CROSS-MARKED:
SUDANESE AUSTRALIAN YOUNG WOMEN
TALK EDUCATION

An exegesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

*As a scholar of education I have often observed how some of the most compelling
insights I have encountered concerning pedagogy come from those individuals
living and operating outside the boundaries of educational scholarship. Sometimes
such individuals are not formal scholars at all but individuals who have suffered at
the hands of educational institutions.*

(Kincheloe, 2009:26)

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Declaration of Authorship

This thesis contains no material which has been submitted for examination in any other course or accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

Anne Harris
March 2010

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DEDICATION

The film series *Cross-Marked* would obviously not have been possible without the willingness and generosity of all co-participants. What is perhaps not so obvious are the delicious meals, belly-laughs, and deep kindnesses shown to me by so many who were strangers at first but not for long. I thank you all and hope you will see that these films are making a difference, at least one teacher at a time. This project belongs to:

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Nyayany and Sarah Thong
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ABSTRACT

Cross-Marked: Sudanese-Australian Young Women Talk Education draws upon the various knowledges of Sudanese students from refugee backgrounds, and upon the principles of critical pedagogy. The project suggests ways forward for those who wish to engage in more critically conscious, socially just research and educational practices. In so doing, this research further develops and critiques the principles and practices of *ethnocinema*, which prioritise relationship and mutuality in intercultural collaborations over aesthetics or outcomes. It explores the notion of *refugeity* as a state of being across cultures, in relation to educator, student and researcher relationships. *Cross-Marked* critiques current educational practices which marginalise, exclude and objectify those who are emerging from refugee pasts; seeks to re-frame refugeity as a state of being rather than a fixed identity; and foregrounds ways in which all ethnographic and pedagogical collaborators can share in an evolving criticality, using multiple and creative methodologies and contexts.

The researcher uses her own status as insider/outsider – as immigrant gay educator – to contextualise her reflections on and relationships with these Sudanese-Australian co-participants. The seven films (six co-participant films and my own reflexive film) and exegesis which comprise *Cross-Marked* comment on the complexities of the performance of identity for both the researcher and her co-participants. Gender, age, race, class and ethnicity intersect as a range of intercultural encounters in this study. Taken together, the films and the exegesis seek to offer new methods and an evocative depiction of how to move further toward an engagement with 21st century intercultural collaboration, both inside and outside of the classroom.

VIEWING/READING PROCESS:

My preference is for the films to be viewed alongside the exegesis. The films inform the written text, and the text contextualises the films, in an evolving and interconnecting manner. Ideally, the reader will become also the viewer; will read the Introduction and then watch the first film, *Slowly By Slowly*, before proceeding to read Chapter One, which is intended to complement this film. The process should be continued – first film and then corresponding chapter – through to the last film, *EthnocineMe*, which forms the Afterword.

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INTRODUCTION

October 10, 2008
Today, after a few failed attempts and false starts, I am waiting at the
Sunshine train station in the western suburbs of Melbourne. It is an
unusually hot spring day beneath a crisp blue sky. I am meeting Nyadol
Nyuon, a Nuer young woman from South Sudan, a new participant for my
short film project. I am sitting on a cement wall near the exit of the train
station, writing on my Mac laptop, smiling over-hard at every Sudanese
young woman who mills about or emerges from the train tunnel, in case
they may be Nyadol, but really looking like a weirdo. I get some strange
looks, which is understandable. I am an outsider here. I am nervous.
It's always nerve-wracking meeting a new participant. I'm asking them
for something, and I'm aware that much has been asked of them already.
I'm a stranger, with seemingly little to offer, and my expectancy and dis-
ease feel as visible and enveloping as my too-heavy green skivvy and blue
jeans, all of which make me sweat with discomfort. My phone buzzes on
the hot concrete next to me, and I answer. It's Nyadol – not cancelling –
just running a few minutes late. I go back to my computer and stop
harassing with my too-earnest smile the women who walk past... (Process
Journal)

…Ten minutes later, when a willowy dark-skinned young woman throws a
shadow over my computer screen, it is obvious before she speaks that this is
finally Nyadol. She is beaming a giant smile, hand extended for shaking,
confident, yet apologetic for her lateness. I'm just grateful she's come. We
cross the steaming road which feeds the transport hub and sit outside at a
café, where I order a cool drink but Nyadol declines. I have brought
previous films of mine to show her; to illustrate the idea of this film project;
to situate myself as outsider/American but insider/educationalist. But we
never get that far: Nyadol talks, passionately and rapidly, about the situation
that Sudanese young people are facing in Australia. Her commentary ranges
from gender differences to cultural conflicts between Sudanese and
Australian customs; from community organisational funding to university
placements for young Sudanese-Australians; from the successes and
limitations of the Lost Boys Association to global warming and the fragile
state of oil-rich Abiye back home in South Sudan. She recounts for me her
background and describes her imagined future. She never stops talking in the
two and half hours, except once…

A young boy, about 14, approaches her shyly, but with purpose, and shakes
her hand. They greet each other and she asks him what he's doing, and when
he says he's looking for work, she describes a machinery-driving traineeship

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that she knows about and asks him if it would be of interest to him. He says yes, so she gives him her phone number and makes sure he puts it into his phone so he doesn't lose it. Then she takes his number and his name. Bemused by this last detail, I ask her when he leaves who he was. She doesn't know: "Just a kid hanging out, looking for something to do." I enquire why he has come up to *her*, specifically, out of all the people milling around the hub – did he know her before? Had he reason to believe she could help him? No, she says, but it happens to her all the time. Her father was a senior commander in the SPLA (Sudanese People's Liberation Army) and when people ask her for help, she sees it as her duty to help them. Didn't she worry about giving a strange kid her phone number? No: "Every Sudanese boy or girl is my brother or sister. I will do what I can to help. We all need help." Nyadol should know. She arrived in Australia in 2005 at the age of 16, having been born in exile in Ethiopia and raised in Kakuma[1] refugee camp in Kenya. If this fact seems incredible to me, considering the bright and commanding confidence she exudes today, it does not to her: "You lived through war," she says of, and to herself. "You lived through being a refugee person…literally you ask yourself, 'What can I not accomplish?'"

Nyadol is an extraordinary young woman. Her openness, her intelligence, her connectedness are all immediately impressive. Not all the young women in my film series have had the advantages she has had, and not all of them have the poise or the skills. But they are all remarkable women, who have overcome incredible adversity, to find themselves now in a strange new country, trying the best they can to belong, to help themselves and each other, and to construct new identities. For most of 2008, they have shared that journey with me.

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[1] "The Kakuma Refugee Camp is a moderate-sized 'city' of tents, shacks, and thatched roof huts in the desert of northwest Kenya, inhabited by more than 90,000 refugees (Sudanese, Ethiopian, and Somali, mostly, but also Congolese, Burundian, Rwandan, and Ugandan). Dating to 1991, it is equally a sanctuary and a prison—once admitted, residents cannot leave without permission of the Kenyan government—and inside its fences, children age into adulthood. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees administers the camp, with aid from a patchwork of international relief agencies, or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)." This camp, located in the Turkana region of northwest Kenya, was home to many Sudanese-Australians in transit from Sudan. Others came via Egypt. From http://bcm.bc.edu/issues/spring_2008/features/the-camp.html accessed on August 10, 2009.

As Ken Robinson says, education is "one of those things that goes deep with people" (Robinson video, 2006). In this work, I have endeavoured to understand something about what Sudanese young women know about their own schooling experiences in Australia. But I have also endeavoured to understand what I know about schooling and social justice. Setting out to work with a specific group of co-participants defined by their nationality-of-origin (Sudanese), their race (African), a condition (former refugees), and their gender (female), I ended up studying myself – or, more specifically – ourselves (our self) in relation to one another.

Haven't we all "suffered at the hands of educational institutions", as Kincheloe (2009:26) reminds us? I know I have, as both a coming-out lesbian student 25 years ago, and as an American-Australian teacher of arts-based practices and social justice today. The relentlessly hierarchical structures, the drive to conform, the social spaces of bullying, exclusion and arbitrary alliances have affected us all. In 2006, as I daily confronted the task of teaching Sudanese-Australian young women from refugee backgrounds at a Catholic girls' school in Melbourne's western suburbs, it struck me that we were failing in the task of offering appropriate, democratic and socially just education to these students. It occurred to me that every day these students were articulating to me what they themselves wanted, needed and, in some cases, dreamt of having at school. They knew a great deal about what wasn't working. And slowly I began to realise that they knew something about what was needed. Why wasn't anyone asking them?

So in 2007 I began this journey, through a Victoria University PhD, of asking them what they knew. It was not so easy a task as I had imagined. Informal conversations, under duress and at leisure, in a school between a teacher and students, are not the same as formal university research. I had worked with a number of Sudanese-Australian young people both as a teacher and as a community arts writer, and I thought recruiting participants for my study would be easy. Prior to relocating to Melbourne in 2005, I had worked as a teacher and community arts worker in Alice Springs in Australia's central desert for nearly seven years. I had attempted to run

playwriting workshops with young people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, as I had done as an artist-in-schools in New York City's Harlem before coming to Australia. In addition, I had been working as a playwright for many years. The young people in Alice Springs were, by and large, not very interested in theatre, having had little exposure to it in their remote location. One creative Indigenous young man suggested working instead with video cameras, and the workshops grew immediately. Film was accessible, immediately gratifying, and the young filmmakers could work largely independently to achieve their artistic visions. A few of them went on to win awards in national short film festivals. So when I began running arts-based projects at my high school in Melbourne, I remembered the advice of that young filmmaker and brought some cameras to our first meeting. My students were equally enthusiastic, and we made several bi-lingual films in Arabic and English at the high school. When the time came for structuring my doctoral research project, the medium of film was the obvious choice. It was equally important to me that any research document that would eventuate from this project would be accessible to its co-participants, and short films were, it seemed, far more accessible than a lengthy written thesis. However, most of the Sudanese-Australian young women I knew and approached for this project were not so enthusiastic.

Ironically, once they heard they would be filmed many of the Sudanese-Australian young *men* I knew in the community were more than willing to participate. Not so the young women. If they wished to participate at all it was only to create a television-style drama, a fashion shoot, or a dance video; they were not much interested in talking at length about school. And yet, I knew, at school they had much to say of the trials and tribulations of being an African-Australian student in this new environment. As it turned out, I began with a former student, Lina Deng, and recruited Grace Mabor and the students from River Nile Learning Centre through community canvassing, advertising and professional contacts. Some of the students knew Lina, which helped – especially when they saw her film and understood better what was involved. I focussed initially on Melbourne's western suburbs, because these were the young people I knew and had worked with. I was

introduced to Achol Baroch and Nyadol Nyuon through colleagues at Victoria University who were their teachers. I met Angelina Kuol and others who live in the south-eastern suburbs of the city through my volunteer work as a tutor at the Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning (SAIL) program, and through a theatre project on which I was working as the writer. By and large, the co-participants informed and validated each other's involvement in the project through those informal channels of inter-community dialogue in which most young people engage. Within the Sudanese community of Melbourne, however, these affiliations lay largely, but not completely, along the lines of language groups, rather than geography. Although many of the Dinka people have resettled in the western suburbs and the Nuer in the southeast, there were exceptions (including several of the co-participants). The young women knew each other through language and family affiliations across sometimes considerable geographical distances. In spite of this, most of the films were made with individual young women, since the co-participants said they preferred this to working in the small groups I had originally envisioned.

Because I chose to interview 18 to 25-year-olds, most of these young women were no longer at secondary school. In some cases this meant it was hard to re-engage them on the topic of schooling. In other cases I was struck by how present it still was for them; how raw, and often painful; how unresolved. Still others had begun to idealise their school experiences to the point where they described them as 'fine', adequate, or even, sometimes, without room for improvement. (At least this was what they said to me, 'the teacher'.) An informal 'network' began to form amongst the young women who were 'doing one of those films', and they kept tabs on each other through me, and through the community, in order to know which community talks and screening events were emerging as the completion of each film – film after film – rolled by. In the end, I believed it was the talking and the filming, not the topic, which kept them engaged. Try as I might, it was impossible to limit them to discussions of school, and that heartbreak felt by documentary filmmakers began to inform the difficult editing process: often the most

compelling footage could not be included as it did not pertain to education as outlined in the project brief.

Had I chosen to work with students still at school, in schools, the films in my research would have no doubt been very different. The reason I chose not to do this was because I believed – and still believe – that the overriding economy of schools is concerned with conforming, achieving and fitting into the prevailing hegemony of school cultures. As a teacher, I wanted to remove myself – and the participants – from this economy/context of power dynamics. I wanted the films to document the young women in their own environments, in their own words, and at a liberating distance from these 'sites of performance'. I wanted there to be no shadow of a doubt in their minds that I wasn't expecting a 'correct' answer, a conforming response, or a kind of response that they knew would not compromise them in their schools or as students. I wanted them to know they had the right to 'talk back', something not always easy for Sudanese-Australian young women; and I wanted them to recognise that education is not always in or all about schools. If these young people know what they educationally need, I figured my best chance of hearing about it was to engage young women who had gone through at least some experience of schooling and who *now* have strong insights into their issues.

I found that I had come with a strong thesis of my own: that schools were not doing enough for refugee students; were not – largely – democratic environments where a critical pedagogy (McLaren, 1996, 2000; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2005, 2007; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998; Giroux, 1988, 1989, 2005; and others) of social justice was being practiced. I came also with the theory that Sudanese-Australian young women, in particular, were viewed at schools as transgressive of the school context by many, and were thereby relegated to what Giroux calls "fugitive spaces" (1996:12); that to other students they were sometimes frightening, exclusive, aggressive; that to teachers they were often seen as non-compliant, arrogant, explosive and 'too hard' and that this was due to what schools perceive as these students' language and conceptual knowledge deficits. Deficits that that therefore

require that these young women need to be 'managed' (read *excluded*). What *I* found in the minds and lives of these young women, however, was vulnerability, fear, envy, deep conflicts between culture and integration, confusion, ambition and pride. By and large they did not blame the schools for their difficult and sometimes disappointing performance at school. While they saw opportunities for improving the experiences of young Sudanese-Australian women at school, they also saw how difficult the situation is, how complex it is for the providers, and how much their non-African peers had tried to assist their integration. They saw clearly many of their own limitations while trying to understand and 'fit in' to this new culture-within-a-culture of Australian schooling. I was most surprised to find how much they took upon themselves; how willing they were to accept responsibility for what went wrong – and what went right – in their own experiences at school. They believed that they could do better; and deeply wanted to.

Most of the participants in this study still had strong hopes that they would continue to improve their education in numerous and varied ways, and that education was, in the end, their best chance at 'succeeding' in this new life in Australia. However, some recognised alternative paths to achieving their goals: attending vocational training programs, undertaking internships, working in community organisations or volunteering. Many of the co-participants described the research films as being a galvanising experience for them. Some have used, or plan to use, their films for future work: Nyadol will use her film in community speaking engagements; Lina has already used her film as supporting material for community arts funding applications and work; Achol has used her film as an audition piece. Overall, the participants have reported positively on the ways in which this project has encouraged them to think critically about their experiences, and about their knowledge of the Australian school system.

Sometimes they were confused about my interest in their experiences. They asked questions like "Do you want to be black?" and "Why do you care?", and often these were more difficult to answer than I initially realised. Overall, this research project has led me back to my own feelings of

marginalisation, both as a new immigrant (from the United States in 1997), and as a lesbian teacher in heteronormative school environments. I have moved from being a teacher who identifies with the theory and practices of critical pedagogy – who saw and at times participated in what I consider *re-marginalising*[2] practices in the classroom – to a passionate advocate for educational reform: an anti-assimilationist, a fellow traveller in the process of integration, and an individual engaged in the process of exploring my own feminism and feelings of 'refugeity' within the increasingly hegemonic capitalist culture of 21st century Australian education.

> *February 13, 2009*
> *I am uncomfortable with academic writing. I come at this work from a background in playwriting and creative writing, and I am self-conscious and feel inadequate when I set myself the task of sculpting an academic paper out of this work I love and feel passionate about. I am sitting in the Dancing Dog Café in Footscray, in the western suburbs of Melbourne, on a beautiful summer Friday afternoon, and feeling stupid. I realise that this is exactly what a year 8 Sudanese-Australian student said to me in a 'pathways' class at school on Tuesday. I told her she is not stupid. I told her everything I could think of to help her to feel smarter, more capable, and less trapped by the system of our school. I realise that sitting here trying to avoid and then return to this exegesis I am feeling very like what Ajak might have been feeling on Tuesday. I understand better why I try to avoid this exegesis with every fibre of my being. I understand why people never finish PhDs, and why they drop out of school. I remember why people move away from situations and activities that cause them to feel stupid, and why they move toward activities and situations in which they feel capable. (Process Journal)*

These six films document the wide spectrum of abilities, ambitions and circumstances encountered by just 15 young Sudanese women living in Australia today. Working with them on the films has been immensely inspiring, and full of a camaraderie and community that I never anticipated. It has also at times been difficult. Due not only to the complex logistics of lives still engaged in resettlement, but also to intercultural and cross-generational misunderstandings. My identity as a gay woman, although never discussed with my co-participants directly, impacted on our experiences of each other. Being a '40-something' woman who is still 'unmarried' and childless, elicited discomfort, pity and sometimes relentless goading from these women. I have been advised on fashion, dating, fertility and cooking. I've been asked if I'm jealous of their husbands, boyfriends,

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[2] marginalisation has been defined by Yvonna Lincoln (Guba and Lincoln 2006:207) as: "omission of stakeholder or participant…views, perspectives, claims, concerns and voices…".

housekeeping, children and Blackness. I've been ridiculed for emigrating from the United States, and simultaneously had contacts, gifts and airline tickets requested of me. I've been not only a researcher and filmmaker, but a babysitter, a taxi driver, a social worker, a tutor and a mentor. I've asked them to share their lives with not only me, but also with the camera, that unassailable 'other' in the unseen audience to whom they speak. And I've had to share my own life in return. We've all made choices about what we've shared and what we've censored, and both of these choices tell us much in this reflexive process of the performance of our identities. I've made burgeoning friendships with several of the co-participants, but I've also left our meetings in tears, enraged, screaming the often two-hour drive back home at the top of my lungs. I've spent days in McDonalds and shopping malls waiting for potential participants who never materialise. I've been privileged to work with over 23 young people and to hear their stories, but ended up with just six films. I'm proud of the films, as are my co-participants, but it has been a long and winding road for us all.

My fear of appropriating voice and culture has kept me – at times – passive as a researcher; my relentless questioning of my hybrid role as a filmmaker/teacher/academic researcher and member of both a dominant and non-dominant culture has tied me in knots. But these are important knots to be tied up in, because only from this paralysis of 'tongue-tying' can the filmmaker/activist/critical pedagogue/qualitative enquirer, emerge 'untied' to listen and collaborate effectively. Or at least honestly. For me this has been a humbling and transformative journey.

By and large, these young women are focussing on the future, not the past. They are grateful – in spite of the ways in which they are often framed by the media and the minds of their fellow Australians – for the opportunities that exist in their new country, and are eager to take advantage of all that Australia has to offer. While they are confused and overwhelmed at times in their navigation of the bureaucratic intricacies of the education, health care and work choices systems, they are confident in their ability to learn these new processes – and are realising that it will take considerable time. But

above all, they have much of benefit to say to their fellow students and to the wider Australian community, and are eager for any opportunity to share their knowledge and insights.

Alternative Spaces

Cross-Marked's co-participants are Sudanese-Australian young women aged 18 to 25 from Melbourne, Australia. All have arrived since 2004 with refugee backgrounds, and as a group are critically under-researched (Cassity & Gow, 2006).[3] One of the aims of these films is the creation of an alternative space in which these young women may share with other young people, educationalists, and the general public crucial knowledges acquired in their first five years of residency in the country. Participants have explored issues including transitioning from language centres to mainstream schools, 'performing' the role of student at a mainstream school, disengaging from school, and their own, and others', expectations of themselves. As a teacher, video artist and researcher, I have facilitated the making of these films by offering guided questions to establish a shared language of reflection; by mentoring the co-participants in the use of video cameras and editing; and by facilitating conversations between co-participants. This project does not aim to examine the efficacy of school-based programs, but rather seeks to recognise the power of these young women in response to, or *in spite of*, their current (or recent) educational contexts, and to foreground the skills they have developed navigating traditional, hierarchical educative systems into which they are expected to fit successfully. The project uses an arts-based methodology to create an affirming space in which the silent or silenced voices of Sudanese-Australian young women might be liberated from school experiences of invisibility or hyper-visibility. As such, the project aims to assist young former refugees in their integration experiences, by establishing an alternative safe space through an arts methodology in

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[3] "There are scarcely any major studies dealing with African refugees in Australia and none with a focus upon young people (cf. Beattie & Ward, 1997; Gow, 2002; Udo-Ekpo, 1999)" (Cassity & Gow, 2006).

which they may reflect upon their experiences, help to re-educate their educators and peers, and take action toward correcting some of the inequities they have found in their schooling experiences. And in this way they are benefiting other, younger students from refugee backgrounds and the schools that work hard toward serving them.

These co-participants (see below) have been recruited through various strategies. One singular strategy (general invitation through posters and email) did not work to attract Sudanese-Australian young women to my project. Potential co-participants cited issues of logistics, home duties, lack of interest and shyness around the camera as the main reasons why they might not be interested. Mostly, though, my initial advertising met with silence. Co-participant Lina Deng suggested that I change my project to focus on Sudanese-Australian young men, or "anyone else" other than Sudanese-Australian young women, whom she described as too constrained by cultural prohibitions against speaking or appearing publicly. I sent out flyers, advertised at community organisations, networked through arts and education contacts, and met people through snowball sampling. In the end, it was snowball sampling that provided these fifteen co-participants. What is clear is that no single strategy worked for accessing these young women, and that the most successful strategy was through relationship. I was repeatedly told by both Sudanese- and non-Sudanese-Australians (including some fellow-researchers) that I would not find any interested Sudanese-Australian young women for a study of this kind. It was repeatedly recommended to me that I should change the project to focus on young men, or older women – neither of whom would be difficult to access, and both of whom might be more willing to speak on film. If this project were to be replicated by other educationalists, what has become clear to me is that working with female former refugees in the Sudanese community means that one must establish relationships first and discuss the project second; an approach which I now understand as central to its *ethnocinematic* methodology. The relationships and the trust are central to the success or failure of a project of this kind. This relationship of trust is familiar to any documentary filmmaker, particularly in

ethnographic documentary – but should also be familiar to any educator or community-based researcher.

Films made with this prioritisation of relationship are an extension of ethnographic documentary, a type of performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003) which may be considered **ethnocinema**. The notion of ethnocinema has been around since the early 1980s, but a clear definition which distinguishes it from general ethnographic documentary film is needed, and one is proposed more fully in Chapter One and in the conclusion. However, a preliminary note for clarification is called for here: ethnocinema can be characterised firstly by the relationship between co-creators, secondly by the principles of critical pedagogy (anti-oppression, anti-objectification, and social justice action), and thirdly by their collaborative genesis. In this exegesis, I assert that makers of ethnocinema know all too well that without solid relationships with their co-participants, these so-called documentary films have a greater possibility of being misunderstood, of being received out of context, more so because of the age-old and persistent perception of documentary film as some kind of 'reality' television. Even beyond other qualitative inquiry methods (such as ethnodrama), the subjects of ethnocinematic films may be objectified, 'anthropologised' and patronised by viewing communities who believe they are observing a 'real' look at a whole community; such is the legacy of ethnographic documentary out of which ethnocinema is emerging. Ethnocinema, on the other hand, asserts that films made collaboratively are documents of *relationship*, and are not representative of whole communities, 'authentic' individuals, or unassailable 'truths'; that they trouble the very notion of authenticity itself. Ethnocinema is a type of film, but even more it is a way of being together in a shared creative endeavour which documents a moment in time – a moment of intercultural meeting, understanding or misunderstanding. St Denis encourages educators and researchers to "work and collaborate across a multitude of differences, both within and outside our own communities." (St. Denis, 2007: 1087), and ethnocinema – and therefore *Cross-Marked* – aims to do these things.

Ethnocinema seeks transparency, and rejects aesthetic invisibility; it honours collaboration and rejects authorial interpretation; it prioritises individuality over generalisation, and process over product. As a result, ethnocinema recognises that collaboration in film requires mutual vulnerability, cultural contextualisation and recognition of film products as collaborative tools rather than as products in themselves. For this reason, the principles of ethnocinema can sometimes work at odds with the aesthetic concerns of standard filmmakers, and the investigative needs of traditional ethnographers. When I began this project, I struggled with aesthetic desires versus the principles of ethnocinema to which I was committed. As I changed during the course of the study, my own transformation as a result of the relationships documented in these films overpowered my desire to end up with industry-standard 'beautiful' films, and opened up possibilities for a new kind of cinematic beauty, new standards of filmic success. An ethnocinematic investigation includes the ways in which our subjectivities overlap, and this has become a central focus of this research.

Therefore, *Cross-Marked: Sudanese-Australian Young Women Talk Education* is an ethnocinematic project which celebrates the knowledge that Sudanese-Australian young women possess, and which recognises its transformative potential for the education system. It acknowledges that the challenges they are navigating through racism, sexism and cultural marginalisation as integrating former refugees offers them valuable insights into ways of improving the Australian and other school systems. It takes as its central theme the belief that when educationalists ask our clients/students/collaborators what they need to thrive more fully in schools, we will be on our way to re-constructing the relationship and therefore a new collaborative system of education which is more liberatory, which seeks the "conscientization" (Freire, 1970:19) of its students and more fully rejects the "banking system" criticised by Freire (1970:58). The project's aims include the provision (through film) of alternative spaces where these young women can reflect on their lived experience and understand more fully the forces at work on them in their new Western cultural environment, including those forces which would keep them silent, marginal and subordinate.

METHODOLOGY / THE PROJECT:

This study takes as its overarching theoretical framework the critical pedagogy of McLaren, Kincheloe and Steinberg, Giroux, Shor and others. It uses as its main methodological approach what Kincheloe, and Denzin and Lincoln (from Levi-Strauss, 1966), develop as bricolage, a "methodological Diaspora" (2009:10). Furthermore, its character as ethnocinema can be considered an extension of qualitative inquiry related to but distinct from ethno-drama and ethnographic documentary film practices. It is an interdisciplinary project and cannot be other, since it uses an amalgam of disciplines and theoretical frameworks to interpret its multi-layered intercultural and arts-based content. It is my recommendation that in order to fully benefit from the stories and recommendations of these young women, and to understand the evolving relationships between researcher and co-participants, that you watch the films first, or watch them in conjunction with this exegesis as you go – that is, watch *Slowly By Slowly* after reading this Introduction, then read Chapter 1 in which Grace's film is discussed. This will allow you to see the films develop as the project developed, through my development as filmmaker and researcher, and with an understanding of the young women as individuals and as co-participants in this 'community' of filmmakers/research participants. My intention is to retain this structure when the films are used as the basis of an education package which will be distributed to schools after this research is completed. The schools pack is being collaboratively compiled and documented by co-participant Nyadol Nyuon and myself.

I began this project as an arts-based investigation into the schooling experiences of Sudanese-Australian young women, and chose film as an accessible and fun way to involve them in the telling and showing of their stories. Film as an arts-based methodology allowed me to develop a collaborative relationship with the co-participants, and it provided for a skills transfer which was consistent with its social justice and critical pedagogical aims. Because we were investigating school practices, it was important to

engage in an approach that is, I believe, all too absent from schools – an arts-based way of knowing; a way which is creative, fun and invites mutuality and exchange.

This ethnocinematic research – six short ethnographic documentaries – was created in Melbourne between March 2008 and May 2009. The project was not funded beyond an APA scholarship through Victoria University, and the films were not created with the intention of public screening at film festivals or for television documentary distribution, but rather, for an audience of other students from refugee backgrounds and educators. Foremost in my mind was the experience of the co-participants; that they should have as much input as they were comfortable with, and that they could, should they choose, decide crucial aspects of the construction, naming and packaging of the films. While not all co-participants were completely satisfied at project's end (some wanted more footage of themselves, less of others; some wanted me to make them 'look better' than I was able to; some specifically wanted the films to be placed on television, Youtube or other public fora), all consideration was taken to ensure that the co-participants drove this project. It is ethnographic in its attention to a particular cultural group, and can be considered auto-ethnographic in that it includes my story/ies as teacher/citizen/community member in a shared educative community. The project is generative and arts-based in that we have jointly created new knowledge, new understandings, together in a shared creative endeavour. *Cross-Marked* is, then, equally ethnographic and arts-based, and exemplifies the principles of an emerging ethnocinema in which collaborations are mutually respectful, beneficial, socially transformative and which honour different ways of knowing.

Ethnocinema is compatible with arts-based pedagogy and research practices. Working with co-participants for whom English is a second, third or fourth language, I have seen firsthand the powerful accessibility of film as opposed to a written thesis which would have remained inaccessible for many. I am reassured by my choice to use film as a tool that is familiar and accessible to my co-participants. But there have been obstacles as well: a majority of the

footage was shot by me as I was simultaneously attempting to facilitate interviews and/or conversations. This is not an easy task, even for an accomplished filmmaker (which I'm not!). The films suffered at times from the difficulties of these conflicting tasks, and yet I remained committed to not entering into these relationships with a 'film crew', which I believed would alter the conversations in ways I did not want. This methodology also evoked challenges because the films were most often not shot in highly 'controlled' environments, preferring as I did (and do) the *cinema verité* approach of filming the participants in their home environments, in their everyday lives and contexts. For many of these co-participants this meant chaotic environments with many young children, noises of a busy home, street environments, or *ad hoc* filming sessions amidst classes, errands, or other highly volatile variables which sometimes informed the films but more often ruined hours of footage.

Nevertheless, I believe they stand as documents which attest to the learning of both the co-participants and myself. We not only got to know one another, we got to know something about filming, being filmed, and the performance of our identities. The voices you will hear in these films are loud, clear and full of great ideas. The stories told are sometimes full of sadness, suffering, the effects of racism and the struggle of integration. But as you watch them I hope you will be filled with the same inspiration I was filled with in making them: that hope overcomes despair, that aspiration overcomes exhaustion, and that the resilience of these Sudanese-Australian young women is changing the face of Australia forever, and that we are all by far the richer for it.

Below I offer a brief overview of the theoretical framework highlighted in each chapter by film, as they are divided, which can be followed along in this same order on the DVD.

THE FILMS:

    1) Grace Mabor's film *SLOWLY BY SLOWLY*

…the first weeks was difficult. Really hard. I couldn't wake up from my bed, I was so scared…because they were all different you know, and it was really hard to get to know [the] other students in the school. Because I think the western people they're mostly like when they know you, they know you, so they don't bond quickly. They get to know you slowly by slowly.

Grace Mabor was born in Etang refugee camp in Ethiopia, to a Dinka father and Juba mother, and has never been to Sudan. Grace was eventually able to enjoy relatively constant schooling where she grew up in Nairobi, Kenya, along with her five sisters and one brother. After her father was killed while working in Sudan, Grace's mother assisted the family's transition to life in Australia by stressing that "education is the key", and by teaching them English from birth. Grace's story is unusual by refugee standards, but she has still experienced and witnessed the difficulties for young women of transitioning to a culture in which roles for females are considerably different to those at home. Grace's continuing journey as a young Sudanese-Australian woman has shown her that Africa and Africans are often misrepresented in the media, in schools, and – particularly for young women – within the community.

Chapter One examines Grace's film through a lens of traditional ethnographic documentary and the emergence of what might be considered ethnocinema. I draw on documentary theorists including Barbash and Taylor (1997), MacDougall (1998), Tobing Rony (1996), Ruby (2000), Rouch (2003), Heider (2006) and Aufderheide (2007) in order to compare and contrast these films (with a focus on *Slowly By Slowly)* with a history of ethnographic documentary which traditionally defines them as about "other cultures, exotic peoples, or customs" (Aufderheide, 2007:106).

Out of this anachronistic straightjacket leaps the emergent practice of ethnocinema and I attempt to define its characteristics, possibilities and potential critiques. I examine the difficulties and necessities of working interculturally in ethnocinema, particularly within our own communities. In a post-multicultural[4] context, academics, educationalists, and filmmakers are

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[4] for many cultural workers the term intercultural replaces the sometimes-contentious connotations of multicultural and is the preferred current terminology

working even harder to expand the possibilities of intercultural collaboration, and ethnocinema suggests one way forward. This chapter also examines more generally the relative absence of Sudanese-Australian women's stories in the popular media. Despite much coverage of Sudanese immigrants, from the stories of the 'Lost Boys' to media vilification of African young men and their portrayed violence, the voices, stories and experiences of girls and women remain relatively invisible. This chapter explores some possible reasons for this absence, and suggests how *Cross-Marked* may contribute to representations of emergent identities within the Sudanese diaspora.

2)   Nyadol Nyuon's film *STILL WAITING*

> *You would always always try to prove yourself against something. You think you've had enough, always waiting as a refugee, and now you have also to wait to be accepted. You are waiting for something you're probably never gonna receive, and it's a constant fight. People get tired.*

My first meeting with Nyadol is documented at the beginning of this introduction, but my continuing relationship with her reminds me what a formidable young woman she is. Nyadol – like Grace Mabor – comes from a family with strong educational and social activism values, and she embodies these values in everything she does. She works assiduously at improving herself and achieving her individual goals, and she is tireless, too, in her support of the Sudanese-Australian community, and her strong language skills and formidable intellect enable her to be a spokesperson in a multitude of ways for young Sudanese-Australians. Since almost her very arrival she has been active with the Lost Boys Association of Australia, with community organisations like the Centre for Multicultural Youth, and through her work at the university. Nyadol has been the most actively collaborative co-participant in this project, and continually suggests new possibilities for ongoing work together. Yet she remains firmly committed to addressing the need to create and promote work from within the African-Australian community:

> *Most academic work is produced by Western white people, so you think about it, there's not much work there by Africans about Africans. And what happens is sometimes there could be exaggeration of facts, or complete misinterpretation or misunderstanding of things, so sometimes I doubt if the identity that is presented of us is exactly what we think we are. You know, it's an interpretation of someone thinking who we are,*

from the outside, and that's why I say there needs to be a lot from within. And one of the challenges will be how is it gonna be accepted when it's coming from within, or is it gonna be too different to a lot of things that are already accepted? (Or) they cannot be accepted because they are challenging to a lot of things that are too fundamental and well-respected.

Her film *Still Waiting* is just one tool which may be used to stimulate consideration of the abilities and unique voices of the emerging Sudanese community in Australia and abroad. In Chapter 2 I use the critical race theory of James Clifford (1988) and others to contextualise Nyadol's clear articulation of how racism is negatively impacting on these students as they make their way into and navigate through this education system. Like the other films in this series, *Still Waiting* suggests multiple methods (including film) for troubling the notion of self/other in an increasingly diverse nation which is itself still becoming.

3) *CHICK CHAT AT THE RIVER NILE*

LIZZIE: They shouldn't be sending them to high school, because if they can't understand the language, sending them to high school is killing them. They gave us a book that every word that we didn't know, we have to write it down. How many of us used that book? How many of us used that book to write those words? None!

I became aware of the work of the River Nile Learning Centre (RNLC) through an education colleague who is on their board, and who thought the Centre might be interested in having me facilitate a video workshop as part of my research. I approached Tim Molesworth, then Director of RNLC, about running a workshop for their students in filmmaking and/or compiling an education video for my research project. He was hesitant at first, believing that the students would not be interested, but he allowed the project to go ahead.

