sudan and difficulties in the U.S. is instead being used to tout freedom and opportunity in the U.S. and the generosity of the “American” people. Why don’t the Lost Boys challenge the appropriation of their story? Shouldn’t they use their position as public figures to redirect audiences to their original intentions, to the real objectives of their trauma claim?

Yet, audiences have also been captured, or caught up in the eventfulness of the story of the Lost Boys. And the Lost Boys are star players, who play by the rules, allowing the flipping of their story, repeating back to us our own fictions about “America”. And at the same time, the disjunctures in the story (such as experiences of racial discrimination, or un(der)employment after college graduation) slowly reveal our ideal image of ourselves as an unsustainable fiction.

What sticks? What adheres? What coheres? What flies?

In considering the agency of individuals, it is reasonable to say that the limited, ideological understanding of the Lost Boys' story requires or depends on the Lost Boys' affability and flexibility. But in considering the logic of affect and the politics of belonging, it is clear that the Lost Boys must play by the rules; they can only make small modulations which will not attract the attention of a referee, who would stop the action and apply the rules. The potential of a star player's actions are found in following the rules, for, "if the provocation goes too far, new rules need to be invented to subsume the modulation devices" (Massumi 2002a: 77).

Lost Boys who act in the role of public speakers in Phoenix did not overtly confront audience interpretations of their story. Rather, they told their own personal stories of hardship and adaptation, and I suggest that audiences, especially those familiar with public media accounts, then filled in the blanks, or fitted the story into their own frames of reference. In this way, it *seems* as though there is agreement on the meaning of the Lost Boys' story, while there are actually multiple understandings and interpretations.

Public speakers at the AZLBC often discussed how they might update their story. Though most everyone agreed that politics was missing from the story, it seemed perhaps too complicated to delve into in the short time allotted for speaking. One young man commented:

The history of the Lost Boys is kind of telling everything, but the details of what is going on in Sudan are not being told. Because it's mostly politics. We try to stay away from going deep down into politics. But what's missing is what's really going on in Sudan and even right now if Americans are not involved over there it's not going to be easy. It's kind of fragile what is going on in Sudan (Personal interview, December 17, 2009).

The Lost Boys' main goals are to help their friends and families in South Sudan, to improve their living conditions and bring about peace in South Sudan, or to assist those in the U.S. who are still suffering. Time and again, they told me that they speak in order that their story might bring attention to the suffering that is still occurring. The following section looks more closely at the relationship the Lost Boys have with their own story. I approach this relationship now because I think it's important to help us consider what the Lost Boys themselves might want us to learn from their story, even as they, themselves, figure out how to tell it.

## THE LOST BOYS' RELATIONSHIP TO THEIR OWN STORY

**Repetition and the psychoanalytic view of trauma.** The Lost Boys of Sudan are not the first children to carry a name that references J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. Between 1960 and 1962, during Operation Pedro Pan, 14,000 unaccompanied children were airlifted from Cuba to the U.S. "with the purpose of safeguarding their minds from Castro's revolutionary ideology" (Gonzalez Mandri 2008: 252). Gonzalez Mandri (2008) revisits the adults who were the children of Operation Pedro Pan, as they recover collective repressed memories of the traumatic separation from their parents and home country for ideological reasons. In reviewing literary works, Gonzalez Mandri discusses how repression may influence subconscious repetitive attempts to revisit trauma and heal. She stresses that storytelling may be a safe way to open a window on past harms, as a healing alternative to subconscious reliving.

According to a psychoanalytic approach, trauma is a kind of haunting that occurs due to repression and inability or unwillingness to confront feelings and memories associated with the disruptive event. "The truth about the experience is perceived, but only unconsciously. In effect, truth goes underground, and accurate memory and responsible action are its victims" (Alexander 2004: 5). Thus, traumatic feelings and affects spring from the anxiety of continual repression. Here again, distanced repetition, such as cultural representation, is helpful in restoring collective memory and healing trauma.

The aim is to restore collective psychological health by lifting societal repression and restoring memory. To achieve this, social scientists stress the importance of finding—through public acts of commemoration, cultural representation, and public political struggle—some collective means for undoing repression and allowing the pent-up emotions of loss and mourning to be expressed (Alexander 2004: 5).

These are both individual and collective undertakings. Thus, repeated telling is a process of revisiting and uncovering the past, tentatively touching those emotional places that had been hidden away. Constructing a narrative is reconstructing one's life. The Lost Boys are still figuring out what this means. During a casual lunch conversation, one young man remarked to me that, when he was a child, it did not occur to him that his childhood was so brutal. He'd had nothing else to compare it to.

Jany Deng is one young man who often presents as a public speaker. Jany was asked to tell his story at a local event in November, 2010. As part of his story, Jany often includes some harrowing details about his older brother's life. Though from the same family, their lives diverged in important ways that ultimately had tragic results. Jany and his brother lived in separate refugee camps in Ethiopia; his brother underwent intensive military training while Jany did not. Upon arrival in the United States, Jany was resettled with an American foster family and admitted into high school because he was sixteen, while his older brother was considered an adult and lived with several other Lost Boys in an apartment. As Jany tells it, after a couple of years, "the life was becoming difficult". Jany's brother took a gun to the resettlement agency and threatened the staff. He was shot and killed by police. In Jany's words, his brother was looking for help, and repeating what he knew from his past. Jany, through public storytelling, also repeats the past but from a distance, and with the emotional support of receptive audiences.

Most often, however, the Lost Boys do not seek to relive past experiences. Only a small number, between eight and fifteen, young men were participants in the public speaking group at the AZLBC while I attended as a volunteer. Many of the South Sudanese with whom I spoke, have not seen films, television episodes, or read books that tell the Lost Boys' story. They are aware that many materials exist, but do not seek to view them. Most of the young men who participated in interviews told me, *I do not have to see the movie or read the book, because I lived it. I already know*. One young man said, "Probably I don't really bother myself with that because I already, I have the experience. I'm one of them, so what you need sometime is something you don't know. Yeah. But I already have experience of that. So I don't really bother to read those books" (Personal interview, December 11, 2009).

One young man has gained exposure to books and movies through college classes. It was difficult, he said, to be confronted with painful history. Although he has experience in sharing his past as a public speaker, he prefers to keep himself motivated by focusing on the future. "I don't need to put my mind to that. Into that history. To remember everything. Only: moving forward" (Personal interview, January 11, 2010). Another young man who had not read any of the

books remarked on the shared experience, saying that when confronted with stories, “I feel like I’m there. I already know it. I was born there, I grew up there. The same situation... Yeah, I already know it, you know. Without seeing it, I know it already. And I have feeling for it” (Personal interview, January 15, 2010).

**The dark side of the Lost Boys.** While it is apparent that many of the Lost Boys, including the public speakers, maintain a distance from their traumatic past, I was encouraged several times by South Sudanese to not shy away from confronting what some called the dark side of the Lost Boys. They were referring to childhood military service and other difficulties that have come after resettlement, such as struggles with alcoholism and PTSD, and to the fact that some Lost Boys were currently homeless or locked up in prison. The idea was that I should portray, as closely as possible, a true portrait of the community. Yet, I was also cautioned to keep this aim to myself and not divulge this intention to the general population at the AZLBC, because some people in the community would not like it. I was told specifically that the concern here was not damage to the community, but rather that I might find fewer participants willing to cooperate with my research goals!

This audience-selective honesty was also extended to public speaking events. One Lost Boy made clear that he discusses the dark side more openly only with audiences “who know the Lost Boys better”. To other audiences, the dark side of the Lost Boys is a missing part of the story.

And also when I am out there speaking, I always end by saying that. I go to the dark part of the Lost Boys, the bad part of it, and then I have to find a way to bring it down to: this is who we are, ten years into America. And this is what we are doing. And not all of us are doing well, so definitely I will mention that. And that’s, I think that’s our role as Lost Boys. And people like you who know the Lost Boys better you know, this is their bad part, and this is who they are today. And that’s the part that I feel like is missing. And I think it is up to us to let people know that ten years ago we were here, and today we are here (October 29, 2010).

The recognition of a role for Lost Boys supports the idea of the Lost Boys as a carrier group. This speaker identifies it as the role of a Lost Boy to be honest, not only about past suffering, but also

the ongoing struggles of many in the community. It is the role of a Lost Boy, as a public figure, to accurately represent all aspects of community health when possible, to receptive audiences, in order to find the help that people need.

The military aspects of the story were not apparent to me (even as I was familiar with television and documentary film coverage, and as I attended public events featuring Lost Boys as speakers) until I began to read memoirs and autobiographical accounts. Had I simply missed a part of the story that was already out there in the public realm? Or was this part of the story somewhat hidden; were there internal or external pressures to maintain an image of the Lost Boys that was sanitized of the horrors of military participation? Accounts of Lost Boys who suffer from PTSD are more common in later media coverage, but even these often attribute trauma to war conditions in general, rather than military service by children. Military service was not mentioned in any of the Lost Boys' personal stories at public presentations that I attended. Lost Boys in Phoenix readily pointed out to me that the military aspect of their story is often silenced. As one young man said, "What is missing that people are not being told. We are child soldiers. So we just...Lost Boys. A lot of people know what it is. But we just stuck with this name and we walked a thousand miles and that's it. No, we were forced to walk a thousand miles because we were told to go to school. But in reality we were actually to go into the army" (Personal interview, February 6, 2010).

Personal stories vary; some children were aware that they were heading towards military training, while others were lured by the promise of education or the hope of finding family members in Ethiopia. Scroggins (2002) tells of British aid worker Emma McCune's marriage to Riek Machar, the Nuer military officer who was second in command of the SPLA (and first Vice President of South Sudan until 2013). She describes how the children and refugee camps sometimes were used as pawns to elicit food and medical aid from humanitarian agencies that were then distributed among soldiers (similarly, photos emerged in 2014 of South Sudanese soldiers wearing backpacks with the UNICEF logo – backpacks that were meant for school children). The story also introduces how McCune took in one child soldier, sending him to live in

her home and attend school in Kenya; the young boy was Emmanuel Jal, who became a rap musician and published his memoir *War Child* in 2009. In his memoir, Emmanuel Jal repeats the familiar saying, “education is my mother and my father;” for child soldiers the saying became: “the gun is my mother and my father.”

Some accounts suggested that Lost Boys were screened for military experience during their initial interviews, with the mistaken understanding that child soldiers were not acceptable candidates for resettlement. Another reason for the silence on military experience could be that it was, in many cases, forced. As young boys caught in the midst of utter upheaval and war, they did not have a choice of where to turn for survival. Some were told they would receive education in Ethiopia, some, like Emmanuel Jal, knew they were headed for military training (in his Memoir *War Child*, Jal tells of embracing violence as a coping mechanism and outlet for anger at all the destruction and loss he faced). And where else could they go? What choice did a young boy have, when a soldier ordered him to guard his gun under penalty of death? As one Lost Boy described, the military aspect permeated life in the camps, creating a situation of complicity without consent:

Ethiopian government with the SPLA were very, very close. So refugee camp was a kind of military way of running it. Even now we use to be like, standing in line and all that, do things in a military way. So everybody had a small kind of training on how to defend themselves, on how to fight and all that. And some of them were enlisted into the army when we were coming out of Sudan (Personal interview, October 29, 2010).

Another Lost Boy said, “You don’t want to remember it. That was not your point, to go into the military. And you were imposed at some point to be trained on something like that (Personal interview, October 29, 2010). The point, for many of the Lost Boys, was survival and education, not to join the fighting.

And finally, it is important to consider the impact the story has on the Lost Boys, now that they are living in the U.S. and they are subject to popular impressions from public media depictions. As we will see in the next chapter, the Lost Boys are often recognized in their everyday lives; they lead a rather public life. Public media accounts of the Lost Boys’ struggles with PTSD due to their traumatic pasts have an impact the Lost Boys’ public image and their



sense of security in the U.S. There is a strong community ethic to maintain a good public image and not harm their community's chances (for example, in finding employment) in the U.S.

**Lost Boys Reunited: gaining pieces of the past.** To be reminded of one's childhood as a Lost Boy is significant; most of the young men have no records and have suffered loss of family members and friends who could otherwise reconnect and remind each other of their lives. The Lost Boys are missing any proof of their lives from their childhoods and teenage years. One young man told me about a special event in his life; while at Kakuma, there was a poetry competition among students in honor of African Refugee Day. He recalled, "So in 1999 or 1998 I was selected to read my poem on African Refugee Day. That was the biggest one. So my poem was the best and it was selected. So I had to recite it in 99. In African Refugee Day, June 20. And that was the first time I saw every camera flashing everywhere. Do I have those pictures now? No, I don't" (Personal interview, February 17, 2010).

A major event in 2010 was the online release of documents from the Lost Boys' past. Aid workers had conducted interviews and documented basic information upon the young boys' arrival in Ethiopia in the late 1980s. These documents were recently rediscovered, and the AZLBC applied for a grant to scan and release the archive through a secured website, called Lost Boys Reunited. The young men can search the database for records of themselves, friends, and family. One newspaper account describes the following:

Last September, the site was about to go live when it lit up. "All of a sudden, our site was discovered," says Ann Wheat, a city supervisor and church volunteer, who founded the Lost Boys Center. "Literally within the first two weeks, the word just spread." The site had 3,800 visits from 32 countries in that period, resulting in orders for 400 personal records. The word was spreading from Lost Boy to Lost Boy. "They were looking up their brothers who they had travelled with," says Ms Wheat. "It really gave us our first sense of the power of these documents to a group that has been robbed of so much." Until they moved to the US, none of the Lost Boys had any kind of personal documents. What they knew about themselves, they carried in their heads. Diing Arok's document was one of those which lacked a photograph, but he says that does not diminish its significance. "It'll be important for me to show it to my kids," says Mr Arok, an engineer with the Arizona Department of Transportation. "It's a frame of work that shows who you are," says his friend, Malek Deng (Adams 2011).

I remember the day I was at the AZLBC when some of the young men were showing others how to search the database to find their own documents. It was emotional to witness, yet what I remember is the laughter and light-heartedness of guys making fun of each other for looking so young and so skinny in these photographs that were like mug shots. They joked about the memories that were awakened. Later, one of the young men, Arkanjelo Arop, posted on Facebook:

Looking back at life as a child during the war i felt completely destroy. i check my name in the reunitedlostboys.org i couldn't believe that was me. the proof was name and others information' including my clan. i started wept, but i remember what nyankol say in her sung that any child whom left her parent will not enjoy the life. i look up at sky' than down and pretended like it didn't happened. it was a crazy movement.

Proof of the past makes it immanently more real. The Sudanese are subject to both persistent reminders and empty spaces, or the lack of tangible proof of the past. Because of dissemination by mass media, the story has a(n) (omni)presence that precedes the young men and speaks for them, at times catches them up and destroys them from the inside, and even as many Lost Boys admit there are gaps in the story and sometimes inaccuracies, it may be a relief at times to let existing media tell the story: "Because the history itself tells more about the Lost Boys than you can tell" (Personal interview, December 17, 2009). This is something about the relationship the Lost Boys have with this story, the story which must be kept at a safe distance, even as the Lost Boys are compelled to repeat it as widely as possible, to perform it for audiences, so that the lessons of this story might be learned, and future suffering prevented.

**The best ending.** Retelling the narrative of a social drama requires tracing threads/narrative components (White p. 145 in Turner 1980). The researcher should identify interpretive frames and ideal plots as understood by those involved.

A social drama is a plotted narrative in which the actions of the various protagonists can be reconstructed as distinctive attempts to define the situation. Each protagonist has his or her own 'ideal' plot: how he or she would have the story unfold and be interpreted. One of our tasks then must be to reconstruct the ideal plots as conceived by each protagonist, to interrogate the drama from their particular point of view, to gain a fuller meaning of the event at the level of social action (Eyerman 2008: 24).

As part of reconstructing the ideal plot and understanding the nature of the trauma claim according to Lost Boys and their publics, I asked all interview participants to tell me their idea of the best possible ending to the story of the Lost Boys. Audience respondents expressed the general hope that the Sudanese ‘would be successful’ in the United States and in Sudan. One volunteer hoped the Lost Boys would be “able to go back to Sudan and improve conditions over there... I just hope that they can find peace in their lives and work and improve conditions” (Personal interview, February 2, 2010). Another respondent focused on the AZLBC, saying, “I hope their Center survives economic times, and gains or continues to have community support and continues to educate and make productive citizens” (February 4, 2010).

Nearly all Lost Boys responded that they would like to better themselves through education and be of help to people in South Sudan. They pointed to accomplishments of Lost Boys who had returned to South Sudan to build schools, medical clinics, or drinking wells in their home villages. Several commented that they felt more capable to make changes in South Sudan than in the United States. Many Lost Boys see themselves as advocates for South Sudan, and as ambassadors living in the United States. They feel responsible to pass on their history, including to their own children. One Lost Boy said that his role was “to be giving back. To become ambassador of the world. To tell the truth, telling the history. The same thing with our kids. We have to pass it on to them. We have to let them know. We want to pass that on and keep advocating. In political arena or in civil arena” (Personal interview, January 9, 2010).

Many of the young men’s responses were forward-looking, rather than focused on remembrance or memorialization; this seems in keeping with the assertion (Eyerman 2001; Alexander 2004) that the process of cultural trauma works its way slowly through generations. The Lost Boys have high expectations for themselves, and a sense of responsibility to pass on a cautionary story to the next generation. They also carry the weight of expectation to rebuild a future in Sudan. One young man said, “People expect that when [the Lost Boys] are here [in the U.S.], they can go back [to South Sudan] and change their community. That alone is the big dream of the Lost Boys. When they come here, people expecting them that they can go home

and change the whole thing” (Personal interview, January 9B, 2010). Another Lost Boy made similar statements: his life isn’t right when people at home are suffering. This sense of responsibility makes him feel that, whatever his accomplishments, it’s not enough:

But right now I don’t feel like I have done something that actually will change my life. Nothing. So. I could confess, I’m just nothing now. Except maybe I am alive, so that may be important thing. But for me to say, you know what, I’ve done this and I should be proud for what I have done, it’s nothing. Even if I could get this [college] degree, I feel like I’m still nothing at all. Because my family are not well off. The entire country is not well off. Even if I’m here, I will think about them. So, where is my life at? It doesn’t look right. That’s the thing (Personal interview, February 17, 2010).

The television show *60 Minutes* aired an update to the stories of Joseph Taban, Abraham Nhial, and others in 2013 called “The Lost Boys of Sudan: Twelve Years Later”. It became apparent that some of the Lost Boys, despite adhering to the “bootstraps” dictum, despite working hard, and despite their relationships with local mentors, still faced severe hardships even after arrival in the U.S. For example, Joseph Taban had endured the theft of his driver’s license, his car was flooded, he’d been stabbed, hit by a car, survived a kitchen fire, and had been laid off his job during the economic crisis. He’d earned a degree in biblical studies and still studied medical books at home in keeping with his dream to become a doctor, although as yet he had no opportunity to attend medical school. However, he did learn that his mother was still alive in South Sudan, and *60 Minutes* set up a Skype meeting, so that he and his mother could speak and see each other for the first time in twenty years (CBS Interactive Inc. 2013). On the website for this specific episode of *60 Minutes*, the comments section contains links to various organizations which assist the Lost Boys, including a personal fundraising website that was opened on behalf of Joseph Taban. Nearly forty thousand dollars has been raised in the past year.

One point that emerged multiple times in interviews and some events is the attitude of holding failure as a community asset; as a reminder and lesson to others, much like the centuries-old tsunami stones placed on hillsides in Japan, which warn, do not build below this line (Fackler, 2011). In September 2008, local Holocaust survivor and public speaker Gerda Weissman Klein spoke at a public event in cooperation with the AZLBC. She said, pain should

not be wasted; it should be shared. She told the young men, we are the spiritual heirs of those who died; we are their legacy, because they did not have children.

During one conversation, a Lost Boy told me about the weight of expectation he felt in his youth while playing a soccer game in the refugee camp. His team was defeated one day. He acknowledged that, "We got defeated as a team. We don't have to take it personally." However, during this particular game, he did not score any goals. And he was known for being a player who could make goals. He attempted to help me understand the communal expectations and pressure that he felt:

It become a societal issue, that night everybody talk about, so, so that this team got defeated and everything. And players you get used to a certain standard. You get fed for good food. Meat is difficult to get in the camp. But if you are a player they can go and buy the goat for the players, the day that you are playing. Then you get good food and they bring juice, you know it's not easy to come by. So these good things that you eat, and then people expect you to deliver more (laughs). So we got defeated (Personal interview, October 29, 2010).

The feeling that he had let down his team weighed heavily on him that night. He continued his story, telling me, "So that night I was like you know I was very close, very close to commit suicide, to be honest with you. Very, very close. Because I didn't think, you know... people went to the game, it was most everybody. And I kind of took it on myself that I didn't score." Then he connected these feelings to the Lost Boys who were having trouble in the United States, saying that community expectations could be harmful.

So with that, you know, that aspect of competition within ourselves, and these expectation whether from home or here, for those who enter the jail, like you said, we are struggling with that. All these phone calls that are coming overnight from home, asking you for money, and you are not giving anybody money. And what everybody is hearing about you is you going to jail, is you drunk here and there. It's just pushing them to the edge too much. So that expectation is killing a lot of people. Is it a good thing to have expectation; yes. But too much of it is not good. And that's what makes some people not do well (Personal interview, October 29, 2010).

So I told him a story. Another Lost Boy who was a public speaker often wore a large belt buckle that showcased the word "Wasted". A native English speaker at the AZLBC warned him not to wear the belt buckle, "because to Americans, that means you are drunk – that you've been drinking alcohol." There was a concern regarding what message he was projecting as a public speaker and representative of the AZLBC.

The belt buckle-wearer responded, “I bought this belt buckle because it reminds me of my childhood. Because I was a child of war and so my childhood was wasted.” Then he explained, “You know, in Sudan, if somebody is walking along a path and there’s a hole or they trip and fall, or something like that, then they’ll put a marker there...”

The soccer player interrupted: “So that another will not fall in there.”

“Exactly!” I continued the belt buckle-wearer’s story. The belt-wearer had told me, “That’s why I have the belt buckle, to tell people what war does to children, what war does to people. It’s that it wastes their lives.”

So I told the soccer player, “I thought that was really cool, because I thought, imagine a culture, imagine a society where even the people that fall are appreciated, because of what they have to tell you.”

Do not let history repeat itself. Do not let another fall into that hole.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

This chapter focused on the story of the Lost Boys as the narrative claim in an ongoing process of cultural trauma. The trauma process is a struggle of meaning and identity, which engages wider publics who did not suffer the original trauma event. Audiences report a strong emotional connection and identification with the Lost Boys, and there is an extension of solidarity through mutual, deep feeling emphasizing common humanity and overcoming adversity through faith, perseverance, and through a communal ethic of helping each other. In this way, it seems the Lost Boys’ claim is successful; audiences identify with and welcome the Lost Boys, even looking to them as inspirational role models. The Lost Boys, as a carrier group, are a valued community resource.

On the other hand, the Lost Boys’ main goal in telling their story is to bring attention to the violence and poverty in South Sudan, in hopes of alleviating suffering there; yet it is only select, receptive audiences who hear contextual, historical, or political information, which might induce in them a sense of responsibility or moral obligation. At the same time, it tends to be only

select audiences who hear about the challenges the community is facing after resettlement, or the dark side of the Lost Boys: the struggles that some of the young men have with alcohol and PTSD. Also infrequent are discussions about the challenges and obstacles that curb opportunity and limit the life chances for the working poor, for Blacks, or for immigrants in the United States. These politicized understandings are generally not a part of the dominant narrative, although some audiences are touched by these points.

I suggest that, by considering these events at the level of affect, we can understand that an ideological flip has captured the story of the Lost Boys, appropriating it into an “American” story, and that this appropriation is also invaded by seeds of potentially disruptive reality. In this way, the relationship between the Lost Boys and their audiences can be understood to be an uneven, exploitative one, where audiences embrace a self-flattering story without addressing the status quo, the roots of the suffering in Sudan or the realities of the challenges after resettlement. However, the fact that the dominant narrative does not pose a challenge to the “American” myth of opportunity, the fact that the Lost Boys are flexible in allowing for various interpretations of and identifications with their story, and the fact that the dominant narrative can turn an attractive mirror to “American” generosity, means that there is also potential for audiences themselves to be captured or abducted by the story, a story which contains seeds of disruption. The focus on faith and common humanity allows the narrative to be distributed more widely, while audiences are left with tiny impressions, which may lead them to larger, more critical observations.

This brings us to the question: as representation is key in the trauma process, how do these different tellings of the Lost Boys’ story determine the nature of the trauma claim, and the demand for justice? The trauma claim should stir wider publics to recognize that there are issues at hand that must be resolved. As the story is re-narrated and re-represented, which moral issues receive attention? It is helpful to consider a distinction in examining reception of the trauma claim regarding *before* and *after* resettlement. The dominant narrative focuses on the Lost Boys’ experiences before resettlement. This allows audiences to remain uncritical regarding the conditions of the Lost Boys’ (or other refugees’) lives in the United States after resettlement. This

feel-good reliance on an idea of “American” opportunity ignores such questions as: How might the legal status of refugee be linked to U.S. foreign policy or interests, and thus denied to other groups (for example, Central American children)? How do race relations in the U.S. impact the quality of life of people of color? What job opportunities exist, and what are the living conditions of the working poor? Or even, what is the place of Africans in the world (recall that it is a fairly recent development to resettle African refugees in the U.S)? Is it part of the normal, though regrettable, course of events that there should be wars conducted over oil lands that result in mass famines and other atrocities? Does the U.S. government or its people have a role or a responsibility to act in these cases (recall the 1990s movement to divest from energy companies in Sudan)? Some of these missed connections may be a result of the fact that humanitarianism is always, of necessity, selective (Haskell 1985). Yet, it seems currently the social conventions of responsibility allow publics to take in the story of the Lost Boys as a comforting, feel-good story about the generosity of the United States, without addressing broader moral questions. What is at stake here is the nature of justice that will be recognized by wider publics, how the suffering of the Lost Boys will be transformed into new codes of moral obligation, and finally, how this claim and this moral obligation will be memorialized and transmitted to future generations. To empathize alone is not enough; audiences also need context in order to understand a causal link between themselves and events in the world.

The process of cultural trauma is in large part about the re/making of solidarity; to what extent does a new collective identity emerge between Lost Boys and their publics? I have referenced the politics of belonging as a way to understand the ideological capture of the Lost Boys’ story. Belonging is integral to the defining of moral responsibility. Perhaps this redefinition can only happen to the extent that solidarity is extended: as people see that we belong to each other, then we begin to feel a sense of responsibility. Here we begin to touch on the larger moral questions at work, regarding ethical guidelines of humanitarian obligation. It is clear that the arrival of the Lost Boys in the United States, brought about by the work of disparate activist groups, is reshaping a sense of connection and obligation, a sense of the individual’s moral



responsibility to others (and, by extension, individual awareness of the state's obligation and history of intervention in humanitarian cases). This is a remarkable shift for a number of the Lost Boys' publics, many of whom reported that this was the first refugee group they had ever heard of, or met. For others, the Lost Boys are their first acquaintances who speak with an accent. The Lost Boys themselves never imagined they would visit or live in another country.

This process of cultural trauma is ongoing. Lost Boys are thinking through and collectively negotiating ethical questions, grappling with the meaning of their story and how to represent it, even as they often struggle to maintain an emotional distance from their traumatic pasts. There is a push to update the story, since the Lost Boys arrival more than ten years ago, and since a recent eruption of violence in South Sudan caused living conditions there to drastically deteriorate. Some Lost Boys and publics are seeking to expand the narrative trauma claim to include the community's ongoing struggles with PTSD, or living conditions in South Sudan, or for a more detailed understanding of Sudanese politics, including the consequences of oil development in South Sudan. Will the trauma claim be broadened? Will the apolitical focus on faith and overcoming adversity prevail, since it has the broadest appeal? Or will the same dominant narrative carry additional meanings to those groups who may be open to a more politically nuanced claim?

This chapter discussed meaning and belonging in terms of the *story* of the Lost Boys; the following chapter shifts to an ontogenetic consideration of what happens between audiences and volunteers during everyday interactions. Moving beyond the narrative, I will discuss questions that arise from a consideration of performance and subjectivity, as we continue to investigate public perception, reception, and sense of belonging as enacted around the Lost Boys in Phoenix.

## CHAPTER 5

### PERFORMING THE LOST BOYS: SOCIAL ROLES, RACE, AND CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

In February 2011, the AZLBC held the annual fundraiser the *Journey of Hope* Dinner. This was an annual event held at a higher-end Scottsdale resort, attracting wealthy patrons and supporters, and sometimes host to local celebrities and politicians. AZLBC Board Member Mary Ellen Brown planned, as part of that event, a theatrical enactment featuring three Lost Boys presenting their life stories in short monologues. Ms. Brown's intent was to generate a visceral and emotional connection in audiences, and to remind them that the Lost Boys were very young when terrible things happened in their lives. She divided each of the stories into three sections: childhood, teenage years, and present day, with an appropriately-aged community member recruited to present each segment of the story. The final enactment featured nine South Sudanese youth: three young boys, three teenagers, and three Lost Boys, all telling the stories of the three original young men. The youngest boy would step forward on stage and begin his story, "I am Anyuon Chan. When I was eight years old..." to describe the atrocities and hardships endured by the children. Then the teenage boy continued the story, "I am Anyuon Chan. When I was fourteen years old..." telling of the years in the refugee camp. And finally, the now thirty-year old young man would step forward and say, "I am the real Anyoun Chan..." and speak from his present day experience.

The presentation was powerfully moving and received a standing ovation from the crowd of several hundred supporters. The enactment is also a successful example of a project that brought together different community members to work towards a common goal. The nine actors met several times over a month-long period to practice their roles. The logistics and commitment that this entailed were a major accomplishment for the Lost Boys, children, and families involved. I think about the meaning of the process: the experience of meeting together multiple times, talking about and working on the project. The logistics of matching schedules and transporting everyone and meeting on time were challenging for the community, and meeting those challenges enhanced a sense of solidarity. Through the performance, the Lost Boys and the

younger children had the chance to step into each others' roles: the older actors had an opportunity to act as role models for the younger, and the children repeated back to the Lost Boys their childhood stories. The Lost Boys saw their own stories enacted by, in a sense, their brothers, who reflected their younger selves. I would argue it was as powerful an experience for the actors as it was for the audience to witness.

Yet, due to concerns regarding whether the South Sudanese could commit and follow through with the month-long process – precisely these reasons why the enactment was so important – it almost didn't happen. A volunteer mentioned to me that it was almost considered to ask sons of volunteers – middle class, white children – to perform the roles of the younger Lost Boys. I involuntarily sucked in my breath when I heard this. It seemed to me this would have been akin to robbing the Lost Boys of their own story. The value of voicing one's story is also in the process of preparing and doing it, especially together as a community. There are rewards in the recognition and the growth of social capital and social networks. Perhaps the children of volunteers and the older Lost Boys would have bonded through voicing the Lost Boys' stories together, but I imagined that the Lost Boys might feel at a loss to see their stories represented by the children of volunteers – like seeing parts of one's soul siphoned off and enlivened through someone else, another person who is then congratulated and rewarded. While there are strong bonds between South Sudanese and local volunteers, there is also a point where experiences and identities diverge.

This chapter looks at subject-making: the social and political construction of victims and volunteers. I use the idea of "performing refugeeness" (Szczepanikova 2010) to start the discussion, but otherwise, I do not delve into theories of performance. Instead, I continue developing the idea of affective background, as sets of dispositions and habitual ways of being, as fluid momentum. This fluid thickens as a mesh, can seem solid as a boundary, viscous; it can seem to gather and hold subjects into positions on a social matrix or grid (e.g., race, gender, nationality, belonging), or, indeed, inside a moral web of humanitarianism. I suggest positionalities can be understood as socially enforced through tensions and perceptions of

expectation. Affect directs us to consider “habitual interaction with the world (rather than ‘consciousness’ of it)” (Cresswell 2012: 97). Affect also gives us a way to talk about indeterminacy: the “openness to an elsewhere and an otherwise” that leaks out of this seeming-solid (Massumi 2002: 5).

Therefore, I continue to think about how Lost Boys (and volunteers) are confined to or reinforced into particular ways of behaving and being, based upon their “role” or subject position as refugees (Lost Boys), victims, sufferers, etc. (or in the case of volunteers, benevolent helpers), and also how acting inside/outside of these roles highlights and enacts boundaries of belonging. These positionalities are not always of ones’ choosing, but are inscribed and reinforced by cultural contexts (the seeming-solid): “Refugees resettling in a host country do not arrive and occupy an empty discursive and representational context, enabling them to construct and manage their own group identity(ies). Rather, they are socially constructed by the in-group and, thus, positioned relative to a pre-formed social matrix of understandings” (Hanson-Easey et al. 2014).

I conduct this discussion in three broad sections: the refugee and the volunteer as performative roles, race as a product of social relations, and cultural citizenship. In considering social role “as the enactment of rights and duties attached to a given status” (Goffman 1959: 16), the aim is to illuminate whether and how the Lost Boys are able to step outside their prescribed roles and pose challenges or critiques to popular conceptions without losing support, and to forefront the question, to what extent are the Lost Boys able to exercise autonomy in configuring themselves as subjects? I am concerned with the ways subjectivity governs the permissible expression of emotions and self. Additionally, in illuminating boundaries of belonging, we will set the field for a critique of humanitarianism as mobilized and enacted around the Lost Boys.

## **PERFORMATIVE ROLES OF THE REFUGEE AND THE VOLUNTEER**

In her account regarding the silencing of Rwandan Hutus in a Tanzanian refugee camp, Malkki (1996) describes how camp administrators dismissed refugees’ own testimonies and

concerns. An idealized conception of a “real refugee” embodying pure suffering blinded the administrators from authenticating the actual suffering of the people under their care:

There was a pronounced tendency [by refugee administrators] to try to identify and fix the ‘real’ refugee on extralegal grounds. And one key terrain where this took place was that of the visual image of the refugee, making it possible to claim that given people were not real refugees because they did not look (or conduct themselves) like real refugees. This suggests that refugee status was implicitly understood to involve a *performative dimension* (Malkki 1996: 384, emphasis added).

In this section, I draw from Szczepanikova’s (2010) reference to “refugeeness” as a social construction of what is considered to be typical for people labeled as refugees. It is not a set of psychological or social features, but refers to the subject positions that are re-created through social interactions over time. This ‘looping effect’ of social types has been noted more generally; “‘human types’ have the capacity to act in a way that conforms to representations of them... it is possible to inhabit a category in such a way that the category is confirmed” (Cresswell 2012: 101).

In this case, “refugeeness” is employed to refer especially to a state of being locked into the position of a client who lacks the political means of addressing their position in society, or a person limited to the role of a “grateful recipient of aid” (Szczepanikova 2010: 473). The term describes the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) within the Czech Republic in refugee’s lives and demonstrates that “particular forms of assistance and public representation depoliticize refugees in a sense of fostering rather than challenging unequal power relations that lock refugees in a position of clients lacking political means of influencing their place in a receiving society” (Szczepanikova 2010: 461). Refugees are constructed as incapable of determining their own needs, lacking access to voice their needs or help themselves, and are instead placed in a muted and limited role. Some refugees are able to make use of other resources and disassociate themselves from the label, affording them a position from which it is safe to criticize the NGOs, while others “find themselves trapped in performing refugeeness” (Szczepanikova 2010: 463).