That first week I met the students and proposed to them that it might be fun to create their own film. They were interested in the skills, and articulated a number of issues of concern to them: the birth of their babies (most students at RNLC had small children or were pregnant), the local community in Footscray in Melbourne's west, and school. We began experimenting with

film techniques and group discussions. There were eight students who were in regular attendance on the Tuesday afternoons when I visited, but others came and went irregularly. Of these eight regulars, six were Sudanese (Dinka and Nuer), one was Congolese, and one was Burundi. Three students in particular were interested in learning how to work the cameras, and in the process of editing. So from the beginning, part of this workshop was allowing the participants to film themselves and each other, and offering advice about film techniques. While the 'workshop' structure included instruction, it didn't often work terribly well (much to my frustration!), and I realised the best practice would be to allow them to film what and how they wanted, and then to play the footage back for them so they could themselves see what was and wasn't working. So this is how we proceeded.

Early drafts of the film were more heavily weighted toward the birthing experiences of the girls, including issues around pregnancy and schooling. On playback, however, Grace Mabor insisted that the co-participants critically examine the 'message' this film might send to – and about – African-Australian young women. They decided in discussion that they wanted to convey to other young African women that it was not preferable to get pregnant before finishing school, that it was hard, and that they were sometimes judged unfavourably – both within the African community and in wider Australian society – for being young mothers. They also expressed a desire to convey how pregnancy and early motherhood had impacted on their freedom and their schooling. We shot additional footage, including group discussions about school and their current experiences at RNLC. This footage was merged with the earlier footage to create the final film. I knew that it was important that my co-participants needed to learn filmmaking skills, and I was committed to sharing what little I knew about using a video camera and constructing short films. Coming from a playwriting background, I know about story structure and characterisation. I knew even a documentary needed an 'arc', and I knew that this visual form differed from playwriting in that pictures would tell these stories, not only words. And yet, from day one, I struggled with the logistics and incredible technical requirements of the two-fold task before me: not only was I trying to teach

myself how to become a documentary filmmaker 'on the fly', I was also trying to interview these young women pedagogically. It was for this reason – the very difficulty of the task – that I knew I couldn't use a film crew, and that this journey of mutual discovery we were embarking upon together was really what this research was all about. This was exciting and legitimate critical pedagogical territory, and yet there was no traditional notion of knowledge transfer or 'teaching' going on here, except maybe from the young women to me!

One difficulty was the fluid nature of the group. Near the end, especially, when the film was beginning to take shape and there was a degree of excitement about the project, other new students wished to be included. From an educational and research perspective, I very much wanted to include them, but from a filmmaking perspective it was difficult. The 'narrative' had emerged already, and the main 'characters' were well established both individually and collectively in the footage, and it was difficult to integrate new identities into the film at such a late stage. Additionally, some young women wanted to be included but didn't want their faces to be shown – which presented additional challenges for a film-based project. In some cases, the students who wanted to be were included; in other instances, they were not.

In Chapter 3, I have documented the process of co-creating this group film, including some of the difficulties and challenges surrounding the ways in which I felt I had reified their subordinate status as students/former refugees, and disempowered them in the process of using this film as an agent of change. However, this chapter also highlights the ways in which I felt they marginalised me as white/outsider/other. The work foregrounds the need (discussed earlier in this introduction) for relationships to be considered as primary to this work, and how easily, in the absence of strong relationships, the reification of the otherness of our collaborators re-emerges. Chapter 3 uses the ideas of transgression and transgressiveness to examine the ways in which young Sudanese-Australian women are being marginalised but, more importantly, empowered by their sometimes-status of 'transgressive', and

how this might be a liberating positionality for them as they navigate an often-hostile education system. Using the critical race theory of James Clifford, and educational theory drawing on Stuart Hall, Paulo Freire and bell hooks, this chapter examines ways in which transgression as positionality can be liberating for both teachers and students.

The making of this film was a steep learning curve for me. I continued to struggle with some of the technical aspects of filmmaking – I had learnt by then to wear headphones when filming, to ensure proper sound quality, and I was more conscious of lighting and other technical requirements. However, it was still difficult to facilitate and film at the same time. The engagement of some co-participants as filmmakers gave me more freedom for facilitation, but it also presented new challenges regarding aesthetic considerations. In the end, I decided that the co-participants' willingness to engage in the production of the films far outweighed aesthetic concerns for the quality of the film, and as a result much of the footage is 'shaky' and unclear. While this has meant that this film (more than others with less hands-on input from co-participants) has been criticised on aesthetic grounds, it has informed my consideration of the core elements of ethnocinema as a collaborative practice which prioritises the relationship between makers and the content above any aesthetic considerations, and as such I (and the co-participants) consider the film a success.

### 4)	Achol Baroch's film *SINGING INTO LANGUAGE*

The hardest thing [is] you didn't understand the teacher in what they say. You didn't understand the class, what they're talking about. You look like you're a deaf person in the middle of millions of people. You can't talk to anybody: not the teacher, not your friends in the class, because they're speaking English. …That's like a nightmare to me.

Chapter 4, *Singing Into Language: Creating a Public Pedagogy*, offers the advice of Achol Baroch, who understands very well what some students need despite never having yet been to mainstream school. Using the radical critical pedagogy of McLaren and Giroux, I contextualise Achol's comments about crucial deficits in schools for former refugee students. It is a

reconceptualisation of the 'deficit model' of the students themselves, which draws on Freire's articulation of the 'banking system'[5] of education. The chapter also looks to information and communication technologies (ICT) and arts methodologies for assisting students with significant English language learning challenges and histories of severe schooling interruptions. There is nothing new about identifying the desperate need for change in schools around democratic education and equity in access. However, Achol's film suggests how easily and powerfully these approaches could be employed using arts-based methodologies to assist students in need. Blending the practical advice and lived experience of these co-participants with the theory of critical pedagogy highlights possible ways forward.

Achol Baroch was a student at a local TAFE English as a Second Language (ESL) program, after transferring from her language centre in the western suburbs when I walked into the office of Kelley Doyle asking if she knew of any Sudanese-Australian young women who might like to make a film. A similar project had been running at the school recently, and one young woman had been particularly enthusiastic, but had been required to discontinue her participation because of home problems. There were no other candidates. About two months later, Kelley called me back wondering if the project was still running because the young woman she had told me about, Achol Baroch, had moved in with an aunty who was supportive of all Achol wanted to do. Achol was by this time seven months pregnant and the school term was ending soon. She had stopped attending her TAFE classes, and Kelley thought engagement with the film project might hold her over until she gave birth. Shortly after, Achol and I met and it was a dynamic friendship from the beginning.

Achol was 18 years old when we began filming, and she loves to talk. She was – more than any other participant – candid about her past, her current feelings and situation, and her dreams for the future. She saw the project as a means of continuing her dream of working as an actress, particularly in film

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[5] See Footnote 25 for an explanation of 'banking system'.

or television. Achol's aunt, Rebecca Long, and her niece and nephew Anna and Bronson, soon became integral players in our filming process and our many get-togethers. Our meetings were always social, family-oriented, and full of laughter and food. The children loved to see themselves on film as well, and soon they had made their way into Achol's documentary. Her aunty Rebecca also shared her amazing story of survival and escape from South Sudan, and when we had completed filming for Achol's documentary we decided that Rebecca's story should be filmed also – and that Achol should be the one to do it.

These two films became more about spending time together, strategising ways for Achol to re-engage with school and speed up her English language acquisition, which was still very slow. Once the films were completed, we continued to meet on almost a weekly basis, to attend doctor's appointments together and to plan for the baby. When Achol's daughter Loaner was born in December of 2008 – only three days before I left on a two-month overseas holiday – I went to the hospital and filmed Loaner when she was just a few hours old. We realised that the film project could also be a gift to the future Loaner, documenting her mother's experiences around the time of her birth, as well as a keepsake for Achol for whom so many records of her own past had been lost in the process of surviving as a refugee and its aftermath. Her film remains for me a document of her incredible tenacity as a young woman, a single mother, a new Australian who despite all her experiences to the contrary, focusses on the positive rather than the negative, and whose dreams for the future continue to flourish.

If Achol does return to school, it will not be an easy road for her. Yet neither will it be easy if she does not return to school. Achol – like most of us – does the best she can, and recognises that these films are primarily for an audience of younger students; for teachers of the future. She has participated largely in order to help others, not herself. Her generosity is extraordinary and displayed by the passion with which she speaks in her film. Achol continues to try and improve herself. She still plans to return to the TAFE program she left when she gave birth. In the meantime, she studies simple language

books with her five- and six-year-old niece and nephew. She would like to read more easily; to get around more easily. I wonder if she worries what her two-month-old baby Loaner will say to her when Loaner is herself in school; when she begins to know more than her mother of this new society in which she will be an Australian, and Achol will, perhaps always, be Sudanese.

5) Lina Deng's film *NEIR CHI PUJ (EDUCATED GIRLS)*

*That's the thing. Teachers are like the prophets to me. You guys are
teaching us something that's gonna last forever, right or wrong.*

Chapter 5 explores Lina Deng's film *Neir Chi Puj[6] (Educated Girls)* from the non-'dominant perspective' of a gay teacher, even though I am perceived by my co-participant as 'mainstream'. I comment on this film project – the first in the series, chronologically – through a discussion of the value of film as an arts-based methodology, and as an integrative tool, in schools and elsewhere, to more dynamically give voice to our co-participants/students but also ourselves. It acknowledges the complexity of working interculturally, which I argue includes (sometimes invisible) gay/straight identities. The sometimes-difficult collaboration between Lina and myself in the making of this film is explored through our conversations together and her filming of me, and hints at the multiple layers of meaning present in ethnocinematic collaborations. Ethnocinema requires something more than simply reclaiming the "ethnographic I" (Ellis, 2004), or turning the tables on dominant subjectivity. Ethnocinema takes as a core principle that there are no longer such simplistic definitions of what constitutes dominant and non-dominant subjectivities. Lina's sometimes-perception of me as a dominant Other does not necessarily make me so. As woman, gay, immigrant I can in many ways be constructed as mutually non-dominant, and yet I recognise and must acknowledge Minh-ha's outrage that "everywhere we go, we become Someone's private zoo" (quoted in Eagleton, 1996:394). Ethnocinema seeks to recognise difference not as "essentially 'division' in the understanding of many" (Minh-ha, in Eagleton, 1996:394), but as a means to understanding, and perceives a shared sense of '**refugeity'** (or

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[6] Dinka for 'educated girls'.

otherness) amongst contemporary critical thinkers – one that can be highly productive and binds us together rather than leaving us differentiated and alienated. (This notion of 'refugeity' will be explored more fully in Chapter 6.)

Lina was twenty years old when she participated in the research project which resulted in her film *Neir Chi Puj (Educated Girls)*. At first she was reluctant to participate in the filming aspects, preferring to simply remain a respondent and be filmed by me. We met weekly at her home in Caroline Springs, a far western suburb of Melbourne, and we were both new to the process. I knew Lina previously as I had been her Year 12 English teacher, and Lina's film was my first undertaking in the series. I had taught high school media, assisted students to make films at school, but never having been a filmmaker myself before, it was trial and error for both of us. The Victoria University cameras and equipment were new to me, as were the demands of documentary filmmaking.

Lina was very forgiving of my many mistakes and disasters. There were days when we had shot footage for hours before I realised the microphones weren't turned on. An attempt at being inclusive of her younger sister who always sat nearby resulted in the microphone shaking and perverting the sound, but added considerable levity for us all. Much of the early footage (weeks of it) was in the end too poorly-lit to be usable. The comings and goings of Lina's many family members sometimes created overwhelming background noise that rendered excellent interview material incomprehensible. There was also the time that I brought Chinese food for one of our 'intercultural' weekly lunches, as she had never tried it before, only to give her and other members of her family a disabling gastro bug for the next two days! All of these trials she laughed off and accommodated. In the end, we spent three months of Fridays together, and became friends. Lina has since enjoyed some local 'fame' as a result of her film and its public showings, and has applied for grants and community arts projects involving film. We have intermittently spent time together writing and shooting her

first narrative film, conceived and created predominantly by her as an African-Australian film, called *Beneath the Silence*.

Lina has also become adept at speaking about her film, and is an advocate for film as a tool for assisting Sudanese-Australian young women to find a public forum for their ideas. She says she has come to believe that arts projects like these can be a stepping stone to other professional work and artistic opportunities. She has commented upon her frustration that the careers counsellor at school "never tells you" about these kinds of parallel pathways, and the opportunities that can emerge as a result. Lina has begun to assist other young Sudanese-Australian women and men in their own film projects. She has also become an articulate speaker at conferences, seminars and public fora on her film and the process of making it.

6)   Angelina Aluel Kuol's film *IN TRANSIT/ION*

I've improved now. When I want to say anything I just say it. I don't feel embarrassed at all anymore.

Chapter 6, *The Interchange*: *Source of Creative Understanding* takes a different approach to the difficulties faced by many former refugees living and schooling in Melbourne and other suburban, regional or remote centres of the 'cultural west'. Angelina, like her co-participants, makes lucid and achievable suggestions for improving the schooling conditions for former refugees. But she also discusses, by extension, the external obstacles faced by many former refugees, conditions that impact heavily upon their ability to remain engaged with schools. The film *In Transit/ion* comments upon the difficulties of public transportation faced by many who live far from work and home in sub/urban areas; upon the home duties and cultural obligations of Sudanese-Australian young women; and upon the extensive logistical difficulties of accessing language and curricular assistance at school for those with real 'material conditions' which interfere.

Angelina lives in Cranbourne, in the southeastern suburbs of Melbourne, and we became acquainted through our mutual participation in the Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning (SAIL) program. I met Angelina in

September 2008 and we shot her film at various locations at and around her home in Cranbourne over a two-month period. Her friend Veronica Bar also helped to shoot the film, and offered film advice during the making of the documentary. One of the first things that Angelina told me was her schooling history: she had just recently changed schools to be closer to her home, but her new school had no ESL program, nor an ESL teacher, and she was floundering a bit in her mainstream Year 12 English class. I offered to tutor her on the days we filmed (usually a Saturday afternoon), but she did not take me up on the offer. Angelina told me in detail about her old school, which has a very highly developed ESL program and a high population of recent arrivals from refugee backgrounds. For this reason, the school caters well to these students, and there is strong and varied community among the African and other recent arrival students. She had felt comfortable there, and was doing well academically, but then her family moved from Dandenong to Cranbourne and Angelina was travelling for close to two hours each way to reach the school. Obviously, she needed to change. Her new school was still not close: she takes two buses each way.

Through my shock at these logistical hurdles, we quickly decided to focus Angelina's film on the difficulties many new Sudanese-Australian students and families face regarding transport. As many have no choice about settling in distant regional suburbs of the city, transportation difficulties, language barriers, and financial strain contribute to an isolation for many. It is difficult to travel to the city, and expensive at times. Transportation difficulties complicate friendships, cultural outreach, services access and participation in the life of the inner city. Sometimes friendship groups and extended family are kept apart by these distances. Many (especially women) within the Sudanese-Australian community don't drive. Cars are expensive to buy and maintain, and often young women are not let out on their own anyway. So without a male relative to drive them around, young women can be isolated at home. Angelina's film explores some of these issues, and how this isolation impacts on schooling for young women.

This chapter draws on a theory of shared 'refugeity' and "seventh moment"[7] and "eighth moment scholarship"[8] (Denzin, 2003:122) to explore my developing understanding of ethnocinema as prioritising process over aesthetic product, and as a tool for "critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom, and community" (2005:3). It documents my frustrations with my own technical limitations and the cultural misunderstandings inherent in these filmmaking processes, thereby advancing my original premise that productive innovations in schools can only begin through collaborating, listening, and identifying those places of vulnerability on all sides.

A note on the title of this exegesis

I struggled to find an appropriate title that encompassed all that these young women had so generously shared with me during these long and sometimes arduous processes of creating their films. I asked all co-participants for suggestions. While many of the young womens' suggestions were understandably bitter, or were offered to provide us welcome comic relief (for example *Shut Up and Sit Down!: Refugee Students Put Teachers in Their Place*; *School Sucks Big Time;* or – my personal favourite – *Black Bitches/White Bitches*), in the end I returned to the procedural politics of schools: cross-marking is a process familiar to most teachers, and symbolises an attempt at equity. While as teachers we are encouraged and sometimes required to be self-reflexive, in the marking of students' work we must be able to demonstrate checks and balances. The process of cross-marking is meant to ensure fairness, double-checking and something approaching objectivity.

While *Cross-Marked* makes no claims to objectivity, it does strive toward mutual self-examination. The original distress that drove me into the arms of doctoral research in the first place – a feeling that these students' voices were being silenced – has productively informed my approach to this work and to

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[7] This performative seventh moment, says Denzin, "enacts the feminist, communitarian ethic", is "subversive" and is characterised by an "anti-aesthetic" (Denzin, 2003:122).
[8] Denzin and Lincoln define this as the period from 2005 onward, or the "*fractured future*" (2005:3), which "confronts the methodological backlash associated with the evidence-based social movement".

my continuing teaching practice. The author feels no need to qualify the claims of these co-participants. As both Butler (1990; 1993) and Foucault (1970) have pointed out, the nature of truth is 'always partialised' and performative. Any 'truths' contained in this exegesis and films are performative and partial. None of the commentary in this exegesis or films should be taken as universalised truths, nor do the author (nor co-participants) make any claims in this regard. It is not through one voice alone, whether that of any teacher or any student, that we will find answers, and *Cross-Marked: Sudanese-Australian Young Women Talk Education* seeks to model this dialogic approach by providing one conversation along the way.

CHAPTER 1: SLOWLY BY SLOWLY: Ethnocinema, Media and Women of the Sudanese Diaspora.[9]

> Because we are people who believe that the world of tomorrow, the world
> we are in the process of building, cannot be viable without a regard for
> cultural differences; the other cannot be denied as his image transforms.
> (Jean Rouch, 2003:45)

While there have been many films in recent times on the sufferings and resilience of the 'Lost Boys of Sudan', most young women who have fled the violence remain astonishingly invisible. A survey of filmic sources on Sudanese documentaries reveals more than 22 short or feature films on the Sudanese refugee experience – and only one of these significantly features the story of a girl or woman.[10] Documentary film is increasingly accessible (both to viewers and to makers), mobile and highly marketable as a means of disseminating previously unheard stories and creating social change. 'Brand recognition' is one reason why terms such as 'Lost Boys' are so hard to abandon, and why those who don't fall into these categories sometimes struggle to be seen and heard: name recognition, with funders and public opinion, is powerful.

There are a multitude of reasons why Sudanese young women may be less visible than their male counterparts, some of which began long before the term 'Lost Boys' was coined by a United Nations relief worker at the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. This chapter will examine some possibilities why most Sudanese young women were overlooked for refugee

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[9] Portions of this chapter were presented at Launceston, Tasmania in August 2008 as the paper "Fair Dinka: The 'Found Girls' of Sudan and Performative Integration into Contemporary Australia".

[10] This list of films about Sudan in general, or Darfur specifically is not exhaustive, but is a good place to start. Some films are feature length and some are shorts, but almost all are documentaries: *Benjamin and His Brother*, dir. Arthur Howes, 2002; *The Weight of a Nation*, prod. Kevin Kindle, 2006; *God Grew Tired of Us*, dir. Christopher Quinn, 2006; *Come Back to Sudan,* dir. Patti Bonnet & Daniel Junge, 2008; *3551, a Story of Change*, UNICEF, 1998; *All About Darfur*, dir. Taghreed Elsanhouri, 2005; *Lost Boys of Sudan,* dir Megan Mylan & John Shenk, 2003; *On Our Watch*, Refugees International, 2006; *Children of Terror*, prod Hannah and Damien Lewis, 2004; *War Child*, dir. Christian Karim Chrobog, 2008; *Facing Sudan*, dir. Burce David Janu, 2007; *Long Journey Home of James Nguen*, dir Rick Castiglione, 2007; *The Promise*, dir Tim Salem, 2006; *Child of Hope*, dir Time Salem, 2008; *Darfur Now,* dir Ted Braun, prod Don Cheadle, 2007; *Sand and* Sorrow, dir Pau Freedman, 2008; *African Soul, American Heart,* dir. Debra Dawson, 2008; *The Art Star and the Sudanese Twins,* dir. Pietra Brettkelly, 2008. The following films include the story of one female each, in a cast of several boys' stories: *A Great Wonder: Lost Children of Sudan*, Dir Kim Shelton, 2004; *A Long Walk Home*, dir Tiffany Frances, 2005; and the 2005 documentary *Finding the Lost Girls of Sudan*, prod. Ashley Umbro, is the only film that features a Sudanese young woman, Aduei Riak.

resettlement in the United States with the first wave of 'Lost Boys' in 2001, and how this pattern continues to inform the unequal gender representation in media coverage of the stories of Sudanese former refugees. It will also explore more fully the emerging genre of ethnocinema, and the possibilities inherent in this form of documentary, for women of the Sudanese diaspora, and for others who still struggle within their own communities and the international community, to be heard and seen.

TWICE FORGOTTEN: The 'Lost Girls' Are Growing Up

From their refugee experiences, to their long and arduous process of integration into new cultures, the invisibility of Sudanese young women has been noted by advocates and some aid workers, but it fails to enter the scope of many major aid organisations. According to journalists, although an "estimated 3,000 [females] arrived in Kakuma in 1992, most have simply vanished from official records" (Matheson, 2002:par.13). The blindness of aid organisations cannot be attributed to ignorance of the situation:

> UNHCR officials knew about the girls. In December 2000, Julianne Duncan, an anthropologist specializing in refugee children filed a report explaining in heartbreaking detail how the girls were being shafted. (McKelvey, 2003:par.8)

In selection processes for resettlement in the United States, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) officials used lists of boys who had been counselled through a "psycho-social program", but neither they nor the US Government seem to have looked further for children in need.

> The US has received 3,276 Sudanese boys from this group since 2000. In this same time period, the US received only 89 girls.[11] (Refugees International, 2002:par.3)

The absence of girls on the UNHCR list for humanitarian relocation to the US was best explained to *Refugees International* by a young 'lost girl': "We girls were not put into groups like the boys. If we had been put into groups, we might have been attacked. We are now in the community, and no one

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[11] I have cited American statistics because Australian statistics on Sudanese girls and young women are not available. I recognise that while intake processes are different for the USA and Australia, the general problem of visibility remains comparable, despite greater numbers of female refugees in resettlement in Australia. And the very lack of figures provides further confirmation of their invisibility.

knows where we are" (Refugees International, 2002:par.3). The girls endured many of the same traumatic experiences as the boys, but culturally could not be grouped to live by themselves. Like the boys, these girls had also lost family members and homes.

> The reality is that these lost girls have been forgotten twice: upon arrival in Kakuma Refugee Camp, and again when the US refugee resettlement program was started. (Edgerton, 2002:par.5)

Placement of many girls with foster families inside Kakuma refugee camp lent the appearance that these girls were cared for, a claim disputed by some aid workers and former 'lost girls' like Aduei Riak:

> "In Sudanese culture, a young woman is not allowed to stay alone, but for the guy it's okay," says Aduei Riak. "So what really happened was the young girls were placed in foster homes, and while they were in foster homes they became mothers and housekeepers and got lost along the way." (Beshkin, 2004:par.7)

As a result of these multiple factors, says journalist Tara McKelvey, "the girls simply disappeared" (McKelvey, 2003:par.6).

While the Lost Girls have begun to organise themselves in the United States, the Lost Boys remain the 'superstars' of refugee spokespersons in most countries. Even at a national Lost Boys and Girls conference in Arizona (2004), the girls were allocated only a single session at of the two-day event, and that at seven-thirty in the morning, where few Lost Boys (or anyone else) were present to hear their stories. In Australia, where the numbers of female refugees far outweigh males, there is still no women's or girls' organisation comparable to the Lost Boys Association, so political activism often relegates females to subordinate roles. The Australian Lost Boys Association is focussed on issues mainly pertaining to male resettlement, and Sudanese-Australian young women (like Nyadol and Grace) who wish to advance feminist concerns must continue to agitate for more active roles within this male-dominated organisation.

While most former refugees who identify as 'Lost Girls and Lost Boys' are no longer either children or lost, the term is familiar worldwide, and carries with it the kind of brand-recognition that can often assist fundraising, and

initiate promotion of the Sudanese diasporic community. Although I am aware that many within the Sudanese diaspora use the title with pride and comfort, it is considered by some to be inaccurate or infantilising. As Laura de Luca notes,

> The label overlooks the resilience of these young people and is not accurate for those who are now adults, but the Sudanese refugees themselves use the term because of its popular recognition. (DeLuca, 2008:para.2)

Grace Mabor, in her film *Slowly By Slowly*, recognises the power of the tales of the Lost Boys, which have had wide circulation in the popular media. She respects the suffering of those young men, but questions why these are the only stories Westerners seem to appreciate hearing of the Sudanese experience.

> *Those Lost Boys I would tell you that they're not moving on because they keep being reminded of the same thing over and over again, and it's no good. They need to move on, they need to make a life out of themselves. Not with the Lost Boys name, but with their own name, and with their own ability to do something. So I don't agree with it…The past is the past, the future is the future. You already told your story, it's over and done with, now you go to a new chapter…a nicer story, "Yeah, I have kids, they're big now and I'm not a Lost Boy any more"…that's what they should do. It's much more interesting instead of sad stuff all the time. I just think these people don't want us to go ahead, they just want us to stay like this. And it's no good.*

Grace's commentary recognises the role played by the media, and acknowledges the fact that often these films and books about the Lost Boys are not being made by the Lost Boys themselves, but by outside Others. Her commentary exposes the insider/outsider dichotomy of those who are experiencing flight from Sudan's civil war versus those who are framing and commenting upon them (including myself). When Grace identifies "these people" who are clearly *not* Sudanese, and ascribes an intention that doesn't "want us to go ahead", she does not extend the analysis to *our* shared project. The gap is intriguing, especially considering that she identifies Americans as the worst perpetrators, but does not include me (as an American) in her critique.

> *…All these American people…who are going back there taking over and making all these funny funny movies or documentaries. Well (we) should take control and make (our) own documentaries and give (them) to the world. Because it's not fair, like even if we do have poor people …we have wealthy people too, and we do have very nice places for you to relax and have fun. So when they show all these things it makes me angry.*

> *Because I feel like it's not fair. Why do we have to be shown like that? Do I look like I'm suffering now? No. So why are they doing that? I think it's the media. They don't actually see that there are other interesting things to tell.*

Over the period of filming together, Grace and I talked more about the construction of African identities in western contexts (particularly through the media), and less about education. She came to question why films about Africa were always tragic and violent, when films about Western nations like the United States and Australia so often showed positive images, despite the tragedy and violence present in these cultures. I felt largely ill-equipped to offer adequate explanations for these questions. We discussed the traditional documentary roles of 'filmmaker' and 'subject', and the possibilities for ethnocinematic collaboration. As the filming reached completion, Grace's commentary focussed on the power of the media which sometimes outweighs the influence of classrooms and curricula. Her commentary became more impassioned as she focussed on these multiple forms of creating and knowing, versus the more traditional methods she has found in schools and universities.

> *How come, when they show Africa, it's more like they show the poor places, they don't actually show the exciting places of Africa? ...I used to wonder why but you kinda told me it's for us to go out there, to go back there and do it for ourselves and show them the best parts of living in Africa. But when they go there they actually look for the worst parts, they go and look for the poor people and all this tragedy. Everywhere there's tragedy and everywhere there's wars, but you don't see people showing America like, "Oh my god this is the poor place," they always show these beautiful places. Africa has very beautiful places too! And I used to live in the beautiful places, you know? So I don't know why they would think that way.*

Grace's statement that "you kinda told me" reflects the dialogic relationship that was developing between us during the three months I visited the River Nile, and suggests power dynamics emerging between us; the dynamics of older and younger women talking together. We continued to wonder together about why things are as they appear to be, and reasons for the inequities – not just between Sudanese young women and men, but between African and Western filmmakers and cultures. As I shared with Grace my concern about a lack of documentaries featuring the stories of Sudanese young women, Grace seemed to often take my opinion as fact and I wondered if this was a dynamic established by my identity as teacher, older

woman, or for another reason. We continued our dialogue about gender inequities in resettlement, media representations, and education throughout filming.

Many films and media coverage of the Lost Boys celebrate the considerable gains made by them and their advocates in the relatively few years they have lived in the West, but often disregard the experiences of resettled young women:

> This success, however, has not been matched by an equally determined effort to resettle their female counterparts. The "Lost Girls" have been neglected by the United States and by the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), and the time has come to redress this injustice. (Edgerton, 2002:par.7)

Veronica Abbas, a Sudanese young woman now living in the United States and active in the Southern Sudanese Women's Association, has this to say about the girls back in Kakuma:

> [T]he girls at home need help. They need education. You know, they don't want to be in the kitchen, they don't want to get married when they are 14, they don't want to have 10 kids …and they're not educated. (Beshkin, 2004:par.11)

Refugees International continues to monitor, publicise and advocate on behalf of Sudanese girls and young women, during their refugee experiences and after. More research and media attention must be focused on the separate and distinct needs of the 'Found Girls/Women of Sudan', both in resettlement and before. These very capable young women must be encouraged to speak their stories, perform their identities in new and changing contexts, must be supported to explore non-traditional areas of self-improvement, including education and employment. Refugees International continues to call on other agencies and governments to assist in these daunting tasks, which must become a shared responsibility across our increasingly interconnected communities.

> Since relatively conservative social standards in Sudan consider education beyond the primary level a male opportunity and prioritize marriage for girls…Male refugees are backed by the cultural expectation that they can, and will, survive any hardship. Female refugees are left with the cultural legacy of dedicating their lives to their families. (Adayemi, 2006:par.11)

Grace Mabor and other co-participants in *Cross-Marked* echo these sentiments:

> **Grace:** *My mom is a teacher. She is really good in English and she was the main person who speaks to us in English. She always taught us that education is the key and with it you can go anywhere.*
>
> **Anne:** *Is that equally for boys and girls?*
>
> **Grace:** *Yeah, she doesn't discriminate.*
>
> **Anne:** *Is that unusual?*
>
> **Grace:** *For Sudanese people? Yeah, exactly! I reckon my mom is very different. Because she didn't have it… she was the only girl among four boys, she thought "I don't want my kids to suffer". And she passed it to us.*

The girls and young women of the Sudanese diaspora, while benefiting from enduringly strong cultural and familial connections, bear additional gender re-negotiations which men do not, and which at times further complicate their integration and go unacknowledged. In *Cross-Marked: Sudanese-Australian Young Women Talk Education*, I have chosen to focus on co-participants between ages 18 and 25 years expressly because they inhabit the liminal space between childhood and adulthood, which in many ways compounds the difficulty of their integration into Australian society. In Sudan, the demands of adulthood come earlier, a cultural practice which continues to inform Sudanese-Australian culture:

> In Sudan there is no concept of "adolescence" as children over 12 years are regarded as adults, whereas in Australia adolescence is a distinct category. These problems often result in low self-esteem, confusion of identity and experiences of social isolation. (Malual, 2004:33)

Grace was a student at Victoria University and was employed as a multicultural education aide at River Nile Learning Centre[12] when I ran the film workshop at the school. She was immediately engaged in the shooting, and a quiet but insistent discussion stimulator. Grace consistently challenged and encouraged the students to look more deeply at the repercussions of the statements they made, and was at times frustrated by what she described as their lack of ambition. During 'down times' when the students were at lunch, or before they had arrived for school, Grace and I would talk – often

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[12] River Nile Learning Centre was founded in Melbourne's western suburb of Footscray in 2006 as "a response to the educational difficulties faced by young refugees in Australia who have suffered from disrupted education…" and "provide educational services to the refugee community, as well as conduct curriculum research in the area of refugee education". From http://www.rnlc.org.au/ accessed on August 9, 2009.

with Judith, the teacher at River Nile – about the 'state of things' for African young people from refugee backgrounds. Grace always had a 'big picture' approach to these discussions, clearly perceiving some of the macro- and micro-inequities that affected the situations in which the participants found themselves. About halfway through the two-month project, I encouraged Grace to make her own film, as she clearly had much to say and had highly developed perspectives on her community.

The film was largely shot on one afternoon in April 2008 in the kitchen of the River Nile Learning Centre. Soon after that day, Grace was 'let go' from her role as multicultural education aide at the Centre due to funding cutbacks. She left for lunch that afternoon and never returned. She didn't return my calls or text messages. In January 2009, Grace contacted me and said she had been going through a bad time but was "back", and we met. She watched the latest draft of her film and liked it. She was excited to have a copy of it to take with her. We discussed the possibility of shooting more and adding to the film, for which she expressed enthusiasm. We also discussed Lina Deng's idea of bringing all the co-participants together for a dinner gathering at which they could view each other's films, discuss the process of being involved in this research, and make connections with each other. Lina and Nyadol were keen to discuss the possibility of developing an African-Australian women's association, and a dinner might provide a forum for its inauguration. Grace was not interested in such an event, commenting that they didn't really have anything in common. When I contacted her after this meeting to arrange subsequent editing sessions, she never returned my calls.

Grace's film largely addresses her family relationships, her strong home culture of education, and her views about the difference between public perceptions of the Lost Boys and the invisibility of Sudanese girls and young women. Grace clearly articulates her view that the Sudanese diasporic community must 'move on', and in order to do this they are creating and must communicate 'new stories'. By the time we met again in January 2009, Grace had re-enrolled in university and was working toward a degree.

Ethnographic documentary, *as it was (and wasn't)*

For the past forty years or more there have been ongoing debates about the definition, nature and audience of ethnographic film. The literature abounds with debate and development of the work begun, probably, with *Nanook of the North* (1922) by Robert Flaherty, and including the work of Rouch in Nigeria (from the 1940s); Worth and Adair in the US (in the 1960s-70s); Tim Asch (largely in the 70s); the MacDougalls in Africa and Australia (from the 1980s); and which continues to evolve today.

Concerned about blurring of definitions in this field, scholars, including Jay Ruby, take great pains to detail their perceived differences between ethnographic documentaries and everything else. There is considerable scholarship available on ethnographic documentary, including seminal texts by filmmaker-scholars MacDougall (1998, MacDougall and Taylor); Tobing Rony (1996); Barbash and Taylor (1997); Heider (2006); Rouch (2003); and Ruby (2000). The changing nature of media production, consumption and distribution itself counters Ruby's somewhat embittered assertion that

> So-called ethnographic films are, in fact, films about culture and not films that pictorially convey ethnographic knowledge. They are produced by professional filmmakers who have little or no knowledge of anthropology and by anthropologists who thoughtlessly follow the dictates of documentary realism. (Ruby, n.d., *Manifesto*).

What Ruby calls Ethnographic Cinema (EC), Rouch called alternately ciné-ethnography and ethno-fiction, while others know it as ethnographic documentary. Bill Nichols, in *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of meaning in contemporary culture* (1994) states unequivocally that "ethnographic film is in trouble" (1994:63).

As I engaged in these intercultural collaborative film projects, I began to consider a new kind of ethnographic documentary style; something which did not exactly fit the definitions (contradictory as they sometimes seemed) of either traditional ethnographic documentary, or of this elusive 'ethnocinema' I had seen mentioned sporadically. Grace's film, *Slowly By Slowly*, made me realise – both through our conversations and our collaborative process – that I needed to define these terms and understand

where this work was positioned.

In attempting to clarify the attributes of ethnographic film, Heider admits in his 2006 update of the seminal *Ethnographic Film* that "it now seems clear that there are many ways to make films of ethnographic value." (2006:51). And yet, he goes on to say, "the single best predictor of ethnographicness in a film is the extent to which an ethnographer was involved in the filmmaking" (2006: 57). He still contends that "No ethnographic film can stand by itself," despite the fact that – he believes - *written* ethnographies can. Heider says "it is impossible to conceive of ethnographies made up of pictures without words". And yet, films contain both words *and* images. Why must an ethnographic film be "supplemented by written ethnographic materials" (2006:58) as Heider claims? When one considers the work of filmmakers such as Trinh T. Min-ha, it is a truism to state that viewers have experienced the multi-layered filmic and ethnographic troublings inherent in films such as *Reassemblage* (1983), which Minh-ha has always intended as stand-alone works independent of academic commentary.