As we have seen, the Lost Boys in Phoenix do not present themselves to publics as refugees. They present and are received as Lost Boys, a signifier which elicits emotional and ideological affects. It became clear in the previous chapter that the Lost Boys' story is most often understood as a Christian narrative of faith and overcoming adversity, casting the Lost Boys as polite, hardworking, and absent of anger or bitterness. Yet, one of my main concerns as a researcher was to inquire, to what extent do the young men find themselves trapped or confined by their public roles, and by the expectations associated with the Lost Boy label? To what extent are they able to exercise agency on their own terms, and speak to their community needs, without necessarily breaking apart or destroying the mesh that positions them so favorably among local audiences? If mobilization of humanitarianism takes place in the emotional space of relating, of configuring subjects, then how subjects are configured will also potentialize the field within which humanitarianism emerges.

The Lost Boys in Phoenix conceptualize themselves as future and current leaders. Many of the Lost Boys recalled to me that the late John Garang, leader of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement /Army (SPLM/A) had called them the "seeds" or the future of Sudan. The young men who departed Sudan like seeds in the wind were expected and encouraged by elders to gain education in their adoptive homes and eventually return to rebuild the country, to replant and flourish. Some of the Lost Boys think of themselves as "ambassadors" in the United States and are proud of the attention they have drawn to the political situation and living conditions in South Sudan. These community-led self-conceptions are a great source of pride, encouragement, and motivation to the Lost Boys. As we have seen in the previous chapter, local audiences embrace the young men as public speakers who have wisdom to impart, and audiences often place the Lost Boys in the position of role models who embody faith and hope through adversity. This has the unintended consequence of excluding other perspectives, and we will see some examples of exclusion in this chapter.

These socially performative roles do not emerge from a void. Context is instructive. As natural as it may seem to us that a Lost Boy should be honored and heard, a focus on affect

reminds us that content is not self- interpreting; interpretation “is a matter of the sort of background abilities that you bring” (Searle 2009). This cultural context is socially constructed and historically contingent. For example, a particular way of conceptualizing Holocaust survivors began to emerge in the 1970’s in the U.S., one that often represents “the fact of survival as a heroic, rather than an accidental outcome, and seeks redemptive, life-affirming meaning in the fate of survivors” (Byford 2014: 65). This cultural shift (a re-ordering of the social matrix) was a conscious undertaking, in part, as institutions began collecting and disseminating personal stories and testimonies, paying heed to both psychological and historical elements, in attempts to rehumanize and reindividuate survivors (Byford 2014).

This is the cultural context that the Lost Boys entered in 2001 and is reenacted by audiences and the Lost Boys together. This is the mutually-adhered-to “definition of the situation” which allows for the “smooth working of society” and social encounters (Goffman 1959: 9); it becomes a kind of instructive, affective background. Audiences are thus moved by the experience of meeting a Lost Boy, one who is imbued with moral authority to tell his story. Audiences are moved by the story, and also moved by their own experience of valuing the testimony, by their experience of themselves as they honor a survivor, by experiencing ourselves as we bear witness. Honoring a Lost Boy is a reaffirmation of these larger values, and in this sense, the narrative, the survivor, and the witness are all co-creations.

Bearing witness should be approached above all as a culturally and historically situated social practice, involving the collaborative construction of a narrative that is recognizable, within a specific interactional, cultural, institutional, and political context—and as relevant, reliable, and valuable. This means that the study of any testimony or collection of testimonies must also involve an examination of the ways in which specific (and evolving) social, cultural, historical, and material factors help to establish the survivor as a source of epistemic authority (Byford 2014: 77).

It may seem natural to readers to value and honor victims of atrocities in this way, but there are many refugee groups and asylum seekers who arrive in the U.S. without the media attention and public welcome surrounding the Lost Boys. Let me give two alternative examples to illustrate that this context of reception is a social construction. Byford (2014) compares the American culture of Holocaust memorialization (from the early 1980s to present day, described above) to

the institutional and cultural context in Serbia in the late 1980s and 1990s. In Serbia, interviews were conducted in concordance with the political aims of documenting the communist Yugoslav resistance against the Nazis. This context shaped a very different sort of testimony. Personal testimonies were discouraged, in favor of factual, corroborating evidence to produce a seemingly objective, authoritative account of the atrocities committed during the war. “In that context, any acknowledgment of the psychological vulnerability of survivors would only have undermined their credibility as dispassionate and trustworthy ‘eyewitnesses’” (Byford 2014: 68). Thus, although individual life trajectories served as the narrative basis for the Serbian accounts, “personal revelations, intimate details, and private reflections are scarce in the recordings” (Byford 2014: 68). This stands in contrast to the American culture of Holocaust memorialization, which honors personal details as emotional truths that contain a moral and educational value.

Let us now consider an example of a context that situates South Sudanese refugees in a particular way, again in contrast to the American culture of Holocaust memorialization. A recent study examines the negative and essentialist portrayal of Sudanese refugees on Australian talk radio (Hanson-Easey et al. 2014). The study cites a background discourse, shaped by reports in the national news of violence between South Sudanese in Australia. This background discourse has “characterized Sudanese refugees by their proclivity for criminality and gang violence” (Hanson-Easey et al. 2014: 366). The essentializing language employed by individuals (e.g., using coded terms such as “tribalism” to connote a supposed innate tendency to violence) on talk radio programs is “inexorably bound to the wider social-political context, making the link between everyday talk and the maintenance and reproduction of group identity and intergroup relations” (Hanson-Easey et al. 2014: 367). Key to this study is the suggestion that essentialist beliefs and characterizations are multifarious and can exert (unconscious) influence on “social perceptions and behavior, irrespective of context” (Hanson-Easey et al. 2014: 377).

The broader point here is that public perception and reception cannot be understood outside of the circulation of affect and the context of public discourse; social and cultural contexts



are acting upon us, structuring what seems plausible and acceptable, even as we negotiate and act upon our surroundings.

...humans are envisioned in constant relations of modification and reciprocity with their environs, action being understood not as a one way street running from the actor to the acted upon, from the active to the passive or from mind to matter, but as a relational phenomena incessantly looping back and regulating itself through feedback phenomena such as proprioception, resistance, balance, rhythm and tone; put simply, all action is interaction" (Anderson and Harrison 2010:7).

Finally, there is a marked inequality between the social position of a middle-class volunteer or audience member and a South Sudanese refugee. To what extent is a Lost Boy able to contest interpretations of his/their public representation<sup>6</sup>? In addition, although audiences and volunteers identify with the Lost Boys, the young men are still performing their stories for audiences who do not share their direct experience, cultural background, or their native language.

One day I decided to press a Lost Boy regarding his response to a male audience member. The man had approached us at a public event, expressing his appreciation and well wishes to the Lost Boys. He said the story causes him to thank God he was born in America and not somewhere in Africa. The Lost Boy vigorously agreed with him and they chatted in this vein for a few minutes. Later, I asked what he thought about the man's comment. I felt reluctance to press the issue; but finally asked, was he not at all offended by the implication that it was better to have been born in the U.S. than Africa? Aren't there problems in the United States, and aren't there positives in South Sudan that audiences underestimate? Didn't the man's comment somehow display a combination of ignorance and condescension? The Lost Boy explained to me that he had not thought to be offended. Truly, people are suffering in South Sudan, and he is simply glad and hopeful for assistance when another person acknowledges this.

Another Lost Boy told me about a moment when he says he began to experience awareness of the social position of Africans in the world. This moment occurred while he was watching the Bruce Willis movie *Tears of the Sun* (2003). In this movie, a Navy SEAL team is sent to rescue U.S. citizens caught in Nigeria's civil war. To this Lost Boy's recollection, a nun

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<sup>6</sup> Most of the young men who act as public speakers do not exhibit the desire to contest or agitate in public, even as some of the Lost Boys discussed political questions and sensibilities with me in private conversation.

hesitates evacuation, saying that she doesn't want to leave her people behind, and that God will bless the African people. Willis' character answers that God left Africa a long time ago. The Lost Boy paused to let this sink in, and then continued, "That is true. Even though it was in a movie, that connect right away... nobody cares about Africa" (Personal interview January 9, 2010).

My concern here is the connection between power, subjectivity, and self. There is a circular, mutually constructed connection between subjectivity, power relations, and the permissible expression of emotion, which is also connected to the permissible conception of self. A subject, "whose production is ongoing and never complete, acts within horizons that constitute the very potential for acting" (Harding and Pribram 2002: 421). The thing about your horizon of being is that, you might not even think of yourself outside of it: How am I allowed to feel? Does my social position even allow me to acknowledge my powerlessness, my need, and my lack of a social position?

**Being a public speaker.** To act as a public speaker is to take on a public role and exercise personal agency; speakers must "believe they have a story worth sharing in public and, in many cases, this in itself is a personal revelation that reflects acquisition of agency" (Vivienne and Burgess 2013: 286). The access to public self-representation also indicates a degree of social capital. Once set in motion, this access can generate a feedback loop of doing and being, which has transformative effects in a public speaker's life.

Public speakers at the AZLBC were self-selected volunteers, and also in part selected in other ways: who is reliable and will arrive punctually (in contrast to those who would arrive according to "Sudanese time" as AZLBC staff laughingly referred to the culturally fluid sense of time), or who has free time to volunteer (many South Sudanese are working full time and/or multiple jobs). Some public speakers were personally recruited by the AZLBC staff to take on a visible leadership position. Traditionally in South Sudan, a skilled orator can be nominated by the people to speak for the community. Because speakers are considered to be leaders in representing the community, there are parameters of exclusion. Lost Boys explained to me that a

public speaker needs to have a personality that is suited to leadership: he needs to be good with people and a skilled communicator. One young man talked about his history as a public persona, which began in Sudan:

My public speaking started when I was so young. I liked to be involved a lot on public services. When I was in Africa, I used to be a leader in my church. I used to be a singer in my church and in drama club my high school, I used to be an actor somehow. And when I came here, it has become a part of me. I want to do something. Then when I came here, we met a lot of American that help us and I got into being a speaker. Always I got asked to go present [my story]. So that's how my speaking started... I have gone to the prison, to speak in some high school, elementary school, kindergarten, in the church, and some other like rotary club (Personal interview, February 17, 2010).

Some public speakers are known for skillful deliveries, as one volunteer noted, using body language, "pregnant pauses, and interjecting humor" (Personal interview, February 8, 2010). A gifted storyteller is able to modulate intensity and guide audiences through emotional waves like a surfer channeling the momentum of the ocean. Yet, many of the Lost Boys do not capitalize on these techniques. Another audience member remarked that one Lost Boy's "matter-of-fact, monotone delivery" had made an impression on the audience. Rather than dampening intensity, the matter-of-fact delivery was a stark contrast to the subject matter. This seemed to make the speaker more authentic and heroic. Here was an ordinary person, who had happened to survive extraordinary horrors, and who was now working at Wal-Mart and going to school to become a medical assistant.

A speaker has to maintain a distance from the story in order to tell it, because some parts are too painful to recollect in front of an audience. As one Lost Boy explained, telling his story in front of an audience requires self-control and a degree of detachment. He said, "It is normal for a human being to try to be nice to another human being that they're talking [to], and you don't want to break down in front of another person; you always want to keep that cool part" (Personal interview, October 29, 2010). In contrast, a volunteer who has introduced Lost Boys at speaking events remarked, "I've gone to speak a lot and I'm pretty graphic when I tell [the Lost Boys' story]. Maybe [the Lost Boys] don't want to go there, but I am graphic. I feel like people need to know [the details]" (Personal interview, February 8, 2010). The volunteer feels compelled to voice the

more difficult details of the Lost Boys' experience, in order to confront audiences with graphic mental images of suffering, and to provoke an emotional and moral response. This particular volunteer has done extensive fundraising to benefit the Lost Boys.

Although the Lost Boys maintain emotional distance when telling their stories, it is still an emotional experience, and public speakers and audiences are impacted. One young man spoke about his experience telling his story at a prison, and how he was brought back into contact with his most vulnerable and powerless moments, and was additionally moved to see that some of the prisoners had tears in their eyes. Other Lost Boys talked about how members of the audience would show tears, or begin crying. Sometimes the Lost Boy would cry, too. Yet, after nearly ten years in the United States, several of the Lost Boys say, "the story is getting old. Audiences don't cry like they used to."

One public speaker discussed how his feelings about his war experience have evolved over time. When reminded of his powerlessness to change his past, he instead focuses on using the story as an agent of change for the present and future, both for himself and for audiences.

The history is not changing. But the way I feel is changing. From the very beginning I was bitter about it. But that perspective has changed right now to, I wonder why it happened. That's my question... I will give [the audience] the kind of attitude whereby, if this guy went through this and still make it who he is today, maybe I myself, I can make it through whatever I am going through. So you can change your life around if you want, there is always room and opportunities if you are determined to change whatever you've been through (Personal interview, December 17, 2009).

In this way, the opportunity to act as a public speaker has given him the chance to present himself to audiences as a model for positive change, a role that the audience affirms. The relationship he has with his own story has changed, in part, through a feedback circulation of relation between contacting his past in the present, his performance as a public speaker, and supportive response from audiences.

Another young man talked about how his willingness to share his story came about. At first, he did not want to talk, because it caused him to relive painful memories and emotions. He said, "When I came to this country, I never really want to talk about it most of the time. When people ask me, I try to tell... But I used to cry when people asked me a lot of stories and felt sorry

about me. So it was kind of getting me, and I was like, this is not good. So for my benefit, I had to stop that because it made me feel emotional” (Personal interview, February 17, 2010). Over time, he decided to be more open:

But as time goes and a lot of Americans become to know about the Lost Boys, and they want to know, they invited us to go to dinner, they ask us questions, we go to talk to kids and everybody. So I’m like, you know what, let me talk. If people want to know about this, I’ll give it up. So that’s how I felt, you know what, this is the time for me, to just say, and then let it go (Personal interview, February 17, 2010).

Some Lost Boys do not get the opportunity to reconcile with their past through public speaking. As noted earlier, there is community pressure on public speakers to be a positive and knowledgeable representative of South Sudan and the Lost Boys. Some young men are excluded from this role. One Lost Boy with health problems explained:

Since I been diagnosed diabetic, nothing is good to me. So when I go to the public, I just sit down. I don’t want to talk. To be a good speaker too, also you have to know English very good and then you can represent people. And to know what to say, too. You have to know what you talking about. If you don’t know, you can’t go and represent people. You have to know it. Know exactly, explain exactly, and people will be benefit and understand fully. They can leave with a full understanding (Personal interview, January 7, 2010).

Members of the community are self-monitoring, and also step forward to correct each other. Changing Hands Bookstore, a local business, hosts an annual birthday party for the Lost Boys. The Lost Boys are invited to present to an audience, give an update on their lives over the past year, and answer audience questions. One young man took a few minutes to talk about war, politics, and religion. But his resentment quickly became apparent. He said that he would never take a job from an Arab, and right away two other presenters stepped forward to take the microphone away from him and redirect the public remarks. This same young man would, during private conversation while socializing at the AZLBC, sometimes move aside his clothing from his limbs to present his war injuries, and claim that if an Arab walked through the front door of the AZLBC, he would not hesitate to kill him. He would point to his physical war injuries, declare the loss of his family, and assert that these losses gave him the right to exact the same harm on any member of the Arab population. The young man was eventually enrolled in a job placement program. The following year, 2011, he again took the public stage but this time spoke about how

although Arabs left him with physical injuries, they did not take his heart. He concluded his remarks with, “I love everybody—Thank God.” He later mentioned to me that he found it best to not spend too much time at the AZLBC, and that he found it best to not talk too much, since this familiarity can “cause problems”. It seemed to me he had found a balance where he could function as a member of the community and as a sometimes public representative, but only on a superficial level. So far, he had not found a place at the AZLBC where he could safely divulge the depth of his anger, suffering, and ongoing struggles.

Over the years, many have worked to provide spaces and opportunities for multifaceted representations to explain the story of the Lost Boys and events in Sudan, and to make room within the public image for the complexity and contradictions necessary for approaching understanding of any population. For example, Ann Wheat, who is the co-founder of the AZLBC and a lifetime member of the Board of Directors, has argued against repressing the psychological and emotional difficulties faced by the community, even in public representations. In an article published in an online magazine in 2005, Ms. Wheat commented on the persistence of posttraumatic stress disorder within the South Sudanese community nationwide and the dangers of repression, as instances of suicide, homicide, car accidents, alcohol abuse, and legal troubles began to emerge throughout the South Sudanese diaspora.

“We want our Lost Boys happy, polite, and grateful—and during the first couple of honeymoon years, that’s what we saw,” says Ann Wheat, co-founder of the Arizona Lost Boys Center in Phoenix... “But we do the Lost Boys and ourselves a huge disservice by perpetuating a one-dimensional image of them. If they were all models of emotional health, we might as well conclude that war is good for children, save our time and resources, and all go home” (Flayton 2005).

Ms. Wheat remains deeply involved with the local South Sudanese community. When I asked Ms. Wheat about the public image of the Lost Boys and the emergence of posttraumatic stress, her comments centered on the struggles and efforts that volunteers had made over the years to locate resources to help the young men. She spoke regretfully about how it was impossible to reach out and help everyone; that some people fell through the cracks; and she spoke of the difficulties in locating a culturally and socially appropriate methodology that would

generate responsiveness instead of alienation. As an example, she described unsuccessful efforts to hold Alcoholics Anonymous meetings at the AZLBC. There is real heartbreak among community members; many Lost Boys and volunteers told me about friends and colleagues who had been lost. Some of the fallen had also been the most promising.