Still, much that is written on ethnographic film continues to reify difference and regard ethnographic cinema primarily as just another tool for studying the Other (which is decidedly *not* how I viewed *Cross-Marked*). Developments toward a new anthropology and within ethnography by scholars, including Rosaldo, who critique traditional ethnographical practice as a "mythic past, [in which] a strict division of labor separated the Lone Ethnographer from 'his native' sidekick" (Rosaldo, 1993:31), continue to help ethnographic documentary break free of its constrictive subject/researcher origins.

What becomes clear is that ethnographic film is changing, and the boundaries are expanding more quickly than academic discourses can comfortably accommodate. MacDougall and Taylor (1998), Crawford (1992), Nichols (1985; 1994), Minh-ha (1989) and others have all written on the necessity for rethinking of those structures, relationships and audiences affected by, and involved in, the production of what can be considered ethnographic films.

Ruby, as one of the founders of visual anthropology, has a significant claim to understanding and helping to define ethnographic film as a sub-discipline of anthropology. And yet, his ideas of what constitutes ethnographic film in an evolving interdisciplinarity for the 21st century seem outdated. Despite his recent retirement, Ruby's texts and commentary are still ubiquitous in ethnographic film courses, and his views are influential. Unfortunately for non-anthropologists, his writings too often rely on the Us/Them binary and his arguments seem to seek to preserve an imagined 'purity' of anthropologically-trained ethnographers. Prins makes the point that "the dividing line between ethnographic and commercial or other visual media is blurred at best" (2004:508).

In *Picturing Culture* (2000) Ruby attacks Nichols (1994) for suggesting that anthropologists may be resisting the inevitable evolution of ethnographic film, and yet his criticism seems to verify Nichols' claim. Ruby asserts that true ethnographic films and films made by woman/native/Other "are distinct in two significant ways" (2000:31), primarily that "ethnography…expresses the view of an outsider." Surely autoethnographers including Bochner and Ellis would disagree. But more disturbingly, Ruby claims that

> the intention of an ethnography is to contribute to an anthropological discourse about human behavior. Native producers seldom have either the interest or the competence to make such a contribution – at least, not in any direct fashion. (2000:31)

Trinh T. Minh-ha, whose seminal text *Woman/native/other* (1989) [quoted by Ruby and Nichols both] challenges exactly this positionality, suggests instead that filmmakers from 'marginalised' positionalities have not only the right but the ethical imperative to tell their own stories, or to at least participate in the telling. She goes further to compel marginalised filmmakers/artmakers/writers to make their works *for* their own communities, in addition to *out of* their own communities. Ruby does not see any future of ethnographic film as moving toward self-made films by former subjects of ethnographic films. He sees these as different documents completely, with different agendas, and not to be confused with 'legitimate' ethnographic films. Ruby believes "the future of ethnographic film is located

in anthropologically grounded theories and anthropologically trained filmmakers taking control of the genre" (2000:31). I agree with Ruby's project for defining the terms of ethnographic cinema as it changes and develops into the 21st century. Yet it is my belief that ethnocinema is intrinsically answering the call for a need to define this new cinema, and it is in an organic blending of the dual perspectives of maker/filmed that the theoretical arguments of Ruby and Minh-ha might be coalesced. This new aesthetic may also contain feminist notions or ways of seeing and/or being characterised by multiplicity. Nichols wondered at this possibility 15 years ago, yet noted "the possibility of a feminist ethnographic film aesthetic, however, has received no debate at all, to my knowledge" (1994:71); it is a possibility which today still calls for far greater development. Rouch himself challenged anthropological claims to, and definitions of, ethnographic documentary, and wanted to

> transform if from "the elder daughter of colonialism, a discipline reserved to people with power interrogating people without it. I want to replace it with a shared anthropology…an anthropological dialogue between people belonging to different cultures, which to me is the discipline of human sciences for the future". (Rouch in Aufderheide, 2007:112)

Minh-ha challenges notions of ethnographic film itself, and offers what Crawford calls a "fly-in-the-I"[13] (Crawford, 1992:79) alternative to western notions of filmically representing 'the Other'. Her work effectively unsettles the binary tensions of Us/Them and of ethnography/documentary, and offers a deconstructed alternative which, Crawford suggests, may provide "constructive solutions" to those wishing to work cross-collaboratively to explore subjectivity and representation. Minh-ha urges us to go beyond a subjectivity in film that "merely consist(s) of talking about oneself, be this talking indulgent or critical" (Minh-ha 1997:419). Her filmmaking and research rejects a "subjectivity that is still unaware of its own constituted nature" (419), and demands of both filmmaker and collaborator-participant an attempt to examine our co-created roles as

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[13] Crawford identifies three modes of ethnographic film, which he calls "the perspicuous, the experiential and the evocative, modes which overlap with three filmic approaches I have called the-fly-on-the-wall, the-fly-in-the-soup and the-fly-in-the-I." (1992:67). Minh-ha, according to Crawford, fits his "fly-in-the-I" mode which moves beyond the participant-observer research strategy in ethnography, and "in which the camera is used to comment on and 'deconstruct' Western conventions of representing other cultures." (Crawford, 1992:79).

self/other in a dominant Western culture which seeks to maintain hegemonic systems of self-definition.

Ethnographic documentary in Australia

Within the Australian context, there are important precedents for soliciting the input and active participation of co-participants in the ethnographic documentary process. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (now called the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Studies [AIATSIS]) contracted David and Judith MacDougall in the late 1970s and 1980s to make a series of films about the Aurukun community in Cape York, Queensland. The films became more collaborative than the MacDougalls' earlier East African documentary projects, and ultimately served an important role in documenting land rights ownership issues. The process was innovative (in documentary terms) in that the MacDougalls were working *for the community*, and thus the agenda for the films was essentially the community's. This was a major departure from earlier models of ethnographic film, in which documentary filmmakers visited exotic locations and filmed from a 'fly on the wall' perspective, seeking to intrude as little as possible on the 'real' life of the communities they were documenting. *Cross-Marked,* too, grew out of the questionings of my Sudanese-Australian students in Melbourne about why conditions were not different for them in schools, and the collaborative nature of the project has changed some of my original intentions. However, Grace ascribes misrepresentation to outsiders making films about 'exotic' other locations. She remembers a conversation where I encouraged Sudanese-Australians to go back and make films which might represent Africa more accurately. Ethnocinema goes beyond this binarism: it wonders whether we can make films together, across borders, across ethnicities or experiential divides; films that trouble notions of 'authenticity' of representation. Ethnocinema challenges filmmakers to document cultural frontiers where we are all emerging in relation to one another, and rejects the notion of 'real' or 'authentic' selves which need to (or can) be documented.

In his *Transcultural Cinema,* MacDougall identifies a form of filmic testimony, which he calls 'conversation with the filmmaker' (1998:118), and which he positions somewhere between storytelling and formal interviews. This less formal structure, which I have most closely used in *Cross-Marked*, resembles participant observation but allows for commentary on the process and for contingencies which arise in the ethnographic filmmaking process, including both filmmaker and co-participant in this commentary. While MacDougall explores subjectivity, he reminds us that as filmmakers we are always already in the film. He cautions against imagining an ethnographic documentary that can be considered 'truth' and asserts that "the representation of anything is by definition the creation of something different" (MacDougall, 1998:48). Not only can the co-participants of *Cross-Marked* not be said to be 'wholly' or 'truthfully' represented in the films, but their representations will surely be read differently by different audiences. To MacDougall, "films are objects, and like many objects they may have multiple identities" (MacDougall, 1998:150). Layers of representation and object/subject-ification are apparent in *Cross-Marked* as they are in any ethnographic/ethnocinematic project, but the shared focus of education and its role in the lives of young women emerging from refugee pasts allows their individualities to emerge. The extent to which the co-participants were a disparate group, and their varied relations to me, is evident in the films, and informs their responses to the question of schooling in Australia for new Sudanese immigrants.

The MacDougalls' experience of bringing together "different people whose agendas were not necessarily identical" (Grimshaw 2001:141), challenged the filmmakers' artistic and political vision of their film(s)[14], a challenge I encountered repeatedly while making the films which comprise *Cross-Marked*. These challenges do shape and re-orient the films during the filmmaking process, and it is clear that the ethnocinematographer who is

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[14] David and Judith MacDougall have developed a theory of 'participatory cinema', which they contrast with typical cinema verite. Patricia Aufderheide still classifies their work as "classically observational" (2007:113), but reminds us that the MacDougalls wish to "reclaim documentary as an arena of engagement with the world, one that actively confronts reality, and that in so doing is transformed into a mode of inquiry in its own right" (2007:113). By this definition, the MacDougalls' work might be considered a bridge between traditional ethnographic documentary and ethnocinema.

open to these challenges will benefit from the fluid nature of this kind of work, as will the films themselves. But as Grimshaw points out, the implications of learning to work in a fully collaborative manner go far beyond the films which result, in that "the negotiation of relationships within any particular film may be taken as symbolic of the dynamics at work in modern society as a whole" (Grimshaw 2001:141). This is true of Grace's film *Slowly by Slowly*, and of the other films in the series, in regard to the dynamics within both educational and broader societal contexts overall.

Professor Marcia Langton (former Chair of AIATSIS) argues in her essay '*Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television': An Essay on the Politics & Aesthetics of Filmmaking By & Aabout Aboriginal People and Things* (Langton, 1993) that Indigenous people must have far greater involvement in their representation in the media, including film – not just those who are making their own films, such as director Rachel Perkins. This must include a dialogue in which "all parties test and repeatedly adjust imagined models of each other ('be it at a supermarket check-out or in a film co-production') to define a working form of intercultural exchange" (Morris, 1998:244). While the numbers of Indigenous Australian filmmakers continue to increase, what we are considering here are notions of true collaboration in an intercultural context. MacDougall, surprisingly, in 1998 still reports that "to my knowledge there are as yet no ethnographic films that integrate long segments of indigenous filming with those by an outside filmmaker, nor collaborations incorporating the different perspectives of several filmmakers" (1998:120). Clearly there is a need for a redefining and revitalising of the work being done within ethnographic documentary, and one way forward may be the emergent – though still largely undefined – genre of ethnocinema.

Ethnocinema, *as it is (by way of what it is not)*

A review of the current literature produces only a few scant indicators of what might constitute ethnocinema. Most recognise and seek to preserve its origins as a tool of anthropology; as a research device for assisting researchers going into 'the field', collecting data, and producing analysis. I

am suggesting that ethnocinema in the 21st century has moved beyond these origins and that the role of anthropologists and all researchers must adapt to changing communities, transnational identities and new notions of representation. Film theorists and documentarians Barbash and Taylor suggest cultural differences are "being ceaselessly de-formed and re-formed on your doorstep wherever you are" (Barbash & Taylor, 1997:5). While most contemporary ethnographic documentarians insist on being transparent about their place and agency in the filmmaking process, some films will emerge as records more of relationship than encounter. These films, I propose, are intrinsically ethnocinematic and highlight the liminal space of intercultural encounters in the contemporary world.

Fatimah Tobing Rony delineates three modalities of her own in "ethnographic representation in early cinema" (1996:195), from the work of Regnault, which Tobing Rony calls "ethnographic inscription" (195), to Flaherty's *Nanook*, which she terms the "taxidermic mode of ethnographic representation" (195), and to Rouch's self-reflexive films of the 1950s. She identifies a shift which began in the 1970s within anthropology and ethnographic film toward troubling traditional notions of representation, both in the West and in cultures and communities which had been the subjects of such films, and in which indigenous and diasporic peoples are learning how to use video technology and taking control of their own representations. This is work that was initiated and defended by such filmmakers as David and Judith MacDougall, Faye Ginsburg, Timothy Asch and others (197). She also considers the 1972 'ethnocinematic experiment' of Worth and Adair in *American Indians and the ethnocinematic complex: From native participation to production control* (1989), in which seven co-participants of Navajo heritage were given video cameras and asked to make films which were 'Indian', as a seminal study. Tobing Rony (1996) and Pack (2000) consider developments in Indigenous media in relation to the largely essentialist analyses of the Navajo project's researchers. Pack explores in depth the anthropological notion of "native authenticity" (Pack, 2000:274) and whether – and to what extent – this remains possible through film and video. The elusive 'native authenticity' couldn't be further from the

concerns of the ethnocinematic filmmaker. While he upholds the anthropological standards of Ruby, Pack makes strong points about the impossibility of a homogeneous, generic 'native' way of seeing, through film or other means of representation, and he quotes Clifford's well-known argument that "all ethnographic representations are partial truths" (1986:7 in Pack 2000:278). What Pack lacks is a way of pushing collaborative ethnographic film/video projects into the next stage; these are not films which seek to document 'dying' cultures or even to 'empower' disenfranchised communities. These voices already have agency, and they share community or agendas with their collaborators – these are not 'authentic' identities speaking from some Enlightenment ideal of native purity to the more analytical/'polluted' West. Ethnocinematic films document relationships between makers from different cultures or sub-cultures who now share common space – be that political, philosophical, geographical or virtual.

In the case of *Cross-Marked*, we are all makers in a shared dialogue about education. No perspective (neither theirs nor mine) is prioritised, and the intended audience has been negotiated between the co-participants/makers. The intended audience may be small/academic and large/popular, all at once. There are no artificial lines drawn in this increasingly technologised or rhizomatic (Cormier, 2008:3) age. Popular culture is pedagogical, and street ethnographers can be academically relevant, although not everyone agrees.

By Ruby's reckoning, what is emerging as ethnocinema has almost nothing to do with ethnographic films. What Ruby calls Ethnographic Cinema must, he claims (among other things) "be the work of academically educated and academically employed socio-cultural anthropologists" (Ruby, n.d.:par.3). By this definition, even Jean Rouch doesn't qualify. His 'manifesto' was published in 2000 as *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, and the text asserts Ruby's call for places where"critical standards are debated and canons develop" (2000:23), and the need for ethnographic filmmakers to generate a set of critical standards analogous to those for written ethnographies. In this regard I agree with Ruby, and yet my

extension of ethnocinema, and desire to define its characteristics, diverges from Ruby's in two important ways: firstly as a call to ethnocinematic filmmakers (whether academic or non-academic) that films included in this category must prioritise a collaborative relationship between makers and imaged; and secondly, that Ruby's so-called "marketplace considerations" (2000:4) need not pollute the product which is made. After thirty-four years of frustrating and unsuccessful effort to distinguish anthropological investigation from film-as-ethnography, Ruby proposed in 2008 that "anthropologists should simply relinquish the term ethnographic to professional documentary filmmakers and seek another term to characterize their efforts" (Ruby, 2008:3).

And yet, confusion remains. By 2006, one of the scant references to ethnocinema appears online in *Burmese Daze: My Date with a Transvestite Spirit Medium*, (Davis, 2006), a rambling ethnographic narrative of one man's experience in Myanmar. The author views a video of Myanmar's Festival of Spirit Possession which he characterises as "a surrealist anti-documentary, with no voice-over, odd visual juxtapositions, and none of the quasi-academic tone that afflicts so much *official ethno cinema*" (2006:par. 9) I could find no definitive explanation of what might constitute 'official' ethnocinema, nor, similarly, one uncontestable definition of ethnographic documentary for that matter. An abstract for an academic paper on the ritual branding of Andean cattle in Peru refers to the paper as an "ethnocinematographical study in which we reinterpret, with and in the film…" the acts which they have recorded filmically, using the video cameras as "observation instruments" (Reyna, 2005:1). I contend that the portability and usability of contemporary video and editing equipment suggests a more collaborative imperative in creating works of film which can (and often are) seen well beyond academic research circles. The very accessibility of video requires researchers to reconsider our audience and our methods: while traditional (written) research documents were seldom accessible to the subjects of that research, video is not only accessible but much more easily distributable and reproducible. For this reason (but not this reason alone), I reject the notion of ethnocinema as in any way

'observational', and suggest that it must, by its nature be interactive.

Several recent European film festivals list among their offerings the category of ethnocinema, but no examples are given, nor the term defined. Yet other contemporary film festivals appear to use the terms 'ethnographic' and 'ethnocinematic' interchangeably, which only adds to the confusion. I was clutching at straws. But then, in 2001, came *Notes from the underground*, Gocic's insider look at the filmmaker Emir Kusturica, in which he discusses what he alternatively calls ethno-cinema and then just 'ethno'. A *Modern Language Review* article is of the opinion that,

> *The appeal of Kusturica's films...is that of 'ethno' cinema, a cinema rooted in local traditions but expressed in 'Western' form. This liberal political engagement with exotic subject matter is none the less, argues Gocic, an empowerment of the marginal.* (Haymes, 2004:2)

and from a far less favourable online book review:

> *he invests considerably more time to embracing instead his own recurring but vague references to 'ethno-cinema' as a base context from which Kusturica is operating (and by which Gocic seems to mean to have it both ways: indulging in exoticism and critiquing others' supposed essentializing). The only specific examples he offers to define this category are a handful of big budget Hollywood films involving Native Americans.* (Karl, 2004:par.25)

Gocic himself says that, "inside film history itself, ethno cinema is the most exciting cinematic concept that the world has had to offer in the past two decades: aesthetically, it is difficult to argue against" (2001:168). However, throughout the text his attempts to define ethnocinema contradict and obscure any practical working definition. Gocic identifies 'ethno' as having been around since the 1950s and as being typified by a sense of the "local", including local motifs, but frequently made for a Western audience (2001:120). Surprisingly, only nine pages later he locates the birth of 'ethno cinema' "in the late 1970s and early 1980s solely judging by the Cannes winners, which were Italian at the end of the 1970s" (2001:129).

Nevertheless, ethnocinema includes, he says, a "feeling for a foreign audience, the trans-national step forward" (2001:120). Elsewhere, he lists the following characteristics: "nostalgia," (as a search for the "'lost 'authenticity' of primitivism"), "intertextuality, openness and subjectivity (as postmodern

characteristics), incredulity (or denial of ideology), and 'double coding' or unexpected, surrealist, incongruous elements" (2001:158). Gocic seems to equate Kusturica's 'ethno' or 'ethnocinema' with an 'ethnic' sensibility, identity or location. If this were sufficient to define the genre, surely all films are ethnocinematic, as they are all suffused with particular cultural sensibilities.

If, by use of the term 'ethnic', Gocic is suggesting 'minority culture' (which it seems he is), many might take affront at the notion that an internationally award-winning white male director (albeit in Bosnia) is 'ethno' and that his corollary in any other European country is not. Similarly, a filmmaker who is "woman/native/other" (Nichols 1992:44 in Pack 2000:273) such as Minh-ha might not consider a white male European filmmaker to be ethno-anything. The term and its connotations are clearly problematic and poorly defined.

Therefore, I began to consider ethnocinema as a descriptor of its process rather than of its being. If ethnography can be characterised as a description of people (through writing), then ethnocinema can surely be first and foremost a description of people (through filming). Similarly, autoethnography suggests 'autoethnocinema', and can be legitimately understood as an investigative strategy or method. Like ethnography, ethnocinema can have many forms and – unlike Ruby's contention that it must be "avowedly anti-realist, anti-positivist, dissociated from the canons of documentary realism" (Ruby, n.d.:par.4) – can be anything its makers and imaged want (and agree) it should be.

> Subcultures, cultures, and supercultures merge and emerge anew, ceaselessly. In the rough-and-tumble of transnational migration and capitalism, what was exotic yesterday may be domestic today. And what is domestic today may be exotic tomorrow. (Barbash & Taylor, 1997:5)

Traditional ethnographic documentaries may be – in this rough-and-tumble – a thing of the past. The story of Grace Mabor and other Sudanese young women navigating the Australian education system is, simultaneously, the story of the Australian education system navigating its Sudanese students.

This complexity and mutuality combines to suggest an emergent notion of something more than just 'encounter': ethnocinema, a type of ethnographic documentary which is relational, collaborative and seeks to create social change. In ethnocinematic relationships, we are mutually changed, are mutually interrogated, and this duality is present in the films.

In Grace's film, her relationship with me as teacher and not-her-teacher in not-her-school helped to facilitate conversations about the often-oppressive practices of mainstream schools:

> **Anne:** *What were the teachers like?*
>
> **Grace**: *They were actually very nice. Most of them expect--in my English classes--sometimes you have to write essays about yourself or about your family. And they expected me to write essays about weird stuff like, oh yeah, about Africa. And I would tell them about Africa--we weren't rich but we weren't poor. But I think they expected me to be like, 'Oh we were living in the jungle and the lions came,' or something like that. I don't know. Because every time I wrote an essay they'd be like, 'Grace I think you need to put some more stuff because I don't think you're giving me your all' and I'm like, 'Okay, I'll try'.*
>
> **Anne**: *Do you think that's racist?*
>
> **Grace**: *No, it's not racist, I just think they have a different perception of life there in Africa. They think it's like living in the villages but they don't understand that when you live in Africa it's pretty much like here.*
> *(Slowly By Slowly, 2008)*

This elision of Grace's real and complex story for one that is simpler and more familiar to the new audience is a common experience of the co-participants of these films (and sometimes to the subjects of traditional ethnographic films). These young women consistently express feeling both invisible and hyper-visible, and this kind of inaccuracy (or projection of Western fantasies/desires) of the Western concept of African life is one reason why they continued to feel unseen, even after their mainstream school integration had begun (or finished).

Of the twenty-three co-participants (only fifteen went on to make films), only two responded explicitly to questions of what might constitute a liberatory intercultural filmmaking practice which we might define as ethnocinema. Both Grace and Nyadol stated clearly that while collaboration was to be encouraged, young Sudanese both at home and abroad needed to begin

making films for themselves (see more on Nyadol's reflections in the Conclusion). They rejected the idea of 'outsiders' entering the community/ies and facilitating or creating films of their own, despite the fact that in some very real sense, this was exactly what we were engaged in while creating *Cross-Marked*. Bochner and Ellis (1996) remind us that autoethnography provides a paradigm through which we can use "another person's world of experience to inspire critical reflection on [our] own" (1996:22). Never in any of the films did the co-participants indicate any experience of teachers' critical reflection about their relationships with these students. Any reference to the Sudanese-Australian students' backgrounds was largely either a re-marginalising of their cultural 'difference' (as in Grace's commentary, or took place during Cultural Diversity days where Sudanese-Australian students were asked to dance, cook or recount narratives of their refugee pasts), or overtly negative (expressed in racist encounters, or in the context of curricular explorations of AIDS, disease, famine, or war). By and large, though, their backgrounds remained invisible, non-integrated into the multicultural fabric of their schools.

Grace states that African students – whether from refugee backgrounds or not – must integrate with their non-African peers, and that teachers should encourage them in this. She recognises the attraction of sticking together, but asserts that language and cultural acquisition only take place through integration in the schoolyard, in classrooms, and outside of school. When questioned on the pervasive racism which often confronts young African students in 'mixed' social and academic groups, Grace matter-of-factly states that this is inevitable and one must simply "let go" of the hurt this causes, which is "all you can do". She affirms that increased intercultural understanding will result from these efforts and will eventually benefit all.

Grace, like many of the co-participants, describes the role of teachers as pivotal in helping students from refugee backgrounds to remain in school:

> **Anne:***…what do African students need, in secondary and even tertiary* [schools]*?*

> *Grace: Same as anyone. Just understanding and communication. Because obviously if you can't understand something, you need someone with you who's going to encourage you and make you feel like you're not wasting your time. That it's worth it, you know, that's all you need. Because if someone's always making you look like you're stupid, you'll never do it, right? So you need somebody patient, to be around you.*
>
> *Anne: What prevents African girls from staying in school longer?*
>
> *Grace: First, they get pregnant. Second, they don't have the motivation, like they don't have anybody to back them up and tell them, 'Yeah, go for it, you can do it,' you know? They don't have that. And that's why they don't actually go for it. They just dream, and dreaming…everybody dreams. But then you have to do something to reach there. (Slowly By Slowly, 2008)*

Grace is fortunate in that both her mother and father were highly educated, and have encouraged their children to do the same. Her mother began teaching her children English from birth, and actively encourages them in educational pursuits:

> *Anne: Where did your mother get that love of learning?*
>
> *Grace: Well, she says that when she was a kid, she always liked school. Then when her dad passed away, it kind of made her feel like 'I don't have anything'. Her mom was never educated, and her dad was never educated. But the one thing that they had was for her to go to school. That's one thing they really wanted her to do. She felt like they really wanted her to do something for herself. Not for them, but for her. She feels like education takes you places, it makes you somebody. And why wouldn't you want that? It's the best gift anybody can give you, or you can give yourself. (Slowly By Slowly, 2008)*

Ethnocinema, *as it might be*

The films which comprise *Cross-Marked* can also be viewed as documenting emerging identities and viewpoints which have previously existed mainly as oral explorations within the Sudanese-Australian community. Committing these young women's voices, images and viewpoints to film allows them to have independent visual and oral expression within the educational and wider communities. As these young women negotiate their development as African, and as Australian, viewing their own films enables them to reflect on their experiences and to contextualise these experiences in relationship to others. This includes their non-African peers, their male Sudanese-Australian counterparts, and their parents and teachers, and helps these peers to examine our own subjectivities from a more critical position.

Peter Loizos articulates his understanding of the particular requirements of ethnographic documentaries in his (1993) *Innovation in Ethnographic Film*, in which he considers Heider's (1976/2006), proposal that ethnographies must address "whole bodies, and whole people, in whole acts," and which must draw from significant "anthropological research" (Loizos, 1993:7). Conversely, Rouch encouraged the potential of ethnographic film as a "celebration of a relationship" between filmmaker and imaged, in which the "rapport and participation" (2003:12) between both parties enhances any end-product that is collectively achieved. Loizos's claim (like Ruby's) that contemporary filmmakers blur the lines between 'authentic' ethnography and general documentary seems increasingly out of place. No longer are ethnographic filmmakers (or their imaged) content to bring the stories of "distant peoples to audiences in North America and Europe" (Heider, 2006:15). When the ethnocinematographer turns her/his lens on multicultural communities at home (which must – in ethnocinema – include her/himself), opportunities for collaboration and social change emerge and demand to be explored.

As Barbash and Taylor (1997) point out, "collaboration between filmmakers and subjects in documentary has aesthetic, ethical, and political consequences" (1997:87), and research documentarians must be constantly aware of these implications while conducting their research projects. I have highlighted these consequences in some chapters of this work. An ethnocinematic approach embraces perhaps the most important consideration for the contemporary ethnocinematographer: that, as Barbash and Taylor put it, "even you, in and of yourself, may, in a sense, be intercultural" (1997:7). For Rouch and Feld, a significant benefit of filmic research is its ability to share with the participant the ongoing drafts of the research document. It is this crucial step which enhances the participation of the co-participant, and "allows the ethnographer-filmmaker to meditate openly and self-critically on his or her own role" (Rouch & Feld, 2003:19). In *Cross-Marked*, this process of collaboration and feedback, not only during filming, but also during the editing process, has had aesthetic, ethical and political consequences for the project and for my work as a researcher which are also apparent in this work.

Cultural considerations are well-documented in ethnographic documentary literature (Heider, 2006; Crawford 1992; Rouch & Feld 2003), but I encountered technical considerations as well. It was important to me to not work with a 'research team', as I was committed to co-creating films in which these young women felt as 'equal' with me as possible – where there were no experts. And to creating an atmosphere in which the camera could be forgotten, played with, or in which the filming could unfold as part of a conversation between us. I knew that if I entered the homes, hangouts, or university settings of the co-participants with a cinematographer and/or sound person with me, the experience (and the films) would be very different from what I had hoped for. I wanted the project to create an 'alternative space' where they could express existing views and emotions, not 'perform' in yet another white-dominated space or encounter. And while of course this was partially a naïve desire to make films which recorded some abstract notion of the 'truth' (a notion I have since abandoned), the one sense in which I did achieve my objective was that I most often remained a racial minority in my encounters. So if I was not powerless, I was at least a minority, thereby unsettling the white-dominated spaces these co-participants usually find themselves in.

What I ended up with, at least initially, was lots of dynamic conversation with little 'usable' footage. Lina Deng, my first co-participant, was generous in her willingness to reshoot the same (never the same but similar) conversation many times after I'd gone home and examined the footage: it was too dark, too light, too quiet, too loud, or poorly-framed. In consultation with the co-participants, I decided not to reshoot any of the footage. We all felt that a certain quality of spontaneity would be lost, and with it the excitement of the 'first go' from some of the earlier footage which was important to us all.

Some of the films in *Cross-Marked* have been criticised by filmmaker colleagues as being technically flawed and not of a standard for television or wide circulation. In the end, I have come to accept this outcome as appropriate for the *Cross-Marked* project, despite some desire on the part of

the co-participants and also myself for the films to enjoy the widest possible circulation. I'm still not sure whether films which set out to 'create an alternative space' for young women to have their say can also be films which would be attractive to mainstream viewers. Perhaps Ruby's claim that ethnographic cinema must have "no economic potential" and remain "removed from the economic dictates of public and state television" (Ruby, n.d.:par.9) has some veracity. Certainly these young women's words/stories/performances are worthy of mass circulation and consideration. However, the project itself identifies a need to *disrupt* notions of learning and becoming, and I'm not sure a commitment to these ideals is compatible with mass marketing. I believe the films trouble notions of representation in ways that aesthetically slick, emotive and happy-ending films cannot, and in this I am more than satisfied with the outcome.

Like Minh-ha's *Reassemblage*, and other films which "exaggerate reflexivity to an extent where the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction no longer exist" (Crawford, 1992:79), the transgressive value of these ethnocinematic films is primarily in disrupting notions of agency for *Cross-Marked*'s 'fly-in-the-I' co-participants during the process of seeing, viewing, and re-viewing their emerging and constantly changing subjectivities.

Ethnocinema, then, suggests that the voices/images of women/natives/others have something in common, and have agency in contributing to ethnographic film, whether independently or collaboratively, interculturally or intra-culturally. This attempt to offer a working definition of ethnocinema may share more with the more recent movement of intercultural cinema which emerged around 1990. Laura Marks identifies this emergence as connected to three main factors: "the rise of multiculturalism…availability of funding…and an intellectual climate characterised by the disintegration of master narratives and a growing conceptualisation of knowledge as partial and contested" (2000:2). Whatever its filmic and academic antecedents, ethnocinema is emerging, and – as Rouch has repeatedly showed us – 'the other cannot be denied' as his/her image and means of production transforms.

CHAPTER 2: "TOO DARK, TOO TALL, TOO SOMETHING":
Refugeity and the New Racism in Australian Schools

> How does one represent other cultures? What is another culture?
> (Said, 1978:325)

FROM ONE EXTREME TO ANOTHER

Nyadol Nyuon is a 25-year-old Sudanese-Australian woman enrolled in a Bachelor of Arts degree at Victoria University. Despite arriving in Australia mid-Year 11, Nyadol went on to graduate high school with a 67 ENTER score[15], higher than most of her Sudanese-Australian peers – indeed, higher than many of her Australian counterparts. She has successfully navigated the third year of her degree, but her residual impression of her high school performance is one she describes as failure. She was told by her teachers that despite English language skills which exceeded many of her Australian classmates, she could not enrol in mainstream English, and therefore she completed the ESL stream. Her dream is to study Law, but she was fervently discouraged from this by her teachers. Her presence in the BA program is to her a compromise, but she is determined to complete it and then attempt to transfer into Law. She is acutely aware of time going by, but she works hard and remains ambitious. She wanted to repeat her VCE primarily to "prove my teachers wrong", but her mother's advice compelled her to go on to university and let the past go.

> *I was very upset when I went to school sometimes, because I was constantly being put into categories that I did not think I fit in. They would think I'm traumatised, I'm a refugee, I'm a victim. And with all the best intentions that they had, it was almost as though I was being vilified for something – of course I'm a refugee, of course I've gone through these experiences. But one thing they failed to recognise in me is that I'm here in Australia now, and what you should be noticing now is not so much what I've suffered and what I've gone through and that I'm a refugee and I'm traumatised, it's the strength and the resilience that a lot of refugee people have. You can feel sympathy for me, but I really don't need that, and I think a lot of refugee people don't need that.*

Nyadol's interest in studying international law is to create change not only within Australia but back in Sudan as well. She is particularly concerned

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[15] The Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER) is the national Australian tertiary entrance score, and is a percentile ranking designed for university entrance, and is used only in the state of Victoria, although other Australian states and territories have comparable measures.

with the roles of women and their adaptation to new ways of being. Nyadol believes that young women have the "most changed" experience in coming to Australia:

> *(My mum) has always emphasised the importance of school. And that has made me stay in school longer, even when you feel like you want to give up, you're tired. You know, the fact that she tells you a story: "I was in school, and I wasn't able to complete my school because I was forced to marry someone else, and look at my life right now." So learning to be out there and talk about things that women have not necessarily done in the past, it's quite a new area for women to venture into.*

Many of the co-participants, including Nyadol, speak about the roles of women in the resettlement experience as being caught between two worlds. On the one hand, family expectations require young women to go to school, learn English and take advantage of the economic possibilities of the new country, but on the other hand, a daughter's study can come second to a son's. Lina Deng (Chapter 5) describes the experiences of many young women who, when studying, will often be told to prepare the meal, clean the house and serve a guest, while the son will be encouraged to continue his school work. When a young woman resists these customs, or extends her ambitions further, she may be seen as transgressive, a label which seems to follow her both inside the home and outside of it. Parents from refugee backgrounds often struggle to assist their children in a culture that is still frightening to them:

> …Parents may be fearful of people outside the family and hence may resist forming supportive social relationships or discourage their children from doing so. Some parents may also fear the consequences of their children's contact with a new culture, particularly if there is divergence of values between it and their own. This may not only affect children's abilities to make connections with their new culture, but may also lead to intergenerational conflict and an overly harsh or overprotective approach to parenting. (VFST[16], 2007:32)

Nyadol recognises the difficulties of straddling these intercultural demands for both parents and children, but sees a need to challenge these traditional roles of women:

> *Coming from a background where women sort of disappear into the background no matter how much they put forward, it becomes an*

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[16] Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, commonly known as Foundation House, is a "non-denominational, politically neutral and non-aligned" organisation which "provides a range of services to people from refugee backgrounds who have survived torture or war related trauma," and is a recognised leader in service provision for asylum seeker and refugee communities in Australia. http://www.survivorsvic.org.au/about/index.htm

> *important fight. Because you need to start presenting the ideas of women*
> *there, but not only of women but of women from your background*
> *because sometimes they're not very well represented in general.*

Many of the co-participants have discussed double standards for young
women versus their male counterparts: young women are often not allowed
out alone, or after dark. Riding in cars with males other than family
members is still sometimes seen as transgressive, and marriages are
sometimes still arranged. Even when they're not, the young man must come
from the appropriate tribe or clan in order to gain the young woman's
family's acceptance. Bride prices are still usually paid. Nyadol sees the
complexity of women's evolving identities in diasporic life:

> *Most women have brought up their kids single-handedly because of the*
> *war in Sudan, and they have taken up so many responsibilities. Which, in*
> *a certain way, should make them more adaptable in picking up a lot of*
> *other new stuff, but then again if you look at it it's a completely new way*
> *of thinking, a completely new way of living. And for some of them it's*
> *almost like beginning life again because you're completely*
> *disempowered. All your skills become invalid when you come to*
> *Australia. You can't even speak the language in the first place.[17]*

It's not easy for any member of a family to integrate into a new culture, but
for women the burden is exacerbated by what Nyadol calls the "burden of
carrying on culture". This is almost exclusively a woman's role, and it
extends beyond reproduction. It is traditionally the role of the female to
maintain the home, which is representative of the maintenance of 'home
culture'. That is not to say that there aren't many young men living on their
own in Australia who have taken on the burden of both traditionally male
and female roles: some young men cook, clean and maintain their own
homes in addition to maintaining their 'masculine' public personas. But for
women who have not previously been raised to cultivate a public persona this
task of re-constructing both a public and private identity can be daunting.

When asked what the most central conflict within the Sudanese-Australian
community is, Nyadol responded:

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[17] This experience of becoming almost children again due to the constraints of language has been
written about extensively by Gunew Sneja, but is beyond the scope of this research. See particularly
Framing Marginality:Multicultural Literary Studies. 1995. Carlton:Melbourne Univ Press*;* and
"Migrant Women Writers: Who's on Whose Margins?" in *Gender, Politics and Fiction: Twentieth
Century Australian Women's Novels.* 1992. Carole Ferrier, (ed.), St. Lucia: Univ of Queensland Press.

> *The main conflict in the Sudanese community is the perception of girls 'becoming too western', and rejecting what are considered 'Sudanese' ways of life.*

There is considerable debate within Sudanese communities about what "Sudanese ways of life" are. Those activities and customs considered by many men to be Sudanese ways of life are frequently traditional roles for women, and the co-participants have complained bitterly about how much of 'tradition' seems to rest on women's behaviour. How do you construct a new identity while retaining an old one? What makes them Sudanese? Is it colour of their skin, religion, food, family structures? Clearly these are ongoing negotiations within the community and are a constantly evolving process for all cultural groups and group members. Nyadol identifies the inextricable layers of becoming that are present in Sudanese-Australian young women:

> *I think the biggest challenge is actually finding a sense of belonging or a sense of self. We should respect the Sudanese traditions, we should always keep up with them, which I think is a decent and noble thing to do because your origin is important, your roots are important. But also you're constantly being asked out there to become Australian. And somehow these two cultures don't necessarily agree.*

The question is a sensitive one. In the period 1997-2007, 62% of all Sudanese immigrants were 24 years or younger, and "55 per cent of Sudanese settlers in Australia were male" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007:7). While the males still (as in the USA) statistically outnumber females, the nature of the Sudanese diaspora in Australia is informed by the loss of male heads of families in the conflict back home. Where men survive, they often travel between Sudan and Australia in order to maintain family obligations back home, and the women are still often left as heads of Australian households. These are new family constellations for the Sudanese. Despite remaining a collectivist society, these emerging Sudanese-Australian family groups demand a public identity of the women that previously was not required. The women are not always enthusiastic about these new tasks, but nonetheless they find themselves becoming in ways that are new and sometimes welcome.

Nyadol – like her co-participants - is vibrant, ambitious and eager to fit into Australian society. She has been let down by the education system, and has – in some ways differently than her peers in the project – been largely left to her own devices. Someone like Nyadol – with consistent prior education, good English skills, and strong family support – will succeed despite the school's underestimation of her potential, but for many of the co-participants, without these advantages, the outlook is more grim. They all highlight those very real educational needs of former refugees which go far beyond language. Each has made the point that no one took the time to talk to them, to assess them properly, or to assist them in making lasting and supportive relationships within the school system. The challenges facing students from refugee backgrounds are multiple, and cannot be reduced to a need for language, although this is often the case in funding and educational circles. While language acquisition is crucial to any integration process, it is not the only – or even the most daunting – obstacle the young women in my study have identified.

CALLING IT LIKE IT IS: When Words Are Not Enough

This chapter asserts that while language needs are identified by state and federal funding bodies, other tools for integration remain largely overlooked and underfunded. The school where I work is not unique in its struggle to meet the needs of our Sudanese-Australian students, and neither are our African students' struggles to meet the needs of the school. Over the past three years we have battled to find more funding for language assistance, but we have also begun to realise that these students need more than just language.

Students may feel alienated and anxious, according to the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House):

> The culture and structure of Australian schools is very different from
> what they are used to. Many refugees speak of the different teaching style
> in Australia, describing it as less formal, with an emphasis on
> experiential, self-motivated learning. (The Refugee Resettlement
> Handbook, 2005:18)

Other students who have had little experience of schooling prior to arrival in Australia can face other challenges: "For those who have not experienced any sort of formal education the structured learning environment of the school can be alienating" (VFST, 2005:19). Teachers, too, may experience a variety of reactions common to others working with refugees, including: "helplessness, guilt, anger, fear, avoidance reactions, or fulfilment" (VFST, 2007:36). The resource *School's In for Refugees: Whole School Guide to Refugee Readiness* also identifies "emotional blocks to learning" including "anger, low frustration tolerance, aggressive behaviour", and school strategies which include arts-based approaches "allow for appropriate expression of difficulties by telling somebody, storytelling, drama" (VFST, 2007:34). Teachers can easily burn out and, without sufficient professional development and support, can take out their frustrations on students, including former refugees. According to the *Refugee Resettlement Handbook,* "schools are one of the first casualties of war" (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2002:23, cited in VFST, 2005:18). Most schools are chronically under-resourced: even where there is individual or institutional dedication to helping students from refugee backgrounds, there is simply not enough time to give *enough* support. As a result, these students are sometimes streamed *out of* (or into!) mainstream classes inappropriately and can be inadequately advised about pathways for further study, and as a result describe feeling alienated at school. But perhaps most importantly, racism – both overt and covert – adds to their disconnection.

The co-participants in *Cross-Marked* have reported experiencing racism on a regular basis, but it is hard for them to prove. We know that verbal and psychological abuse as a devastating form of racism (Ambler, 1997:8-11; Peacock & Albert, 2000:11-16) is alive and well in schools, not only in Australia, but internationally. Achol, Nyadol and the other co-participants *all* reported experiencing verbal and psychological abuse, including subjugation, and more overt forms of racism such as phrases like 'monkey', 'nigger', 'go back to the jungle', 'go home', and 'black bitch'. All participants expressed the negative effects of these experiences, which were

exacerbated by school staff who regularly denied, ignored, or avoided dealing with the attacks. In some instances, in complex performances of attack and counter-attack, it was the victims of abuse who were punished. Kumashiro tells us that

> educators and others need to examine not only how some groups and identities are Othered, that is, marginalised, denigrated, violated in society, but also how some groups are favoured, normalised, privileged, as well as how this dual process is legitimised and maintained by social structures and competing ideologies" (Kumashiro, 2000:35-36).

Navigating classmates' racism is one matter, but according to co-participants' commentaries, unresponsive teachers and administrators have had a greater negative impact. Because of their involvement in creating films about their experiences, the co-participants in *Cross-Marked* report feeling 'stronger' and 'happier' to have someone listen to their stories, and it has provoked advice from them concerning improvements in schools.

Of course, racism is not the only obstacle confronting students from refugee backgrounds. These young people sometimes have inadequate support at home for either the demands of homework or the circuitous Australian school system; their parents often have little schooling in a vastly different cultural context, and these students can be confused about where to look for assistance. At times they experience conflict between home duties and school requirements. If they are to invest sufficient time in studying as their teachers demand, they sometimes risk being perceived as threatening the home culture, rejecting traditional obligations, or becoming, as Nyadol says, "too Australian". Simultaneously, students like Nyadol can be framed at school by a deficit model simply by virtue of their refugee backgrounds, and feel – as they repeatedly say in their films – underestimated by their teachers and peers.

UNDERESTIMATING AND OVERESTIMATING: the Double Bind

Nyadol Nyuon and others like her – those who are excelling academically – talk about an emerging 'glass ceiling' for former refugees – not only in schools, but in the workplace as well. When Nyadol arrived her mother brought with them meticulous records from her school in the Kakuma

refugee camp in Kenya. Both Nyadol's spoken and written English is articulate and was – even at that time, she believed – up to the standard of her peers. Even her ESL teacher, she claims, admitted that Nyadol should not be in the ESL class. And yet, when she enrolled, school administrators would not allow her to attend the mainstream English class. She took no aptitude test, nor could she recall being interviewed by members of the English department faculty. Nyadol was told that, based on her recent arrival in the country, she may not enrol in the mainstream English class. Repeatedly throughout her interviews, Nyadol described her frustration at being underestimated by her teachers:

> *A teacher's duty is to kindle your interest to want to do more, not to want to do less. Or even not to do anything at all!... every time I'd look at (the teacher) I'd think, "What does she think of me?" You know, "What are the other categories in her head that she's placed me in that I can't escape?". And one of my teachers told me, "If you fail, you can always repeat Year 12" And I think he meant it in a good way, but I ask, "What tells him that I'm going to fail?" Because I was doing as well as most of the young people in class....they were seeing the refugee, and I think they were seeing too much of that refugee and not enough Nyadol.*

The story highlights Nyadol's inability to be *seen* by her teachers as an individual with skills, knowledge and assets, but also the complexities for teachers of working with students from backgrounds that are largely unknown to them. Being underestimated by those who are meant to help you achieve is demoralising and can, in itself, result in despair and disengagement. Even when it is motivated by the best of intentions on the part of the teachers, the students are damaged by this lack of faith. I see it often from teachers who claim it's their professional duty to *prevent* students from enrolling when they believe they will not succeed in a given course, that advising the student otherwise would be setting them up to fail. Still, other low-achieving students are most often *advised* what to take and not take, based on their academic histories, but not refused access to classes. So why are former refugees treated differently? As Nyadol says,

> *Restricting someone's perception of how high they can reach, it's killing people's dream. And I think some teachers make the assumption that because of the experiences that we've had we would not necessarily be able to cope with a lot of things but [I] came through war, and lived being a refugee person. Literally, you ask yourself: what can I not overcome? And someone else telling you what you can or cannot be, or what you cannot do, it's unacceptable.*

Clearly, many teachers are struggling to meet the needs of their students, but their resources are limited. Arts-based tools can provide simple, flexible and student-centred alternatives to frustrating text-based literacy acquisition. Many teachers and administrators are trying to do the best for these students, but are drowning in confusion and fear. The considerable body of resources[18] (many online) is growing every day, but the students themselves are each teacher's best advocate and adviser. Australian organisations like Foundation House (VFST) offer freely available curriculum support and ready-made integration programs such as their 'Klassroom Kaleidoscope' resource, are available free of charge via the internet. Community organisations like the Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning (SAIL) Program, the Sudanese Lost Boys Association of Australia [there is currently no Lost Girls Association], and the Sudanese Online Research Association (SORA) are eager and available to advise from within the community. It is an arrogance to assume that non-African, non-refugee educators should automatically know what's best for these young people. That's why my research holds at its centre the belief that asking the young people themselves is one crucial, but so far missing step. These young people *do* know – in many ways – what they need to succeed here. They may not know everything, but they hold crucial knowledges about themselves, their histories, and their desired futures that will make their success possible. And dialogue does not require additional funding. Inviting these young people to present their perspectives on film, in dance, music, visual art and drama, is a simple and effective beginning for engagement in the new world of western education. It does require, however, a reversal of the 'deficit model' view that Sudanese young people arrive with nothing to offer, and everything to learn.

UNINTENTIONAL RACISM

According to my co-participants, some racism in schools is dismissed or minimised by teachers and administrators as baseless and we can term this

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[18] Many, like those produced by the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST) and the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), are readily available online.

'unintentional racism' or "the problem of denial" (St Denis & Hampton, 2002:4). Unintentional racism is invisible to many non-Africans and indeed is a source of shock to and denial by teachers when African students identify encounters which hurt them. Such incidents may include peers' avoidance in the schoolyard, being asked what it was like to live in huts in Africa (even when they come from urban centres), racial stereotyping, or the ubiquitous "she scares me". St Denis and Hampton remind us that naming racism in schools takes courage, and that "there are many reasons and ways in which the problems of racism and white supremacy are relegated beyond acknowledgement, beyond naming and therefore, beyond problematising and re-dress" (St Denis and Hampton, 2002:5).

I have been struck as a researcher and teacher by how often Sudanese people are referenced according to their darkness and their height – by teachers, community workers, and by Sudanese young people themselves. Height – a marker of beauty in traditional Sudanese culture – and skin colour have become recurrent symbols of their difference, and representative of an inability to hide, to blend and to fit in. Like all adolescents, Sudanese young people want to fit in. And while their backgrounds present unique challenges to them and to the education system, it must not be forgotten that they are still just young people who – more than anything – want to belong. For many even language acquisition is seen primarily as a tool not of future academic or workplace success, but as a means of becoming 'Australian'. Many Sudanese-Australians are finding that even as they become proficient in English, racism continues to hinder their efforts to integrate. Nyadol experiences it regularly, but now she is seeing her younger brother encounter the same troubles:

> The racist chants that some people would say, even to my little brothers, you know, "You are so out of place, there is no place where you fit in". Being African it's even tougher because your skin colour stands out so much! I could just never get lost among people, or be short enough. I'm always too dark, too tall, too something, you know, to be Australian. Sometimes it's sad because …it's not so much that you don't want to be an Australian, it's that you would never be seen as an Australian. You will always be Sudanese-Australian, but always Sudanese more.

Both the intentional and unintentional racism present in most schools creates what I term **'refugeity'** – a sense of otherness, of not belonging, which many students face, not only former refugees but those who are gay and lesbian, non-Anglo, differently-abled and/or non-academic achievers. Bullying – another uncomfortable topic for school administrators – can establish in its victims a sense of 'refugeity'. Segregation or alienation happens in countless informal ways in schools, and that this sets the pattern for children's integration and experience of wider society. When refugee students are left in classrooms of thirty students, sometimes as the only black student in the class, with teachers rushing headlong through unfamiliar curricula, those students are not going to seek help. When teachers introduce a unit on poverty in Africa, or on AIDS, their Sudanese students are not often going to interrupt to correct the sometimes inaccurate or stereotyped information, but will nevertheless often remain silently resentful of the inaccuracies and stereotypes. As the constituency of our classrooms change, so must our teaching styles and topics.

Anecdotal evidence shows that African-Australian students will often not raise their hands for fear of appearing stupid, of being laughed at, or of drawing unwanted attention to themselves. Their sometimes poor English skills mean that they often doubt themselves, both linguistically and conceptually. Nyadol tells us that students from refugee backgrounds may find it difficult to directly question authority, even when their futures are at stake:

> *We don't understand that you can say no to authority. Because where we come from it's very hard to say no to authority, so when the teacher says "You can't do English", you just know you can't do English.… and if they tell you you can't do English, that has a lot of impact, a lot of influence on not only your perception of yourself, but sometimes the perception of your community.*

Development of greater understanding for this cultural difference and of proactive habits for initiating dialogue with former refugees in their classes will assist ongoing assessment of their progress. Ignoring this trend adds to the kinds of disruptive behaviours that some principals and teachers are coming to associate with Sudanese students. Some – not all – refugee

students act out because they are being victimised and ignored, and at times other attempts to rectify the situation have failed. These students would benefit from committed and long-term assistance to adapt to their new contexts (and for their new contexts to adapt to them!), and dialogue might productively be a part of that assistance. To imagine that all refugee students are the same, with the same needs, is as re-traumatising and stereotyping as ignoring them altogether.

INTENTIONAL RACISM

> Discrimination and racism are damaging to the development of self. In contrast, when there is a comprehensive understanding of the background experiences of refugee children in the school and in the wider community, insensitive or racist treatment is diminished and the likelihood of children internalizing simple and negative stereotypes is reduced. (VFST, 2007:31)

The multiple stressors working against Sudanese young women remaining and thriving in schools is compounded by a sometimes hostile socio-political context in which both micro- and macrocosmic factors may inhibit these young women from expressing the extent of their hopes, fears and lived experiences. The Refugee Council of Australia, the peak government body on refugee resettlement issues, identifies "discrimination and racism both within and beyond the school environment" (RCOA, 2008:43) as major obstacles to refugee young people persisting with education. One goal of these films is to create an alternative space in which these young women may share with other young people, educationalists and the general public, issues that include racism, transitioning from language centres to mainstream schools, 'performing' their student roles, and their own and others' expectations of them.

Some teachers and administrators inadvertently encourage segregation between cultural groups to avoid what they fear will be confrontation, or their own general inability to effectively manage the repercussions when they occur. Nyadol has experienced it:

> *My brother recently got beaten by three boys, and they poured milk on him and I went to the teachers, and the response of the teachers was very disheartening because he's the only black kid in the school and ...what (the teacher) told me was, "Maybe he doesn't deserve some of the things*

> *they do to him". And I asked him, "So he deserves some of the things they*
> *do to him?". My mom went to them the day my brother got beaten*
> *because he came home crying. And when I went one week later, on the*
> *next Friday, they had done nothing. They had not even enquired who the*
> *boys were, or what they did. After I went they just gave them a warning.*

It is also unreasonable to assume that if there is fear of people with dark skin, there will not be race-based segregation or antagonisms in classrooms and schoolyards. Anecdotal evidence in most schools suggests that there *is*, and yet many principals and school staff deny this, or talk about the 'African problem' instead. Without exception, all of the young people who have participated in my film series have identified racism as a negative factor in their experiences in Australian schools. From their teachers and their peers, on the streets, but also in the classrooms and schoolyards, African former refugees are confronting yet another trauma they thought they had left behind. Nyadol has identified it as only the next obstacle in a series of traumatic events resulting from fleeing the war in Sudan:

> *Does racism exist in schools? I definitely think so. Some teachers might*
> *be racist, and I think some students too might be racist. ...*

Liep Gony, an 18-year old Sudanese immigrant, was bashed to death by two non-Sudanese Australians in Noble Park in September 2007. Despite the fatal victimisation of Gony, subsequent media reports used the incident to position African (and specifically Sudanese) immigrants as aggressive, anti-social and unsuccessfully integrating. This incident, and related others, caused then-Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews to cut Australia's intake of African refugees, amidst a considerable community uproar. ("Liep Gony's family fled war in Sudan", Herald Sun, Sept 29, 2007 http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,22501251-661,00.html, accessed on August 15, 2009; "Murder victim caught on film in brawl", ninemsn, Dcember 4, 2007 http://news.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=300826, accessed on August 15, 2009; "African refugee quota cut", Courier Mail, Oct 4, 2007 http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,23739,22528580-3102,00.html, accessed on August 15, 2009.)

The media vilification of the Sudanese community in Australia after the bashing death of Liep Gony in 2007 proved what many Sudanese young

people knew to be true: even when they are victims, they are seen as perpetrators. Although Gony was bashed to death by non-Sudanese perpetrators, then-Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews used it as a reason to claim Sudanese immigrants were not fitting into Australian society, and African intakes under the Australian humanitarian entry programme were reduced by thirty percent. The effects of the media coverage of the affair have been long-lasting, and can still be felt in schools. In a recent focus-group assessment I conducted at my high school, students discussed their fear of their African classmates, which they attributed only to 'skin colour' and things they'd 'heard' in the media. When pressed, they admitted they'd had no negative encounters with their African peers, but that perhaps negative media reports had contributed to their apprehension.[19]

Nyadol states in her film that "No matter what we do, we're seen as criminals". These perceptions filter into schools, and often the new students feel they have nowhere to hide. Nyadol articulates the double-bind:

> You go to school and that's where you're supposed to be given the chance of constructing your future life, and you have this whole negative environment surrounding you. And you come out of school, and you still feel it on the street. I keep asking myself: if (Liep Gony) had been a white kid, beaten by Sudanese boys to death, what would have been the reaction? It would have been ugly.

The truth is, it *was* ugly anyway, and the Sudanese-Australian community is still grappling with its repercussions. But many outside of the Sudanese community have forgotten the tragedy, and – in my experience – many schools are reluctant to admit that racism remains a problem in schools. Be it the teachers who are frightened of their African students, administrators who worry that their schools are being seen as 'African schools', or students who feel 'threatened' by their African peers but can't say why, it seems that just by their very presence, African students are intimidating someone. Critical pedagogy compels us to consider the perspectives of the African students, and I suggest that – compounded by slow English language learning – African students too frequently remain

[19] Conducted in December, 2008 at the high school in Melbourne's western suburbs where I teach, this focus group was a student assessment of a school-based peer mentoring program called Beaut Buddies, and included African and non-African Australian students. It was not conducted as part of the research for *Cross-Marked*, but their responses were unsurprisingly similar to the co-participants of this project.

absent from discussions about their own learning. Giroux states that "Any pedagogy of critical thinking that ignores the social relations of the classroom runs the risk of being mystifying and incomplete" (1988:64), and this includes silencing of the marginalised and racist practices.

If *Cross-Marked* can be taken as any indication of Sudanese-Australian young women's perspectives, racism must be dealt with before schools can truly be safe and supportive learning environments. There is ample evidence in my study that most African-Australian students have experienced both intentional and unintentional racism from their peers – verbal assaults that escalate until the African student sometimes reacts with physical assaults – for which they (and not their peers) are punished. Cleary and Peacock (1998) offer research on students who fight back against racism in the school, and the schools' inability to support them. St Denis warns us against "blaming the victim by individualizing and psychologizing the effects of systemic and structural discrimination" (2007:1084). When conflicts do arise, responsibility is often attributed to the refugee students. This is a view supported by Nyadol's experiences:

> *When an African kid does something it's because they are 'traumatised', but when a white kid does something it's because they are 'naughty.'…the biggest response I've had since I came to Australia that a lot of Sudanese young people have been told, by teachers, is 'ignore it'. Ignore what they say, don't respond. But I realise it's not even the kids that are ignoring it, it's the teachers that are ignoring it! Maybe because they are ignoring it, they want the kids to ignore it also, but if you are the victim, it's hard to ignore. You know it's hard to ignore being called a monkey, or going to school and finding it written on the wall. It's just hard, you know, and it shouldn't be happening.*

As these young people come to schools with additional educational challenges, they feel that teachers are by and large ignoring them; simply allowing them to enrol and then leaving them to fend for themselves. When the pressure mounts and there is a conflict, in a 'her word against mine' standoff, schools are often not coming down on the side of their black students. This perception – whether true or false – is leading some young African students to feel hopeless, disengaged, and to drop out in increasing numbers. The research of St Denis and Hampton and others shows that often "the denial of racism is justified on the basis that openly addressing racism

will only make matters worse" (St Denis & Hampton, 2002:31). Worse for whom? Many African-Australian students feel that speaking about racism in schools is validating and empowering, and assists them in taking positive action toward countering the damage to self-esteem from covert racist encounters.

There is a growing body of research which offers alternative means of support for these students. Parallel programs, which feature small-group language tutoring, help. Nyadol's advice is clear, and concurs with that of industry leaders in refugee health and wellbeing studies[20]: that parent and community engagement programs form a crucial three-way partnership with schools to support former refugee young people to remain in school and to strive to achieve. However, community organisation research shows that schools often seem confused about how to create home and community links, and try to do it all themselves. "Schools often do not have strong connections with ethnic communities and other organisations that may be able to assist to make links with CALD parents" (O'Sullivan, 2006: 20). Students can help: most of the young people with whom I've worked as a teacher and researcher are enthusiastic about bringing their worlds together. And those, like Nyadol, who are committed members of a next generation of African-driven researchers, will be able to address the challenges from within the Sudanese-Australian communities.

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[20] see bibliography for publications by Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture; Refugee Health Research Centre, La Trobe University; Centre for Multicultural Youth; and Victorian Department of Education and Training.

CHAPTER 3: "NEIR RIEL"*: Transgression and Fugitive Spaces
*(Dinka for 'Strong Girls')

> Teaching is a performative act... that offers the space for change,
> invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as a catalyst drawing out the
> unique elements in each classroom." (bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*,
> 1994:11)

> **Transgress:** 15th century middle English word which etymologically
> means "to step over or across," but can also mean "to go beyond (a limit,
> boundary, etc.)". from the latin *trans (across) + gradi (to step or walk).*

In *Vanity Fair*, Miss Pinkerton's kindly sister Jemima insists that Becky
Sharp must get a dictionary upon her departure, just as Amelia (the 'good'
middle-class girl) has. When Miss Pinkerton refuses (and scolds Jemima for
even suggesting the equality of the girls), Jemima – in a rare (dare I say
transgressive?) display of rebellion – makes it her business to give Becky the
book after all:

> "Stop!" cried Miss Jemima, rushing to the gate with a parcel.

> "…Becky Sharp, here's a book for you that my sister--that is, I--Johnson's
> Dixonary, you know; you mustn't leave us without that. Good-by. Drive
> on, coachman. God bless you!"

> And the kind creature retreated into the garden, overcome with emotion.

> But, lo! and just as the coach drove off, Miss Sharp put her pale face out
> of the window and actually flung the book back into the garden.

> This almost caused Jemima to faint with terror. "Well, I never"-- said she-
> -"what an audacious"--Emotion prevented her from completing either
> sentence.[21] (Thackeray, 2001:11)

Thus ends the schooling of transgressive Becky Sharp at Chiswick Mall, but
also perhaps the flame for social justice in her teacher Jemima. The scene
illustrates perfectly – albeit within a different historical, social and economic
setting – what may be considered a transgressive or 'ungrateful refugee'[22]
response. Students like Becky Sharp are positioned firstly as transgressive
for their very presence in privileged contexts, just as black students in mostly
non-black schools are. But additionally, these students cause outrage when

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[21] Thanks to Assoc Prof Michele Grossman for the connection.

[22] For related discussion, see: "Don't Bite the Hand that Feeds You",
http://refugeeresettlementwatch.wordpress.com/2009/01/23/dont-bite-the-hand-that-feeds-you/
accessed on July 23, 2009. Refugee Resettlement Watch; "South Africa: Don't be ungrateful, refugees
told", http://www.afrika.no/Detailed/12461.html accessed on July 23, 2009. Africa News Update; "The
World's Most Ungrateful Refugee",
http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2004/jan/28/modlocalgov.comment accessed on July 23, 2009.

they respond without the expected gratitude to either the patronising kindness (at best) or disdain (at worst) of their teachers. To Miss Pinkerton, Becky Sharp is – when she refuses to perform her role of underclass student – completely invisible. Miss Pinkerton does not – or perhaps would rather not – see her. But this is nothing compared to the outrage of the well-intentioned Jemima, when her offer of assistance is rebuffed. Miss Pinkerton, like other real-life educators, is frightened of the possibility of 'contamination' of the good child Amelia by Becky and her 'uncivilised' behaviour.

The multiple roles being performed within this scene construct not only the transgressive refugee trope, but also the resentful teacher who must perform in relation to her. When Becky throws the dictionary in question out of the carriage window, after Jemima's many transgressive acts to get it to her, we see the dynamic of many teachers and students caught in the performance of 'refugee education' today. Although initially well-intentioned, some teachers' actions fails to satisfy either party – disappointment predominates, and resentment builds; students turn against teachers, students against their peers, and sometimes students against themselves.

> *Lizzie: You can't always have a teacher—when that teacher has 25 in a class, you can't expect them to talk slowly because that's not good for the other students—that's stopping the Aussie kids to learn!*
>
> *Sara: You can't put them down, Lizzie--! When they mix them, that's when they learn! Because they will pick up the words from people. But if they separate them they're not gonna learn nothing! They're gonna be by themselves.*
>
> *Lizzie: Teachers speak fast, they don't wait for anybody. ...Her question is, how many African kids does that [put up their hands]?*
>
> *Sara: Some. There's some that do.*
>
> *Lizzie: Well I been to African class and I haven't seen none of them with their hand up and asking a question---*
>
> *(general hubbub of dissent and excitement)*
>
> *Sara: Maybe they don't understand.*
>
> *Amani: I did put my hand up, all the time—*
> $\qquad\qquad\qquad$ *(from 'Chick Chat at the River Nile')*

Hooks reminds us that "engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students" (hooks, 1994:21) but requires mutuality from teachers. She invokes

Freire in saying "authentic help means that all who are involved help each other mutually, growing together in the common effort to understand the reality which they seek to transform" (hooks, 1994:54). We must repeatedly risk being wrong, as Jemima is, about our students, and willingly reflect on our own experience. Hooks turns repeatedly in her *Teaching to Transgress* to Freire to understand that "only through such praxis…can the act of helping become free from the distortion in which the helper dominates the helped" (hooks, 1994:54). The rebuff by Becky of Miss Pinkerton's patronising offer is the kind of transgressive act which is so often cited through gritted teeth by those educators who attempt to 'help' their Sudanese-Australian students in today's schools. Former refugees are positioned as victims who require assistance, but from whom an 'appropriate' response of gratitude is expected in return.

As I write, twice in the past week, teachers at my school have come to me with 'problems' with their Sudanese-Australian students, and both times they were problems around students accusing them, 'unfairly', they thought, of being racist. Both teachers asked me, quite earnestly, why I believed these students might have levelled such a charge. There are so many reasonable explanations for these students' comments, and yet what amused me was that the teachers had come to *me* to ask my opinion, and not to the girls themselves. Were they looking for explanations, or validation? As a known 'ally' of the Sudanese-Australian students in my school, were they hoping to reveal these encounters to me before – they feared – the students would? When I suggested to both teachers that perhaps the students *had* experienced them as racist, even if they, the teachers, had not, they were – unsurprisingly – outraged. They were shocked at the "audacious" responses from both the students and from me, their fellow teacher. When I subsequently suggested that even if their encounter with the student hadn't been overtly racist these young women encounter racism frequently in their everyday lives, and that perhaps they unfairly applied it to this encounter, they were equally shocked and resistant.

I find such belligerence confounding. Firstly, it would be hard to imagine anyone suggesting that racism is not still alive and well in schools today. As individuals constructed by our environment, it is not difficult to believe that we *reflect*, if not enact, that racism, even when we don't intend to do so. Secondly, as educators, are we not trained to be self-reflexive, to consider our actions and words, and to continually adapt to new information and educational modes? Certainly, we should be. We know that re-experiencing trauma is a common experience for former refugee students, and some

> common triggers are…authoritarian and threatening behaviour…All these experiences can cause overwhelming anxiety…With the pressure of anxiety and tension (which cannot be controlled) the student may become highly irritable, unable to tolerate frustration, resulting in reduced control over impulsive and aggressive behaviour. (VFST, 2007:30)

When we are presented with a new student cohort, of whom we have little knowledge (and therefore, reasonably, some fear or trepidation), are we not equally called to examine ourselves in relation to these new students? And when those students are black students, and if we accept that racism/homophobia/classism/sexism/Euro-centrism still deeply pervade our schools, we must understand that black/gay/poor/female/non-European students will be typified as transgressive more readily than dominant others.

TRANSGRESSION AS REFUGEITY

Kincheloe and McLaren remind us that critical researchers should "try to become aware of…their own subjective, intersubjective, and normative reference claims" (2005:305). They also suggest that:

> Upon detailed analysis, critical researchers may change these assumptions. Stimulus for change may come from the critical researchers' recognition that such assumptions are not leading to emancipatory actions. The source of this emancipatory action involves the researchers' ability to expose the contradictions of the world of appearances accepted by the dominant culture as natural and inviolable. (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005:305-306)

What astounded me in my colleagues' approaches was the seeming sincerity of their concern – and how rapidly it evaporated when the suggestion was made that they, too, might play a role in the 'racist' interaction with these students. Jemima almost 'fainted with terror' and outrage in 1848, but she would not be out of place in the multicultural Melbourne of 2009.

The suggestion has often been made to me as a gay teacher, that actions of mine are transgressive, even when they are the same actions taken by my heterosexual colleagues. As gay teachers everywhere know, we are expected to be more cautious than our peers when we interact with students, when we speak of our personal lives, when we agitate for change. After nearly ten years as an 'out' lesbian teacher in secondary schools, I am still regularly asked why lesbian students are drawn to me for counselling, as though there were something vaguely transgressive going on. This is as frustrating to me as my colleagues' questions on racism. I also regularly experience homophobic attitudes from my colleagues who would never imagine they are being homophobic. So I know, from my own lesbian subjectivity, that we easily remarginalise others unintentionally. I am also regularly reminded of my 'imperialist' enculturation as an American, by these same colleagues, and I laugh and acknowledge my need to examine my attitudes and behaviours in light of this. And yet, they often remain invisible to themselves as fellow imperialists.

While it's reductive to talk about 'dominant class' groups within the teaching profession, heteronormativity is alive and well. No matter how insecure a teacher may be on the condition of class, race or length of service, they are secure in their ability to share heteronormative details of their personal lives with students, and think nothing of it. I have still never brought back photos from a school holiday trip abroad with my partner and shared them with students, partly because talking about 'gay things' is seen as sexually transgressive (even if the photos were of Disneyland), and partly because I fear the loss of power in relation to my students. Many of my students know I'm gay, but we don't talk about it. I still fear that talking about it opens me to derision, and I want to avoid that in my relationships with students over whom I'm meant to have some authority. I acknowledge my inability to come out to my students as a desire for my retention of power, and I acknowledge the hypocrisy of this stance in relation to my self-concept as an 'educator for freedom'. We all have our limitations. What I'm suggesting is that my self-awareness around these issues at least *makes room* for me to consider that I might *also* be enacting racism, sexism and classism as I go

about my business as a teacher. My lesbianism informs my racism, and helps me to remember that even when I don't think I'm being racist, I may well be. It reminds me that I am an outsider, a fugitive, and that I experience a sense of refugeity on a daily basis, as my students do. Why then, when my colleagues come from a variety of races, classes and family constellations, do they find it so hard to consider the possibility of their own racism in relation to their Sudanese-Australian students?

I believe there are strong parallels between the refugeity experienced by my African students (and the young women in the *Cross-Marked* project), and myself, but it is not always easy to talk about with them. While we may all experience instances of refugeity in our lives (and I believe we do), not all refugees are 'equal'. In schools, sexuality has long been acknowledged as the last taboo frontier. It has never stopped being a topic of discomfort and terror within educational circles. Taboo too, is the question of students who transgress school rules and systems. Students who are not able – or who apparently refuse – to learn in the ways in which we teach are seen as transgressive and taboo. We serve the meal of curriculum, and if the students don't eat we assume they are not hungry. When the transgressive student is black, *very black*, in a country with proportionately few dark skinned people, and in a culture which holds a collective shame (or at least ambivalence) about its black population, the transgression precedes any action a Sudanese-Australian student may take.

If transgressive acts and statements can be doorways to power or even to freedom (but also to occlusion and exclusion), what might have been the students' motivations for levelling the charges of racism, particularly if the encounters were not overtly racist at all? One such encounter ended when a Sudanese-Australian student parried, "You're only picking on us because you're Asian, and Asians don't like Africans". This inversion of the racist charge with a counter-racist charge implies the hidden currency in 'victimhood' as a performance encounter. Not content to resist the teacher's instruction, this African student was performing two attempts at power: challenging the teacher's motivations (inherently recognising the power of

the 'r' word) and simultaneously challenging the teacher's right to be a 'dominant' class member as an Asian person.

The encounter 'got them into trouble' and also effectively got the teacher 'off their backs' by throwing a loaded charge. By effectively demonstrating their understanding of that teacher's vulnerability around her ethnicity (or otherness or 'refugeity'), the students asserted an ability to finely read the hegemonic demands of this environment; who belongs, who is vulnerable, and how to upset these apparent roles and status relations. In this case, they rightly gauged that the Chinese-Australian teacher's power could be undermined twice: firstly by accusing *her* of wrongdoing (superseding their alleged wrongdoing); and secondly by naming *her* difference, (thereby nullifying *their* difference). These encounters tell us much about *how* these young women are finding and asserting sites of power in a social context of disempowerment. They simultaneously tell us a great deal about their understanding of transgression: that personal transgressions can be voided by larger social transgressions, or the spectre of them. No actual wrongdoing is required for the charge to be laid and the power to be attained. This is an inversion and 'performance' of these students' frequent experience in schools: as African students, they often are met with charges of transgression when no transgression has been committed; their difference is enough to position them in a zone of transgression. This is not unlike the continual challenges I have received from co-participants around gender performance, as another site of possible vulnerability which can be used to re-position themselves and others in centre/margin considerations.

TRANSGRESSION AS COUNTER-RACISM

While some teachers do strive to develop understanding of their students from refugee backgrounds, frustration can quickly build and fatigue set in. I have seen this repeatedly in myself, and in my colleagues in education and within the community sector. Sudanese-Australian students are by no means the only cultural group that elicits this kind of response from teachers, but they represent – as discussed elsewhere in this paper – a convergence of

factors many mainstream educators find confronting: they are, as Nyadol says so often, "too tall, too dark, or too something to be Australian".