**Unsolicited public recognition.** There is a significant difference between making the decision to represent oneself and one's community as a public speaker, and being recognized in everyday public and semi-public spaces as a member of that community. The Lost Boys are public figures who are often recognized and approached in their everyday lives: in a perpetual state of being "on call" to answer questions and to represent not only the story of the Lost Boys, but may also find themselves acting as representatives of the Southern Sudanese community, educating local publics and speaking for black Africans generally, and as immigrants and newcomers to the United States who are asked to comment on "American" ways of life. At the same time, many of the Southern Sudanese recognize that their visibility may lead to increased opportunities for social networking.

Southern Sudanese are highly recognizable as an immigrant group, both because of media coverage and also due to physical characteristics such as very dark skin and tall stature. During April, 2009, I visited the Tempe Historical Museum to conduct short surveys of viewers at a photography exhibit that included images and stories from several different refugee groups resettled in the Phoenix area. When I approached one family to ask their feedback on the exhibit, the mother singled out the Southern Sudanese and asked for information about them, saying that she had become aware of the black African immigrant group's presence in Arizona: "I had seen them around at the grocery store, at Wal-Mart, and wondered who they are." A longtime volunteer at the AZLBC similarly commented, "When we go around town, when we're driving around Phoenix, my son, or my little daughter will just look at someone and say, *hey that looks like a Lost Boy*. And it's just amazing to me. They're always on our minds" (Personal interview, September 4, 2010).

Regarding public recognition, one South Sudanese commented, “Even our color is really darker than anybody else. So people can just immediately know who you are. So it’s not bad. Some people may think [it is bad], but I don’t think it is a bad thing. If people read books and see movies about you, saw the history about you on the TV, so they probably know more about you and they will approach you. So I don’t think it’s a bad thing” (Personal interview, December 17, 2009). Public recognition can be a signal to the Lost Boys that they are successful in their attempts to bring awareness to conditions in South Sudan, and it can afford them access to wider social networks.

The South Sudanese also field questions from strangers who may not recognize them as Lost Boys; “Where are you from?” is common. Interview participants seemed to take the queries as a matter of course, and interpreted them as coming from natural curiosity, rather than as an indication that they were perceived as out of place. Some played with the question, answering, “I am from here” and making light conversation. Some saw an opportunity to raise awareness about South Sudan. One young man commented that it is his accent that gives him away as an immigrant, and remarked on local understandings of and associations applied to Africa:

Sometimes, we get, “Are you Nigerian?” So it depends on who you meet... Even if I told them I am an American, because I am a naturalized citizen, I always tell them I am from Sudan, or Africa if I don’t want to go into detail. I’m from Africa. They say, “Where?” I say, “Sudan.” Because I also learned that not every American knows that Africa is not a country. Sometimes I say I’m from Africa and then we leave it there. If I say Sudan, someone will say, South America, or something. But if I say Africa, yeah, they’ll remember through Lion King, Hakuna Matata and everything (Personal interview, February 8, 2010).

I asked one young man who is a college student about being recognized as a Lost Boy at school.

I don’t know how people really know. One of my class... when he came to the class, he knew actually that I was from Sudan. At the end, when he finished talking, he came to me, like, “Hey, you from Sudan, huh?” I was like “Yeah, how do you know?” “Yeah, I know.” He actually knew who I was. So it just caught my brain. So what can I say? It seems like everyone knows me and where I’m from. Even my professor wanted me to talk to the class about this (Personal interview, February 17, 2010).



As our conversation continued, he spoke about different circumstances where he chose not to disclose his identity as a Lost Boy, or to withhold disclosure for a time. In everyday life, it doesn't seem appropriate to claim the identity, unless the topic is broached or people are curious.

Actually, I never try to tell. There is no need to tell people, "Hey this is what happened to me." So I don't feel like, you know. But if you want to ask me, "Where are you from," I will tell, "I am from Sudan." If they will know more about me, I will tell it. I remember when I was at [college] there was this guy from Africa. He was from Ghana. He was actually my close friend. He never knew that I was from Sudan. Because we always play, we hanging out, do stuff. One time, he asked me. And I try to tell him a little bit, and, "Come on, tell me more." Then I told him I'm from the Lost Boys. He shed tear, he cried. And he was like, "Man, I never thought you were with these guys." And I was like, wow. So it felt like, he felt my past, my experience (Personal interview, February 17, 2010).

Withholding disclosure preserves a space to be known as an individual, rather than to be designated by a label and perhaps pressed to relive and tell details of a difficult past. Withholding disclosure may also preserve a sense of personal integrity; one may choose to not reveal intimate details of one's past experience until sure of a friend's support and reception. The symbolic power of the label Lost Boys represents a known history, which precedes the young men as individuals. The label grants legitimacy but also marks the young men, because so many people are already aware of the public image and associated history. It may be a concern for some to maintain a sound sense of privacy even as one is recognized as a public persona.

In thinking about how South Sudanese must navigate being public figures and deciding when and where to tell their stories, I am reminded of discussions relating to curator's decisions in how to represent memorial sites:

Sara Bloomfield, director of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, said that "human remains are not objects that get curated and displayed," but added that the Sept. 11 project "is a museum on a site of mass death," putting it "into a whole other category. One of the ongoing tensions is balancing the educational goal with the goal of always honoring the memory of the victims," Ms. Bloomfield added. "Those sometimes come into conflict, and it requires a lot of sensitivity and building a lot of dialogue and trust with your constituency, in our case Holocaust survivors. I don't think there's any one clear-cut answer."

Piotr M. A. Cywinski, director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, said, "Every authentic memorial site has something of a museum and a cemetery in itself. Both roles should be present and clearly recognizable, yet they should not be confused and mixed," he wrote in an e-mail. "We cannot turn back the time, just as we cannot free the space around Auschwitz-Birkenau from human ash and tiny remains of human bones. There is no sense in creating some artificial order and peace on a land contaminated with extreme evil" (Hartocollis 2011).

As a geographer, I think about the emotional preparation that museums give people in advance of witnessing exhibits, through being a building, not a person, through being located in one place, separate and distinct. There is thoughtfulness and care to protect the presentation of memories, artifacts, and to notify that this is a sacred location of human remains. While people who carry memories of mass atrocities slip in and out among the rest of us, and may not announce themselves, or may not be noticeable as survivors. I think of all the work that people must do in order to grant themselves private space to remember, or to be safe from remembering.

Another Lost Boy spoke about the difficulty inherent in the possibility of being confronted with painful memories at any time; causing him to be selective about when and where to tell his story.

One of the hardest thing is to relive that story. Because some of the saddest thing that I've seen as a child... And if I look I say, ok it cost me this much, if I look at where I am today. So, it bring both joy and also sadness. Especially the journey part. The loss of life, the things I have witnessed along the way... But I don't want it to be a constant, put on display, where I have to look at it every day (Personal interview, February 8, 2010).

There is other evidence of mixed feelings regarding display of stories, or second-guessing in the best story to leave behind. One of the features at the AZLBC is the story wall: a long hallway where tens of framed photographs and printed narratives are displayed. The personal stories and photographs were compiled by volunteers, who interviewed the Lost Boys and Lost Girls. During a tour of the AZLBC, the story wall was a highlighted stop and source of pride. It is also disconcerting to pause casually to read, and discover the stories of atrocities and loss. When I spoke with one of the volunteers who had a prominent role in putting together the wall, she mentioned that she and her team do their best to track and follow up with the Sudanese who are featured on the wall, so that individuals can make updates or changes to their profiles. From time to time, they will discover a blank spot, where one of the framed photographs has been removed. These accounts are now preserved digitally and are available online through the "Lost Boys Found Oral Histories" digital repository at the Arizona State University library.

**Performing benevolence: social roles of audiences and volunteers.** I was a volunteer with a local refugee resettlement agency for two years, from 2002-2004. During that time, I recall a lunch break conversation among several of the agency employees, who were remarking on the rise in phone calls, queries, and donations spurred by the arrival of Lost Boys. One employee expressed frustration that callers would ask or demand that their donations be given to the Lost Boys of Sudan, when there were many numbers of refugees from other countries who had just as little as the Lost Boys, but who lacked the media coverage. The following (rather long, but worth the read) account from journalist Bixler (2005) addresses the phenomenon of sudden increased interest and mobilization of volunteers associated with the initial arrival of the Lost Boys to the United States in 2001:

News accounts of the Lost Boys' coming to Atlanta and to the rest of the United States swelled the ranks of volunteers, and resettlement agencies found themselves answering more and more phone calls from people eager to help these Sudanese teenagers and young men. It did not take long for a pattern to emerge. For one thing, most of the volunteers were women. They tended to be in the middle or upper class, professional women or the wives of doctors or executives. There were exceptions, of course, but many volunteers were suburban women in their forties and early fifties with no children of their own. Some saw in the Lost Boys an opportunity to nurture and, at the same time, become acquainted with someone with dark skin, a real person from Africa. Many lived in mostly white neighborhoods and had little contact with African Americans, a common pattern in the American South that cultivated, for some, a fear of the unknown, shaped and refined by whispered rumors and television stereotypes. Volunteering with the Lost Boys allowed them a safe adventure with people who were so different yet, much to the relief of the volunteers, not so different as to prevent acquaintance. There was an aura of excitement, the promise of a delightful excursion from the ho-hum routine of an air-conditioned world with few surprises. Most Lost Boys spoke English, after all, and tended to worship in a Christian church. Some women who volunteered would talk breathlessly at first about meeting the refugees, as if they had gone to the moon. Here finally, it seemed, was an adventure, exotic but safe. Yet it would be wrong to say that the women volunteered for primarily selfish reasons. In the next two years, many would invest hundreds of hours and up to several thousand dollars of their own money to shepherd the Lost Boys into American life. They would be the ones to determine whether the young men got the education they craved. And if they were at times pushy and protective, well, the refugees seemed willing to accept that as part of a bargain that delivered them a guide (Bixler 2005, 107-108).

The volunteers that Bixler describes were taking on activist roles for the benefit of the refugees; becoming political agents on their behalf, yet inadvertently reinforcing what roles the refugees themselves were able to enact or practice.

In addition, I want to highlight Bixler's observations on difference and commonalities (he mentions race, language, and religion) and their influence on the relationships between volunteers and refugees. As he mentions, the arrival of the Lost Boys attracted many volunteers who live within culturally and socio-economically homogenous areas. Some have little prior experience engaging with people from another country, who speak other languages, or who come from different backgrounds. When I asked what are the benefits of volunteering, one local respondent said, "I think [my] children and myself gain empathy for the plight. It helps with understanding other cultures... But it also teaches the children patience, to try and understand the accent. [Volunteering] really lets you meet someone that you would never have the opportunity to meet in any other circumstance" (Personal interview, September 4, 2010).

Volunteering is also, for many, undertaken as a religious activity, either through individual spiritual impulse or in conjunction with one's religious community. So volunteering can be undertaken as an activity in partnership with one's understanding of God. Many South Sudanese and volunteers are religious and faithful people, and even as their particular faiths may differ, language is often used that suggests the presence of God in everyday life. For example, the following were said to me at various times by Sudanese and volunteers: "God bless you for helping us Sudanese," "You are a Godsend," and "I will pray that you find a good job after graduation". I appreciated these thoughtful sentiments, and share a sense that helping others is a way to put love into action. The sense that one was called by God to assist the South Sudanese is very personal; it seems to me this is an individual understanding of God's role in daily life, not necessarily associated with a particular religious organization, even as different religious groups were involved in collaborative projects to assist the South Sudanese and AZLBC programs, and different religious organizations (mainly Jewish and various Christian—no Lost Boy who spoke with me could remember being asked to address an Islamic group) contacted the AZLBC to invite speakers to present to the congregations.

One volunteer in particular mentioned the active role of God several times during our conversation. The volunteer said, "I felt in my heart a great compassion for the Sudanese; I felt

like God was calling me to be involved with them” (Personal interview, February 8, 2010). This volunteer had done considerable work to raise money and donations for the Lost Boys. Later in the same conversation, the volunteer mentioned that God had directly assisted her volunteering efforts by preceding her and opening the hearts of people she contacted for donations: “God went before me and opened the hearts of these people. It’s his work” (Personal interview, February 8, 2010).

Bixler’s (2005) account of the early volunteer mobilization to assist the Lost Boys includes the experience of a volunteer who experienced a recurring dream. In this dream, she saw an image of African children walking alone, and she later identified them as the Lost Boys.

Cyndie would say years later that the dream had recurred several times by the day in 1992 that she found herself in the waiting room of a doctor’s office. Thumbing through a copy of Life magazine... Cyndie saw a color photo of bedraggled boys walking in a line through an African forest... Cyndie asked a receptionist if she could have the magazine. She returned home and kept it on a table in her kitchen for the next eight years. During that time, she confided the story to her friends. She concluded that God had planted the dream in her mind and had revealed to her the story of the Lost Boys because he meant for her to do something about their suffering (Bixler 2005: 101).

When Cyndie hears that Lost Boys are being resettled in U.S. cities, “she calls a resettlement agency and asks if they need volunteers to work with the Sudanese. The person replies, ‘The first two came yesterday, and they need a mother’” (Bixler 2005, 102).

These anecdotes present us with another way to understand social and cultural context, or affective background. This background, the sum of events and experiences, large and small, in turn channels what we think of as possible; we can either go with the flow or fight an endless onslaught of pressures against our travel upstream. Things can go our way, or we are buffeted with injuries, slights, and blocked with dead ends. Since no person(s) could reasonably control all of these events and coincidences, it must be God’s work. In this way, one can interpret intentionality in the anonymous momentum of events.

I turn now to consider comments regarding the relationships between South Sudanese refugees and the volunteers who work to assist them. I consider the established roles of helper – sufferer and examine how these roles and the emotions accompanying and configuring them

define boundaries of behavior and community. Academic literature stresses the silencing effects of unequal power relations; while the image of voiceless refugees suggests a resigned acceptance of a limiting role. During the two years (2009-2011) that I acted as a volunteer at the AZLBC, I saw these roles both challenged and reinforced, especially as part of the discussions regarding the function and mission of the AZLBC.

Volunteering gives powerful emotional rewards as part of a performance of the self. Helping or volunteering allows a person to experience and practice the self as, for example, gracious, generous, non-discriminatory, or empathic. South Sudanese and volunteers often invoke family relationships with each other; this elicits a strong sense of belonging and attachment, but also sets into place social roles that may limit expression. In her study, Szczepanikova (2010) asserted that informal and friendship-based relations between refugees and NGOs are often more effective at silencing refugees, because to create room for refugees' critiques would require subversion of their role as grateful recipients of aid.

Volunteers may become new learners of their own culture. Throughout interviews, volunteers brought up lessons learned through their interactions and relationships with Southern Sudanese. Several spoke about gaining a new awareness of the dangers that nonwhite people face from racial profiling and racial discrimination. One young woman talked about rethinking the nuclear family and family structures after becoming acquainted with African extended families, especially the close cross-generational relationships. Many volunteers and audiences of public speaking events reported that they were viewing U.S. consumerism with a new perspective. A common remark was that they were reminded to be grateful for the standard of living in the United States; while some audiences and volunteers expressed a feeling akin to shame or regret, and a desire to purge their excessive materialism.

Volunteers emphasized the rewards and gifts of volunteering, rather than focusing on what they themselves have given. One person said that volunteering has "given me a lot of joy in life. I feel blessed by the whole entire experience. I've become a better person because of [the Lost Boys]. They've been giving to me" (Personal interview, February 8, 2010). Volunteers

frequently commented on the graciousness of the South Sudanese community, saying that they felt welcomed and that their efforts were appreciated. One volunteer said, “The rewards and the gratitude from the guys is better than I ever could have imagined... When you do something for them, they just don't forget it” (Personal interview, April 8, 2010).

The same respondent spoke about the sense of community and welcoming that enveloped her as a volunteer; she said that the Lost Boys told her, “Well, you're a Lost Girl now. Because you work with us and you help us.” The volunteer said, “It kind of makes me feel like a part of the community, and like, definitely makes me feel good, to know that they recognize that I'm there. If you go and you volunteer, you're one of them. Like, you are a part of their community” (Personal interview, April 8, 2010).

Many volunteers commented on the South Sudanese community ethic; another volunteer said, “One of the things I noticed with Sudanese is what a wonderfully tight knit, supportive community – quite frankly I am envious of it” (Personal interview, February 8, 2010). Another volunteer spoke about the sense of welcome she encountered upon meeting members of the South Sudanese community, saying she was welcomed as a mother figure: “And they are very welcoming of others and treat you as family. I still get tears in my eyes when they call me mom. And it's just been a rewarding experience for [me and my family]. It really has been” (Personal interview, September 4, 2010). In many cases, drawing on a sense of family becomes a source of mutual satisfaction and bonding.

One volunteer who also appreciates the chance to act as a maternal figure has hosted at her home several of the young men who were recovering from illness or surgery. In many cases, the volunteer actually initiated the procurement of medical assistance for the young men. In this way, she was able to provide care beyond the capacity of the AZLBC.

[One young man] had an operation; nobody offered to go with him. I asked who was going; he said no one. I was upset because he was volunteering [at the AZLBC] and no one offered. I took care of him all night; he had a reaction to medication, and he stayed eight or ten days. One guy [who stayed at the house to recover from surgery], said, ‘This is the first time I knew what it's like to have a mom’... That's a big motivator to me; my job, my first one, is to be a mom to them. I love these young men. They call me mom (Personal interview, February 8, 2010).

This same volunteer spoke about the slow discovery that many of the young men she was assisting with medical help, were accepting help with utter blind trust. This volunteer has developed relationships with the young men and been able to offer support that is needed, but that is very rarely asked for. It was through the recommendation of several young men that I was directed to speak with this trusted volunteer.