Giroux's *Fugitive cultures: race, violence and youth* (1996) examines the role the media play in conflating violence and race, particularly among youth. His observations about the emerging 'culture of cruelty' in the United States can be applied to Australian culture: "If there is a new mean-spiritedness at work in American culture, it is present in the material experiences of youth, especially among those who are poor, black and unemployed" (1996:22). This spirit, he contends, is

> manifested increasingly in the wave of representations flooding the media culture. How youth are seen through popular representations becomes indicative of how they are viewed by mainstream society and points to pedagogical practices that offer youth themselves images through which to construct their own identities and mediate their perceptions of other youth formations. (1996:23)

As discussed in Chapter One, I propose that many young Sudanese-Australians are vulnerable on the basis of this same media vilification, possess (as a group) greater gaps in education than any immigrant group previously integrating in Australia, and – ironically – often demonstrate too little 'gratitude' to satisfy their Australian hosts. When the then-Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews said, in 2007, that the Sudanese were not integrating sufficiently, he was not specific about his meaning. Surely he was not referring to their becoming victims of murder, as Liep Gony was.

A slew of news reportage soon after the Gony murder consistently presented Sudanese young men as walking in gangs, exhibiting threatening behaviour, and acting aggressively (see footnote 17, page 73). And yet Sudanese young people will tell almost anyone that walking in groups is culturally appropriate and only appears threatening to those who might find a group of a black young men threatening anyway. The young women of River Nile Learning Centre discussed their ambivalence about staying with other Africans at school: on the one hand there is safety in numbers, but on the other hand self-segregation can slow integration and language-learning:

> **Arilette:** *It was difficult to find friends. Cuz I didn't speak English; anyone talk to me, I couldn't hear. Yeah but the teachers from high*

> *school, they tell me no make friend with the African girls, because I was African. We talking like in the same language. They would want me to have friends like Australians, who can teach me English if I say wrong they can tell me correct way to say.*
>
> ***Amani:*** *You don't know how to speak English, you're like "Oh my god, they think I'm dumb or something". From the way they look, the way they talk, cuz when I used to go to school, like the first time I came here, um, I didn't know anything. I just went to high school at Year 8, straight up, I didn't know how to speak nothing, not even one word. So like I see some girls, from like, the white girls, they talk, you know? I feel like "oh my god". I just want to eat them, but I can't do anything about it. For like 3 months. Then I learned how to talk to people and stuff.*

When the topic of Sudanese students arises in conversation amongst educators, too often faces fall, voices quieten and comments like, "Oh yes, we've got some Sudanese students, too. What do you *do* with them? We're struggling". And yet, as this research has taught me and as I have observed, within the community of young Sudanese students whom I know, there is almost no self-perception of themselves as transgressive: if anything, they discuss a need to be able to talk back *more,* stand up for themselves more often and more confidently. By and large, they have described themselves as struggling to understand and navigate the seemingly endless maze of new rules, new codes of behaviour and new ways of being. They rate their progress, on the whole, as remarkably successful. Nyadol Nyuon in her interviews discusses the feeling of paralysis within the Sudanese-Australian student population to question or challenge teachers: "We don't talk back to teachers at all. In Sudanese culture, if a teacher tells you you can't do English, you just know you can't do English. That's it." Many of my teaching colleagues would not agree.

TRANSGRESSION AS WALKING AWAY

When I began this project, I conceived of the work as an investigation into the ways in which these young women were not only *perceived* as transgressive, but were *behaving* in a transgressive manner. My focus has changed. What now concerns me is the gap between these two divergent views. I welcome the change in my perception and concerns: I have grown, been transformed (as one hopes to be in critical pedagogical research), and now see complexities beneath the complexities I already knew (as a teacher) were there. And yet, as I see the world more and more through the eyes of

Sudanese-Australian young women, I also see myself as a well-intentioned but sometimes misguided teacher, an often-frustrated advocate of arts-based methodologies for assisting former refugee students to integrate and increase their language skills. I see a tired-looking middle-aged white woman standing on the stage of our auditorium at school, having given up yet another lunch period to help stage a 'dance-drama' of the Beaut Buddies social integration program at my school, and I see the 20-odd mostly Sudanese students talk over me, laugh at me, mostly ignore me. I sit them down and give them another one of my very Anglo 'respect yourselves, respect the work, respect each other' speeches, which they talk through, until I finally turn around and quietly leave the auditorium, walk to my car, and drive away.

The next day there is a scandal: Ms Harris has 'stormed out' of a rehearsal. Two of the non-disruptive girls come and apologise. I thank them, but explain that I feel I'm wasting my time trying to 'force' them to do something they don't want to do. Really I just want everyone to be quiet and do what I say. I can't believe this is me, and I feel the failure all the more acutely in contrast to my research and long-held core beliefs. I talk to my colleagues at school about it, who mostly just laugh. I talk to my colleague at Foundation House (VFST) who advises that consistency and non-authoritarian support are what the students need. I recognise this, but want my lunches back if we're not going to end up with a play. Two years into my research, and nine years into my teaching, I'm stumped again.

> **Lizzie:** *They shouldn't be sending them to high school, because if they can't understand the language, sending them to high school is killing them.*
>
> **Amani:** *No, I think it's good. Cuz the more you stay at language centre, they're all people who don't know English. You just keep talking your language, your language, and then you're not gonna get anything. I think it's good to learn for only two months, three, then they should take you to high school.*

Most of the co-participants in *Chick Chat at the River Nile* have either dropped out of mainstream school or never attended. Almost all were either pregnant or had young babies. Their film is perhaps the most 'rough' of the

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six in the *Cross-Marked* series, but it also has a playful and discursive sense of community and dialogue that is missing from the other five – it was the only film created with a group and not an individual. Because, too, we met at the same location each week, and the structure was roughly the same, there is a continuity to the sessions which comes through in the film. This film can also be distinguished from the others in that these young women offer a sense, more than any others, of their own role in their disengagement from school, which I attempted to document in my process journal:

> *May 2, 2008 – 1st workshop at River Nile Learning Centre*
> *One girl – Margaret I think – emerged early on as the informal leader. Extremely vocal, she would not sit down at the table with the rest of us, at the beginning. She adamantly said she was not interested in a film project. She walked away – kept walking away – but kept coming back. She'd sit down for awhile, then walk away again – criticising, or for a cigarette, etc – She was the most opinionated in the group, and came across as very 'angry' – but I realised quickly that she would be the director, and her participation was needed by the other young women. She simultaneously asserted her independence from the goings-on, but challenged the others to 'do something'. I saw her participation at the table as a victory, once she finally stayed more than wandered. By the end of this session, Margaret was the only one who wanted to learn the camera. (Process Journal)*

Margaret went on to be – along with Grace and myself – one of the camera persons on the film. She is bright, impatient, and full of energy. When she was having a bad day, generally everyone was having a bad day and we didn't shoot. But when Margaret was on, the conversations flew. What I find interesting in my journal notes was Margaret's process of 'walking away' as a form of empowerment – which appeared to us (teacher-facilitators) as transgression. It reminded me of my own walking away from the auditorium, an act I didn't perceive as transgressive, but one which the students did. She had been asked by her teacher to sit and participate in the workshop for no other reason than because that's what the others were doing, because that's what we (the teacher-facilitators) *said* we would do at this given time. But on reflection, Margaret performed many important aspects of her personality in the walking away and returning – her ability to leave, her desire to return, that she needed space in which to think through the situation, that she may have needed a kinaesthetic expression of her body's coming-to-terms-with in order to think properly – the possibilities are endless. What is important here is that Margaret was not positioned as

'transgressive' by her teacher-facilitators and so she somehow chose (repeatedly) to return. Had she not been given that choice, she may have stormed out and left forever (as many do in mainstream schools). In this sense, Margaret's walking away is not transgressive, as translated from the Latin. It suggests a tantalising possibility that transgression then can serve as a means of returning anew, on new terms. That transgression does not necessarily mean walking away *forever*, as we in education, sometimes believe.

> *Margaret: Before I came here, I didn't know how to read, you know? And plus I didn't go to any school…all the schools I go to, I stay for maybe one week, one month, and I'd run away. So when I came here actually I improved a lot. Now I can read my messages, I can send messages back…and all this stuff.*

In her introduction to *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks celebrates a "teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries" (hooks, 1994:12), one that enables both teachers and students to step further into the unknown territory of liberatory education. In this kind of movement, former refugee students can become our guides in a collective effort to renew educational norms. This makes deep sense to me: I hunger for a practice of freedom in my teaching; I enjoy being transgressive in my teaching and my life, and I write about enjoying the transgressions of my Sudanese-Australian students. And yet, after too many lunchtimes of chaos, I just quietly turn around and walk away. It's not what I want to be in the world, or in the lives of these young women. And yet, this journey is, as Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) remind us, an 'evolving criticality', not a destination.

TRANSGRESSION AS LIBERATION

If transgression began its etymological life as two Latin words which meant, roughly, "to walk or step across," then certainly Sudanese-Australian young women can be said to be transgressive. Former refugees, and other immigrants (even from the United States), understand perhaps more deeply that 'stepping across' implies a leaving, and leavings are almost always painful.

> *Nyanyany: Ok, my name is Nyayanya, and I'm from Ethiopia but I'm Sudanese. I come to Australia in 2006 and I come to this school last year. Yeah because I'm still young, I want to go back—maybe I go back to high school. And then maybe I'll go back to Ethiopia to see my mom and my parents because I miss them. But I love Australia too.*

Departure, arrival: all cultures' rituals almost always celebrate – or honour – these steppings-across. Transgressions in this sense are to be celebrated, for they carry us to a new place, a new awareness and new ways of being or becoming. Why then, does the term carry such dire connotations in an educational context? Surely we want *all* our students to transgress their previous educational limitations or boundaries. Hooks, in writing about her development as an educator, foregrounds the "role of excitement" in the classroom as "potentially disruptive" (1994:7) and highlights the need for mutuality in the classroom: "I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not take, to share in any way that I would not share" (1994:21). If we can celebrate teaching that enables transgressions – and I believe we do, at least partially – why is it so much harder to celebrate *students* or *learning* that is transgressive? This is the harder question. If transgression among teachers creates the conditions for "new visions" and "rejuvenation" of schools (1994:12), and if hooks' call is for mutuality between students and teachers, then surely teachers must be willing to support students' transgressions; to read between the lines, even when they are transgressing *our* boundaries.

In schools, any form of transgression is the enemy of teachers and administrators, for we all know (at least we claim) that any transgression which goes unpunished is an unlocked door for others to jemmy wide open. In schools, the rhetoric goes something like, "We can't make exceptions for some, we've got to be consistent" or even "We've got to be seen to be doing something". It is the perception of *unpunished* transgression that throws fear into the heart of every school principal. And the punishing is the objectification of that student: "We must make an example of her". At the heart of this kind of rule-enforcement is the fear, "What will they think if…?" But Kincheloe and McLaren remind us that instances of violence or perceived transgression should not be taken on their own:

> …if we view the violence we find in the classrooms not as random or isolated incidents created by aberrant individuals willfully stepping out of line in accordance with a particular form of social pathology, but as possible narratives of transgression and resistance, then this could indicate that the 'political unconscious' lurking beneath the surface of everyday classroom life is not unrelated to practices of race, class, and gender oppression but rather intimately connected to them. (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005:306)

Recently at my school, a Year 7 student was caught after having stolen the mobile phone of a classmate and run up a sizeable phone bill. She gave the phone back, promised to pay for the calls (although one wonders how), and apologised to the owner. This young Sudanese-Australian 'perpetrator' had been in the country for less than two years, had been born in a refugee camp, and was struggling in more ways than this with her new life in Australia. The school was adamant that she must 'pay' more than monetarily. She must be made an example of. They threatened to call the police in on the matter, and when she protested, they finally agreed to pay a home visit to her parents to ensure that she would be punished at home. When they arrived at the girl's home, the student's single mother welcomed them warmly, introduced the six other children, the male community leader who was serving the role of father, and assured them that the child had already been severely beaten over the matter and would continue to be. The school representatives (there were three present, and an interpreter) did not wish the child to be punished in this way, but could not find an alternative that would satisfy all present. In their 20-minute visit, the school representatives learnt that the mother, deeply ashamed for the family and the community, was suffering from a terminal brain tumour and that she didn't have long to live. As the child's only surviving parent, she was deeply concerned that her daughter learn the Australian laws and customs as quickly as possible so that she (and all her children) would be able to survive once she was gone. Clearly, this was a situation which showed the educators that they had underestimated the pressures in this child's life and that there were significant cultural misunderstandings afoot. Still, they wished the child (and the 'victim's' parents) to understand the severity of the 'crime' and to 'make an example of her' at the school.

Perhaps the most obvious observation about hooks' passion for an education system that is a "practice of freedom" is that she experienced this in her own childhood. She has first-hand knowledge from her childhood days in all-black schools, of classrooms as sites of empowerment and social transformation. She notes that when, during the American integration of segregated schools, black children began to be taught by white teachers, "knowledge was suddenly about information" and that "obedience, not a zealous will to learn, was what was expected of us" (hooks, 1994:3). Perhaps my student who stole the mobile phone, too, will grow up to devote her career to creating the kind of learning environment that hooks experienced in her early life. And I'm not suggesting that in order to transform education we who are not black (or gay or Asian or…) have no role to play. What hooks' words *do* tell us is that one must have a personal experience of education as political, impassioned, and related to one's lived experience. The difficulty is in finding ways to create these conditions for those who do not – by virtue of their identities, inclinations or life circumstances – already experience them. It is becoming increasingly difficult in an age which is characterised by 'information' of the kind that hooks laments in white schools. Hooks sees this possibility in teachers who demand "an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress" (hooks, 1994:207). These voices of the River Nile Learning Centre co-participants, and of my students and myself, then points us to an exciting opportunity for new positionality: if those school representatives who, visiting the student's home for punitive reasons, had remained open of heart and mind to the reality of this student's life, could they not have imagined ways to move beyond the boundaries of 'business as usual'? Can't I move beyond my own boundaries with the dance-drama rehearsals in the auditorium? These moments can provide a critical invitation to educators: when previous models of behaviour control are not working, might not the so-called transgressive behaviour of these Sudanese-Australian students be a modelling, an invitation to engaged and aware teachers that we ourselves need now to transgress, to step over old rules and boundaries, and begin to consider education in a new way? In this view, a cohort of students behaving

unconventionally is a radical opportunity for change. Will schools accept the invitation, or – to put it another way – will I go back to the auditorium at lunch?

TRANSGRESSION OF (HOME) CULTURE/S

Hooks describes her joyful childhood schooling thus: "To be changed by ideas was pure pleasure. But to learn ideas that ran counter to values and beliefs learned at home was to place oneself at risk, to enter the danger zone" (1994:3). This 'danger zone' is familiar to Sudanese-Australian students, as the gap between home culture and school culture that often widens as time goes by. Integration can represent the impossibility of becoming too Australian, while never being Australian enough.

There is a popular misconception amongst some educators that early pregnancies among Sudanese-Australian young women are traditionally located, a view that is firmly rejected amongst my co-participants. While it is true that many young women, if living in Sudan, would begin reproduction earlier than in Australia, the circumstances of the pregnancies of many of these young women are seen as utterly transgressive within the Sudanese-Australian context. At home, the young women would only be conceiving within strict cultural norms of early marriage, with severe penalties for both young women and young men who transgressed these rules of marriage and family structure. In Australia, as in Sudan, young women who become pregnant before marriage, or without the involvement of the fathers, are seen as shameful. The young co-participants of the *Cross-Marked* project see their behaviour as a result of their new lives and changing roles as women in Australia.

> *Sara: You know, it's hard when you're by yourself and taking care of the baby by yourself. In our culture, when you get pregnant and the man is not next to you, it's bad…so it was hard for me, really hard for me to get through it, but I think I'm strong enough to do it, so.*
>
> *Margaret: They say we're bad girls.*
>
> *Judith: What does 'bad girl' mean?*
>
> *Margaret: Like Africans think that if you go clubbing…if you drink, smoke, you dress in shorts--*

NaomiI: Yeah like that's what they say about us because we have babies—

*Judith: So you can have the Lost Boys and the Bad Girls--! (all laugh)
So is that fair to have those labels?*

Anne: Cuz the boys party too right?
Margaret: -- but they don't say stuff about boys

Anne: Why? Why should the boys be different?

Margaret: Because the boys are allowed to do anything—because the boys are free but the girls have to be married. Be a good girl and all this so you can get married. So someone can say, "Oh she's a good girl, she can do the work at the house" you know? But here some people just wanna go party, that's why Sudanese people think they're bad girls.

Educators wrongly imagine the option of pregnancy is a comfortable, familiar or empowered alternative to the difficulties of school participation for Sudanese-Australian young women. While pride is still associated with motherhood, and is seen perhaps more normatively as a symbol of passage into adulthood, the circumstances and financial burdens of early and often single motherhood are still as deeply problematic for Sudanese-Australians as their non-Sudanese counterparts.

May 16, 2008
The co-participants got into a lively discussion today in which Lizzie (who is Congolese) was criticising the practice of 'bride price' among the Sudanese. The Sudanese students defended this practice: generally the argument was Lizzie saying that Sudanese girls were devalued by it, and the Sudanese girls saying the practice demonstrated their value. Lizzie admitted that the father of her baby (who we had seen in the video being born) had gone back to his Sudanese girlfriend because he had paid a price for her and wanted to get his money's worth – and she is now pregnant. It was a heated debate, and Lizzie was not convinced! (Process Journal)

Many of the co-participants in this study are seen as transgressive by their own culture as they navigate their journey of integration into Australian society. Still others devote much of their time to helping maintain Sudanese culture amongst their peers and younger people. While the project's aim has always focused on examining their educational experiences, it became clear that education and the performance of identities happen both inside and outside of schools, for teachers, students and researchers:

June 29, 2008
Today is Thursday so I went for my regular session with the young women at River Nile Learning Centre. When I walked in the door, most of the

> *students were still at lunch, but Amani was working at one of the tables. She looked up when I called out, "Hey, how's it going?". No response. She kept looking at me. "Having a good day?" I asked. Silence. Margaret was sitting next to her, barely acknowledged my entrance. Suddenly, she: "You look exactly like that girl Helen on TV". Sincerely stumped, I shook my head. "Helen?" "You know," she said, as though it was the most obvious thing in the world. "Helen! Helen, the talk show host." I figured out she meant Ellen DeGeneres, the famously lesbian comedian and talk show host, but didn't let on. I wanted to see how far she'd go. "No, I don't know of any Helen. Can you describe her?" "You know, she's got her own talk show, she's really funny, and she just—she dresses like you, she's got short hair—" Margaret couldn't take it any more. "You mean the gay one?" Amani: "Yeah! She's gay." "Oh," I said. "You look exactly like her, you remind me of her." Margaret was getting bored with the exchange. "She's married to Portia de Rossi, so it can't be all bad. Portia de Rossi is hot." (Process journal)*

I was embarrassed to be identified with gay Ellen – a comparison that, in a different context, I'd probably welcome. But on this day, in this space, with this young woman, it felt like an attack. Perhaps it wasn't meant so. Often these comments were not made derogatorily, just simply as an acknowledgement of difference. I guess the point for me was that I didn't *want* to be different. I've *always* been different, and being different is often tiring. So I experienced *their* statements of my difference negatively. The degrees of refugeity of outsiders in our 'multicultural society' are subtle and ever-changing. These subtleties are well-understood by the co-participants of *Cross-Marked*, and they have been performed between us throughout the making of these films. We enact and discuss (to the limited extent we are safely able) both the benefits and encumbrances of our outsider status, our fugitive knowledges (Hill 1996). I position myself as better able to understand their predicament of *refugeity* due to my own non-Australian identity without ever overtly discussing my gayness. They acknowledge their ongoing refugeity as new Australians in relation to my status as fellow new Australian, but also their insider status as feminine, reproducing, and desirable in relation to my 'lesser' femininity, 'barrenness' and perceptions of desirability. We are both re-enacting our insider/outsider status as co-participants in this film project, vying for belonging, mutually acknowledging and sometimes reinforcing dominant modes of being women. The discomfort I have felt at times during the research is a constant reminder to me of feelings of difference and inferiority which the co-participants continually discuss in relation to their own education experiences. My desire

to transgress in relation to them – to fight back, run away, and assert my power – have all been reminders of the ways in which these students (and I) have performed transgressively in schools, and the moments of freedom these transgressions have gained for them and me.

TRANSGRESSION AS A PRACTICE OF FREEDOM

James Clifford draws on the work of Stuart Hall in reminding us that, if "a discursive linking of pasts and futures is integral to the positioning of collective actors, then some gathering up and performance of 'traditions' must inform all political subjecthood" (Clifford, 2000:97). Sudanese-Australian young women struggling to find their place in largely non-African classrooms are drawing from their collective past experiences as they establish new ways of being. The co-participants discussed feeling validated by the other co-participants' discussions of racism. They shared common experiences of teachers who told them to "ignore it". They collectively began to reject what the Riddle Scale of Difference[23] identifies as 'tolerance' (*'I'll leave them alone if they leave me alone')* of their difference, and are increasingly demanding more. The difficulty is not theirs in identifying the forces at work against them, it is the schools', which desire to continue to see themselves as neutral or 'depoliticised'.

Giroux suggests that "comprehending schooling as a mechanism of culture and politics is at odds with the largely depoliticised view of schooling embraced by dominant educational models" (Giroux, 1996:17) He brings us back to the need for we teachers to see ourselves, and our classroom practices, more clearly before any change can come.

> 'Political education' means teaching students to take risks, challenge those with power, honor critical traditions, and be reflexive about how authority is used in the classroom. On the other hand, a 'politicizing education' refuses to address its own political agenda, silences through an appeal to a teacher driven methodology, objectivity or notion of balance. Politicizing education perpetuates pedagogical violence, while a political education expands the pedagogical conditions for students to understand

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[23] Riddle Scale of Difference, developed by Dr Dorothy Riddle of Tucson Arizona, to articulate various ways people deal with difference, particularly around sexual orientation in relation to social justice. The stages include: repulsion, pity, tolerance, acceptance, support, admiration, appreciation, nurturance.

> how power works on them, through them, and for them in the service of
> constructing and deepening their roles as engaged thinkers and critical
> citizens (Giroux, 1996:53-54)

In their own way, these Sudanese-Australian students are showing they have an understanding of transgression as political education, as a practice of freedom. Once positioned outside the hegemonic culture, either willingly or unwillingly, these young women are creating their own economies of difference. The encounters also highlight how their transgressiveness is related to their blackness. If they are made different by their blackness, then the rules of the hegemony no longer apply to them, and they are free to create new rules, new economies of being. The 'void' or unknown or unknowable space created by the new conditions (their blackness in a largely non-black culture) offers opportunities, not simply deficits. The students have recognised their teachers' 'unknowingness' around how to behave with black students, and they are attempting to capitalise on it. They understand intuitively that their teachers are on new ground: most have never taught African students before, or former refugees. The young women's understanding of the magnitude of this newness is informed by their own positionality in the newness, and they see practical ways forward. Largely, though, they are not being asked to share these knowledges, and the lack of recognition of their knowledge on this issue (about which they are experts) is frustrating for most.

Hooks tells us that liberatory education enables us to confront feelings of loss and restore our sense of connection. It teaches us how to create community and – perhaps more importantly – that we are each responsible for making classrooms "life-sustaining and mind-expanding, a place of liberating mutuality where teacher and student together work in partnership" (hooks, 2003:xv). My experience with the River Nile Learning Centre was sometimes frustrating, often hilarious, and I learnt much from it in my many ways of being: filmmaker, teacher, white, American and gay woman. Despite some disappointments on both sides, it was a classroom project where minds were expanded, where teachers and students worked together in partnership, despite our many differences. *Chick Chat at the River Nile*

documents some important conversations between these young women; conversations which reveal (to us and to them) honest and often painful recognitions of failures on both sides which have added to their alienation from schools. Although Margaret did come to learn something about film techniques, most of the other participants did not. I remained an outsider to them, and they continued to see the film as a task they were required to do at school – not what I had wished for when we began. However, it did show me much about the ways in which my co-participants and I are *both* transgressive, about how we hold different and changing roles in a confronting dance of learning and becoming, and viewers of the film will hear the raw voices of those young women who, like Sarah Kut, would 'love' to go back to school, but have yet to find their way.

CHAPTER 4: SINGING INTO LANGUAGE: Creating a Public Pedagogy

> The category of border also prefigures cultural criticism and pedagogical processes as a form of border crossing. That is, it signals forms of transgression in which existing borders forged in domination can be challenged and redefined. Second, it also speaks to the need to create pedagogical conditions in which students become border crossers in order to understand otherness in its own terms, and to further create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power. (Giroux 2005b:20)

Achol Baroch had only one dream when she arrived in this country three years ago: to attend an Australian high school. She attended language school for one year. All of her friends and relatives then moved on to high school, but Achol was assessed by her teachers as having insufficient language skills to enrol, and was therefore streamed into a TAFE language class, where she has floundered for two years. The other students, she says, are older, know where they are headed, and the teacher often ignores her. She wants to be an actress, and would rather focus on trying to get auditions now instead of going to school. In December 2008, she gave birth to her first child, and hopes one day to go back to school but doesn't know when.

> *If I say I want to go to high school they be like, "If you go to high school what you gonna do? You can't read. If you can't read, why you going to high school?" I was like, "Why you guys telling me I can't read? If I go there I can find help" They're like, "Nah, your chances are not good". They never gave me a chance to go to high school in Australia and that really hurt, you know.… they just pushed me to bring me here because, "You can't read". That's the excuse. How I can read if nobody show me how to read? They say "You're not that smart, you can't do it properly, TAFE will be alright with you". I didn't understand that. I be like 'okay' because I don't have a chance anyway.*

For Achol – with almost no prior schooling, poor English skills and few family or financial resources – the English language school's underestimation of her *social* needs of school have been devastating. She repeats her desire to go to school as a place of social connectedness. What she most regrets is not being given the chance to try at mainstream school. While Achol may have been wrong in assuming she could find the help she needed had she been allowed to enrol, the fact that she was not given the chance is what hurts her most deeply. Her commentary highlights what other co-participants have also discussed: the option to choose for themselves, to

stream themselves as their complex needs dictate. Her story also highlights what Lizzie at River Nile Learning Centre and others have stated: that friends, popular media, and arts-based practices have helped them learn best.

In early 2008, Achol became pregnant to a young man who wanted nothing else to do with her. Already struggling in her TAFE program, she had dropped out by the time we met in September. Her case worker at the school told me that Achol had a love of acting, was very keen to work on films, and was biding her time until the baby came. We began to meet at the school on a weekly basis, although we soon shifted to filming at her home. Her aunty Rebecca had herself survived unimaginable traumas as she fled the Sudanese civil war as a child on her own. She has taken Achol into her home and together they do the best they can to get by. As Achol tells it:

> *I came here around 15 or 16. I never know what is A, B, C, D in English you know, I just came [a] new person. You know in my [language] school the first year, I didn't learn anything…My old friends, were all in one school and everbody went to high school except me. I didn't went to high school...Like I'm getting older now, but my brain is trying to open up. I know myself I can read. I know myself I can speak properly. Yeah, it's better than before. A little bit. It's kinda like 50-50.*

And from my journal, around the same time:

> *19 September 2008*
> *Achol often mentions how she hopes this film will be of interest to other people, and how she hopes it will help other girls. She suggested we put it on Youtube! (a first participant to discuss distribution). She hopes someone will see it and give her acting work, and in a variety of ways she expresses her hope that the film will be a tool of transcendence for her out of her current circumstances. I try to be enthusiastic, but I am not hopeful of this. I feel powerless and sometimes opportunistic to be 'taking' her story and believing I'm not able to deliver the benefits she hopes for. Nevertheless, my sessions with her are fun, interesting, and always heartwarming. Her aunt Rebecca has called me family from the beginning, and I think of them in this way also. I feel responsibility for them, and affection for them. She has a keen sense of humour, and a clear understanding of the ways in which African-Australian students are being abandoned by the school system as it currently functions. She has practical ideas for how computers and drama can assist new language learners. She is engaged with the world, with political and feminist ideas, and yet she recognises she is a slow learner in school contexts and doesn't know what will become of her. She said today in her film, "I don't have a chance anyway", and it cut me to the core. I want to know how a film like this can assist her in practical terms. (Process journal)*

The question of whether these films can offer an 'alternative space' for learning and sharing knowledge is one of the central aims of this research.

Achol is, through current financial circumstances, less able than some other co-participants to get out and about and to socialise with others in her age group. She is now a mother, and this has increased her isolation. Her life with Rebecca is framed by them primarily in two ways: in feminist terms, as single mothers and Achol's decision not to involve the father in her baby's life; and in racist terms, due to Rebecca's two half-Indigenous children, both of whom are viewed as outsiders by some in the Sudanese community. Their bond is mutually supportive and strong, but it is isolated from larger circles of support which could assist them in the long term as they work toward improving their material conditions. Partly because of this, and partly due to our easy camaraderie, my bond with their family has continued beyond the making of Achol's film. We are currently engaged in filming and transcribing interviews with Rebecca as she describes her own remarkable journey out of Sudan as a girl and eventually single mother, having arrived in Australia alone with five children in 1998. We realise we lived in Alice Springs at the same time, but didn't know each other. We remark on the smallness of the world, and the interconnectedness of all our lives. I try to link Achol with community groups, tutors, even the River Nile Learning Centre, where she could attend with Loaner (her daughter), but she declines all options. Today she is simply trying to come to terms with motherhood, and attempts at home through television and sometimes reading to increase her understanding of English.

Achol loves acting, and often describes media- and arts-based activities as the best means of increasing English language skills for newly- and recently- arrived former refugees, in a context which is less intimidating and more enjoyable than standard classroom practice.

> *If you go to computer, every spelling is there…it's easier to find it there than the book, [or from] the teachers. If I go to computer and listen to new music I want to print it out to read it again. I listen to it and read it down here on the paper. Like you go to Google and search and then …you just find what you're looking for. Or ask somebody next to you, "I want to print that song out" they just help you print it out. [And] if you listen to the song the same word down here on the paper that way in the music too it's like talking and you can read, listen and read at the same time.*

Achol's experience with classroom teachers has been largely negative: repeatedly told she is not learning fast enough, or overlooked for other students who are improving more steadily, she believes computers, videos and television give students support that is unwavering and more readily accessible.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

On the one hand, students newly-arriving from refugee experiences are under-funded by the Department of Education ESL guidelines, which has remained relatively "unchanged since 1983, and was not designed for" students with severely interrupted schooling (ACTA, 2006:3).[24] "Students are entitled to stay up to 12 months in the ESL New Arrivals Program (NAP), although further Commonwealth funding is not provided after the initial six months" (Olliff & Couch, 2005:1). Even twelve months is grossly inadequate for many former refugees beginning English-language learning for the first time.

The most needy of these students – like Achol – are floundering as they struggle to remain engaged with the school system at all; insufficient English language support means they are poorly supported to study in the same courses as their Australian-born peers, and generally are struggling with transitions, which is well-documented in recent research (Cassity & Gow, 2005, 2006; O'Sullivan, 2006). Achol is aware of her severe language needs, but identifies school as a place of social connectedness. But government funding and schools are all severely overstretched, and while they often share Achol's view of the role of school, they are at pains to be able to respond to the need. Increasingly, young people like Achol are dropping through the educational – and social – cracks, suggesting long term concerns for their successful integration in Australian society. Achol describes her dream as having ended… and she is still just 18. As she describes it:

> *If you know me, and I can't read, you're supposed to help me. Hardest thing is…teacher not listening to me…and if every month they gonna try to tell me "Pick your level up", that really piss me off! How (am) I gonna pick my level up? I just been here three years, you know, and I never*

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[24] Australian Council of TESOL (Teaching English as a Second or Other Language) Associations.

> *learn English before in my life. And how I gonna pick it up? It's not like*
> *a paper or books or...it's not that easy!*

Achol's story highlights a number of problems for former refugees and their teachers. Was the language centre remiss in streaming Achol to TAFE? Should they have given her the chance she so badly wanted? If she had been allowed to enrol in a local high school, where *would* she have found the language help she insists she could have found?

The fact is that Achol wasn't given the chance, and this bitter disappointment – along with her poor English skills – holds her back more than anything. Ambler (1997), Delpit (1995) and St Denis and Hampton (2002), in researching Canadian Aboriginal students' academic performance, have documented the powerful impact of low expectations of marginalised students, creating a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' in students' failure rates. For Achol, the language centre's lack of confidence in her abilities ignores other non-language based needs: to fit in, to have a chance – even if that chance ends in what we might consider academic failure. Achol never mentioned graduating from high school, or getting high marks like everybody else – she simply dreamt of *attending*. By denying her this possibility, the education system has inadvertently deprived her of the opportunity to 'construct her identity' like her peers. It ignores the socialisation function of school, the community-building that occurs here, and the cultural performance space that offers rehearsal for 'the outside world'.

Achol's disengagement from her language centre peers is perhaps a more damaging blow than slow language acquisition, and for Sudanese-Australian young women, the isolation appears to be more severe than for their male counterparts. Achol began with a ready-made peer group which offered support and informal participatory mutual learning. Once that was removed, Achol has struggled to find 'her place' here. Powerfully, Achol has named her new baby Loaner because, as she says, "she will always know what it's like to be alone."

> *I was alone all this time. I'm doing everything by myself you know,*
> *nobody was there for me up to now. But I think it's a good name for her,*
> *you know. She'll understand what it means to be lonely. All the time to be*

> *alone without nobody's help and no support. I came to Australia. Other people dream to come here, and some people they don't appreciate it, but I do. All these dramas going on, but here is more safe, you get whatever you're looking for, opportunities, everything.*

Achol's story represents both the resilient optimism of many in the Sudanese-Australian community, but also the burden on schools of trying to integrate students with unprecedentedly low levels of literacy. The challenges to schools of this kind of service delivery are well-known, and widely discussed in educational circles. Solutions are few, but schools are trying. I suggest, though, that we are not trying hard enough, or quickly enough, in schools where a combination of low literacy and stark cultural divides are creating what some believe is a new face of racism.

Scholarship on the notion of a new racism is not new: Sniderman has written extensively in the American context about a new covert racism "that is disguised and subtle but real all the same" (Sniderman & Piazza, 1995:68), in which this new racism is "hard to identify and easy to defend" (Sniderman, Brody & Tetlock,1993:246; Sniderman, Piazza, Tetlock & Kendrick, 1991). In the Australian context, Babacan links this new racism (or 'cultural racism') with a "politics of fear" (2007a:118) and asserts,

> "Essentially, the key element of *'old racism'*, the so-called incompatibility of different ethnic groups and their 'inability' to co-exist, remains as an integral part of *'new racism'*" (Corlett, 2002 in Babacan, 2007:121).

This new racism is apparent in schools, at least to the students. We must tackle the problem of racism "head on" (Brough et al, 2003:193), and we must begin to recognise the many necessary reasons why even academically severely challenged young people need to be in school. Freire told us over 30 years ago that dialogue is the key to creating education that is "the practice of freedom" and not the practice of "domination" (Freire, 1970:81), and arts-based activities and curriculum offer some of the best possibilities for establishing this dialogue.

PERFORMATIVE SCHOOLING: Ethnocinema as Border Pedagogy

These ethnocinematic films which reflect, interpret and educate others, draw from McLaren's notion of the performativity of identity and acknowledge that these co-participants have been required to perform multiple roles in their schooling which is both different from their peers (as African young women), and at the same time divergent from their 'lived experience' or home identities (as, culturally, Sudanese). These multiple roles foreground the interplay of invisibility/hypervisibility, and articulation/silence of new Australian and of African young woman. These layers of identity/ies are enacted within a context of micro-inequities, which serve to remind them of their marginal status as gendered, raced and linguistic minorities. While most of these young women already experience belonging within strong familial, cultural and linguistic groups, this new role as African-Australian is the most recent layer in complex and emerging diasporic identities. In this complex economy of identity performance, arts methods offer authentic, fun and context-specific opportunities for engaging a range of learners.