The trust factor with the boys... when I took [one young man] to the doctor the first time, he didn't say anything... I realized later all these guys were going and they didn't know what I was going to be doing... it just has evolved; very few people tell me what they need. [One young man] didn't call me to ask me to go with him, but I listen very carefully and ask questions and that's how I find out what's going on (Personal interview, February 8, 2010).

In one instance a Lost Boy related to me how he had addressed a volunteer during a disagreement and explained to her that, while it may be rewarding to speak to each other in terms of family relationships, that does not mean that the Lost Boys are children; the young men should be held accountable for their actions. In effect, he was saying the Lost Boys have the right to make their own decisions and their own mistakes.

She said, you don't know how parents feel about their children. I said well you can feel that way. But the child who is 18 years old is a child that is old enough to make a decision. So if the Lost Boys already are all your children, that's great, but you need to know, they are adults. Even if they don't do everything right, that's why we have the legal system to come and get them... Now we have people sitting in the jail, like [one young man] who killed somebody. So that's right to be there, to be in the jail, because he take somebody's life. There's no way around that (Personal interview, October 29, 2010).

Let us turn now to look more closely at encounters wherein Lost Boys challenge the role of "grateful recipient of aid", or attempt to carve out space for alternative viewpoints, by voicing their own concerns and discontent.

**The role of the AZLBC.** As noted in chapter one, the Arizona Lost Boys Center (AZLBC) closed at the end of 2011 and reopened in a new location, with a new mission and a new name: The Lost Boys Center for Leadership Development, with a focus on training and providing opportunities for South Sudanese to relocate and contribute to society in South Sudan. This was a dramatic shift from the social gathering space that the AZLBC had become. The period while I



was a volunteer, 2009-2011, was thus a transitional time and many private discussions and public meetings were held wherein the role of the Center was debated. In this section, I will draw from observations regarding the appropriate services and function of the old AZLBC as it was contested and renegotiated.

The Center became a symbol representing the Sudanese community in the minds of the broader public. According to one volunteer, "We're aware the [South Sudanese] community exists because of the Center" (Personal interview, September 4, 2010). A Lost Boy remarked, "The Lost Boys Center is really good; it kind of keep the image of the Lost Boys" (Personal interview, December 17, 2009). Staff members pointed out that the AZLBC was unique in the United States as the largest and most active Sudanese community center. It functioned as a network hub; when South Sudanese dignitaries and even leaders of other African communities visited the United States, they would stop in Phoenix at the AZLBC. Staff has received phone calls from many other states and other countries from people who need to connect or find information about loved ones. In this way, the AZLBC acted as a central and visible producer of public space.

The role of the Center was evaluated several times over the decade since its founding; as the Lost Boys aged, and as more people in the community enrolled in or graduated from college, their basic needs evolved and the survival and continued funding of the Center required reassessment. Staff and Board members at the Center made the point that in order to legitimate asking for funding help from state and local organizations (since the time restrictions have long since run out on federal assistance to refugees), they needed to show that the Center also was helpful within the broader Sudanese community, including elders and women, or even other African refugees. The Center remained a space where community negotiation was made possible, but also where negotiation may be structured by the roles of "staff member," "client," or "volunteer".

The Center was formed to assist Lost Boys and to an extent, the greater South Sudanese community, with education, employment, and social and emotional issues. By 2009-2011, it seemed that the main use of the Center was as a social gathering place, where Lost Boys and

Southern Sudanese would meet to play dominoes, cards, or as a community meeting space for discussion of current concerns. One Board member relayed to me the perspective that the AZLBC has fulfilled its role for a great number of young men – who had then moved on to other support systems and other goals. According to this Board member, some of the social problems that were emerging at the Center (such as individuals carrying hidden alcohol or weapons) were due to the fact that the population spending the most time there were those who have more complicated problems and who were not as easily assisted. The role of the AZLBC was also limited—some Lost Boys saw this as a negative, because they were acutely aware of the community needs that were not being met (including mental illness, poverty, unemployment, and homelessness). One young man who had looked for employment through the Center and was disappointed, said, “The Center gives us a place to play; I don’t think they can help finding a job. I think the job that they will find for us is a cheaper one” (Personal interview, January 7, 2010). On the other hand, others pointed out that the AZLBC could only fulfill certain functions in supporting the community, and that other organizations, such as churches, other nonprofits, and even individual community members, were better situated to provide these kinds of assistance. At a community meeting, Mr. Awan, the Executive Director of the AZLBC, stressed this point when he answered such a concern by telling attendees that the AZLBC could not (and should not) provide shelter for the persistent homeless within the community.

In analyzing various roles of community development practitioners, Toomey (2009) describes the sometimes disempowering effects of the “Rescuer” and the “Provider”. The approaches and policies of the Rescuer are generally limited to times of crisis, yet they “contribute to the passivity of the poor, where the latter become dependent receivers without taking part in the development process. This may lead to negative attitudes, unwillingness to participate, a lack of trust, and resistance to change” (Toomey 2009: 184). The “Provider” role can extend beyond times of crisis and “focuses on giving the ‘gift’ of charity to less fortunate communities and individuals” (Toomey 2009: 185) rather than helping them to do things for themselves over the long term. The strategies that are employed to solve problems tend to be

more superficial and oriented to outcomes, rather than addressing structural issues or processes. Thus, “Provider-type development projects had the effect of making local people believe that their own efforts were inadequate and that it was more effective to wait for donor handouts and prepackaged projects than to exercise their own initiative” (Toomey 2009: 185).

Mr. Awan spoke to me a few times about what he called the “refugee mentality;” a state of distrust, suspicion, and persistent jealousy that one is always in danger of receiving less aid than the next person. Another young man described the effects of war on the mental states of many Sudanese: “And you know, they say when the war is come to any country, the buildings will be burned down, everything will be destroyed. But the worst thing that get destroyed is the human mind. The way the human thinks is the worst thing that was destroyed and it doesn’t recover quickly. That’s exactly what happened to us” (Personal interview, October 29, 2010).

Thinking about social roles and community norms can shed light on some of the disconnects between AZLBC staff and disgruntled community members. Consider, for example, the following statement made by one South Sudanese young man:

The Center itself is the Center for everybody. But when it come to the Center, the real Center, the Center belong to the staff members. Because the staff members are the ones getting paid. What will they do with the money? Nobody knows. But I think the Center is for the staff members. The staff members are the only one that could go out and look, you know who is in need and who is not... Who know that I’m in need? I’m now, I’m eating food stamps, I’m getting food stamps from the state... Nobody helping me, and who know that I’m eating something? Nobody (Personal interview, January 7, 2010).

To this young man’s understanding, everyone is welcome to visit at the Center, but actually the Center only benefits the staff members. He is suffering, but the AZLBC does not offer him assistance; he had to find assistance through the state food stamps program. This is understood as a betrayal of the community ethic that coheres South Sudanese together. It is shameful and morally reprehensible to live in better conditions than your neighbor; “The ethical demand among these Sudanese is that each person should *help* the Joneses keep up with them!” (Holton 2011: 12). The young man goes on to say that there are other community members who are suffering more than him, and it should be the role of the Center to find and assist those people.

But to me, I don't see the purpose of the money. Maybe for getting pay the staff members, and the community maybe pay for people who went to universities, and people who went to college. But not to go out and look for people who are in need in the community... I think the Center should do something for people who are in need. Not me, I'm not in need. I'm good, I'll get a job and work and get my money, I am good. But there are people out there, people who are addicted to drinking and doing drugs (Personal interview, January 7, 2010).

These statements show the distrust and disappointment that some South Sudanese felt, as the AZLBC assisted some community members with scholarships, professional networking, and employment, yet was unable to offer enough help for those in troubled circumstances. The distrust was compounded by a lack of understanding regarding funding sources and use of funds, and by the lack of understanding that much work was done on a volunteer, non-paid basis. Disappointment and frustration was frequently expressed by the young men, who would compare the U.S. ethic of individuality to the South Sudanese conception of community.

The disappointment and frustration were ultimately voiced to the community at large by a few young men, who criticized the staff (including South Sudanese) and the Board of Directors; they said the AZLBC was akin to a new plantation, wherein the white people were becoming rich off the backs of the Lost Boys. This resonated with some South Sudanese, while others felt it was a power play. In either regard, it drew upon real feelings of disappointment and mistrust, feelings that were validated by the knowledge that community members were suffering beyond the scope of the AZLBC to assist.

Through a series of regularly and emergency scheduled meetings (some of which were closed-door, so I did not attend), staff and Board Members worked to hear and address the concerns. The conflict was then resolved at an open community meeting held in January, 2010. Lost Boys opened the meeting with a prayer for peace and unity, and each speaker directed comments in his own way towards reconciliation and repair of the social body, even as some issues remained unresolved. One Lost Boy repeated an African proverb, "When two elephants fight, it is the grass which suffers" meaning that community leaders needed to come together rather than argue, as the community at large suffers on account of this discord. Board members

in attendance were also invited to speak, and one said that the meetings had not been easy, but that necessary issues had been heard. Board members also urged the South Sudanese community to not lose sight of the bigger picture – that the AZLBC was a community center unlike any other place in the world, and that the goal had always been for South Sudanese to lead the Center with the support of their friends in the broader Phoenix community. The hope was expressed that the leadership experiences and lessons learned at the AZLBC could also be transferred and practiced in South Sudan.

I have attempted in this section to give room for personal statements and stories, while drawing these examples together to illustrate how social roles are both configured by and work to configure what is possible in relations and interactions. The role of emotion is key in locating subject positions: as permissible expression of emotion and conception of self are linked to some degree of power and capital. A focus on social roles can illuminate that templates of social form shift and move as bodies transduce potential; conscious application of new behaviors, new ways of being, might disrupt or generate new networks of being, and it is momentum of habit which brings grids back together in ordered form.

In addition to the roles of refugee, helper, sufferer, volunteer, and Lost Boy, the signifier of race also figures in the social grid of relations. I turn now to a consideration of race as a product of social relations, as a “chain of contingency,” of “sticky connections between property, privilege,” and skin color; race can be understood as “an immanent process,” (Saldanha 2004: 18) and as one of the approximations in the social grid which captures bodies and can be felt or perceived as boundaries of belonging are enacted.

## **RACE AS A PRODUCT OF SOCIAL RELATIONS**

When the Lost Boys immigrated to the United States, they entered a context of social relations with a specific racialized history. While many Lost Boys (and their U.S. publics) see themselves as distinctly African, and separate from the history and culture of African Americans, there is also intersection, as when Lost Boys adopt hip-hop cultural attributes, or experience

racial profiling or discrimination because they are perceived to be African American. This section centers on the understanding of race as a product of social relations. I draw from scholarly work that highlights the social construction of race, putting the focus on social relations and social roles, rather than biological factors: “race is socially constructed; and blackness and whiteness are not categories of essence but defined by historical and political struggles over their meaning.” (Solomos 2001: 198). However, in “considering race through event, encounter, and performance,” (Nayak 2011: 549) and how race is “given meaning through affects, projection, psycho-dynamic imaginings and deep emotional registers,” (Nayak 2011: 560) I do not want to become overly abstract and lose sight of the heart of the matter: that historically institutionalized racism perpetuates large-scale inequalities. I want to use these insights into subjectivities to draw attention to the realities of racism.

In the formerly united Sudan, race was “a mechanism for allocation of rights, resources, and social standing. It has to be seen as a reality built into the structures of government, the social and political institutions of the state” (Jok 2007: 11). Black African Christians in the South and black African Muslims in Darfur were both forced out of their home territories by Arab militias who were armed by the North. Arabs in the North held political power and gained control of the oil resources from southern lands. We have also noted the centuries-long practice of Arab raids to capture slaves from the South. But race is a tangled signifier; one South Sudanese woman told me in the middle of a political discussion that Omar al-Bashir, the President of Sudan, is a Black man, but he pretends to be an Arab and denies his true identity. This accusation shows the social conditions and social relations that are also part of the projection of a racial signifier.

The Sudanese popular notions of race are not based on phenotypes alone, and they are not fixed. They are also pegged to a host of practices such as religion, economic activities, material conditions, the naming of people and other cultural practices. The geographic distance between groups, the natural environment in which each group lives and their language are also considered part of the racial schema. In other words, these characteristics, which are not always part of the definition of race in contemporary social sciences, *but are aspects of social relations* [my emphasis], become the lines separating racial identities. This means that racial boundaries are very fluid in Sudan, and there are many ways in which people who may be classed as blacks could also pass as Arabs, while those who have been known to be Arabs could decide to label themselves as African or black if their political circumstances demanded and allowed it (Jok 2007: 3).

The U.S. social context is similarly racialized and includes a history of slavery; Eyerman (2001) draws on the theory of cultural trauma and examines collective memory of slavery to explain the formation of a unique African American identity. African immigrants do not share this collective memory or identity; yet they may be labeled as Black or African American. In addition, they often seek to reject the marginalization that accompanies this categorization. “For the African immigrant, ‘being White’ is not an option; instead, he is expected to ‘be African American.’ Yet, the African American, because of his history with slavery, segregation, and discrimination is a disadvantaged entity, often lacking the social, cultural, political, and economic capital needed to live the good ‘American life’” (Okonofua 2013: 7).

When Lost Boys arrived in the United States, many made quick ties with middle-class whites. One young man commented that because of this, racial discrimination has really not been an issue.

And then there is this race issue. So definitely the question of race is not a big thing for us. Simply because when we came to America, we tie more with white Americans compared to black Americans. Every city that we in, we are very much friends with white Americans. And White America perceive us as African. They don't see us as Black American or something, they see us as an African coming into America. And that's a different thing, that they look differently. I don't see any race being put into that. The only place that you see race is like workplaces, and people see you as Black. But if you interacting with friends, they see you as an African (Personal interview, October 29, 2010).

I will give one example of restrictions placed on young men who are viewed as black and threatening; the example also shows how the popularized myth of “American freedom” masks racialized realities: The documentary *God Grew Tired of Us* (2006) shows a group of Lost Boys walking on a city street, while the narrator says, “Merchants in [the Lost Boys] Daniel and Panther’s neighborhood have filed complaints with the local police in Pittsburgh. They feel intimidated by the boys entering their stores in large numbers. So a meeting was called to advise the boys not to travel in groups.” Immediately the scene cuts to show Daniel and Panther chatting with a white woman at a public swimming pool. The woman asks, “Do you find everything really new and different here?” The young men answer, “Yes.” She asks, “Do you have a lot of freedom here that you didn’t have?” The young men answer, “Yes.” The statement that the Lost Boys are

enjoying freedoms in the United States contrasts absurdly with the previous scene, which showed that the young men are, in fact, not free to walk or gather together as they please. They are perceived to be threatening when they are together in a group. Considering the disproportionate numbers of unarmed black men who are killed by police in the U.S. (see Lee 2014), the young men are not free; they are not even safe.

The Lost Boys reported to me in interviews and conversations that race is not often openly discussed in the United States. One young man said, “I think the question about race in America... you know, Americans don’t talk much about it, but it is like this thing there” (Personal interview, October 29, 2010). When the topic of race does come up in conversations with whites, Lost Boys are often humorously surprised at the sensitivity and caution of whites. One young man said:

This is very sensitive. You guys don’t get to do a lot of talking about it. Every time someone mentions you are black... to me, it come about... I would say Caucasians are very sensitive. I think they feel like they are going to hurt somebody... You know, it make you uncomfortable... One of my office mates, we share the office, is a Caucasian and we always tease each other. I’ll say, ‘You know, don’t feel uncomfortable. I’m very comfortable in my skin.’ [laughs] But you know, given the history of the country, I agree that people are sensitive to it (Personal interview, February 8, 2010).

Lost Boys often respond with humor in this regard. Some stated that whites in turn are surprised and relieved to be able to mention race without causing offense. The fact that South Sudanese come from a different historical context and do not share the collective memory or identity of a marginalized existence in the United States makes it easier for whites to converse with Lost Boys about race. Whites are not confronted with “angry Black syndrome” (Okonofua 2013: 7). This cultural trope seems to figure as a prominent haunt in the white imagination, curbing conversation. The triggers for anger are not well understood.

One Lost Boy described an example of a conversation about race, wherein he said to a white friend, “Well, you can always describe the black guy because I’m the only one.” His friend replied, “No, that’s racist. What if I say the dark guy?” The Lost Boy agreed, saying, “OK, I can do that, too.” Then his friend asked, “Do you ever feel bad when somebody say something racist?” He answered, “No, why would I feel bad at something that – it’s me? I know I’m dark, I know I’m



black, I'm from Africa." His white friend replied, "I like this kid. Oh, an African American will kill me if I say something like that" (Personal interview, February 6, 2010). Note the caution and confusion apparent in the conversation, and the concern of the white friend that any mention of race will be perceived as a racist statement. I think the conversation shows that the collective, historical, and institutionalized reality of racism is not well understood by whites in the United States; instead it is replaced with the vague, grasping notion that referring to a person as "dark" versus "Black" will alleviate any potential offense. Conversations about race are laced with potential landmines; the Lost Boys defuse the munitions.

Another Lost Boy told this story about an encounter with a young boy, wherein he felt he had to explain his black complexion:

So like one time I went to my dentist and there was a little boy, who never see a dark person black like me before. And he said, "Hey, where this guy come from?" And his father try to ignore him. Then he say, "Hey man, where you come from? Why you so dark?" I said, "I came from Sudan." And he said, "Saddam?" I say, "No" (laughs). "No Saddam. Sudan." And he say, "OK. And why you so dark?" I say, "I'm a son of God." and he say, "Oh I didn't know that!" (laughs). It happen a lot, sometimes. Somebody can ask you where you from based on my accent and how I'm talking to them. Somebody might ask me how I look, "Where you from?" So it just happen (Personal interview, December 11, 2009).

In this conversation, the Lost Boy is nonconfrontational, laughing, and even soothing.

This accommodating attitude creates a by-product: a safe space where whites can begin to think about and discuss race, perhaps for the first time.

Several volunteers commented on their increased awareness of social problems associated with race, including racial profiling. McKinnon (2005) also found in her research at the AZLBC that there were incidents where Lost Boys had been profiled and encountered difficulties from racial discrimination. When volunteers speak about the violence and harassment the Lost Boys have experienced due to racial discrimination, it is clear that the stories have made an impression on them. These are volunteers who consider the Lost Boys their personal friends, even akin to family members. Yet it is unclear whether these incidents prompt deeper thinking

about a culture of racism at large. Does the relationship between white volunteers and Lost Boys serve to simply make whites feel good, without altering the dynamics of various forms of white elitism (Nayak 2011)?

Okonofua (2013) asserts that, “By accommodating the African immigrant, a Black man, African Americans believe that White America attempts to purge itself of the guilt of racism and discrimination” (Okonofua 2013: 7). The author Teju Cole voiced a similar appraisal when he sent out a series of tweets criticizing the “White Savior Industrial Complex,” declaring that justice is a ruse; the real aim is “a big emotional experience that validates privilege” (Cole 2012). The assessment of Okonofua is forceful: “The relationship that is forged between African immigrants and Whites is decidedly unequal and exploitative, and the African immigrant becomes a tool for showcasing the significant racial advance that America has made while in reality, Blacks continue to experience discrimination in all facets of life in the United States” (Okonofua 2013: 7). The real source of tension between African immigrants and African Americans is that the two groups are forced into competition for scarce resources (Okonofua 2013).

African immigrants “seek the definition of Americanization that European immigrants have, which in its broadest usage is a euphemism for Whiteness... Whiteness is highly valued and is represented at the microlevel by middle class values. Many African immigrants have come to place high premiums on these values and actively seek to achieve them” (Okonofua 2013: 6). This implies a belief that positioning in the social matrix is partly determined by one’s values and behaviors (rather than phenotype alone), and that there is potential for movement and change through adherence to particular values and behaviors. Ong (2004) argues that immigrants are subject to social and economic processes of “whitening” and “blackening”.

Increasingly, citizenship is defined as the civic duty of individuals to reduce their burden on society and build up their own human capital—to be ‘entrepreneurs’ of themselves... Attaining success through self-reliant struggle, while not inherently limited to any cultural group, is a process of self-development that in Western democracies becomes inseparable from the process of “whitening” (Ong 2004: 158).

The ideological formation of whiteness as the symbol of ideal legal and moral citizenship today continues to depend upon the “blackening” of less desirable immigrants. Immigrants situated closer to the black pole are seen as at the bottom of the cultural and economic ranking (Ong 2004: 163).

There is a notable body of scholarly literature that follows the assimilation of immigrant and ethnic groups, such as Irish and Jewish immigrants, through U.S. history as a process of “whitening” (see, for example, Roediger 2005 and Brodtkin 1998). Scholars have also shown social pressure exists among ethnic minorities to perform certain behaviors which are perceived as racialized. Fryer and Levitt (2004) points to the phenomenon of ‘acting white,’ which according to one working definition, “describes a set of social interactions in which Black adolescents ridicule other Black adolescents for investing in behaviors characteristic of whites (having an interest in ballet, raising their hand in class, or making good grades, e.g.).” Although Fryer’s study looked at Black teenagers, he also references similar behaviors among several other ethnic and cultural groups.

I witnessed evidence of such performative disciplining. At times, some Lost Boys resist talk about experiencing racial discrimination; for example, one young man pointed out cases he did not think were legitimate. “Even today, playing cards with some of the Lost Boys who are not doing well: ‘Oh I got fired at the job because I’m Black.’ I say, ‘No that’s not how it should be.’ I say, ‘You get fired because you didn’t do well.’ That’s how I see it” (Personal interview, October 29, 2010). This young man was instructing others and discouraging them from what might be interpreted as “playing the race card.”

Another Lost Boy told me about advice he had received from his mentor, a successful African American man who was a former Marine. The mentor had told him, “America loves poor people,” and this was explained to mean that it was possible to work hard all one’s life and not get anywhere; thus, he was encouraged to continue his education in order to “become part of something” (Personal interview, February 8, 2010). Educational attainment and the adoption of white middle-class values is thus understood to loosen or somewhat liquefy the social grid, whereas the grid thickens to hold prisoner the working poor, the black.

Some volunteers saw social progress in their own, self-described, colorblindness<sup>7</sup>, which is used to mean nondiscrimination. One volunteer said, “When we walk in there [to the AZLBC], we don’t see a race. We don’t see a color, we just see people. So to us, it’s not unusual to be

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<sup>7</sup> The Lost Boys generally are not offended or angered by purported colorblindness; it does not occur to them as an attempt to erase or deny the African American historical struggle for equality and justice.

spending time, because we don't really see [the Lost Boys] as being any different. And we don't notice any color. Does that make sense?" (Personal interview, September 4, 2010). The same individual spoke about being aware of discrimination. "They are discriminated against, based on appearance. Because of a lack of mastery of the English language. Because of a difference in color" (Personal interview, September 4, 2010). Here the volunteer distinctly marks black as "a difference in color," which assumes that white is not a color or a race; white is the default<sup>8</sup>.

Tannen (1993) wrote about the privilege of the 'unmarked' and unavoidable 'marked' in terms of gender, which can also apply to race. The 'unmarked' are the words, or social cues, meanings that "go without saying" or show no special distinctiveness: the word "actor" or clothing choices for men. 'Marked' examples are the word "actress" (the gendered, and more frivolous connotation), and women's clothing choices, which convey meaning simply by being gendered. "You couldn't say the men didn't wear makeup in the sense that you could say a woman didn't wear makeup. For men, no makeup is unmarked" (Tannen 1993). In the same way, white individuals enjoy the taken-for-granted ease of being unmarked.

One volunteer spoke about her dawning awareness of being white, as she socialized for the first time as a new college student, meeting friends of different ethnicities, and with local South Sudanese.

For some reason it kept popping in my head like, 'Oh I probably stick out like a sore thumb'. Like, 'There's this young little white girl'. And that's kind of like, I didn't even realize at first that it was, that I was thinking about it... And I never thought about that before... Just like the fact that I think about it more for some reason. Or what it must look like if I am hanging out with one of them. And not because I think that it's bad, it's just I wasn't used to it. Does that make sense?<sup>9</sup> (Personal interview, April 8, 2010).

In this way, middle class, white volunteers may begin to experience a realization of their own race as a status, and this can open a door to thinking about white privilege.

And here, I think, is the main point of discussing the significance of race in regards to the Lost Boys' reception in the United States. How the Lost Boys 'fit' into or belong in a particular

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<sup>8</sup> The term 'Caucasian' is an invented fabrication dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> century taxonomy of humans as part of codifying and enforcing racial hierarchies through scientific means; see Painter 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Note that these two volunteers both concluded their statements with the question, "Does that make sense?" I think this speaks to the sensitivity of the issue; both volunteers were quite tentative and careful in answering, often pausing to find the right words.

social and historical context and how that context places real limitations on their lives, how African immigrants might be changing what it means to be Black or African American in the United States – these are significant questions. Yet the onus of racism in the U.S. is not the burden of racialized minorities alone; it is also the responsibility of those who enjoy the benefits and privileges of being ‘unmarked’ in the society. Volunteers, the majority of whom are white and middle-class, enjoy an exploitative relationship with the Lost Boys if that relationship is based on a denial of a present culture of racism.

### **CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP: THE RIGHT TO BE DIFFERENT**

Migration scholars have addressed alternative aspects of citizenship and rights that are often denied to groups based on difference (Bozniak 2000). The phrase “cultural citizenship” has been used to draw attention to experiences of second-class citizenship and group efforts to claim full rights and recognition. Cultural rights refer to the right to be visible or have a voice and to have control over one’s representation in the public sphere. Pakulski (1997) sees claims to cultural rights extending as a response to globalization and the shrinking of state welfare support.

The cultural rights—which are more in the form of negotiated claims than institutionalized legal entitlements—include rights to unhindered and dignified representation, as well as to the maintenance and propagation of distinct cultural identities and lifestyles... Its domains now start to include symbolic representations, modes of communication and cultural recognition. The claims for cultural citizenship involve not only tolerance of diverse identities but also—and increasingly—claims to dignifying representation, normative accommodation, and active cultivation of these identities and their symbolic correlates (Pakulski 1997: 77).

Rosaldo (1994: 57) argues that cultural citizenship is “the right to be different (in terms of race, ethnicity, or native language) with respect to the norms of the dominant national community, without compromising one’s right to belong”. Ong (2004) examines cultural citizenship as Foucauldian subject-ification and ways that migrants are surveilled, disciplined, and administered, often into specific socio-economic trajectories.

A discussion of cultural citizenship is apt in this chapter in order to further highlight norms of belonging and socially acceptable ways of being. Audiences and volunteers feel a “natural”

cultural affinity with the Lost Boys because the Lost Boys are being used as a mirror to reflect an idealized image of ourselves and our values; we may feel a jolt of disapproval when they act or present themselves otherwise. In this section, I look at different understandings of cultural citizenship through observations from volunteering with the Cow Project at the AZLBC and a discussion of Sudanese-American cultural markers.

**The Cow Project.** My original entry point into the AZLBC was as a volunteer with the Cow Project. As outlined in this dissertation's methods chapter, the Cow Project at the AZLBC entails handmade ceramic cows for sale to raise college scholarship funds for local South Sudanese. Cows are centrally featured at fundraising events such as the annual *Journey of Hope* dinner, hikes and marathons, and speaking events. During my time as a volunteer, we coordinated to host an outdoor table at First Fridays, the monthly artwalks in downtown Phoenix. We set up display posters and a table with cows, and several Lost Boys organized a participatory drum circle, which attracted many passersby.

The cows are recognized as an important symbol in several ways. In general, the cows represent a link to the Lost Boys childhoods and traditional ways of life in South Sudan. When the young men present the ceramic cows, they focus audience attention on life in South Sudan and the centrality of cows to the economy and culture of the Nuer and Dinka people. The Lost Boys remain extremely proud of Southern Sudanese culture and the prominence of cattle. This became clear to me in several ways: first, it was common for young men to wander into the cow room and comment on the ceramic sculptures, telling me about Sudanese cattle, saying the names for different color patterns or shaped horns, or bragging that he could make a better sculpture. Second, I saw the photography of Awer Bul, a Lost Boy artist living in the southeastern U.S., including photographs of young men singing to their cows. The cows are festooned with colorful belts and tassels, and the men appear fierce and proud.

An important aspect in the story of the Lost Boys is that many young boys survived attacks on their villages precisely because they were away at cattle camp. For many consumers,

the cows are understood to represent the story of the Lost Boys as well as a way to support the programs of the AZLBC, especially as an investment in education and the Lost Boys themselves as future leaders. One volunteer commented, "People are interested in history and symbolism of the cows. It's an attractive product and the funds are for a good reason" (Personal interview, February 4, 2010).

The story of the Lost Boys is recognized as a fundamental attraction of the ceramic cows. As recognized in the comment below, cow sales are also higher when Lost Boys are present to talk about the story and answer questions.

If they don't know the background about Sudanese or Lost Boy, nobody can buy them. If they know what is the reason why they had this cow, why they raise the money, yeah. Some people don't want to buy it because they don't know. At least you need to talk about it. You need to be there physically as a Lost Boy. They will buy the cow, they will ask a question. You know, some people have sympathy and they just give the money. Because of that story you give to them. If you don't tell them, somebody going to buy a piece of clay, ceramic cow? Sometimes it doesn't make sense. But at least you give a full story and then people know they have to support, because you tell them (Personal interview, January 21, 2010).

In this way, consumers are buying a symbol of the AZLBC, a representation of the narrative of the Lost Boys, and they are making an investment in the Lost Boys' education. This was perhaps recognized by members of the public who stopped to look at the cows and AZLBC brochures during one event and commented, "So in a way, you're still milking the cows, huh?" Another said to her companion, "You know how I love to buy things that support a cause."

Cow sculptures are also tailored in ways to suit public tastes. Young men told me happily that they would paint any color cow that was popular, even colors that do not exist in real life. Others stopped by the cow room and poked fun at the cow sculptures painted in fantastic colors. I would often ask visitors to the cow room and interview participants if they would try to make a cow, but many were reticent because they sincerely wanted their cow to look the best. Others picked up some clay and reminisced about childhood games and life in South Sudan before the war. The clay cows are thus presented by the Lost Boys and accepted by their publics as a cultural symbol of pastoral life in South Sudan, and a symbol of support for the AZLBC and scholarship fund for the Lost Boys' education in the United States.

**Names and introductions.** Many of the Lost Boys identify themselves by both family and biblical names. The decision made in how to introduce oneself is also a decision concerning how much information to give about oneself. The choice in how to introduce oneself may be made according to the extent a new acquaintance might understand the significance of the names. For example, a biblical name, while reflecting the influence of Christian missionaries in East Africa, also tells the more personal detail of whether one was baptized, and may also indicate that the person was inspired by a particular biblical story, since often (but not always), an individual chooses one's own biblical name. One's first name was given by the parents, a second (or middle) name is one's father's name, and third (or last) name is grandfather's name. Thus, an informed listener may glean tribal and clan information, region of origin, and may note other circumstances surrounding a person's birth, such as birth order, seasonal or environmental information or time of year, or other important events that took place near time of birth. To an informed listener, names tell histories.

In November, 2009, a joint community dinner was held at the AZLBC, and the attendees were members of South Sudanese and local Native American communities. John Vack, the executive director of the AZLBC at the time, had envisioned a series of cultural exchanges between the South Sudanese and the Gila River Indian Community, a significant supporter of the AZLBC. The Native Americans in attendance hailed from different tribes and communities, and when the visitors formally introduced themselves at the start of the meeting, each person gave his full name and explained the origin and meaning of the names<sup>10</sup>. Each person in the room then followed suit, and we heard stories about people's parents and their parents, about local landscapes and weather events, hopes and sorrows. One woman explained that her name referred to her as the child born after the heartbreak of a miscarriage. I thought about how my

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<sup>10</sup> The Native Americans in attendance were all males, while South Sudanese attendees were males and females. At the end of the meeting, one of the South Sudanese women expressed her thankfulness for the visit, and encouraged that the Native Americans should next time bring their women.



middle name comes from my grandmother, the grounding and continuity I feel in knowing family history, and how proud I am to wear and carry her name. I thought about how all of this information can so easily be missed, or never even spoken.

There are scholarly records that show cultural, social, and even economic significance in name choice in the United States. Fryer and Levitt (2004) examine the rise of ‘distinctively Black’ names corresponding to the influence of the Black Power movement, which aimed to strengthen Black pride and identity. Names are distinctive in that children of other races do not share those names. They argue:

Identities are accompanied by certain “prescriptions” that define appropriate behaviors for a person of that type. When an individual takes actions in line with these prescriptions (e.g., a “black” type choosing a distinctively Black name, or a “white” type choosing a White name), there is a utility benefit. The underlying philosophy of the Black Power movement was to encourage Blacks to accentuate and affirm Black culture and fight the claims of Black inferiority. Within the Black community, there were widespread changes in hairstyles and the rising popularity of afro-centric clothing between 1968 – 1975. The adoption of distinctively Black names would be completely consistent with these other cultural phenomena. The identity model may also help to explain why naming patterns among Blacks are quite distinctive from Whites, but Asians name their children in much the same manner as Whites. For instance, if Asian “prescriptions” stress financial success and assimilation, Asian names would be expected to mirror those of Whites (Fryer and Levitt 2004, 790 – 791).

In a similar case, Goldin and Shim (2004) investigate the phenomenon of “keepers”: married women who retain their maiden name.

The fraction of women “keeping” their maiden name rose sharply in the 1970s and 1980s, but declined slightly in the 1990s. But the legal, social and economic institutions supporting this custom began to shift in the 1970s: the laws that pressured women to take their husband’s names changed; the appellation “Ms.” became acceptable; the age at first marriage rose; and the number of advanced academic degrees received by women increased (Goldin and Shim 2004, 144).

Their findings suggest:

More women found themselves in a situation where they had already “made a name” for themselves in a profession, business or among friends and colleagues before marriage. Like the brand names of consumer goods, women elected to keep their surnames to protect the value of their contacts, publications and professional goodwill. A greater number of women might also have kept their surnames as a means of preserving their personal identity, along with their professional one (Goldin and Shim 2004, 146).

Thus, the decision of how to introduce oneself is significant in projecting and maintaining personal, professional, and community identity. A distinctively minority name can also carry

negative consequences, as shown in numerous studies wherein matched resumes with different names are sent to potential employers, and those with minority names are granted fewer callbacks (Jowell and Prescott-Clarke 1970; Hubbick and Carter 1980; Brown and Gay 1985; Bart et al. 1997; Bertrand and Mullainathan 2003, all referenced in Fryer and Levitt 2004). Names are an important and everyday part of cultural citizenship, the right to dignified self-representation and cultural continuity.

Several Sudanese agreed and explained to me that use of names is often contextual. Although many will introduce themselves to Americans using their biblical name, most chose their family names as “official” names when completing citizenship and naturalization paperwork. Those who have reconnected with family back in South Sudan are known in that context by their full family names, and the biblical name becomes more of a “nickname”.

**Appearance and norms of belonging.** Aspects of setting, appearance, and manner that become the “expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual” during a given performance are referred to as *social front* (Goffman 1959: 22). The social front “tends to become institutionalized in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectations to which it gives rise, and tends to take on a meaning and stability apart from the specific tasks which happen at the time to be performed in its name” Goffman (1959: 27). Thus, front becomes a “collective representation” and a fact in its own right. Here I will describe and examine several examples wherein certain aspects of appearance become such collective representations. These examples highlight norms of belonging.