Giroux encourages generative practices (including arts practices) as dialogue, dialogue as collaboration:

> As part of a radical pedagogical practice, border pedagogy points to the need for conditions that allow students to write, speak, and listen in a language in which meaning becomes multiaccentual and dispersed and resists permanent closure. This is a language in which one speaks *with* rather than exclusively *for* others. (Giroux, 2005b:21)

For Giroux, the project of border pedagogy "links the notions of schooling and the broader category of education to a more substantive struggle for a radical democratic society" (Giroux, 2005b:20). Arts-based projects, like *Cross-Marked*, allow young people to engage in this 'multiaccentual' resistant dialogue in which all collaborators are set free of the rigid structures of positivist educational models of achievement. The *Cross-Marked* films provide the participants with the "powers of observing self" (Blatner, 2002:19) as a process of considering different and potentially liberating alternatives. It therefore follows that the re-empowerment of being (through film re-presentation), the re-assertion of 'voice' (through storytelling), and

the validation through doing (of filmmaking) of these participants that can go some way to 'unmasking' them, even to their own new and emergent selves. This 'border pedagogy' extends an educational paradigm embedded in a tradition of critical pedagogy (Giroux 2005; McLaren 1996; et al), which encourages students to question dominant systems and theories, and to develop a critical consciousness about their circumstances. All this while enjoying the project, something few students from refugee backgrounds have experienced.

Achol reiterates that English language acquisition is central to her integration, and she clearly articulates that the lack of language has immediate social implications. Language is, more than anything, about 'fitting in':

> *The hardest thing is: you didn't understand the teacher what they say. You didn't understand the class what they're talking about. You look like you're a deaf person in the middle of millions of people. You can't talk to anybody: not your teacher, not your friends in the class, because they're speaking English. You wish you can talk to somebody next to you speaking English but you can't speak it. That's like a nightmare to me.*

Lizzie and her peers in *Chick Chat at the River Nile*, like Achol, also learnt best from a variety of informal sources including music lyrics:

> *Lizzie: I learned English the most through my friends. Everything I picked on my hands, she'd make me to repeat the word, 3 times or 4 times. If I pick up a pen, she'd say to me "pen". And I have to repeat "pen"! So like most of the time I learned English through her. And also I learned English through listening to music.*

> *Arillette: The teacher tried to teach me to make me understand, yeah but I didn't.*

> *Nyayany: I learnt English at home, with my friends, I didn't come to school.*

Achol relies mostly on music lyrics and television shows to assist in her language acquisition. Classrooms simply move too fast, and are too irrelevant in content, to hold her attention and sufficiently scaffold her language learning. As she identifies in her film, teachers are limited in numbers and become tired, but computers are "always there for you". The accessibility of new technologies, combined with the absence of personality conflicts, racial prejudice, or accelerated peers with whom to contend, is an

advantage to Achol. She sees video or audio recordings of lessons or crucial curricula to be a logical and simple solution to the problem of too few ESL teachers and too little time. In addition, Achol makes clear that role models are powerful motivational tools:

> *Achol: A lot of people tell their story with acting, you know? It's easier than just telling it. The acting people go through where you been. They can understand, you know, how hard it is to be in that person's position. There's people walking around happy, smiling, but they have a lot of stuff going on inside there. They're scared to take it out, maybe it's gonna affect other people.*
>
> *Anne: So acting gives you a chance to get inside someone else's skin a bit?*
>
> *Achol: Mm-hm. Yeah.*
>
> *Anne: Do you have any acting role models? Some people that you look up to, that you'd like to be like?*
>
> *Achol: Not really, no. I just want to be me, just myself. But…. I like Tyra, she's good.*
>
> *Anne: What do you like about Tyra?*
>
> *Achol: Her mom was a single mom, she have a little bit hard time. She was a black girl but she make it. In the tv show, she's a model. Like, she did everything she wanted to do. That makes it a little bit easier for other people. … I watch a lot of American movies and it's not—you didn't choose to be born or your parents, you didn't pick any of this. But you have to get over it and just do something for you.*

Giroux calls this mode of learning-from-culture and learning-in-culture *public pedagogy*, and it bears similarities to arts-based pedagogy, being authentically situated in the lived experiences of the young people; enacted *through* them.

> Pedagogy is not simply about the social construction of knowledge, values, and experiences; it is also a performative practice embodied in the lived interactions among educators, audiences, texts, and institutional formations. Pedagogy, at its best, implies that learning takes place across a spectrum of social practices and settings. (Giroux 2004:61)

Teachers can learn from co-participants like Achol. Although I chose to situate the project outside of schools themselves, the messages of these learners are clear: we are capable of learning and *are* learning, although sometimes in places you don't recognise as pedagogical. Learning English from music videos, movies, friends and cousins; from on the street and on the Internet is life-as-pedagogy, or as Giroux says:

> In this context, pedagogy is no longer restricted to what goes on in schools, but becomes a defining principle of a wide ranging set of cultural apparatuses engaged in what Raymond Williams has called "permanent education". (2004:63)

The political, transformative power of permanent education is what teachers strive for every day. Lifelong learning is the ubiquitous catch-phrase of educationalists, yet in order to recognise these sites of lifelong learning, definitions of what constitutes the pedagogical must be expanded.

RECOGNISING THE FORCES

Ethnocinema and arts-based pedagogies foreground relationship and process over product. They highlight lived experience as a basis for acquiring new learning, for both student-collaborators and teacher-collaborators. They recognise prior knowledges that all collaborators bring to the creative process, and acknowledge that interdisciplinary learning is inextricable from creative processes. They are also intrinsically critically pedagogical, as they value questioning of the status quo and collaborating as socially liberatory and educationally sound practices. Lines blur between outsiders/insiders, researchers/co-participants, centre/margin.

Many teachers use creative writing tasks, diorama-building and drama games, to engage students in an imaginative and kinaesthetic experience of a variety of topics. At Victoria University where I am part of a team which teaches creativity, imagination and design to preservice teachers, we emphasise the arts as a way of *seeing*, rather than an activity or articulate discipline to be taught. Students develop interdisciplinary unit plans through collaboration with local community arts facilities, artists and local contexts in order to teach *through* the arts: that is, teaching a science unit as a student-centred, self-devised enquiry which uses arts practices as the inquiry mode. Teaching through the arts must be more than asking students to write autobiographical recounts, as we saw with Grace Mabor – for, as teachers, we still bring our subjectivities and censuring prejudices to the work. That "pedagogy is always contextual" (2004: 66) as Giroux says, has long been understood, but it requires far more than integrating "the experiences

students bring to their classroom encounters" (2004: 66), like Grace's African past (or her teacher's imagined perception of Grace's African past). A truly arts-based pedagogy, and indeed, public pedagogy, both understand that students must take responsibility for the production of knowledge – a task they enjoy when such knowledge is drawn from their daily lives. *Cross-Marked* shows how readily students – even disengaged students – are willing to step into the role of producers of knowledge, but troubles the notion of teachers' willingness to receive it. Giroux says that the "knowledge produced by students offers educators opportunities to learn from young people and to incorporate such knowledge as an integral part of their own teaching" (Giroux, 2004:66).

I opened this chapter with a personal reflection from my process journal and an excerpt from Achol's commentary on film, to comment on the very collaborative nature of this film-based "performative ethnography" (Denzin, 2003) in order to highlight and acknowledge the strong links between relationship, creativity and criticality. Kincheloe and McLaren acknowledge Freire's central place in the development of an emerging criticality, by reminding us that

> he insisted on involving, as partners in the research process, the people he studied as subjects… [so that] everyone learned to see more critically, think at a more critical level, and to recognise the forces that subtly shape their lives. (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005:305)

as so too, must we become involved in partnerships in our research and teaching.

> *May 28, 2008*
> *It's hard making these films. Apart from the ever-evolving technical problems, which are constant, is the part I didn't expect: me. I didn't anticipate my own 'presence' in this experience, as weird as that sounds. I thought of myself as invisible, despite what my supervisor continually spoke about, that my gaze, and my role as the listener (Bruner), and my role as intermediary, co-editing their thoughts and images, was somehow transparent, background and should remain so. What I didn't expect was the relationship between myself and the co-participants. What I didn't count on was that they didn't know me at all. Or perhaps that's what I DID count on: I liked it that way, and thought it would be nice to continue. I think I liked the power of being invisible, not under scrutiny, and I expected that to continue. Of course it couldn't.*
>
> *I felt exposed from my first visit to the first house, sitting in a room of African women who mostly spoke a language I didn't understand. Along with this came, from day one, my identity as a …what? A not-so-feminine*

> *woman, an unmarried woman, a childless woman – a woman not like them.*
>
> *And what I'm left with are the questions it has raised for me about myself and my role, not just as a teacher or researcher, but more personally. As a woman, I thought we would have this 'solidarity', which is not largely there. And I guess it's obvious that this kind of project should make me reflect more on myself and my own sense of marginalisation, or refugeity, than I anticipated. It feels so much like the enactments of my own adolescence when I could not 'fit in' with the gender performances around me. I hated that period, and it filled me with the anger of exclusion. It is the same anger I feel when I feel 'marginalised' at school as a 'gay teacher'. I feel put down again, and not good enough. Which is what Lina and the others have talked about all through their films – feeling not good enough. So perhaps we are not so different as I think. (Process journal)*

Or, as my father would have said, "no matter where you go: there you are". Denzin and Lincoln, Kincheloe and Steinberg, and others have articulated a practice of research bricolage, which is compatible with what they and others (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; *et al.*) identify as performance ethnography. Denzin tells us this can be an ethnography that "works outward from those moments of existential crisis in the culture" (Denzin, 2000:401) and which affirms each individual's right to be an active agent in the formation of their destiny from the circumstances in which they find themselves. The young women in this study show us repeatedly how active is their agency, even if it does not yet hold the social capital they are striving toward.[25] Ethnocinema, in particular, recognises by its prioritising of relationship in the collaborative process that 'existential crises in the culture' are shared: when something is not working, it is dysfunctional for us all, integrated as we are. This includes but is not limited to sites of pedagogy; it always includes sites of arts-production. When these two endeavours come together, as in *Cross-Marked*, all collaborators now have the chance to explore *together* new ways of being, by "producing narratives, metaphors, and images that exercise a powerful pedagogical force over how people think of themselves and their relationship to others" (Giroux, 2004:62).

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[25] Social capital has been defined by Coleman and Zhou (2004) as the process by which families and communities can impact educational outcomes regardless of class and race. Cultural capital, on the other hand, refers to differing forms of knowledge which assist individuals in their status-seeking within society, and which was first defined by Bourdieu (1986).

Ethnocinema recognises the potential for social agency of all its creators, who are no longer subject and documentarian, but have become collaborators in the creative process. These collaborators may be teachers/students or researchers/young people, arts workers/community members or all community members. The elitism of 'expertise' evaporates in the ethnocinematic collaboration, and all parties contribute equally to the art-making. But this is not therapeutic art-making, either. Research such as *Cross-Marked* is not made to 'empower' anyone, or to 'give' voice to Sudanese-Australian young women, because surely none of us has the ability to bestow power or voice. Ethnocinematic projects such as *Cross-Marked* are, instead, co-created 'alternative spaces' for knowledge that is crucial for, in this case, Sudanese-Australian young women to speak *and* for teachers to hear. Their goal is the transformation of pedagogical spaces – be they in schools, on streets, or in living rooms. The project wishes Achol to feel good about learning English from the Internet, just as it wishes school teachers to acknowledge the possibilities inherent in these public spaces. Literacy teaching and learning *must* move beyond "a technical or credentialized task – it must be seen as a pedagogical practice of both learning and unlearning" (Giroux, 2005b: 238).

This is an extension of a critical pedagogical view of what both teaching and research processes can be; a view which includes the teacher/researcher as an intentional agent of social change, and which "seeks insight from the margins of Western societies and the knowledge and ways of knowing of non-Western peoples" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005:318). These considerations have implications for planning, executing and understanding the research once it is 'complete', which recognises that research with social change at its core is never truly finished – just as arts-based projects never are. And so it is with the film *Singing into Language*, which may never be finished, because Achol continues to change, Australia continues to change, and arts-based practices become better at troubling notions of society, self, pedagogy and the school (and social) systems that "are shaped by forces that exist behind their backs" (Marx, in Denzin 2003: xi).

Arts-based projects – both within schools and in research contexts – are perfectly aligned with research bricolage and the possibility of multimodal explorations. I now celebrate the possibility that relationships between researchers and co-participants are "always complicated, mercurial, unpredictable, and, of course, complex" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005:317), and as a bricoleur I understand and welcome these (sometimes uncomfortable) conditions because of the rich research, social justice (and sometimes artistic) outcomes possible from such instabilities and troublings. McLaren and Kincheloe encourage researchers like me to abandon those advance-planned research strategies that so often only constrict the research, or sabotage it altogether. I would argue that my own research has shown that such conditions negate the planning even once it is in place. What emerges can often seem completely unexpected (although, with hindsight, it should not necessarily be so), disarmingly personal (as it must be), and both more and less than one originally intended to examine. *Cross-Marked* certainly fits this definition.

This project highlights the ways in which arts-based tools can be used in pedagogical sites (classrooms and other) to democratise the modes of communication and knowledge acquisition; enriching the experience of *all* learners (including teachers) grounded in ways of being which run contrary to capital-based, acquisitive Western hierarchies (or the 'banking system' (of Freire and hooks). But more than this, the incident offers a stark example of how the 'banking system'[26] of education is no longer working for anyone. Not in the classroom, with 'curricular' knowledge, and not in school or other communities with social knowledge.

Ken Robinson (2008) highlights the limitations of contemporary schools still structured on 19th century models "to meet the needs of industrialism" maintaining hierarchies of subjects which serve to supply universities and the

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[26] Paulo Freire's articulation of a banking system of education, to be avoided, is characterised by a perception of students as empty vessels who require "an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (Friere, 1970:58).

workforce. Those subjects (and students) most suited to maintaining capitalist economies are prioritised, and the others are devalued. And yet, there are educational, economic and information revolutions occurring around us. We must change now to provide multi-modal and accessible ways of learning for students who, like these co-participants. are in many ways ahead of the school system: they are voracious acquirers of knowledge, and they know that schools are often not the best place to find what they need.

PERFORMATIVE TEACHING: Walking Back In

I chose not to situate this research in schools because I wanted to remove *us all* from these sites of contestation in order to better view the practices and values we have experienced there. I also wanted to free myself from the role of teacher (as much as possible) and the co-participants from their roles as students. In particular, because we were examining secondary school practices, I wanted to meet *away* from that environment, on neutral ground (or on their ground). I was sick of the odds being stacked in my favour. Of course, all indicators suggested that an in-school situation would have been easier, at least logistically: I would have had a captive audience, a group rather than individuals, they would have been there with pleasure representing, as it would, an escape from mainstream classes. And yet, there is a passivity I have witnessed in school-based programs of this kind. They come because they are told to, they say what is safe. They wait for the pizza. I wanted something more fluid. I wanted something more *lawless*, perhaps more chaotic, than business-as-usual. I wanted, dare I say it, something more like our Beaut Buddies drama group in the auditorium…

> *July 17, 2009*
> *On Monday two weeks had gone by since my 'transgression' of storming out. I was leaving Literature class when one of the Year 12 girls came up to me. "Girls giving you trouble Miss? They don't listen, but they want to do the play. I come and talk to them," said Ayen.*
>
> *When the lunch bell rang I went to the auditorium and unlocked it. There were about 15 girls hanging around. "We have Beaut Buddies today Miss?" "I don't know," I said. "Come in and let's see what we can work out." Ayen and Mary sat on the stage. They were matter-of-fact: "We're here to run the show. You girls need to be quiet and do this play, you're gonna be real proud when it's done. Maybe we even have fun."*

> *Fun: that elusive element that teachers always forget. Speaks so much
> louder than respect. For the rest of the week I was an actor, the senior
> girls the directors. Rehearsals are going fine. (Process Journal)*

Arts-based programs like Beaut Buddies, dance clubs, social clubs, film and art-making projects, can provide vital contexts in which multi-age, intercultural and multi-disciplinary mingling can occur. In these environments, students who are still struggling with English language acquisition and acculturation can become leaders, brokers and agents of their own change. Fun wasn't the only crucial element in the success of this Beaut Buddies example. The play was already self-devised by the participants, and we had two student-directors, who were ineffectual. They wanted me to be present, but not in charge. In this case, the social capital of the senior students was pivotal: getting the right *combination* of elements, before teachers give up, is the key. Not just any 'shared creative activity' will do. Avoiding stereotyping 'cultural days' is vital: *Cross-marked* participants discussed the need to be seen *outside* their own culture, to be valued in ways that do not always refer back to their different-ness, or *refugeity*. Students enjoy getting to know non-African students in informal settings, making friends in non-academic endeavours, and sharing their non-African knowledges in fun and creative ways. The finale of the Beaut Buddies play is a group re-staging of Beyonce's hit music video *Single Ladies*, and this hit crosses all borders.

What some previously regarded as majority culture is now not so easy to define. Kincheloe and McLaren remind us that in rapidly changing 21st century environments we must acknowledge that "we are all empowered and we are all unempowered, in that we all possess abilities and we are all limited in the attempt to use our abilities" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005:309). If teachers were encouraged to explore *their own moments* or *states of refugeity* (that is, of feeling outside, other, fugitive or displaced) projects like Beaut Buddies and *Cross-Marked* would flourish. Teachers and critical researchers must now be "cautious in our use of the term 'emancipation' because, as many critics have pointed out, no one is ever completely emancipated from the socio-political context that has produced

[and is producing] him or her" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005: 308). In the case of Achol's learning – and many like her who are new to English – traditional classrooms are clearly not the most efficient places to learn – yet. This is not to suggest that Achol's English language learning via music videos is complete or sufficient, nor that participation in a Beaut Buddies program will give immediate access to academic contexts, but it takes into account important points that teachers seem to have missed: accessibility, interest, relevance, ability and fun are of undeniable value. What Lizzie, Achol and the Beaut Buddies actors have highlighted is the very individual nature of this learning: they can learn when, where and how they want: with friends, in private, at their own pace, creatively, *as they choose*. According to Giroux,

> Educators need a more expansive view of knowledge and pedagogy that provides the conditions for young people and adults to engage popular media and mass culture as serious objects of social analysis and to learn how to read them critically through specific strategies of understanding, engagement, and transformation. Informing this notion of knowledge and pedagogy is a view of literacy that is multiple and plural rather than singular and fixed. The modernist emphasis on literacy must be reconfigured in order for students to learn multiple literacies rooted in a mastery of diverse symbolic domains. (Giroux, 2004:68)

Giroux focusses heavily on visual culture, but public pedagogy must include all those modes that are popularly available, sometimes community-produced, and reflective of diverse communities.

If radical critical pedagogy asserts a need for equal access to forms of knowledge, then public pedagogy asks schools to recognise that learning, too, "takes place across and between cultures" (Connor 1992:251) and across and between modes. The current climate of 'deficit model' assistance to former refugees in schools negates this intercultural 'disruption', and misses opportunities for transformation of schools and *all* their students. Clifford (1992) urges researchers to relinquish the "monological control of the executive writer" (in Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005:326); to acknowledge the power imbalance implicit in traditional teaching and research relations with student/subjects; and to embrace the liberatory practice of collaborative arts-based endeavour.

RESEARCH BRICOLAGE as PUBLIC PEDAGOGY

The principles of research bricolage can be applied to ways of learning, not just researching. These co-participants have shown interdisciplinarity in their approach to acquiring the knowledges they need. From making videos, to painting pictures, to creating and performing dances and dramas, these young women recognise that you take it where you can get it. A multimodal approach, for former refugees, is logical. As Achol suggests:

> If a teacher's reading into my ears [in a tape recorded lesson], and I'm following what she's saying here [on the page], that would be easy for me. And then if there's something a little bit harder, I can ask her, but I understand most of whatever she's writing down here, [because] I'm hearing it. And I'm looking at it. There's nothing better than that: you can hear and you're looking at it.

Any new radical pedagogy that is willing to reconsider itself as well as its student-participants must admit to the increasingly capitalist economy of the education system itself and our vulnerability to it as participants in the system. "The seduction of capital is overwhelming even among the most well-intentioned groups of progressive educators" (McLaren, 2000:8), and if former refugees are to be assisted in their ongoing process of integration, a vital part of this assistance must be the unsettling of the "seduction of capital" itself. This is a radically different kind of assistance than simply helping these young people to try and 'catch up' – a project which most young former refugees find overwhelming and dispiriting. Based on a deficit view of capitalist participants who are new to the system and lacking in these kinds of skills, both the students and their allies become less (not more) motivated in their quest to improve conditions. Both former refugee students and their teachers are more than their lack.

> We can't blame everything on teachers. Sometimes it's a little bit hard. If the class have like 20 or 30 students [they] can't know which one to go to. But [they] know which one is weaker, that kinda needs your help a lot more than others. And then you know if you can't go to them all, you take a little bit smarter one, and a little bit learning one, put them together and you got no problem. You mix them all together, if you see someone is a little bit lower down than others, you can take one person and put them with her and say, "Can you help her today? You guys help each other and show me what two of you can do". That way the kid can learn from another person, and the other person can take something from her. (Achol, in Singing into Language, 2008)

Critical pedagogues welcome scenarios of this kind, where students help students, using innovative and creative methods, and teachers facilitate the process. Critical pedagogy encourages students to "produce and appropriate space for the production of fugitive knowledge forms, those forms of knowledge that often exist either outside of the mainstream curriculum or are seen as unworthy of serious attention" (Giroux, 1996:19). Achol's suggestions that ICT-supported learning and arts practices like film and drama will enhance language learning and democratic classroom practices is simple and achievable. She identifies that even within TAFE-based ESL classes, students who are "a little bit lower down" are devalued within classrooms, and that these students have something to share with their peers. Her commentary suggests ways that shared learning can help to create more socially just, but also more creative, classroom practice.

If critical pedagogy supposes that educationalists (including students) are by their nature activists in this pursuit of transformative knowledge, then Sudanese-Australian young women may be construed as sitting at the centre of this broad activism. They are by their own admission never far from unsettling the dominant culture, including through their enforced invisibility (as subjective agents), their hyper-visibility (through objectification of their colour and height), their silence (as new English language learners), and simultaneously their voices (as Africans, as young people, as women). Their identity construction is by its nature 'activist'. Not only are they unsettling the dominant cultures in which they find themselves, but they are equally transgressing their home cultures in which they also maintain and re-construct themselves. This is the kind of complex creation of self which McLaren, Kincheloe, Denzin and Lincoln and others remind us is necessary for creating lasting change within education and in the culture at large.

Researchers, too, must be activists who recognise that contemporary, multimodal contexts require what Denzin and Lincoln's bricolage calls "multimethods in conducting and writing contemporary research" (Vernon, 2007:205). As Vernon (2007:205) says, "Bricolage is metamorphic rock": it contracts and expands. And it is acquisitive: it begs, borrows and steals. Not

only does this research explore notions of becoming for the co-participants, it must for the researcher as well. Good qualitative inquiry can do nothing else. But it must also include emergent tensions between the researcher's process of becoming and the co-participants', this 'metamorphic/metaphoric rock' of which Vernon speaks. After all, although we may all share experiences of refugeity, our fugitive knowledges (Hill, in Giroux, 1996:216) are not all the same.

Cross-Marked utilises Kincheloe's extension of bricolage to advocate the use of multiple theoretical frameworks in pursuit of complex knowledge construction and to resist more constrictive 'monological' modes of research (Kincheloe, 2001, 2005; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Bricolage research and critical pedagogy allows multi-strand sources of knowledge and knowing to inform both educational and subjective experience, and Achol and her co-participants show that their experiences cannot be narrowly defined as merely 'educative', 'cultural', 'arts-based' or 'gendered'. In considering ways of working with former refugees, Kincheloe's bricolage can be usefully employed in both educational contexts and in research contexts to broaden educationalists' and researchers' understanding of the complex and dynamic process of identity construction that former refugee students are undergoing. Kincheloe asserts that "the multilogicality of the bricolage demands not only new forms of research but undermines the very structure of education as it now exists." (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004:x). The pedagogical recommendations Achol makes in her film, and her very human story of the cost of current educational practices, should assure viewers that the very structure of education does truly need to change.

These changes need not be expensive or terrifying. In the first film, Grace recommends treating former refugee students just like everyone else, but with a particular emphasis on talking to them, learning about them, unsettling stereotypes. In the second film Nyadol discusses the dire daily consequences of racism in schools and recommends that teachers begin to acknowledge this racism as an impediment to all learning, instead of "ignoring it". She recommends making films, participating in research, using the media itself,

but above all, working with families and communities to keep students in school. Achol recommends recording lessons on video or audio so that students can benefit from repetition without disadvantaging students who don't need the same. She and many of the young women from River Nile Learning Centre advocate the use of music videos, vocabulary books, movies, talk shows, mobile phone texting and Internet chatting to improve English language skills. These are all achievable suggestions, but are educators listening? All that is lacking is the will to try.

ME, MYSELF, EYE: A Beginning

I have moved from an early conceptualisation of my research as an 'SBS documentary' of these fun-loving and sometimes transgressive students, to something else altogether: it is ethnocinema, it is public pedagogy that students teach *us* about, it is bricolage research in which I have begun to understand the absent presence (Vicars, 2006) of my American lesbian self in this project, and the research itself (well-intentioned as it is) as a "power-driven act" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005:316). I understand my co-participants not as refugees, but as young women in the process of identity construction, emerging from varied pasts (as we all are), weaving their multinarratives which may include Australian, female, mothers, daughters, ambitious, frustrated, African, and former refugees – and which may include straight, lesbian, or something in between. I understand that focussing only on one strand of their beings helps to reify them as Other at times, and helps to deconstruct it at other times. I understand that they are more than their education, more than their lack of education, and much more than I can easily understand in terms of kinship, culture and becoming. I also feel misunderstood by them at times, most especially at times when they discuss being misunderstood by me. I am often not courageous in my encounters with them, especially around my gay identity. I nevertheless maintain and value my relationships with them as I am alternately (and sometimes simultaneously) researcher, filmmaker, mentor, aunty, daughter, tutor, sister, outsider and friend. I understand that this richness of encounter cannot easily be interpreted and presented as research without a multimodal approach;

without what Kincheloe and McLaren call a "self-conciousness" and that, as I struggle to "expose the various structures that covertly shape our own and other scholars' research narratives, the bricolage highlights the relationship between a researcher's way of seeing and the social location of his or her personal history" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005:316).

Lincoln "maintains that the most important border work between disciplines is taking place in feminism and race-ethnic studies" (Lincoln 2001, in Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005:317), and the "emerging criticality" of the 21st century reminds us that these are the absent presences which remain silenced, if strongly felt, in current research and culture. Denzin reminds us that schools are sites of performance and are intrinsically political. It is no longer adequate to limit ourselves to qualitative inquiry that seeks "to understand the world" (Denzin 2003:225), but we must, rather, attempt ethnographies that "lead to radical social change" (Denzin 2003:225) in a rapidly changing social fabric. Further, it is no longer adequate to maintain schools which seek to 'empower' or even re-empower those we continually refer to as 'refugee students', thereby relegating them always to their pasts, while neglecting their very diverse and changing presents/presence.

I have seen in my research and teaching what Cormier (2008) challenges as legitimate knowledge, in this rapidly changing cultural context, of the need for a centre and 'experts' in any given field, and of the primacy of the canon in educational or academic contexts. Cormier develops Deleuze and Guattari's 'rhizome' or rhizomatic model, in relation to education and the information age, in ways made real by Achol's film commentary. This rhizomatic model offers an extension of knowledge-as-negotiation in a "social as well as a personal knowledge-creation process with mutable goals and constantly negotiated premises" (Cormier, 2008:3). Achol, the River Nile students and the Beaut Buddies drama group know only too well that integration and knowledge acquisition are both social and personal, but their experiences (in the arts) also imagine a "public pedagogy that plays a decisive role in producing a diverse cultural sphere that gives new meaning to education as a political force" (Giroux, 2005a: 5).

"Mistaking perception for truth not only reduces our ability to make sense of the world around us but also harms those with the least power to pronounce what is true" (Karunaratne, 1997, in Kincheloe & Berry 2004:24). Part of the process of research bricolage is identifying what is absent and how to bring it back from the "dismissed, deleted and covered up" margins (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004:20). Kincheloe calls this "boundary work" and identifies that as one brings to the surface that which has been buried, so too does one expose the "ideological devices that have erased the lived worlds and perspectives of those living in the margins of power" (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004:20). Certainly I can apply this to the lived experiences of young Sudanese-Australian students struggling with school culture and attempting to integrate *from the margins of power*. Importantly, too, I can apply it to myself.

Kumashiro, in his work with anti-oppressive education, challenges us to ask, "What if, in other words, we acknowledge that the 'problem' is not a lack of diversity, but *a resistance to diversity* (and an insistence on maintaining certain categories of privilege)?" and to consider that our efforts to redress social injustices then squarely involve "'troubling' our practices" (Kumashiro, 2001:11). To imagine such a new future, to 'trouble' our current practices, arts-based approaches offer an excellent opportunity for exploring that which is not-yet present, in a democratic and co-created manner. It is surely just such 'resistance to diversity', alive and well in schools and also in research, which bears a direct relationship to acts of 'transgression', or at least perceptions of them. When African students act confidently and are perceived as aggressive, when gay teachers mentor gay or questioning students and are perceived with suspicion, when racist taunts go ignored, marginalised young people like Achol suffer most:

> The hardest thing is trying to imagine who you are and when you're
> gonna fit in with everybody. If you can't speak English you can't just go
> along with everybody. You have to try to speak it. That way you can fit in.
> You know I think I can do more better than this. I can read, write, do a
> lot of stuff. I know maybe I struggle maybe 3 or 4 or 5 but this one day
> I'll be maybe better than today. I think I can help other people and
> appreciate what God gave to me. I came to Australia – other people
> dream to came here – and some people don't appreciate it, but I do you

> *know. All these dramas going on but…here is more safe, you know*
> *yourself, you're safe, you get whatever you're looking for, opportunity,*
> *everything. That's what is good about it a little bit here.*

Kumashiro tells us that "common sense does not often tell us that the status quo is quite oppressive," (Kumashiro, 2004:109) and highlights a lack of teacher training that is anti-oppressive. He challenges us to trouble the very notion of 'common sense', an obvious and constant endeavour for immigrants, refugees, and those 'outside' the hegemonic constructions of 'normal'. Kumashiro reminds us that if contemporary education is to create better schools and better societies, we must first recognise the degree to which we are all 'outsiders', and become committed to teaching for social justice, or at least for social change. The *Cross-Marked* project sees an injustice in the inability of teachers to provide authentic, effective schooling for their refugee students, and asks the students themselves to comment upon their ability to learn, and upon the systems which marginalise them and make learning difficult or impossible. This is the kind of critical gaze which I believe is necessary from both students and teachers as we endeavour together to correct the exclusionary practices now evident in many schools. Researchers too must approach education research with a new criticality which acknowledges the understandings these students have, and troubles the presumptions made by their teachers. That is, reframing our own work as co-participant, and the subjects of our research as fellow co-participants.

Cross-Marked suggests that in order to conduct research in refugee education, researchers must contact and reflect upon our own conditions of refugeity as a positionality rather than an identity. 21st century Western culture demands that an increase in mobility and media saturation has implications for the way we see ourselves but also the ways in which we engage with others, at an increasingly rapid rate. Schools are reflective of cultures that are changing rapidly and dramatically. McLaren & Kincheloe remind us that in such changing environments we must acknowledge that "we are all empowered and we are all unempowered, in that we all possess abilities and we are all limited in the attempt to use our abilities" (Kinchloe & McLaren, 2005:309). If we as teachers were encouraged to explore our

own moments or states of refugeity (that is, of feeling outside, other, fugitive or displaced) the nature of this change could be more self-reflexive, less intimidating, and more welcomed by all. *Cross-marked* encourages this difficult work, and sees the reflection and action derived from it as the only way forward in creating socially just, truly democratic schools. This ground-shifting is already occurring as a result of cultural conditions of the 21st century. As Kincheloe and McLaren point out, critical researchers must now be "cautious in our use of the term 'emancipation' because, as many critics have pointed out, no one is ever completely emancipated from the socio-political context that has produced [and is producing] him or her." (Kinchloe & McLaren, 2005:308). *Cross-Marked* recognises these conditions and the need for teachers and researchers to change our language, behaviours and engagements around concepts of liberation, education and democracy in our work with – but not limited to – former refugees.

African-Australian students need optimism and persistence, but so too do their schools. Arts-based learning and socialisation programs can effectively draw marginalised students (and importantly their families, too) back into the life of the school, and provide informal opportunities for language acquisition and socialisation along the way. But, as Achol's story reminds us, the students have to be in schools in the first place. Critical pedagogy interrogates the economic rationalism seeping into education by asking, "What kind of models for identity construction does this new and powerful teaching machine offer? What kind of a better tomorrow does it imply?" (Suoranta *et al*., 2004:195).

In Australia, a better tomorrow is an educational outcome we all desperately need.

CHAPTER 5: THE ART OF BEING SEEN: Sexuality and Gender Performance in Sudanese-Australia[27]

> Remember back in the old days when Australian meant white? …Well, that's finished now, that idea. Cos we all got a history. We all got ancestors. There's more than one way to be Australian - and there's more than one way to be a blackfella, too.
>   (Melissa Lucashenko, 2002:par.1)

> Woman is opaque in her very being…she takes herself simultaneously as self and as other, a contradiction that entails baffling consequences.
>   (Simone de Beauvoir, 1972: 726)

ROLE MODELS AND ARTS-BASED PEDAGOGY

Role models are crucial in allowing Sudanese-Australian young women to begin to envision possible futures for themselves which go beyond traditional female roles back home, and they find them where they can. Co-participant Lina Deng reminds us that films like her *Neir Chi Puj*[28] *(Educated Girls)* can provide necessary role models for encouraging young Sudanese-Australian women to speak their minds, and that finding voice is a powerful step in navigating the process of true integration.

> *…Giv[e] opportunities to black young women to explore their ideas…to let [their] minds out there…it could work in many ways. (Deng, 2008)*

Arts-based pedagogy has radical transformative potential for all those involved with Sudanese-Australian youth in their journey from girls to women, invisible to visible, 'lost' to 'found'. The stronger their own agency can be in reforming and representing themselves as Africans, African-Australians, as women and as former refugees, the better off we all will be. And while educational and other contexts surely have a long way still to go, it is certainly not all bad news for Sudanese-Australian young women attempting to forge new identities, voices and lives in Western cultures.

The first film in my series of six, *Neir Chi Puj (Educated Girls)*, was co-created with 21-year old Lina Deng who had recently completed her VCE[29].

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[27] A version of this chapter was published as *'YOU COULD DO WITH A LITTLE MORE GUCCI'*: ETHNOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTARY TALKS BACK (Creative Approaches to Research, Melbourne, May 2009).
[28] Dinka for 'educated girls'
[29] Victorian Certificate of Education (high school diploma)

During filming, Lina discussed some of these emergent possibilities: the option of becoming a police officer, which would have been impossible in her home country; the many young Sudanese-Australians who are successfully navigating university and vocational courses; the new freedoms presented by Western cultures. Even within the limited scope of ethnocinema, we can recognise that the costs and benefits of acculturation compete. In the stripping away of difference demanded by assimilation/integration, and in the currency afforded by difference as the always already 'old' and 'new' selves e/merge. As anthropologist James Clifford reminds us: "Indeed, modern ethnographic histories are perhaps condemned to oscillate between two metanarratives: one of homogenization, the other of emergence; one of loss, the other of invention" (Clifford, 1988:16).

While these changed conditions in new countries partially represent increased opportunities for Sudanese-Australian young women, they do not come without a price. Many of my co-participants have gone to great lengths to counter perceptions of Sudanese-Australian women as disempowered and subjugated in male-female relationships even within Australia. And while they defend the cultural practice of 'bride price' (paid for young women by the men's families) to non-Sudanese, they simultaneously defend their new freedoms to concerned Sudanese family members who fear they are becoming too Westernised and free. The double-bind is clear: integrate and flourish, but not too quickly. For some young Sudanese-Australian women, these role tensions are constant and crippling. These same role tensions and their transformation in Western society were ever-present themes in my work co-creating the films with the young women.

TEACHERS WHO LISTEN

As Lina's former teacher, I was presented with opportunities to reflect upon the implications of this research for my own teaching practice:

> *A nice teacher is someone... who gives you chances. A teacher who understands you, who you are, your limitations, your capability... How come whenever I talk she doesn't listen? (Deng, 2008a)*

Lina's commentary indicates the complexity of needs of refugee students, and highlights some reasons why many teachers and refugee students simply avoid each other altogether – for both, it can simply become too hard to listen.

Most documentary film projects can be considered generative research in that they 'listen' to the stories of the participants and "remain open to emerging notions" (McKenna, 2004:216) of how or why conditions are as they are – and how the conditions and processes of visual ethnographies might generate new opportunities for both engagement and marginalisation (for both students *and* teachers). But life in a new country is hard for former refugees, and particularly for Sudanese women who aren't accustomed to speaking their truth publicly.

> "In our culture, freedom is not for girls," says Abbas. "Girls are polite and keep quiet. It is hard to have a good life when you think you don't have a voice." (Adeyemi, 2006:par.14)

After arriving in Australia, Lina Deng was, within three months, enrolled in fulltime mainstream school. Asked if her three months at language centre was enough, she remained optimistic despite continuing language difficulties:

> *It was more than enough. I was ready to get out there, just to go to high school because I was excited.*

Lina's eagerness to get on with the business of education is common among her peers. But the enthusiasm quickly fades when the rigours of school life – and the lack of adequate academic support – begin to register. These shifts in expectations highlight the power of the media for pre-settlement refugees, and the need for additional (and ongoing) educational support in resettlement. These young people arrive with imaginings of what it would be like when they finally, hopefully, got here. What they find, though, seldom matches what they saw on television or read about in magazines – particularly for girls.

> *In Egypt I didn't go to school for almost four years. I don't have that vision of how [Australian] schools work…when I came here it's totally different so I was scared, confused, and not trusting what I'm getting.*

Despite considerable ambition – sometimes also a source of frustration for teachers – these students often do not show the foundational aptitude or conceptual knowledge to achieve as highly as they – or their teachers – might wish. Dreams of becoming doctors and lawyers often come crashing down as the former refugee student realises the many impediments to achieving her goal. Often the hardest part of settlement comes in the second or third year after arrival. This is the beginning of the realisation of how daunting the process of achieving tertiary qualifications is for many – particularly one who has negotiated the kinds of uprootedness and interruption the Sudanese have.

> *…the main idea (our parents) came here (for) is to educate their children… And for ladies, for girls like me, education is really important…now I realise how important it is. (Deng, 2008)*

PROCESS REFLECTIONS

In mid-2008, by the time I had completed the first two films in my series, I realised (with the help of my supervisors) that this project includes an autoethnographic component in the form of my exegesis (part filmic, part written) which records my own experiences of, and involvement in, the research – as a teacher, researcher, immigrant and gay woman. As an intercultural project, my own status as outsider/insider and researcher/participant needed to be examined and documented in relation to the work. Part of that reflection emerged by subjecting myself to the same discomfort of being filmed as I'd demanded of my participants. Since then, I have filmed myself as my understanding of the topic and research material has shifted and evolved, but I have also come to believe that allowing the participants to film me offers rich possibilities that can only add to the project. I did not imagine that any of them would take me up on the offer; most were busy with their own evolving lives. But as an immigrant myself, having arrived from the United States eleven years earlier, I knew that being new to a country brings a clarity which fades with time, and I was curious about the participants' perceptions, not only of their educational experiences, but of me as researcher, and of the experience of being involved in this

project. So, when my first participant and former student Lina Deng jumped at the chance of turning the tables on me filmically, I knew I had to agree.

Initially, Lina's idea was to film herself giving me a 'make over'. Representation, particularly around gender and sexuality, had run through our three-month collaboration on creating her documentary. She often questioned (as she had never had the opportunity to do as my English class student) why I didn't dress in a "more feminine" manner, why I didn't "wear more makeup", why I didn't "do something" with my hair. She commented continually on my fashion sense, or lack thereof. My explanation that doctoral students barely have time for a bath didn't satisfy her questioning of my relationship to my body and my performance of femininity. Many Sudanese-Australian students in my school were continually chastised by staff on the shortness of their skirts, too much makeup, excessive jewellery, and other 'transgressions' of school fashion. I was loathe to endure a makeover, but at the same time it mirrored some of the material we had addressed in her film: how Sudanese-Australian young women might become more empowered in secondary schools, and how educators can (and should) facilitate that process. Lina's enthusiasm to give me a makeover seemed to reverse the 'makeover' that had been thrust upon her at school. Lina seized the opportunity to divest me of my supposed mainstream position and recast me as marginal, a possibility with which I was surprisingly uncomfortable.

When Lina finally came to film me, however, she simply picked up the camera one day after a filming session and trained it on my face. At first she barely spoke. We had agreed that the terms of this encounter would be that *she* got to ask the questions this time, not me. I felt powerless as I watched her move the camera around my face and body. Despite her active involvement in her ten-minute documentary *Neir Chi Puj (Educated Girls),* Lina had not filmed me outright. When she finally took the camera, the first questions she asked were more personal than her original concept, and self-referential:

Lina: Did you like me? As a student?	**Anne**: Of course! Of course I liked you. I admired you, more importantly.
Lina: Did you think that I was smart?	**Anne**: Yeah. I did. And I thought you were very studious and hardworking, and that's the biggest—I think that's the best quality you can have.

Lina's primary concerns were not so different from other students', but the context of the researcher/participant relationship revealed them as particularly unguarded, unaffected and vulnerable. In the process of filming her documentary, Lina had sometimes made statements that were hard to hear, sarcastic, or offensive. She had never really had any "great" teachers, including me; that I was boring, unfair, moody. But in this turning of the tables, she talked about how positively the students perceived me as their teacher, how popular I was, and generally gave complimentary feedback. What intrigued me about this was not the veracity of her claims, but the timing of them. It seemed to me that when I had the 'camera' (the power), Lina was sometimes rebellious or aggressive. Her most critical comments toward me were made on a day when another ex-teacher was helping film, and had offended Lina. And yet, when Lina controlled the means of production (the camera), immediately she became more relaxed, complimentary and open. I wondered if these same dynamics could be translated to the power dynamics in classrooms, and what might happen if teachers had the courage to turn the tables there. We as teachers often talk about empowerment of students, but seldom enact this at the expense of our own positions of authority.

In the early stages of filming her documentary, I had found it difficult to allow our roles to evolve from teacher/student, as did she. Now, as Lina ran the show, she began to question the research:

Lina: Why did you come up with the whole… project… why did you think of it?	**Anne**: …Mainly because of teaching former refugee students – I really wanted to do a project where the students got to speak about what they thought could be better, because at school I don't think you have that chance.
Lina: Okay.	

Mostly Lina did not challenge my responses or cross-examine. I wondered whether the concept of formal research and questioning had meaning for her (having not yet been to university herself), or what her motivations were for her involvement in the project. Each time I tried to question her about this, though, or redirect the conversation, she reminded me that this was not my time to question, but hers. Expressing my own discomfort at aspects of this intercultural experiment elicited nothing about hers:

Anne: Do you think it's weird that a middle aged white woman would want to do this project?

Lina: No.   *Anne: About Sudanese girls?*

Lina: No. Is it weird for you?   *Anne: It's been harder than I thought. Sometimes I feel very much like the outsider.*

Lina: Mm-hmm.   *Anne: --because I'm coming into your world. It has felt uncomfortable at times...It's scary, going into someone else's world.*

I thought this would be an opening for Lina to discuss the experience of 'being in someone else's world', of which she is an expert, but she didn't take up the thread. The conversation returned again and again to my fashion sense, and – much to my dismay – to the image I project.

SHUTTER: SQUIRMING BEFORE THE LENS

Lina: You know what you're like?   *Anne: What?*

Lina: I don't want to say you're like Oprah because she's black—   *Anne: I can be like Oprah, don't be racist!*

Lina: I'm sorry. But you're white, I can't help it—

Benjamin tells us as early as 1936 that film – despite its many freedoms – is not reality, and has no totemic relational value. "The audience's identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera" (Benjamin, 1973:228). What we have come to consider 'reality' (TV or documentary) is merely representation, with no opportunity for the actor to "adjust to the audience" (Benjamin, 1973:228) during her/his performance,

as in live performance. Lina's (and my) performance to the camera, then, can be considered a representation which is both more and less real due not only to the filmmaker, but to the form. By this reckoning, Lina's film – even if self-made – is still a representation that should not be mistaken for an 'authentic' or real performance. Film, unlike totemic art, rejects what Benjamin calls its "basis in cult," and is produced for the "exhibition value of the work" (1973:223). It is art made for reproduction, and as such cannot claim to be performing (or hiding) a more essential function than being viewed.

In training the camera on her interviewer/ethnographer, Lina is doing what Edward Said (1978) calls reversing the orientalist's colonising gaze by taking control of the means of production, and making strange the familiar (ubiquitous) imperialist gaze. Former refugees are adept at this process of recasting, and they and other new immigrants are expertly positioned to do this crucial work. However, for those involved in the process of resettlement – both the new arrival and the dominant culture member – framing simplistic and binary definitions of subjectivities can be dangerous. As Said has asked: "How does one represent other cultures? What is another culture?" (Said, 1978:325); the co-creation of Lina's film challenges easy answers to this dilemma. Mishra cites Benjamin's suggestion that "in the age of mechanical reproduction, the film gives rise to new possibilities of meaning, new political expressions and a totally different mode of distribution and dissemination" (Said, 1978:325 in Mishra, 1987). Much has been written in recent years on the process of filmmaking from a non-dominant subjectivity, but a key question this research explores is: *can contemporary African filmmakers and newly integrating African-Australians take strategies for self-representation one step further than simply 'reclaiming subjectivity to objectifying the objectifier?* It demonstrates in its enactment that Lina wishes to do more than control the telling of her own story; produce her own story for others' consumption (either African or non-African). Her analysis of the performativity of me as her 'ethnographer' goes beyond expression of an inward gaze to a reasserting of the African gaze as constructor/consumer, and repositions Australian 'mainstream' culture members as Other. It

implies another layer to the palimpsest of the integration experience – not only is Lina's experience and voice searching to find space/place to exert itself, but her gaze itself can be understood as an emerging new Australian gaze which views Australia (including but not limited to Africans) differently. So, not only is Lina changing her construction of identity/ies, not only is *Australia* changing in its construction of identity/ies, but Australia is evolving its conception of itself, as it gazes upon its (evolving) self from increasingly diverse subjective perspectives. Certainly the immediacy of Lina's position as co-constructor of this new Australia perfectly places her to see and comment upon this transformation, in ways that more established members of an (older) national identity may struggle to do. In this way, Lina's gaze and my own share newness to the culture as a defining characteristic, and yet the interplay of self/other redefines 'Australian' even as it comments upon it.

In the act of taking the camera and training it upon the (white) Other, Lina (and others like her) recreates the mainstream Australian identity as Other, and comments upon it. This seems to me to go far beyond the identity politics and reductive evolution of 'multiculturalism', and even of ethnographic film, in that the voracity of the 'view' of this new gaze is not just itself, but its new world – it is an omnivorous gaze. In her filmic investigation of me, Lina shows an awareness of not only her own changing and layered identities, but mine as well. She recognises in the act of becoming filmmaker that she can be both subject *and* interlocutor, but also how easily *I* can be shifted from interlocutor to object.

This is exactly the kind of shift in perspective that critical pedagogy seeks to facilitate in classrooms, a kind of subjectivity that questions *per se* objectivity itself. This is a completely different and more liberatory classroom practice than helping marginalised or underachieving students to *fit in*, and the work of Freire awakens educationalists to its possibilities. This is the work of assisting *all* students to understand, in fundamental ways, that *all* perspectives, no matter how institutionalized, are subjective, and are therefore open to scrutiny and must be scrutinised. When not only students

from refugee backgrounds but also their peers and teachers can acknowledge that no position is irrefutable, that no perspective is absolute, they will be far better able to negotiate the power structures that position them as marginal, deficient, or privileged. This is liberatory education practice which includes and benefits all, including educators. If an ethnographic documentary project like *Cross-Marked* can be said to be an intercultural project, surely reciprocity must be part of it. As long as I hold all the power (filming, editing, examining), it is not truly an intercultural experience, only the appearance of one.

Anne: How does it feel to be filming me instead of the other way around?

Lina: Feels good.

Anne: Does it feel more powerful?

Lina: Hell yeah!

Anne: Are you making me look ugly?

Lina: Big time! (laughs) I'm actually searching on each corner of your face. Your American nose. You need a nose job!

Anne: I need a nose job?

Lina: Yeah.

Anne: Is that gonna make a big difference in my life do you think?

Lina: Makes you about twenty years younger.

Anne: Why would I want to look twenty years younger?

Lina: So you can be my friend for good.

Together we filmed about thirty hours of footage over three months, and the material was rich and varied. Although Lina filmed some of the footage of her home, neighbourhood and family, I was usually 'in charge', directing most of the conversation and easily hiding behind the role of 'researcher'. Once Lina began to film me, however, it was hard to negotiate the boundaries around the area to be investigated. She wanted *carte blanche* to film me as she saw fit, and – within reason – I believed this was fair and desirable. I believed (and still do) that she deserved the opportunity – as an evolving filmmaker herself, and as the co-participant – to frame me in her own manner. As a teacher I have always believed and tried to model that we

should never ask our students to do things we are not willing to do ourselves, and my research project seemed no different.

Lina's interview of me returned often to the theme of performance of femininity. Apart from attractiveness, she also thought that a teacher should be dressed in a more 'dignified' manner, in order to demand respect.

Lina: I would love to see females looking more sophisticated. You know? Looking glamourous. Because nowadays if you just get a pair of jeans---for example, you're a teacher and you're just wearing … casual--

Anne: Yeah—

Lina: It doesn't really work out with what you do.

Anne: So- you think that if you're in a position of power you should dress formally.

Lina: Yep.

I found these challenges confronting in general, and more so because they are linked for me to questions of my sexuality, questions which are never absent from my life as a gay woman, particularly so as a teacher. The implicit ways in which these questions of performativity of gender have continually raised themselves in my life, as in the lives of many gay and lesbian people, are exaggerated for teachers in schools. It highlights the fiction most teachers (and administrators) continually construct of school environments, and teachers in their roles as educators, as 'neutral', and there is an implicit economy of what characterises a 'trustworthy' and 'open' teacher, devoid of a personal life and political affiliations – which any gay, lesbian, or minority group teacher knows is not true.

In my 'turning the tables' experience with Lina, this was the only area that I was fearful she might investigate. My experience in the Sudanese-Australian community showed that homosexuality was an often joked-about, much-maligned lifestyle, and I had decided not to come out to Lina and other participants for fear of negatively impacting the research. I was afraid that they would see me as *too* 'other' for them to comfortably maintain such a one-on-one project. That is, I was afraid some or all of the participants would withdraw from the research, and I was equally afraid that they would reject

me in our growing relationship. While this is something most gay and lesbian people worry over in most growing relationships – both professional and personal – I felt the weight of our other significant differences already, and didn't want to add to them. I struggled with the possibility, though, that 'outing' myself to Lina or others would in fact help them 'place' me, and may in fact help them understand me better. What this repeatedly brought me back to was wondering whether my unwillingness to come out to Lina or the others was simply my own unwillingness to give up the 'power' of my (albeit unconventional) appearance of being 'straight'. In any event, the possibility of disclosure frightened me. As Lewin and Leap tell us, "the gay man or lesbian carefully managing each dimension of the impression he or she makes, fears the worst" (1996:13). In the end, for a multitude of reasons, it never happened, although I felt it was a subtext screaming in my head throughout several of the filming relationships, most notably with Lina, Achol and Nyadol – those with whom I was developing a more personal relationship than with others.

While this line of questioning did not emerge directly, these three young women did question me on my relationship status, which I sidestepped. I wondered if Lina's preoccupation with my appearance was a roundabout way of approaching the subject, or something more subconscious: did Lina instinctively recognize this as a site of vulnerability for me, and continually pursue this line of questioning as an act of domination over me, a site where she felt instinctively more powerful and confident?

Lina: Can I ask you something personal?	*Anne: I might not answer you. But you can ask—*
Lina: Yes you will.	*Anne: I don't know—*
Lina: Why aren't you into fashion?	*Anne: What makes you think I'm not into fashion?*
Lina: Because right now you're wearing a brown blazer--	*Anne: I think I look quite funky today.*
Lina: No, you look totally ewwww. Old. Because you're wearing an orange inside top, and brown and orange, they don't get along.	*Anne: I'm not wearing brown. You're colour blind! This is like a grey/purple top, orange bra, these are cool grey jeans—*
Lina: --orange bra with a grey purple	*Anne: --and my red Connies. Please*

top!	*film my Connies because they are cool.*
Lina*: Look at that! (she films them) Oh my god.*	**Anne***: So what you really mean is, 'Why don't you dress like me'? Isn't that what you mean?*
Lina*: Uh, no.*	**Anne***: Isn't that what you're really asking?*

(silence as she pans up my body. When she gets to my face:)
Lina*: Look at those wrinkles…*

In her text *Women Filmmakers of the African and Asian Diaspora: Decolonizing the Gaze, Locating Subjectivity*, Foster aims to "locate the strategies that women filmmakers of the diaspora are using to decolonize the gaze and to ground their films in subjectivity" (Foster, 1997:7). How do black women, refugee women, lesbian women or other filmmakers from underrepresented groups 'reclaim subjectivity' in their filmmaking? It may simply rest with controlling the production of the films in which they appear, or it might go beyond this to include the content or perspectives from which they choose to participate. Is Lina's ethnographic documentary *Neir Chi Puj* (shot mostly by me) as grounded in subjectivity as her own narrative drama *Beneath the Silence*[30] (shot mostly by her)? Neither of these may ultimately be as destabilising and reclamatory as Lina interviewing and shooting footage of me. Lina is able to reclaim her subjectivity as she constructs a performance of 'former refugee/new Australian student' in her documentary film for my research by what she chooses to share, despite my position behind the camera. I am suggesting that Lina's roles of both subject and filmmaker can be viewed as transgressive actions/statements/performances for the camera, and that they convey subjectivity, regardless of the filmmaker.

I maintain that Lina and the other co-participants reclaim their own subjectivity in a number of ways throughout the process of this documentary project, not only through positioning themselves, but by positioning me. While Lina chooses to participate in a documentary film made by a dominant

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[30] Lina's second film emerged during the filming of her education documentary and went into development before we had finished the documentary, 2008.

class/race member, she is acknowledging the value of her subjectivity to the mainstream. When she takes control of the camera and dominates the construction of that documentary, she also acknowledges the fluidity of that subject position. Her subjectivity is mutable – in opposition to a deficit frame of social capital which was offered to her in mainstream school and frequently by mainstream society.

Foster's book explores the ways in which contemporary African (and Asian) women filmmakers are revolutionising documentary and ethnographic cinema. If African women filmmakers are currently engaged in disrupting the voyeurism and objectifying nature of conventional ethnographic documentaries, is there room for a white filmmaker to participate in creating films that aim to do the same? Ethnocinema believes there is: in the relationship which emerges through the project, both self/other are represented in newly constructed ways. One way of disrupting this voyeurism is in making transparent the intercultural relationship normally shrouded behind the scenes. Foster's contention that controlling the means of production is 'foregrounding subjectivity', is limited. It presumes a one-way relationship between the content and construction of ethnographic films, and assumes that by creating the films the subject is empowered and the gaze is recast. It ignores the complex relationship between reception and production, and classifies films created by marginalised filmmakers as more authentic, or even automatically transgressive in a dominant culture. This cannot be assumed, either in content or reception. We have moved well beyond the tenet of Orientalism that the Other cannot represent her/himself, so that "they must therefore be represented by others" (Said, 2000:206), but similarly we must not fall into the trap of believing that self-representation is always 'authentic' or an end in itself.

The danger, in a contemporary context, is that the films will be read as one-dimensionally 'representative', and not seen in their complex subjectivities, which often cross multiple boundaries. Lina's filming of me speaks from many perspectives; 'former refugee' is one. But it is layered with other subjectivities: young adult, new immigrant, female, African-Australian, just

as mine speaks from multiple subjectivities. By foregrounding her subjectivity as former refugee, the viewer risks erasing Lina's other, multiple identities. And by classifying me as 'dominant class' researcher/filmmaker, my identities as immigrant and lesbian are equally erased. A richer investigation might include the ways in which our subjectivities overlap, which is what an ethnocinematic research project like this attempt to do. The danger of overlooking our mutual (and sometimes) overlapping subjectivities in an (auto)ethnographic project of this kind, and reifying object/subject dichotomies, undermines the potential of critical pedagogy and any critical analysis of either.

ETHNOGRAPHY: WHY WE ENGAGE

Both researchers and participants have deeply personal and diverse motivations for engaging in ethnographic research. My interest in beginning this project was to establish alternative spaces where Sudanese young women could confidently comment on their experiences of education in Australia. I had no interest in exploring my own experiences of those Sudanese-Australian young women, and no understanding of the degree of vulnerability the research would require of me as well as of them. The personal investment that was required from me was perhaps never fully apparent until Lina turned the video camera on me. The power dynamics in our relationship were immediately palpable, as they had not been to me when I was 'in charge'. Through the camera, Lina was inspecting me with unnerving precision, and it was an unpleasant feeling. I felt like I was under the microscope, a 'specimen' being examined: not an unfamiliar feeling to my co-participants or the participants in any 'study', as Lina readily (and gleefully) admitted. I felt powerless, and continually tried to reassert some: uncomfortable with the long lapses of conversation while Lina was preoccupied with gazing at me through the camera's lens, I unconsciously kept asking questions of her. "How does it feel?" "Is it different?" "Do you feel powerful?" And she would remind me that it was *her* turn to ask the questions. The rules of domination are not easily unlearned or relinquished. At the same time, it reminded me of my students' continual and often futile

efforts to shift the power dynamic in my classrooms, and how I often resisted such attempts.

In the process of this research, both while Lina filmed me, and while I filmed Lina, questions of relationship emerged constantly. We had been teacher/student, were now researcher/participant, and were also explorers in other lands: mentee/mentor, black/white, straight/gay, young/middle aged, African-Australian/American-Australian. These shifting roles brought richness, but also intercultural discomfort, which we both sought multiple ways of navigating. For Lina, the fantasy of me being younger offered the possibility of being, as she noted in her early interview, "my friend for good":

Lina: But with you, you're like my mentor. One time you were my teacher.

Anne: Right, so it's not quite—

Lina: And you're older than me...

Anne: So there are just some things you can't share?

Lina: Yeah. It's out of my comfort zone.
Lina: Yeah.

Anne: But isn't that okay?

Anne: Are there some things that you can get from me as a mentor type person, or an older person that you couldn't maybe get from me if we were the same age?

Lina: Advice, support--

Anne: Yep.

Lina: And of course making this film.

Anne: Maybe.

Lina: And teaching me English. Come on, I'm speaking better than you right now.

The dance of power was constant. In ways of which I wasn't even aware, I could see it later on film or in transcribing the films. I was shocked to see the ways in which I fought both tacitly and explicitly to retain a position of power in relation to Lina, and yet it reminded me that even when we are not aware of it – *primarily* when we are not aware of it – dominant cultures exert power and privilege over marginalised cultures. In the dance of our multiple cultures, it was not simply black and white: there were race, class, language, age and sexuality struggles competing for recognition as they co-performed.

Lina's expressions of power over me were not limited to our private sphere, or to questions of fashion. At times, particularly when her film would screen publicly, or when there was outside interest in our shared work (conferences, seminars, media interviews), Lina would frame me as her employee, her assistant, her agent. She often joked about firing me. She challenged me about whether I was trying to be Black. She joked about making me walk behind her. While I found these encounters offensive at times, and always frustrating, I was not surprised by them. It seemed to me a logical extension of her celebration of the *possibility of power* – not only culturally, but over her former teacher. Who among us has not at some point held the fantasy of dominating our teachers? Nevertheless, or perhaps for this reason, I found it difficult to know how to respond: when I did not strike back with a joking power play, the jibes from her escalated. When I attempted to question her about them, she deflected. Most importantly to me, I did not want to use familiar ways of reasserting my power over Lina, as the project and our relationship seeks to upset the disempowerment of students/young people, both in schools and out of them.

Lina's experience of filming me highlights what Barbash calls the "increasingly interdependent" (Barbash & Taylor, 1997:5) world of filmmakers/subjects of ethnographic documentaries. Films are more accessible to both audiences and research participants than traditional text research used to be (and certainly still is, for CALD[31] community members). "The subjects of your films are better able to judge your representation of them than if you write a book about them in another language" (Barbash & Taylor, 1997:2). Film is also more immediate: whatever is to be captured must be captured in the moment, or lost forever. Because of this, Lina is able to both hold me to account as her interviewer, but is equally held to account as subject. The playfulness – and the friction – of these encounters comes across in film.

> **Anne**: *You've said quite a lot through our whole filming time together about*

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[31] Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)

how I look... Do you agree?

Lina: Maybe because I'm jealous.

Anne: Okay, but do you think you have an idea of what female fashion should look like and because I don't fit that you think I don't have a sense of fashion?

Lina: Maybe.

Anne: But maybe you have a very narrow idea of what women should look like?

Lina: Yep! I do.

Anne: So why should I fit your idea? I'm me.

Lina: Well, you're like my friend.

Anne: But I don't harass you to look like me.

Lina: I'm not harassing you!

Anne: But why don't I say 'Why don't you wear cool jeans Lina? Why don't you stop wearing so much makeup?'

Lina: Maybe because you're liking it already.

Anne: Maybe I'm just more polite than you. (they laugh)

Lina: So, let the secret out. You like it or not?

Anne: I'm intrigued by your sense of what females should look like.

Lina: To be honest with you, I like what you do and I like the way you dress up. Because it's simple. And you're just out there living it naturally.

Anne: Yep—

Lina: Yeah, you're not working so hard at fitting in. Although you're a teacher, you're a mentor, you're a Victoria University researcher, all this kind of stuff, being in a $2000 suit with Chanel necklace and Gucci—

Anne: I'm not a Gucci kind of girl—

Lina: You could do with a little more Gucci, you know? But no, all this kind of high expensive stuff—you're just simple, you're just here...

Lina's questioning indicates a correlation for her between dressing up and "working so hard to fit in". Although framed in relation to my "simple" performance of self, she seems to be grappling more generally with the ways in which power are constructed. If one doesn't need Chanel and Gucci in order to achieve (or maintain) positions of some 'power', what other ways might a woman (like her, like me) be able to reposition herself in relation to the dominant culture and its protagonists?

As McLaren reminds us, critical pedagogy must "be critical of capital as a social relation, which includes being critical of labor as the subject of capital. The struggle against capital is, after all, the main game" (McLaren 2005:97). From Lina's commentary, it appears her main struggle is still located in the pursuit *of* capital, not the struggle *against* it (she is clearly not alone!). If, as McLaren says, "Critical pedagogy must be antiracist, antisexist, and antihomophobic" (2005:97), part of the task of moving beyond the constraints of a capitalist society is to become aware of the interrelationship between racism, sexism and homophobia. Lina's preoccupation with 'females looking more sophisticated' belies an understanding of the ways in which she can develop a resistance to accepted norms of 'capital as a social relation.' Further, Lina's focus on my appearance is performed, and can be read in two different ways: for Lina, it is an extension of our friendship, an expression of her concern for me; for me it reads as a challenge to my femininity. She admits no knowledge of her judgments as a matter of taste: it is clearly a right way and a wrong way, and she is attempting to educate me in the 'right way'. Her judgments were confronting for me, as they cut to the core of my identity. To be challenged on this front by such a new member of this culture reminds me of the visibility of my difference, of my own otherness. Further, that this research might have an added intercultural subtext of heteronormative compliance which is unable to be named in many educational contexts, suggests the possibility of the 'fashion' discussion as a diverted one about sexuality and more core issues to do with 'fitting in' than dress sense.

I have come to believe that Lina's challenges triggered not only my own sense of otherness, but a new awareness of my self-perception as powerful in relation to her. I wonder if Lina has sensed in me a site of vulnerability, and chooses to return there in her attempts to 'even the playing field', or whether she is doing what every young person does for her/himself, in reacting against the perceived establishment. Lina is perhaps unwittingly taking up the mainstream position and recasting me as marginal, and perhaps this is what most creates discomfort: while I endure and have come to expect it from established members of the dominant culture, I seem to have been

positioning Lina as 'mutually marginalised' with me, albeit for different reasons. When she challenges my performance of gender it recasts me as doubly marginal, (homosexually) marginal to her position in the (racial) margin. This positioning and repositioning is what I call 'refugeity' in this research, and it identifies the ways in which 'refugee' can become a marker for those (perhaps less obvious) modes of being which marginalise and remarginalise many of us within and between cultures. Gay and lesbian people everywhere experience the trauma of fleeing or hiding from their primary culture for safety, and while this remains frequently invisible, it is often life threatening, isolating and a lifelong negotiation. I suggest the need for examination of the ways in which we are all subject to conditions of refugeity in time and space, in an increasingly transnational and transcultural world.

What I do know in regard to my work with Lina is that my aversion to this topic presented an opportunity to explore the ways in which we both remain masked, or mediated to and by one another, and to and by the 'audience'. As an autoethnographic researcher, I will continue to confront this site of intercultural exchange in which both of us are (marginalised) players: performance of gender. It highlights the ways in which presumptions of marginal/dominant continue to be problematic for the ethnographic researcher, and for the educationalist. My other participants have not been so concerned with my relationship status or my femininity, although occasionally enquiries are made – when they do, I prevaricate or deflect. It remains an unresolved issue for me, as it does in so many other professional contexts. In their excellent book *Out in the Field* (1996), Lewin and Leap remind us that the process of negotiating one's own identity in the field is common to all researchers, not only gays and lesbians. It is, for all of us, a necessary and often rewarding journey, one which reminded me constantly of the mutual construction of identity for the camera in which we were both engaged.

THE MYTH OF HOMOGENEITY / THE TRUTH OF REFUGEITY

This research with Lina is also at times about the implied or imagined power of being American. For Lina, a large part of my currency for her at school and now is located in my cultural Americanness. Although we are both new Australians, I come from a land of imagined power and glamour for her and for many. The United States was the country she had wanted to emigrate to. It is still an idealised landscape and culture for her, especially concerning perceived opportunities for African-Americans. The construction of this ficto-America is a topic on which I have challenged her and attempted unsuccessfully to engage with her. In the way that dress makes the woman, in Lina's imagined USA all Black people are wealthy, successful and sexy. She is not alone in adhering to this fiction, but I suggest that it has a more layered currency with new African-Australians than many others. In Australia, where the Sudanese-Australian community in particular has been negatively framed by the media, and working together in a media context through film, I have encouraged Lina to question the construction of such fantasy images rather than adopt them wholeheartedly. The myths perpetuated by the American media are not structurally different than those perpetuated within Australia. My currency as an American is undermined only by my decision to have left, but for Lina sounding like an American is in itself a simulation of power.

Lina: Imagine, I've never been to America and I am actually, verbally, American.

Lina: Slightly it is, because when I was learning English back in Africa, I used to watch American movies and—

Lina: And then I liked them and I started learning the American accent and then I got to Australia and it's totally different here so I sort of lost it— and I went to high school and—

Lina: --Anne Harris, an American with dreadlocks I was like "Ooh, American Jamaican."

Anne: You do sound quite American, but that's not my fault, is it? That's not from being around me.

Anne: Ah well, movies, that's different—

Anne: Then when you heard me speak—

Lina positions us as united against a 'totally different' Australian idiom. We are linguistically joined, and my presence in her life causes this initial American linguistic affinity to resurface. In addition, my dreadlocks at the

time when Lina and I met conveyed to her two desirable characteristics: the currency of being American, with the political connotation of wearing a traditionally Jamaican hairstyle.

Lina: Teachers are like the Prophets to me. You guys are teaching us something that's gonna last forever, right or wrong. And you had the dreads on, so it's kind of like a black girl thing. So it's like 'cool, she's one of us.'

Anne: So would you have liked me as much if I didn't have the dreads?

Lina: You don't have them on now, do you?

Anne: (laughs) Yeah but you knew me already by the time I got rid of them.

These continually re-emergent parries between us appear also to be a way for Lina to express affinity with me. She often comments on how others notice her American accent, and shares an intimate laugh with me about Australian slang. Language is a signifier of difference for us both, but the implications are different. For Lina, it also offers a kind of intimacy, which brings us together in a shared otherness. Ethnographic documentary must allow for these moments of sameness, or perceived sameness, as much as it allows for difference.

Despite the complexities, both the documentary film *Neir Chi Puj (Educated Girls)*, and the narrative film *Beneath the Silence* have seemed to offer Lina new possibilities at this point in her life; new ways of representing her emerging selves, and of speaking to others about that experience – both African and non-African. She has reflected on the ways in which this representation can alter not only a general view of African-Australians, but of her own self-image:

Lina: … you're just here, helping Lina, who was invisible.

Anne: Lina was invisible? When?

Lina: Before the documentary. I didn't have anything to do, I didn't have anything to think of. I was just trying to focus on problems more than what I wanted.

Anne: So why do you use the word invisible then instead of sad? Or depressed or miserable? Is it something about being seen?

Lina: Yeah, being seen…Okay, you know how if you're a success right? People will pay more attention to you.

Anne: Yeah (even if you're not wearing Gucci?)

Lina: Yes! But when you're just there

Anne: So people treating you

doing nothing, they'll be like 'Oh man she's boring, let's get out of here'. So I was sort of that person.

Lina*: Mm.*

Lina*: Oh yeah, especially the documentary. I'm actually doing something important after my high school. And I'm getting famous! All my steps to Hollywood.*

Lina*: Yeah. I've changed a lot...*

Lina*: Because that's why everybody's been paying attention to me, even my mom.*

Lina*: She didn't think it was a bad idea. But when I came out in the newspapers and I went to the screening, … she thought it was something really good.*

Lina*: She was really proud of me that I actually got out there and did my thing, about my community and you know, Africans—*

Lina*: Yeah, it's really good.*

disrespectfully is almost like being invisible?

Anne*: And do you think you've got respect from people for this film?*

Anne*: Do you think they're right though? Have you changed?*

Anne*: How do you know that the changing was because you did the film?*

Anne*: Your mom didn't mind you doing it?*

Anne*: Yes.*

Anne*: Wow that's good.*

Of course, identity construction is never a solitary endeavour. It is a function of that omnivorous gaze, continually synthesising external and internal indicators and adjusting the picture, as it were. When Lina discusses gaining her mother's respect for a project of this nature, she is identifying the ways in which the acquisition of cultural capital can be assisted through artistic endeavour, even when it originates as ethnographic in nature, and even when mediated by someone else's gaze.

Lina's construction of her identities through *others' responses* to her performance is not a new phenomenon, nor indeed unique to Lina. However, the fact that Lina recounts her mom's valuing of her due to the *media* attention she received – in a cultural climate where Sudanese-Australian and African immigrants have been actively vilified – is noteworthy. It indicates that the accumulation of cultural capital rests strongly with the image *projected into the public*, perhaps more so than just the *making* of the film. It

also underlines the veracity of Ellis's contention that "telling a personal story becomes a social process for making lived experience understandable and meaningful" (Ellis & Bochner, 1992:80). That is, meaningful not only to the teller, but to her mother, her researcher, and others.