Some of the young men from Southern Sudan have tribal scars marked on their foreheads. The design of these initiation marks varies depending on tribe and clan. For example, many Nuer have *gaar*, a series of horizontal lines across the forehead (Evans-Pritchard 1940) while many Dinka wear *goar*, a series of Vs to resemble cattle horns (Deng 1972), but both signify entry into adulthood as well as social and political legitimacy within the community.

Because most of the Lost Boys were forced to flee their communities prior to the age of initiation, many of them are missing the tribal marks. Several young men relayed to me that they would have or did have trouble garnering respect and the right to speak while in South Sudan, because they do not wear the tribal marks. Said one young man: "In my tribe, if I don't have a mark on me, I have no right to speak" (Personal interview, January 9A, 2010). This same Lost Boy reported that this is not an issue within the Southern Sudanese community in Phoenix, or to his experience, Sudanese communities within the United States. This seems to indicate cultural continuity that is bound to geography and community, which becomes disrupted when communities leave the geographical context of Southern Sudan, encountering and living amongst different cultural and aesthetic values.

However, there is also indication that the signs of manhood and legitimacy associated with the tribal marks were already in flux in Southern Sudan within recent decades. The marks signal manhood within traditional communities, but that signal begins to change when members of the community (such as Riek Machar, former SPLA commander and current Vice President of Southern Sudan, who was educated in the UK) become exposed to outside influences. When I asked one Lost Boy about Riek Machar's lack of *gaar*, the young man began to laugh, and explained:

They still call him a boy. You are a boy. And that's the funny thing. And that's why a lot of people have a lot of pressure. You must do it. If you are a young kid up there and you don't have those marks, no matter how old you are, a little kid like this especially from the Nuer, a little kid like this will call you a boy. Because what they say is, you don't have, you don't feel the hardship of a man. Because those ones are really, really hard. You know, you feel terrified when they have to dig. Cut you with a knife, you bleed like crazy. Sometimes when you cry, they will make fun of your family because you are not a man. So even though we are not there, they still call him a boy. But because he went out of the country. He got educated. And they were actually campaigning for it should be stop. And that's why some of the local tribe, like from Dinka or from Nuer, they don't have those marks. Because their people might have gone to school before and when they came back, they tell their family, this is not good (Personal interview, February 17, 2010).

According to Scroggins' (2002) account, British missionary and administrative influence within Southern Sudan discouraged tribal marks; while politically-conscious, often well-educated Southern Sudanese began to disdain them as creating divisions amongst tribes, instead of a

cohesive national identity. The issue of tribal marks then becomes highly politicized: Scroggins describes the northern Sudanese government's practice of targeting young adult men without marks for assassination because of their perceived political consciousness and revolutionary potential, and the SPLA's practice of mixing groups of young boys from different tribes and regions together inside the Ethiopian refugee camps, to promote a sense of national unity over regional bonds.

Another common tribal mark is the removal of the bottom front row of teeth. Sometimes the whole row of teeth are removed, sometimes the teeth of a young child are maneuvered by adults throughout youth so that they protrude outwards (similar to "buck teeth"), and sometimes a gap is encouraged between the two front teeth. As one young man relayed to me, to be born with a gap between the two top row front teeth is considered to be prophetic and auspicious. Another Lost Boy told me how he used to move back and forth between his uncle's family and his mother's family. He learned that his uncle's family was planning to sneak him out of the village in order to have his teeth removed; his mother's family was opposed to the procedure. But the plan never came to fruition, because there were actually local policemen on the watch at the time for just such incidents. His sisters, however, did have their teeth removed: "The girls are so really, really into it. Because sometime they are like, if you have your lower teeth, you are an idiot. You don't look beautiful" (Personal interview, February 17, 2010).

These cultural conceptions of dental beauty come into stark contrast with those of the United States. One volunteer, Reita Hutson, determined to assist Lost Boys who sought dental care after she met Gabriel Kuany in a grocery store. A local newspaper article describes this:

Hutson struck up a friendship with Kuany at a Scottsdale supermarket where he was working. He struggled with his English and wanted an education. And he told Hutson that he wished his teeth could be fixed so he could have a nice smile. In the Dinka culture of Sudan, it is a tribal ritual to knock out six lower teeth in a brutal initiation rite of passage into manhood. "I told her, mom, to be an American I need teeth so I can speak and eat the food," Kuany said. "I was lucky she found a doctor" (Corbett 2008).

Hutson formed the non-profit organization Gabriel's Dream, which has provided thousands of dollars of dental and other medical care and scholarships to local 'Lost Boys' (see <http://www.gabrielsdream.org/>).

Two volunteers that I spoke with commented on what they interpreted as a sense of shame among some Lost Boys as they arrived to the United States. One volunteer remarked that this shame and discomfort came from being different, from looking differently and not being able to easily chew American food. Another volunteer interpreted a deeper sense of shame, associated with experience of war, displacement, and loss as children. Referencing John Bul Dau's quote in the film *God Grew Tired of Us* (looking back on his traumatic past, he admits times when he wondered that his people were abandoned by God), this volunteer remarked on the sense of shame that children may unconsciously carry for life experiences which are not their fault, but which may become inextricably entangled with arriving in a new cultural context and being different. How can Southern Sudanese, or any person who is "different" make decisions about appearance or cultural practice without being hindered by unconscious shame for being different? This is the heart of cultural citizenship.

A focus on cultural citizenship brings cultural practices and values into an empty space where what is "natural" is shown to be produced and maintained through effort. Myers (2008), in a deftly-written performative piece, discusses the (orthodontic and other "corrective") pain and persistent work that it took to become "straight" and "white" or to meet and maintain an unnatural ideal, which is also part of the economic machine of globalized capitalism:

Every time I brush my teeth, I enact the politics of whiteness. Every ounce of mouthwash that rinses over my teeth works to reinforce the hegemony of my white teeth. Every mint-flavored strand of floss that wedges itself between my teeth is part of the ritualistic power structure that make my teeth white and make my whiteness desirable. My white teeth show people that I have been educated on how to be hygienic. My white teeth demonstrate that I have the means to keep myself healthy. Every tube of Crest Toothpaste I buy is a cog in the wheel of the corporate machine of Proctor and Gamble that seeks to commodify my whiteness (Myers 2008, 168).

Finally, let us consider the collection of commentary and attempts to dissuade South Sudanese young men from adopting clothing and other aspects of African American culture. For example, in the documentary film *The Lost Boys of Sudan* (2003), an elder in the Kakuma refugee camp advises a group of young men who will be departing to the United States, not to dress like the people with baggy pants. In the documentary film *God Grew Tired of Us* (2006),

John Bul Dau laments, “You are away from our culture. Please come back” during scenes that show Lost Boys in the United States wearing hip hop clothing. Several volunteers also remarked negatively on the subset of individuals who adopted clothing and other indicators of African American culture.

Among volunteers and South Sudanese in Phoenix generally, there is disapproval regarding the adoption of such cultural markers. An exception is Emmanuel Jal, a rap singer and peace advocate who lives in London. Jal’s style is an amalgamation of various musical and cultural influences. He has collaborated with Arab and American pop musicians, and he sings in Arabic, Nuer and English. When I spoke with one Lost Boy about the sense of prohibition regarding African American and hip hop styles and culture, he mentioned Emmanuel Jal as a role model who shows that adoption of some traits does not necessitate abandonment of South Sudanese culture and values. Jal is an example of a South Sudanese youth who has forged his own image. Often introduced as a Lost Boy, Jal would not fit the label in the way many define it in Phoenix: Jal did not live in Kakuma refugee camp, but rather served time as a child soldier and was rescued by a British aid worker and sent to school in urbanized Kenya. His story is chronicled in the autobiographical work, *War Child: A child soldier’s story* (2009).

## **IN CONCLUSION**

I imagine layers of latticework representing the multiple social grids each of us navigates in daily life. In discussing social roles, racialization, and cultural citizenship, I sought to identify viscosity, fluidity, and indeterminacy in the social matrix of belonging. Keeping in mind that ways of presenting oneself can be part of a looping or feedback effect, this inquiry into the social and political construction of Lost Boys and volunteers highlights norms of belonging. This will allow us to further ask, what is the character of the moral web of humanitarianism that is enacted around the Lost Boys; in what ways is it somewhat flexible and where is it more rigid? This same web that protects and valorizes the Lost Boys also restricts and disciplines them.

Through framing this inquiry in terms of affect as background and viscosity, we can consider the re-enforcement, re-ordering, or dismantling of social matrices through un/conscious change in behavior or action, or un/conscious adherence to prescribed roles. For example, the cultural shift that took place in the United States in the 1970s, led in part by efforts to disseminate Holocaust survivors' personal testimonies, resulted in a particular national mindset and way of honoring Holocaust survivors. The Lost Boys were positioned into this matrix upon their arrival in the U.S.; they are honored as survivors and heralded as having wisdom to impart.

The roles of volunteer and Lost Boy place individuals in particular positions, associated with expected behaviors and ways of being, which offer both rewards and limitations. To gain the role of a public speaker requires certain traits, but then also reinforces advantages in social networks and capital, and allows a person to establish a new relationship with his or her past. For some volunteers, their activities are part of maintaining an active relationship with their understanding of God and doing God's work. There is a strong sense of belonging, likened to family membership, enacted between volunteers and Lost Boys. While friendship relations were shown by Szecepanikova (2010) to exert limitations on refugees' ability to voice their own concerns, I drew from conflicts at the AZLBC to illustrate a community dynamic where some Lost Boys were able to voice critiques. The Lost Boys' concerns were instrumental in restructuring the mission and focus of the community center.

The arrival of African immigrants in the United States can give rise to disruption concerning a racialized social matrix. There is potential here for the re-enforcement of white middle class norms of belonging, but there is also potential for greater awareness of white privilege and a dismantling or reordering of the social grid. Note that positioning in this racialized grid can follow phenotype (as when Lost Boys encounter discrimination, racial profiling, or are otherwise judged by their skin color) but this is not always necessarily the case, as positioning also takes place by adoption of values, behaviors, and other cultural markers, such as adoption of

styles of dress. The Lost Boys are judged (even by each other) based on whether they conform to white middle class values (and dress code) versus cultural markers associated with African Americans, including hip hop clothing styles.

The Lost Boys navigate culturally acceptable ways to present themselves to local publics, within a social matrix of belonging. The ways the Lost Boys present themselves through appearance and names often conforms to cultural contexts; for example, Lost Boys most often use their Christian names when socializing with English-speakers. In addition, cultural context has enforced dramatic interventions on the bodies of the South Sudanese; many Lost Boys have undergone dental surgeries both in South Sudan and again in the United States in accordance with local regimes of beauty. The clay cows are a kind of cultural prism; transformed from a symbol of the Lost Boys' childhood and pastoral way of life, into the Lost Boys' goal of education in the United States. The young men show flexibility and accommodation in their willingness to paint the cows in exotic and unrealistic colors.

My primary concern in this chapter has been the circular and recursive relationship between subjectivity, power relations, and expression of emotion and self. I posit that the Lost Boys' social position limits their horizon of being, in ways that are not publicly acknowledged, but that sometimes are expressed in private conversation.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS: COMMUNITIES OF FEELING

This dissertation research was undertaken as a response to scholarly critiques of the public representations of refugees; since media representations frequently depict refugees as voiceless, stripped of historical and political context, and can lock refugees into a position bereft of agency, would these same limitations hinder the self-representation of the Lost Boys of Sudan in their daily interactions with local audiences and volunteers? The analysis and findings of this dissertation were roughly broken up into two parts, following Suski's recommendation to pay "close attention to humanitarian narratives, and to the social and political construction of victims and suffering" (Suski 2012: 135) in order to understand the mobilizing potential of humanitarian emotions. In examining the narration of the Lost Boys' story and social roles performed by Lost Boys and volunteers, we can better understand how and under what conditions suffering is recognized by local audiences as legitimate. Chapter four framed the story of the Lost Boys' journey as a trauma claim, and chapter five examined how Lost Boys (and, to an extent, volunteers) are constructed as subjects through social roles, racialization, and cultural norms.

The arrival of the Lost Boys in the United States, brought about by the work of disparate activist groups, has engendered in local publics a sense of connection and obligation to the South Sudanese refugees. This is a remarkable shift for a number of the Lost Boys' publics, many of whom reported that they had never before become acquainted with a refugee. For others, the Lost Boys are their first acquaintances who speak with an accent, or hail from Africa. Although the Lost Boys' story is often received by audiences as flipped to reflect an idealized image of freedom and opportunity in the U.S., this capture may also allow greater dissemination of the Lost Boys' trauma claim and the potential for ideological disruption.

The theory of the process of cultural trauma was used to think through ways that the story of the Lost Boys is successful, or not successful, in prompting audiences to confront injustice. The process of cultural trauma is still underway. Yet, the current social conventions of responsibility allow publics to take in the story of the Lost Boys as a comforting, feel-good story

about the generosity of the United States, without addressing broader moral questions. These questions, such as displacement and war over control of oil lands, the status of Africans in the world and race relations in the United States, and the life opportunities open to the working poor, although not often directly addressed in the Lost Boys' story, and although seem to lie dormant, have potential to germinate.

In addition, it is important to note the spatiality of the cultural trauma process. The signifier and the story of the Lost Boys is transmitted through gatherings of corporeal bodies in various spaces and through different channels, or "apparatuses of actualization and implantation" (Massumi 2002a: 44). Each of these gatherings and encounters may present slight or dramatic alterations to cultural context. We have seen in the section on cultural citizenship in chapter five, that the Lost Boys adapt themselves according to geographical/cultural context, and we noted in chapter four that the Lost Boys modulate their storytelling to appeal to different audiences. Finally, a main point of this concluding chapter is that the mapping of various social positions can be helpful to understand how different gatherings and groups comprehend the trauma claim.

In examining subjectivity, it became clear that belonging is negotiated on a multitude of axes, which can pivot and become re-ordered or re-enforced through everyday interactions. In addition, a circular, mutually constructed connection between subjectivity, power relations, and the permissible expression of emotion was identified. Permissible expression of emotion is related to social position, and in turn shapes self-conception. It is not part of the public image for Lost Boys to acknowledge powerlessness in social position (and expression of anger or bitterness seems only to come from those with the safety prism of celebrity to refract their experience, such as rap singer Emanuel Jal, or Valentino Achak Deng through Dave Eggers' biographical writing). Supporters of the Lost Boys might be prompted to ask, how can we create spaces for the Lost Boys to discover themselves and their feelings and who they really want to be, outside of public representation and the limits and expectations that it places on them?

The tentative emotions of volunteers discussing issues of race are also relevant: these interactions are negotiated based on fleeting and shifting perceptions and social rules. We act

how we think we are supposed to act, according to social rules and roles that we grasp to gauge with a moment's notice. This is a person – black, white, volunteer, Lost Boy, Mom, helper, victim, beneficiary, friend. The boundaries emerge and merge. Emotions are both the catalyst that liquefies and the endurance to a promise or an ethic that solidifies over time.

This dissertation research has been engaged with the emergence/mobilization of humanitarianism around the Lost Boys of Sudan. At its worst, this humanitarianism can be understood as narcissistic, self-serving, and exploitative. Yet, it also has potential for self-awareness and betterment. In concluding, I would like to return to Haskell's (1985) treatment of the emergence of humanitarianism, originally outlined in chapter three. These preconditions explain the social conventions of moral responsibility, which, readers may recall, allow us to ignore some forms of suffering with a clean conscience, even while we attend to other forms of suffering. I want to think more clearly, in summary, about the character of humanitarianism which is enacted around the Lost Boys, in order to prompt its ethical expansion. The application of humanitarianism may always require a degree of selectivity, yet if we can at least acknowledge that our efforts or attention may be limited, then space is created for a broader acknowledgement of injustice. In effect, I am asking: what kinds of stories and subjects motivate our humanitarianism? What kind of humanitarianism does that turn out to be, and are we satisfied with it?

## **THE PRECONDITIONS TO HUMANITARIANISM**

Haskell (1985) outlines the preconditions to humanitarianism as a historical phenomenon; these are the preconditions that must exist in order to compel *some* of us to action to address the suffering of others. It is neither necessary nor likely that an entire population will be influenced to action, yet a certain tipping point can generate “a sustained, collective pattern of behavior in which substantial numbers of people regularly act to alleviate the suffering of strangers” (Haskell 1985: 360). This can even be through “an influential minority in society” (Haskell 1985: 359) as during the abolitionist movement, or through, in the case of groups advocating for U.S.

humanitarian assistance in Sudan, conservative Christian groups, the American Antislavery Group, and influential members of Congress, including the Congressional Black Caucus.

First, “We must adhere to ethical maxims that make helping strangers [those outside of our family or clan] the right thing to do” (Haskell 1985: 357). If our ethical convictions permit us to ignore the suffering of others, “then there can be no basis whatever for the emergence of those activities and attitudes that we call humanitarian” (Haskell 1985: 357). At the same time, Haskell makes the point here that the Golden Rule alone is not enough to compel us to go to Ethiopia (he was writing in 1985 during the famine) to aid victims of starvation.

Second, we must also “perceive ourselves to be causally involved in the evil event... This does not mean that we regard ourselves as ‘the cause’ but only that we recognize our refusal to act as a necessary condition without which the evil event would not occur” (Haskell 1985: 358). Boltanski (1999) also states that the obligation to assist someone who is suffering “may be based on a moral responsibility derived from a sense of causal responsibility” (Boltanski 1999: 13). Yet “neither causal perception nor feelings of moral responsibility can exist in the absence of appropriate recipes” (Haskell 1985: 357).

The third precondition states that, “We must have a technique or recipe for intervening – a specific sequence of steps that we know we can take to alter the ordinary course of events” (Haskell 1985: 358). Recipe knowledge, or knowledge of manipulative and intervening techniques, are essential to our sense of efficacy and thus sense of obligation to act. “As long as we perceive an evil as inaccessible to manipulation—as an unavoidable or ‘necessary’ evil—our feelings of sympathy, no matter how great, will not produce the sense of operative responsibility that leads to action aimed at avoiding or alleviating the evil in question” (Haskell 1985: 358).

The final precondition is that recipe knowledge must exist that is convenient and potent enough that *not to use it* would be understood as part of the cause of the harmful event. This establishes the ethical sense that we are causally linked to an evil event. The recipe knowledge that we draw from must involve techniques that are simple, easy, and known to be effective. “The recipes for intervention available to us must be ones of sufficient ordinariness, familiarity,

certainty of effect, and ease of operation that our failure to use them would constitute a suspension of routine, an out-of-the-ordinary event, possibly even an intentional act in itself” (Haskell 1985: 358). To *not* use the recipes to intervene would be considered an ethical breach. “Only then will we begin to feel that our inaction is not merely one among many conditions necessary for the occurrence or continuation of the evil event but instead a significant contributory *cause*” (Haskell 1985: 358).

These preconditions, Haskell claims, “help clarify both the way in which revolutions in moral sensibility ought to be conceived and the way in which they are to be explained” (Haskell 1985: 359). The preconditions are an attempt to partially explain, following social and economic transformations, the rise of the abolitionist movement and new humanitarian sensibility in the eighteenth century.

What happened was that the conventional limits of moral responsibility observed by an influential minority in society expanded to encompass evils that previously had fallen outside anyone’s sphere of responsibility. The evils in question are of course the miseries of the slave, which had always been recognized but which before the eighteenth century had possessed the same cognitive and moral status that the misery of the starving stranger in Ethiopia has for us today (Haskell 1985: 359).

The expansion of the moral universe indicates a shift from thinking of “unintended consequences” and “necessary evils” to “something for which certain people feel acutely responsible” (Haskell 1985: 360).

The arrival of the Lost Boys in the U.S. has ignited in local populations a sense of moral responsibility for the plight of the young men, yet in some ways local audiences and volunteers are able to ignore suffering with a clean conscience (for example, local publics tend to not make any connection between the Lost Boys and the plight of other refugee or immigrant groups in the United States, and many audiences and volunteers remain unaware and untroubled by racial inequalities and white privilege). How does a particular ethic become commonplace, while another does not? I suggest that we consider Haskell’s preconditions (helping others is right, having a sense of causal responsibility, possession of effective recipe knowledge, such that not to

employ it would be an ethical breach) as well as the emergence of a shared emotional space where ethical connection is made, and a spectator becomes an actor.

The moment of individual transformation, from a spectator or receiver of information to an actor, is referred to by Boltanski (1999) as “the grand moment par excellence” as part of the politics of pity (Boltanski 1999: 34). “The crucial moment in this topic is then the moment of commitment understood as the moment of transformation from the state of being the receiver of information, that is to say, of being a spectator, observer or listener, into that of being an actor” (Boltanski 1999: 31). This swing to commitment takes place in order for the spectator to maintain integrity. Having witnessed (a story of) suffering and become aroused, to do or say nothing would render the spectator corrupt in some way, either through indifference or through having taken a pornographic excitement from the spectacle of suffering (Haltunen 1995).

As the spectator becomes an actor and shares experience with others, awareness of suffering sensitizes them. “It is to the extent that they are aware of a problem, that they are sensitized, that persons exchange with each other accounts of the spectacles which have outraged, shocked, or amused them” (Boltanski 1999: 53). The exchange of feelings and sensibilities shapes and orders a shared emotional space, which “is the support and first stage of moralization because it inserts a configuration of passions within a communal space” (Boltanski 1999: 53). This is similar to Suski’s (2012) claim that “the mobility of humanitarian emotions is not located in some kind of trigger moment, but instead in the social space of ethical connection itself” (Suski 2012: 135). Boltanski goes on to describe the emergence of visceral communities; the sharing of emotional reactions creates a kind of contingent, moral link:

By describing the different ways of transmitting the spectacle of suffering to another person, of sharing the emotional experiences it has aroused, and of making perceptible how one is both affected and concerned, we would like to suggest that the persistence of these ways trace relatively stable facilitating paths. They pick out common sensibilities on which prereflexive agreements – of the order, if one likes, of prejudice if not prejudgement – can be sustained between persons who recognize if not the same ethical values then at least a community of reactions which can often be called ‘visceral’ in expression of the fact that they preexist as if it were their principled justification (Boltanski 1999: 53-54).

Note that these communities are not characterized as sharing the same ethical values, but rather they come together through shared visceral reactions, a more contingent glue. I think the success of the Lost Boys signifier in the U.S. *is based as much on this sharing as it is on the isolation of various emotional communities from each other*. I now turn to offer some preliminary comments regarding how these shared (and isolated) emotional terrains may help us understand local audience mobilization around the Lost Boys.

### **COMMUNITIES OF FEELING**

In an article about the deep emotional loss that is shared by parents who have lost a child, Riches and Dawson (1996) suggest that “bereaved parents have ceased to inhabit the ‘normal’ world because, even if only briefly, they have faced the abyss. Many are still in it” (Riches and Dawson 1996: 151). This emotional boundary isolates bereaved parents from others. “Many bereaved parents seem to inhabit an emotional territory that is inaccessible—and unimaginable—to those of us who have not had to face the death of our child” (Riches and Dawson 1996: 145).

Yet, in sharing stories and emotions with each other, bereaved parents experience a sense of community. “Solidarity is felt by those who share, in full or in part, the devastation of the loss, the changed view it gives of the world, and the willingness to communicate the feelings and experiences which accompany their children’s death and earlier lives” (Riches and Dawson 1996: 153). In detailing the parents’ experience, Riches and Dawson draw from trauma literature, pointing out that “emotional release has been shown to be crucial in successfully de-briefing traumatic experiences,” and highlighting “the power of narrative and verbalizing traumatic experience to give back some sense of control, to account to themselves for a seemingly senseless loss” (Riches and Dawson 1996: 150).

This emotional identification and release draws audiences and volunteers to the Lost Boys. A field is generated between bodies and amplified as emotions are shared. Audiences, who do not share the Lost Boys’ experience, apply the emotional identification to the various

circumstances of their own lives. Thus, while “common experiences and shared distress cement the sense of *Gemeinschaft* amongst bereaved parents” (Riches and Dawson 1996:155), audiences and volunteers identify with the emotional depth and they apply the shared release to whatever their own circumstances are. This occurs, despite that many volunteers and audiences describe the Lost Boys’ trauma as unimaginable. At a fundamental level, audiences report identification with the deep pain, loss, struggle, and hope that are the emotional core of the Lost Boys’ story.

Audiences attending to survivor’s stories and other evidence of genocide look into the abyss. This is something that, it seems, not everyone can do or is willing to commit to. “The bereavement culture facilitates the voicing of two discoveries: firstly, that dread events can and do happen; and secondly, that the complacency and uninterest of modern society protects most people from such discoveries” (Riches and Dawson 1996: 152). Bereaved parents even report that others avoid them (Riches and Dawson 1996). An audience member who linked the Lost Boys stories to those of Holocaust survivors expressed this same sense that it is rare that a person has the will or stamina to listen to trauma stories, and to face the worst that humankind can offer. In this way, public attention and commitment to the Lost Boys has sustained more than ten years since their arrival in the United States. Now that we have identified the common glue, we will distinguish how various alignments of communities diverge from this shared space.

**Communities of feeling: audiences.** Across the United States, scores of (mostly white, middle class) volunteers mobilized to assist the Lost Boys in their transition to living in the United States. Audiences with different understandings rarely intersect and rarely bump into each other, but remain fairly parallel, so that ideological worldviews which might clash, are generally not in danger of disruption or dispute. I did not specifically set out to identify or distinguish audiences and their dispositions, but I do think this could be a useful undertaking (to identify, for example, the supporters of the Lost Boys who were attracted by religious beliefs, or through political activism). Further research could more explicitly divide and highlight the social body’s divisions



and orientations; illuminating the explicit reasoning behind each position. How are audiences and volunteers aligned into visceral communities, and are there overlaps between groups (for example, some religious groups are also politically active, such as some Christian anti-slavery groups and Jewish anti-genocide activities promoting awareness in Darfur)? How might some be swayed in their position (how rigid or flexible are the boundaries)?

These kinds of mappings can help us to understand how connection and isolation are both essential for gathering momentum in social movements, for bodies to come together and act as one. Most volunteers that I spoke with did not make any wider ethical connection concerning other refugee or immigrant groups. This suggests that ethical matrices are immobilized in order to maintain ideologies and concepts that certain audiences take for granted (for example, in supporting the authority and power of the state to distinguish who is a 'legitimate' asylum seeker or refugee). As yet, the story has not been framed to majority audiences in a way that sparks questioning of refugee or immigration policy. Thus, the story does not pose a challenge to those audiences whose ethical judgment is bounded by the thought that "the Lost Boys came here legally" and so are deserving of assistance. For these groups, there is no causal link established between their own political position and the suffering of those whom the state has not categorized as legal immigrants.

At the same time, refugee advocates are also drawn to the Lost Boys, precisely because they can position the Lost Boys as an example to introduce audiences to the existence of political and foreign policy issues that complicate refugee and asylum cases, or to introduce audiences to the existence of suffering in other conflict zones. Meanwhile, others drew upon the Lost Boys as role models for undocumented youth; some teachers had invited Lost Boys to speak in their classrooms with the express hope to kindle a catalyzing emotional identification in undocumented students.

Additionally, we have seen that the story of the Lost Boys is most often presented in ways that support the belief in the United States as a land of freedom, opportunity, and generosity. Audiences are typically not confronted with stories of suffering after resettlement,

which might lead them to question the shrinking of the middle class, the stagnation of minimum wage, or the structural conditions which perpetuate entrenched poverty of the underclass. Meanwhile, adherence by most Lost Boys to white middle class values validates cultural blame for African American poverty, and audiences are comforted in the belief of a colorblind society, which absolves audiences of any causal perception. Audiences remain unencumbered by recognition of institutionalized racism in U.S. society and not responsible themselves to confront white privilege.

On another level, audiences may be moved to assist the Lost Boys, but they don't have an easy, effective recipe to do so. Here I am thinking of the audience members who ask questions such as, "I want to help, but I'm not George Clooney and I can't go to Darfur with news cameras. What can I do, as an ordinary person, to help?" Many audiences are confident in how to navigate life in the U.S., so they are eager and feel they can help the Lost Boys who are here. This is helpful to explain, in part, why fewer audiences seek to directly assist refugees in South Sudan and East Africa. Supporters may be more likely to donate to Lost Boys inside the U.S., or promote Lost Boys' education, so that the young men can bring transformation to South Sudan, whereas donors may be less likely to support campaigns located in South Sudan, because the problems there seem overwhelming or far away. Similarly, majority audiences are not often exposed to stories of continued psychological trauma, of suffering from PTSD or alcoholism post resettlement. Not only are the Lost Boys worried about losing public support, but these are also complicated problems that audiences may not possess easy, effective recipes as solutions.

I have attempted to offer some preliminary remarks regarding how isolation and connection between disparate ideological communities have helped to foster widespread support for the Lost Boys of Sudan. In general, it is remarkable that the Lost Boys have garnered the attention and support that they have from U.S. publics. The dominant narrative has been watered down in order to garner majority support. What does all of this say about expansion of solidarity and definition of new moral codes? The safe space afforded by the dominant narrative allows for some audiences who have little or no previous relationships with those who are "different" (for

example: immigrant groups, the working poor, or blacks) to approach and form relationships with the Lost Boys as a relationship that affirms their existing beliefs. The presence of this compelling story couched in appealing terms and the welcoming, gracious attitude of the Lost Boys who are public representatives creates a space with degrees of both exploitation and extension of solidarity. In general, these various alignments of audiences are not confronted with challenges or disruptions to their worldview. Among smaller populations, and where it is deemed safe by the Lost Boys, discussion is broadened to include, for example, community struggles after resettlement, or relationship dynamics are challenged. In these cases there may be more opportunity to discover a deeper sense of causal responsibility that could begin to redefine the moral code.

**Communities of feeling: the Lost Boys.** While the focus of this research has not been targeted to a discussion of sense of community among the Lost Boys, I would like in my concluding remarks to visit some observations. As noted (Willis 2004), the Lost Boys face difficulties in forging a cohesive sense of community. The young men hail from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and represent a range of peoples who may be at odds with each other in South Sudan. As children in the Ethiopian camps, the boys were grouped together and there are accounts that point to an intentional mixing by the SPLA in order to engineer or sow the seeds of future political unity. Despite this, the Lost Boys report a fragmented sense of community (as also noted in Willis 2004), and in many instances, the Lost Boys point to a sense of political irrelevance in South Sudan, where authority is often attached to military service during the civil wars.

Here is an example where the voicing of anger and demoralization can strengthen moral webs (Zarowsky 2004) or further disintegrate community. While the Lost Boys denounce the violent repetition of history currently taking place in South Sudan, they also note that the atrocities are taking place as members of one tribe target another, and so on. Thus, the young men find that anger voiced in terms of tribe can escalate the conflict, and they often admonish each other

to not engage in tribalism (some of the Lost Boys, however, make no such efforts and fully subscribe to tribal loyalties). One young man, Sam Ruot, who has served as the President of the Lost Boys Leadership Council, has been particularly vocal on Facebook regarding the current crisis in South Sudan. One day he posted his thoughts about reports that Dinka students were being expelled from schools in Bentiu, Unity State. Sam is Nuer, and he posted that students should be allowed to go to school regardless of their tribal affiliation. Later, he posted that his father in South Sudan had told him that he was lucky to be in the United States where he could voice his opinion without fear for his personal safety. In this way, the Lost Boys' presence in the U.S. does present them with a unique opportunity to build a different kind of South Sudanese society.

In some ways, being in the U.S. binds the Lost Boys together and gives them a semblance of a unified identity, as they present themselves and their story to audiences, and as they call upon each other to decry tribalism and revenge killings that are currently gripping South Sudan. Their diversity in viewpoints and range of politicized understandings also becomes functional in managing the unequal power relationship between themselves and volunteers, as some can, even angrily, voice challenges, while others ameliorate the relationship by remaining grateful.

Most Lost Boys maintain that they experience race as a non-issue, hewing to a popular U.S. conception of colorblindness. This stance aligns them with the attitudes of white volunteers and there is scholarly precedent which points to "whitening" trajectories followed by some immigrant groups in U.S. history. While it is true that the Lost Boys do not share the history and political identity of African Americans, they do encounter and suffer racial discrimination. They also can bump up against cultural norms of inclusion in the U.S. and challenge what it means to belong in the United States.

As we saw, the Lost Boys express a range of political viewpoints that would make up their trauma claim, while their main goal is to bring attention and garner resources to change the

conditions and alleviate suffering in South Sudan. The public speakers focus mostly on telling a story of *before* resettlement, and leave the struggles taking place *after* resettlement for select audiences. Among the larger community, many feel a strong sense of responsibility to resolve their own differences internally, including the political situation and violence in South Sudan. This works in the same way that the “bootstraps” mentality does: it absolves others of moral responsibility. At the same time, I argue that the presence of the Lost Boys in the U.S. compels some degree of causal perception in volunteers and audiences, who are compelled to assist the Lost Boys with their goals, including in South Sudan. Greater attention to social positioning can illuminate limits of self-expression and self-conception.

### **THE WEBS OF HUMANITARIANISM ENACTED AROUND THE LOST BOYS**

I have attempted to uncover and examine the ideological capture of the Lost Boys (as a signifier) in order to show how this capture influences causal perception and sense of moral responsibility for suffering in audiences and also configures the Lost Boys and their publics as subjects. Ethics is decided in this social space where stories are told, emotions connect, and subjects are configured. How does power work in this space? If this space is about constructing a benevolent volunteer/audience member, then the Lost Boys are reduced to: I exist to remind you of the importance of faith. I exist to make audiences feel glad you live in America. I exist to support your idea that America is colorblind and that you are not only not racist, but you are generous.

How can we receive the Lost Boys on their own terms? This is especially difficult, when asking the question to the young men themselves yields pat answers. Most of the Lost Boys that I spent time with professed that the media representations of their story are accurate (even as many of the same young men would then admit that they do not follow media accounts of their story). I never encountered a sense among the young men that appropriation of their story was occurring; there was simply the expression of hope that speaking out would bring, somehow, an end to suffering. The young men say that race is not an issue in their lives. This hewing to an

ideological signifier occurs without anyone consciously thinking about it. When the topic is broached, it seems ridiculous to the young men. Yet, out of this adherence to an ideological ideal, the otherwise sometimes leaks out.

By considering the preconditions to humanitarianism, several apertures are noted where there is a failure to connect a sense of responsibility in audiences regarding the causes of suffering. Further, we can identify social conventions which allow audiences to ignore suffering and still feel like a humanitarian/benevolent volunteer. Yet, these same apertures may be the contingent glue that marshals broader support for the Lost Boys. This humanitarian web that protects and valorizes the Lost Boys also restricts and disciplines them. The web reaches inside bodies, “compel[ling] and constrain[ing] what can be thought, spoken, and enacted” (Harding and Pribram 2002: 413) and even felt.

This dissertation research aimed to respond to calls to heed refugees’ own voices and scholarly criticisms of mass media representation of refugees by exploring self-representation at local public events. I find that the popular, apolitical understanding of the Lost Boys’ story creates an appealing, nonconfrontational space, which rarely bumps into or intersects with more critical and demanding accounts. Through heeding and tending to power relations, subjectivity, and the emotional spaces of ethical configuration, we can hope to unmask humanitarianism as an alibi for other forms of oppression, and we can hope to challenge and reinvent social convention to reflect/express a more informed, honest humanitarianism.

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