Lina's identity construction is – at this moment in time – also inextricably tied to media construction of 'African-Australian' identities, particularly Sudanese. For this reason, her performance of self in the film can hold more currency than the multicultural imperative for women of colour to seize production of their own films. I am suggesting that cultural capital is partly defined by its temporality, and in this moment in Australian culture, the films which comprise *Cross-Marked: Sudanese-Australian Young Women Talk Education* are powerful tools for these young women, regardless of who constructs them, contingent upon *how* they're constructed.

Of course, there are other ways of constructing identity and cultural capital. But in this imagistic sound-bite culture the moving image holds unparalleled agency, in a way that even Benjamin could never have foreseen. Lina's journey is in part about seeing what other people use to accumulate this kind of power. But *Cross-Marked* is also about our mutual learning that communication and shared vulnerability, however imperfect, are a means through the maze of intercultural misunderstanding, and that arts practices can provide an alternative space for these meetings to occur. Lina said in her film when discussing the need to have 'non-African' friends because they can "give you" things, that our relationship offers a kind of currency for her (Harris, 2008) But what she doesn't recognise as easily is that our relationship offers a kind of currency for me too. This is what I have tried to honestly explore in our working relationship.

Communication is at the heart of what Freire calls "dialogics"—"the essence of education as the practice of freedom" (Freire, 1970:8), and that stands in opposition to "education as the practice of domination" (Freire, 1970:81). That teachers and students must find a way to engage in dialogue informed by the wider contexts in which they find themselves is the only path toward a

truly democratic education and society. Film projects such as *Cross-Marked* make opportunities for these dialogues to begin.

Lina: I'm really glad that we're still connected, that we still have that communication going on—	*Anne: Well I really admire you and just thinking of you coming and speaking about your film is very brave …*
Lina: Yeah.	*Anne: I think we've both grown. I know I have!*
Lina: That was my goal actually.	*Anne: It's an ongoing process, isn't it?*
Lina: Yeah, you've got those wrinkles going on!	*Anne: I've grown here and here and here…!*

PUT YOUR HAND UP

That the films which comprise *Cross-Marked* have been transformative for the participants and for myself is measurable to the extent that we can comment upon our experiences. However, this project resists the funding trend in education and community arts practices which seeks immediate and measurable 'transformation' through short-term projects. This is a wholly Western notion, and one at odds with a holistic, and in some senses, African world-view: the success of *Cross-Marked*, and any collaborative project that seeks to change the conditions in which people live and work must be long-term and scaffolded. It must involve the ever-changing identities and conditions out of which the work grows. As Nyadol identifies in the last film, *Still Waiting*, "all these projects are good that work toward changing things, but they have to continue, not just stop and start". In this sense, *Cross-Marked* is a beginning, one stone on a long road toward more democratic living and schooling.

The question remains whether these films can have lasting impact in schools, or for educators in general. If one original aim of the work was to inform the thinking of educators and the delivery of education services for Sudanese-Australian (and other) students from refugee backgrounds, then the success of the project can only be measured in how successfully it can change the

thinking of teachers and their behaviour in classrooms. The films primarily document changes in these students, but their advice and commentary offers a collaborative hand to educators. Will the students' expertise about their experiences in schools inform curricula and school practice?

Anne: I know it's not my turn to ask questions, but do you feel that this movie that you've made... that there's a chance it could make things better at school?

Lina: Yep.

Anne: Or do you think nah, it was fun, but it's not really going to change anything.

Lina: When we were screening the documentary I invited a friend of mine and and he was so happy about it you know? And he's like 'Man I'm gonna go to uni and I'm gonna put my hand up. If I like something I'm just gonna do it' and he's like 'You know your film just inspired me.' So right now, when his professor is not in the lecture room he gets to teach the class on editing and stuff so—

Anne: Wow

Lina: So that's a good achievement for him. So he's not a shy person anymore, underestimating his chances of getting out there.

Anne: That's really good.

Lina: I know.

Certainly I have changed through the making of these films, and I know other teachers who are equally transformed through their work with former refugee students. This question has affected my process (and teaching) while completing this project, but I end the project more certain of the need for active projects of this kind in schools. Is this project transferable to other contexts? Certainly. And yet, any transformative value it has must come through participation, not viewing. Ethnocinema is defined by the need to actively collaborate across cultures, and *Cross-marked* is no different.

This is not to say that these films are not effective tools of liberatory education. To date, the audiences for the films have remained film festival audiences, members of the African community, and members of academic and community-based organisations. The work is received and discussed in

'identity' terms: that it's good that young people are 'speaking their minds', are 'having a go', are 'reflecting on their experiences'. But any dedicated teacher knows that reflection is not enough, and that, in fact, the language around making room for these kinds of films borders on patronising if not racist. African-Australian young women (and young men) need to do more than have a go: they need real opportunities in the real world. Can ethnographic film be such an opportunity?

Lina has, out of all my co-participants, most actively used the film and screenings as a springboard to other things. She continues to speak about the film at conferences and seminars when asked in educational contexts and beyond. She also speaks about African young women and film in general, about how this may be an accessible conduit for building cultural capital in a new country still suffering from misunderstanding around race.

Lina discusses the films' making things better at school *by altering the African students' behaviour*; the focus is on the student to change, not the teacher. While this is understandable because Lina speaks from her own perspective, I was initially disappointed with these films and with responses of this kind: I wanted the Sudanese-Australian students to hold their teachers accountable. I wanted them to envision a better education future. A system where not only do *they* learn how to navigate these systems more confidently, but where teachers and administrators become better at assisting them. Lina's vision for this future, like most of her co-participants, does not offer much hope (or suggestion) for the ways in which teachers can change.

Perhaps McLaren's focus on a socialist democracy – in and out of the classroom – is our best bet. He criticises 'grabs' for capital in any of its forms – social, cultural, or economic – and urges educators in particular to move away from a capitalist model toward a more revolutionary recast of our social institutions:

> . . . any revolutionary struggle must be dedicated to educating the
> emotions as much as the intellect and…anti-imperialist struggle must be
> waged on the triple continents of reason, passion, and revolution. It
> must take place not only on the picket line or protest march, but also in

> the schools, places of worship, libraries, shop floors, and corporate
> offices -- in every venue where people come together to learn, to labor,
> and to love. (McLaren, 2005:97)

McLaren calls us to something more than just helping transform the way our students think. Their thinking will transform *anyway*, as they navigate their new culture, and certainly we can bring to their awareness an oppositional reading of dominant culture. While their integration may always be mediated by the class, race, sexuality and gender inequities which rule all our lives, Sudanese-Australian young people will continue to grow in confidence and ability and will benefit from a critical pedagogy, a pedagogy of the oppressed (Friere, 1970:8). What *Cross-Marked* can provide is an intercultural encounter where *both* participant/researcher can celebrate their awakenings and investigate their blindnesses together, and where the shared project of creating a socialist democracy becomes as desirable as Gucci; as engaging as the moving image.

Anne: And do you think you'd be interested to help other girls make films about their experiences?

Lina: Yes, definitely. The research actually inspired me to like the film industry. It just gave me ideas and a few weeks after we shot it I thought of an idea and I was like 'I've got this film.' And that's when I asked you to come and help me writing it because my English is not so good, and here we are.

Anne: Here we are.

CHAPTER 6: THE INTERCHANGE: Source of Creative Understanding

> Intercultural communication as a harmonious endeavour seeks to create
> the sharing of power. In the exchange, the interchange, we find the source
> of creative understanding. (Asante, 2007:50)

Molefi Kete Asante attempts to develop a metatheory which will help contextualise and progress intercultural dialogues and encounters, and re-focus theoretical analyses on the largely Eurocentric roots from they continue to draw. He reminds us that intercultural communication remains "a matter of power" and that "we cannot achieve intercultural communication which is mature and effective until we address the *material conditions of the people*" (Asante, 2007:48). While Asante's analysis focuses on international relations, I believe his call to a new way of approaching the issue of status power and the possibility of equality is relevant in the microcosm of *Cross-Marked* and in schools. For Asante our "battle is intense, the struggle we wage for status power is serious and we cannot *communicate* as equals when our economic position is that of servants" (Asante, 2007:49). Asante's words resonated with me throughout this research as it moved between ethnography and arts-based research: what is the core nature of this project, and what is the essential basis of my relationship with my co-participants? Is power immutable, or are our status positions fluid and changing all the time? Is it possible for *Cross-Marked* (and ethnocinema) to be such an 'interchange', a source of creative understanding for my co-participants and myself, while possibly remaining powerless to address their sometimes dire material conditions?

Consideration of these conditions and of the role I might play in relation to the material conditions of my co-participants returned me to critical pedagogy and to bricolage, both of which advocate action. There certainly have been times throughout my work with these 15 co-participants when I have felt myself to be a member of the dominant class, reaching out from an 'empowered' status position to marginalised others, less powerful than myself. However, I quickly learnt more about the ways in which I was disempowered in relationship with these women – and the many sources of

power they do have – than I did about disempowerment of some imagined 'Other'. I began the project with an altruistic intention of assisting those marginalised others, of inviting them into the realms of perceived power and capital which I seemed to inhabit. I have written elsewhere in this document about the moments (sometimes prolonged) in which I felt these status-relations reverse, when I felt my otherness and seemed further marginalised, than the young women with whom I was working. I recognised in our encounters a dance of power in which we all alternately asserted our various forms of capital; in which we negotiated and sometimes struggled for dominance. But Asante's words would return, and I was forced to admit that, unlike McLaren's insistence on a resistance to capitalist paradigms, these young women are struggling for social agency, and that our communication was informed always by our unequal economic positions. I could not escape the recognition that our difficulty communicating as equals was informed by material conditions. In the case of Angelina Kuol, this difficulty presented itself as a continual conflict with the logistics of our meetings, public transportation and the geographical isolation of her family home in a Melbourne suburb.

ETHNOCINEMA: Addressing the Material Conditions

Anne: What would it look like, if you could make your perfect school?

Angelina: I think if there's more ESL, they should at least have a teacher that can help me out in class. They don't have ESL at all, you just have to work hard. That's all they tell you.

Anne: But is that the truth? Is it possible to understand everything just by working hard?

Angelina: It's not. You need more help. I do need a lot of help.

I met Angelina Kuol through a Saturday school tutoring project in which we both participate, known as the SAIL (Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning) program. Nik Tan, the director, knew of my project and recommended Angelina to me as one of the older students on the other side of town, near Dandenong in the southeastern suburbs of Melbourne. We spoke on the phone and Angelina was enthusiastic. Although most of my co-participants had emerged from the western suburbs of Melbourne, I knew

many Sudanese in the southeast and knew too that this is a faster-growing region for Sudanese new arrivals. While there are many projects emerging to assist new immigrants and former refugees in the southeastern suburbs, these services were still fewer than in the longer-established communities in the western suburbs. The Dandenong region, too (particularly Noble Park), had become notorious for negative media portrayals of the Sudanese community, and especially the tragic death of Liep Gony in 2007 (spoken of by Nyadol in Chapter 2). So, for these and other reasons, I was keen to go to Dandenong and meet Angelina.

From our first meeting for filming, transportation interfered. She asked me to meet her at her sister's home, where she was staying. I arrived at the appointed time, but she was not there. I met her sister, brother-in-law, and several young nieces and nephews. They had no idea when Angelina would arrive. I called her and she said she was on her way, on the train. Her family were generous and friendly, serving me tea and chatting about the project. An hour went by, then another hour. I politely tried to leave, but they were insistent that she would arrive. I should make myself at home. I watched a film in Dinka with the children, trying to make out the plot with no help of language. I felt awkward and uncomfortable, could only think of leaving. I fantasised that Angelina was giving me a first-hand experience of the kind of discomfort that Sudanese students must have entering this Australian culture. I sat it out.

Eventually Angelina arrived. She was articulate and friendly, apologetic for the delay. She had missed the train, been held up at the bus station, had taken three modes of transport to get here; my frustration evaporated. I showed her two of the earlier films in the series. I explained that the purpose of the project was twofold: to affect change in the Australian school system by articulating her experiences and advice, and to collaborate in a filmmaking process together. She agreed to participate, and we decided that Saturdays were the most mutually convenient time to meet. I tutored at one of the SAIL campuses in the western suburbs near my school, and Angelina

attended the one in the southeast. I would drive to Cranbourne and meet her after we'd each finished our respective Saturday schools.

> **Angelina**: *…Getting to make a lot of friends with others, that's how you can get help. Like every time when they gave me homework from school and I don't understand it, I just go to Saturday school and they help me out there. Then I don't have any problem when I go back to school. You also go there to meet new people. Not just only for help but to see new people. I wouldn't be that interested in going all the time if it's just because of homework, because you don't get homework all the time and even if you get homework, sometimes you'd be able to do it by yourself if you understand it. We do other stuff too.   Like we do formals, and we go camping, so it's really fun, it's not just all about homework.*
>
> *I get the bus home, and the train. They're almost 2 hours. And sometimes if I miss the train then I have to wait for another one. And on Saturdays there's no good transport.*

So we began her film *In Transit/ion*, and two patterns emerged from the beginning: firstly, as transport was always an issue, we decided to make it the central concern of the film; secondly, Angelina had no real interest in learning the mechanics of filmmaking. This second issue presented me with a problem: could this project be 'just' an ethnographic endeavour, collecting data with video as the collection tool? Was it primarily an arts-based research project, focussing on developing the skills of the co-participants? Or was it this thing I was beginning to think of as ethnocinema, based on relationship and collaboration for social change. Unlike Lina, Achol and others before her, Angelina had no interest in the arts-based methodology, but still keenly wanted to participate. For some of our filming sessions, her friend Veronica Bar accompanied us and filmed Angelina. Veronica had previous experience with video cameras, and took charge of the filming sessions, directing Angelina and me, always drawing more commentary out of Angelina than in the sessions when she was not present. I welcomed Veronica's participation, but felt powerless to recruit her: sometimes she came, sometimes she did not. Her presence typified my sessions with Angelina, which always felt somehow out of control, no matter how well we had planned the shoot beforehand. It was not yet collaborative. An excerpt of my process journal from those sessions reflects my frustrations:

> *October 2008*
> *I drove to film with Angelina again today. It's about an hour and a half drive each way. She has never yet been on time, or there where she said she would be. Usually it involves me driving back to Dandenong (another half hour), or picking her up at a new location. I am getting to know my*

Melway [street directory] quite well. My meetings with her always involve waiting, going to different locations, transporting others, and usually sitting with various members of her family for long periods of time. Today I spent nearly two hours in the McDonalds on her corner, waiting and calling. It's terribly frustrating, but then she always – eventually – arrives, unlike some of my other co-participants. She is charming, confident and completely comfortable with being filmed. Veronica came again today, and is actively engaged in filming Angelina. She makes suggestions for shots, set ups, and commentary about schools that she and Angelina have discussed in the past. I invite her to take a more active role in the film, or to make one of her own, but Angelina dismisses this suggestion.

My response to my own feelings of despair and infuriation about the difficulty meeting with Angelina was to suggest that her film focus on transportation, as it seems to be an ever-present issue. Now that I have a focus, it feels less frustrating. Every change of location, waiting, etc, can be part of the film. It all becomes part of the commentary about the challenges faced by this young woman as she navigates her commitments in her current life. (Process Journal)

The difficulties and lost time in meeting up with Angelina meant that I was always eager to simply, rapidly film wherever we were. I was aware that at any moment she might have to leave, might not show up, might not make it the next time. When we scheduled a four-hour meeting, we'd end up with an hour or two together, or less. No matter where we filmed it was loud and noisy, people were coming and going, and the light was always somehow wrong. These frustrations had implications for my original intent: I had wanted to make films that were as 'unstaged' as possible, that were collaborative, and that were as imbued as possible with the lived experiences of the co-participants. This meant, however, that well-lit, soundproof rooms were not an option. I had encountered these 'cinema verité' conditions with the previous films, particularly with Lina Deng's, but Angelina's film seemed constantly sabotaged by them. Could a film project like *Cross-Marked* remain liberatory (in the Freirean sense) if a co-participant remained a 'subject' and did not want to actively participate in their construction? I wondered if perhaps she didn't participate as fully in the filming because she was already 'more' than a subject in this film project, through active participation in a dialogue with me as teacher/researcher. The answer can be found in Angelina's commentary: simply, like most of her co-participants, she highlights the absence of teachers asking *why* things were as they are. Angelina specifically discusses teachers' failure to enquire why she is often late arriving at school from her long public transportation journey. Teachers'

failure to enter into dialogue with the students is evident in all the films, highlighting a different area of enquiry: why they didn't complete homework, why they aren't contributing in class, why they want to enrol in mainstream English classes and not ESL, why – like Achol – they even want to *go* to mainstream school when their 'chances are not good'. For Angelina, her teacher's failure to question why she was not able to stay for the afterschool help she so desperately needs, or why she arrived late, is central to her experience of being 'behind' at school. This is not a language-related issue, it is a 'material condition' of Angelina's life here in Australia: she must live in a suburb more than an hour from the city. She must now attend a school with no ESL program because it is more accessible to her home. These are material conditions, and they inhibit Angelina and others like her from accessing the programs and assistance she needs.

> *Anne: So when you first came here, was it scary? Going on transport?*
>
> *Angelina: It was, cuz like I'm not used to trains. Back there, we don't get the train. When we first came I had to get to school, so I got the bus and I got the train from Dandenong station. I was supposed to go to Noble Park, but I went all the way to Springvale. I was like "Oh my god!" I just asked around. Like I don't ask white cuz like—*
>
> *Anne: Yeah*
>
> *Angelina: Yeah. I couldn't speak that good English, so I just asked the Sudanese that I see around. Except that I couldn't understand them because they're Nuer and I'm Dinka!*
>
> *Going to school late you have to miss the--for example, getting 2 buses, I don't really know the timetable, and you know the buses don't come on time so sometimes I get to school late like period 2. I have to miss period 1 and I don't know what they learned in period 1 which lets me down.*
>
> *The teachers don't ask you anything. You just have to write a note from home. By the time I get to school I don't think I'll be late, but I miss the bus so I don't take any note to school.*
>
> *Anne: And do they know about your transport issues?*
>
> *Angelina: Well they never asked me about anything so. They don't know anything. They might think that I'm one that doesn't get up early in the morning.*

ETHNOCINEMA: Ethnography *and* Arts-based Research

As arts-based research, collaborative filming of co-participants allows us to create alternative spaces in which to engage in conversations that may not have previously occurred. They allow not only the co-participants to explain

themselves, to be heard ("I want somebody to hear it!" as Achol says), but also offers the possibility of a dialogue: between myself as researcher/teacher, but also between the imagined viewers of the film and these participants or their peers. This imagined conversation, this filmic beginning to that conversation, is a strong step toward assisting teachers to understand the world in ways that are different from their own.

> Creative approaches to research embrace the Freirian ontological view, which Kincheloe and McLaren describe as the task of interpreting the world so 'we can become more fully human' (Kincheloe & McLaren 2000: 290). Creative approaches acknowledge our own humanness as researchers and research participants and invite levels of engagement that we hope will connect with the humanity in others." (Brearley, 2008:3)

These films seek to create this dialogue between speakers and non-speakers, but also a dialogue about speaking. As Achol reminded us, language is a collective endeavour, a tool for relating which requires context to make meaning of it. Teachers too often disregard the context and focus only on the language as an end in itself. Sudanese-Australian students are not without context, but their context for learning English language has shifted from the home to schools and the public sphere:

> *In your own country it's more easy because the parents, the family, the cousin, [it's the] same language everybody's reading. Your cousin finishes his uni, your auntie's a doctor, your father's a teacher – everybody know how to speak it, everybody know how to read it, and they help you. (Achol Baroch, Singing into Language 2008)*

Cross-Marked (and all ethnocinematic projects) offer the possibility of establishing a dialogue based on the experiences, and in the contexts, of the co-participants. That the films were created in English, not in the co-participants' first languages, underlines the fact that this is a project focussing on relationships, situated in an English-speaking context, in which all collaborators work toward social change. They are not *without* language – they are learning a new one that supplements those they already have. And they are clearly able to convey complex knowledges and acute critical observations in the dominant language of their new culture. More importantly, both the co-participants and I want these films to be viewed by a wide audience and to assist in the project of creating change in schools and in society. This means that unlike some other ethnographic documentaries, that aesthetic or market concerns do not dominate. In ethnocinema, relationship

and process always take precedence over formal considerations. Obviously, to achieve a wide viewing audience, formal concerns cannot be completely ignored, but these aesthetic concerns are addressed *together* in the co-creation of the films, not back in the editing suite by a non-Sudanese editor.

Ethnocinema does not perceive a conflict between its ethnographic and arts-based characteristics. It remains ethnographic because it is grounded in cultural specificity, which is not essentialist and can be always-changing. It does not seek to 'document' a culture, as ethnocinema understands that culture is varied, ultimately unrepresentable and always emerging. The films of *Cross-Marked* do not seek to present what 'Sudanese-Australian' young women think or say, but what *these* Sudanese-Australian young women say, on *this* day, in *this* place, to *this* researcher. Like all critical pedagogical projects, they are context-specific. The project is equally arts-based research. The fact that we have jointly created new knowledge, new understandings, together in a shared creative endeavour, is not at odds with its ethnographic specificity. In this way, ethnocinema, as *Cross-Marked*, extends both traditional ethnography and arts-based research.

Denzin describes "seventh moment scholars" as creative researchers who seek to expand the forms of traditional research in order to better respond to the specificities of emerging social conditions (Denzin, 2003). This performative seventh moment, he says, "enacts the feminist, communitarian ethic", is "subversive" and is characterised by an "anti-aesthetic" (Denzin, 2003:122). Further, Denzin highlights that performative texts in this seventh moment are interdisciplinary, that "in these texts ethics, aesthetics, political praxis, and epistemology are joined." (2003:123). That *Cross-Marked* straddles and struggles with definitions of ethnography and arts-based research, adds to its complexity and value as a seventh moment scholarly endeavour. Brearley summarises Denzin and Lincoln's seventh moment of research "as 'emancipatory'…It is characterised by being culturally situated, critical and hopeful" (Brearley, 2008:3-12), as *Cross-Marked* certainly is.

And yet, there remain technical and ethical concerns which have been difficult to resolve during the filming and contextualisation of the films. I found myself wanting to create 'beautiful' films, aesthetically pleasing films. Editors asked me to consider what my artistic 'intentions' for the films were, and encouraged me not to 'dismiss' the possibility of mainstream audiences like SBS and popular film festivals. The co-participants, too, largely judged the value of their films by the 'look' of them, not the critical content. How could I retain a commitment to my methodological aims when the films that were emerging were at times 'unwatchable' by industry professionals, documentary filmmakers and, at times, the participants themselves? I was told time and again that if I had only kept the camera on the tripod, kept myself out of the shot, used better (artificial film) light, the films might have been 'good'.

Near the end of the year of filming, I came to the realisation that perhaps I'd bitten off more than I could chew. Unlike so many of the co-particpants in their schools, I was given the opportunity to spread my wings, try my best at a project I felt passionately devoted to, and fail if that's what it took. And there have certainly been moments of despair when I believed the project had failed: the films were not as slick as I'd hoped, the content was sometimes not as radical as I wanted, the collaboration was not as complete as I'd hoped. But the look on Lina's face when her film won a best film award in a local film festival was a powerful incentive for me to make them as 'watchable' as possible, while remaining loyal to my original aims for the project. Brearley asks, in her exploration of the dual tasks of research remaining creative yet maintaining rigour, "How can we invite emotional engagement with data and avoid sentimentality and self-indulgence?" (Brearley, 2008:5). This research concern was always present during the co-creation of *Cross-Marked*.

I also came to realise that my own documentary skills and equipment were perhaps insufficient for the task. The cameras that I originally filmed with were poor quality and no amount of skillful shooting made up for the poor lens quality. While the hand-held cameras were less intimidating for the co-

participants to use and for on-the-spot filming, the overall quality of the footage suffered. Perhaps my main stumbling block throughout the project, though, was poor sound. I was not skilled in sound mixing or live recording of this kind, and monitoring sound levels while filming and facilitating/interviewing proved too much for me. Many of the best interview moments were lost in the hum of children, traffic, planes flying overhead, and electronic buzz. The times I did bring an additional camera person with me were notable for how reticent the co-participants became. I have already discussed how much more open and comfortable Angelina became when her friend Veronica accompanied us; equally notable was how reserved and reluctant she became on the occasion I brought my own camera person with me. In the end, I gave up on bringing my own crew; it simply changed the conditions of the filming too greatly. And the involvement of peers was too unreliable to be methodically integrated: I took what I could get when I could get it. I wanted, more than anything, these sessions to be a 'conversation' between the co-participant and myself, and I wanted that feeling to permeate the films. I recognised that our dialogue was in English, and that this potentially presented difficulties for the co-participants, but I believe that this is an integral layer to their current experiences of integration and therefore belonged in the films. I was fervently opposed to the methodology of similar film-based projects of which I was aware: filmmaking teams going into schools in a very controlled structure and creating a 'survey' film with a group of young peoples' perspectives. These films are often highly 'watchable' by documentary standards, but also often do not reflect much of the young people's character and context. I made my choice and saw it through.

> *Anne: What are you like when you're not having to talk English, are you quiet?*
>
> *Angelina: Yeah, I'm quiet.*
>
> *Anne: Like is that the 'real' Angelina, or is that because of language?*
>
> *Angelina: I think it's because of language. I feel embarrassed, you know, I don't want people to laugh at me. So that was the reason why I don't talk in class. They would just come around, they'd be like, "Why aren't you talking?" I'm like, "Oh nothing, I'm just doing my work". I was the only Sudanese, and the rest are all smarter than me, that's what I thought. Like even if I wanted to say something, I wouldn't put up my*

> *hand because I feel embarrassed. I feel like they're going to laugh at me because I'm not that good in English. So I don't bother. Even if I knew something, I just keep it to myself. Like I don't put up my hand.*

And yet, in her film Angelina *did* speak, confidently and directly. Her film not only represents a young woman growing in confidence, but implies the 'absent presence' of her 'non-quiet' self, the Angelina who is not speaking English. This "problematisation of representation in research" (Brearley, 2008:3) draws not only from ethnographic but educational and feminist research, as is characteristic of bricolage research. My commitment to highlighting the subjectivities of these young women rather than objectifying them for data gathering, or establishing a filmmaking career, has resulted in both failures and successes. Despite the quality of the film footage, despite the lost stories and shared moments which could not be included, the films are – I believe – highly 'watchable'. Happily, I believe they retain something of the individual character of each of the young women and also engage the viewer. Each co-participant offers practical and achievable advice to educators and to other Sudanese-Australian young women on how to improve the schooling experiences of new learners from refugee backgrounds. And together, these six films which make up *Cross-Marked: Sudanese-Australian Young Women Talk Education* offer the unmistakable truth that these young women hold critical knowledge about their current circumstances and the keys to moving them (and us) forward.

ETHNOCINEMA: Where the Political is Personal

Throughout the project, my supervisors urged me to keep a video diary of my own process. I was resistant. I had my reasons: it seemed false, self-conscious, 'staged'. And yet, when I finally began to film myself, I understood immediately why they had been so persistent in demanding that I subject myself to the same conditions I requested of my co-participants.

> *June 17, 2008*
> *Why do I have to reflect visually on it? My supervisors keep telling me I must film myself if I expect to film the young women. Lina wants to film me, but the others so far seem quite uninterested. [Ultimately, three participants filmed and interviewed me.] What I do know is: I'm resistant to it! What I don't know is why.*
>
> *The first thing I think about is: what would the application of this video be? With the co-participants' videos I can see its application. But with*

> *me, I just wonder: how would it be used? Who would see it? I wouldn't*
> *want it included on a disk with the other films. Why don't I, and aren't*
> *these surely some of the same qualms the co-participants themselves*
> *might be feeling? (Process Journal)*

In my first filming session, I reflect mostly on the difficulties of the project: my relationships with the young women, logistical difficulties, power dynamics. I notice the rich performance of identities which remain largely behind the scenes, not apparent in the formal interviews. I vent about expectations: mine and theirs. I feel often like their servant, running errands, resenting time schedules thrown out of whack by their changeable timetables. I complain about my inability to get them to "do what I want", how they often seem to "hijack" the filming sessions and discuss what they prefer, meet at locations other than the ones we've agreed upon. My discomfort with trying to 'teach' them filming techniques and their resistance to it. My constant feelings of being brushed aside, ignored, or "disrespected" as I so often phrase it. But mostly, I recognise the discomfort of the filming itself: how it causes me to act in ways that do not feel 'natural', despite my affinity for the form, and my ease with English language. If this is true for me, I wonder, how uncomfortable or 'unnatural' must it be for them?

By my third 'auto/ethnographic' film session, I realise clearly why my supervisors have insisted on this part of the process. It is offering me rich experiences of being a 'subject' which I formerly could not have imagined. I was cavalier with Lina and the River Nile co-participants: "Just be yourselves!" I chirped. Easier said than done. It has also brought me to the need for collaboration and the possibility of something like 'ethnocinema'. That perhaps 'teaching' them anything is not the point; that my desire for control is stronger than I realised; that perhaps I need to 'step across' into their worlds, even for this short time, more than they need to step into mine.

I understand, too, something about the need to establish a relationship with the person filming me. I do not come from a collectivist society like the Sudanese-Australian young women do, and yet I understand that being in front of the camera is objectifying even when I'm alone in the room. I feel a desperate need to make the footage 'dialogic' and there is no one with whom

to dialogue. So, too, for my co-participants, I understand that perhaps their need to understand me, to 'place me' (which includes gender roles) is part of the alienation between us at times. For someone of my age, to be both unmarried and childless is confusing and perhaps suspicious: there must be a reason for this, so what is the reason? My unwillingness to adequately 'explain' my identity may contribute to the alienation, or to some reticence on the part of my co-participants.

By my fifth filming session:

> *October 29, 2008*
> *It would be great if I could film myself bursting into tears about how frustrating it is, but that's kind of hard to plan. I wonder if staged outbursts like this might read more authentically than spontaneous rambling. The co-participants 'performance' of their sexualities sometimes threatens mine. And the co-participants performance of their 'belonging' threatens mine. I think I started out wanting 'to help' these young people, seeing them as so multiply marginalised, as desperately needing help. And now it is so challenging to see that in many ways they belong in ways which far supersede my own (or in ways in which I don't): sexually, culturally, the kind of confidence they have, reproductively, even artistically (I can't get a grant to save my life). Oh god, I suppose that's it. How horrifying! Perhaps this is why I resisted filming myself. I didn't want to know these uncomfortable truths.*

Denzin tells us that seventh moment scholars create work which should "articulate a politics of hope. It should criticise how things are and imagine how they could be different" (Denzin 2003:129), which these films do. Both the co-participants and myself as researcher, use storytelling that is evocative, emotional and complex (Ellis 2004), and which seeks to not only describe the world but to change it. Ellis says, "In line with autoethnography, arts-based researchers include the artist's subjectivity and present their work as embodied inquiry," (Ellis 2004: 215), which *Cross-Marked* does. I have found that our stories are inextricably intertwined (as they should be), and that my own subjectivity continually impacts not only on my co-participants, but on my emerging relationship with this academic work, which is both theoretical and simultaneously highly personal. From my process journal, before the filming began:

> *August 31, 2007:*
> *I was re-reading* Pedagogy of the Oppressed *at my mother's bedside in the Evansville (Indiana) Home for the Aged on St. Paul's Avenue, near St Mary's Hospital where she had just finished her series of twelve shock treatments for geriatric depression. She'd stopped eating, and the doctors 'needed' to make her resume eating, so they coerced her into the*

shock treatments. She never resumed eating, but they (and the family) felt as though they'd done what they could. On this day that I was struggling through Freire, my mother had her last massive stroke which would finally (mercifully) kill her ten days later. I dropped the book on the floor as we rushed with her back to the hospital, to be told it was catastrophic. She understood when he told her that she would die from this, early on, before the bleed completely obliterated her cognitive abilities. When we collected her belongings after her death, the Freire book was missing. Eventually my Aunt Cyrilla retrieved the book and handed it to me at mom's wake while a cousin and I were rehearsing 'Amazing Grace' for the funeral the next day. For me, Freire is now inextricably linked with my mother's last stroke and the desperate look in her eyes when the doctor told us she was on her way.

Multiple layers of meaning and language overlap and blur: my mother's muteness from the stroke; my inability to understand the Freire I was reading knowing that these were my last days with my mother; the Sudanese-Australian young women's inability to understand teachers' rapid-fire instructions in classrooms in Melbourne Australia; my loss of language for the grief when my mother finally died; my muteness in a new culture 12 years ago and theirs now. I have not been able to pick up *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* since that week in August 2007. I read bell hooks' emotive description of her rapturous approach to the same Freire book:

> I came to Freire thirsty, dying of thirst, (in that way that the colonized, marginalized subject who is still unsure of how to break the hold of the status quo, who longs for change, is needy, is thirsty), and I found in his work…a way to quench that thirst. (hooks, 1994:50)

and I wish it were mine: I wish it were true for me, and besides, it makes a much better story. I want to appropriate her experience and replace my own, but cannot. I have my own ghosts, my own lived experiences which bring me to this work, and my own thirst-quenching relationship with hooks, McLaren, Giroux, Kincheloe and Steinberg, Lincoln and Denzin and, sometimes, Freire.

There are boundaries to our experiences, to who we are. And while they are ever expanding and changing, we are defined by the way we see the world. No matter how much I would like to have gotten to some 'truth' or authenticity in these films, I must accept now, near the end of this process, that this project is but one version of a story: not necessarily any truer than anything my students might say to me in class, but nor are they any more false. I accept that I have framed these stories in my role as primary editor of

the films. I accept that my whiteness and my age, and multiple other 'my's, mean that the co-participants have not told me the story they would tell someone else. And yet, the stories *are* real. I have done what I can to extricate them from the status imbalance of teacher/student relations in schools, and I have endeavoured to make an interchange which, as Asante says, "seeks to create the sharing of power". The young women have had a moment in this capital-enslaved culture to speak their minds, and that speaking has been recorded, and has changed us. Others have heard them, and still others will continue to hear them. And this at least, as Denzin would say, "articulates a politics of hope" (Denzin, 2003:122), a place to start.

CONCLUSION: Minding the Gap

> There are no closed systems … every system has a gap … in that space is
> a place of possibility. (hooks 2003:23)

Cross-Marked: Sudanese-Australian Young Women Talk Education is, in a multitude of ways, interested in this gap, this place of possibility, of which bell hooks speaks. The gaps in education for new language learners, for former refugees, are well-documented. *Cross-Marked* offers arts-based responses to these gaps, reframing them not as deficits but as possibilities. It is research that seeks to withdraw the blaming finger from students who are too often framed by a deficit model of learning, defined by what they don't bring to the educational table. Instead, it celebrates what they do know, what they do possess, and what they can share with educators to help transform an ailing education system. It offers the possibility of re-imagining the troubling patterns emerging in education as opportunities for new and dynamic intercultural dialogue, a critical pedagogical re-structuring, not of what education *should* be, but of what it *might* be. These fifteen co-participants don't hold all the answers, but they do offer crucial knowledge about ways to go forward. In dialogue with the education system, they indicate real possibilities for not only former refugees integrating into a Western school system, but for all involved in this educative community to go forward in a more holistic, human and democratic manner. They offer anew Freire's ideal of a 'pedagogy of freedom'.

The Absent Presence of Sudanese Women: New Ways of Seeing

According to the 2006 census 19,049 Australian residents declared they were born in Sudan, with 5,911 in Melbourne alone (Australian Bureau of Statistics). This does not include many culturally Sudanese, like more than half of those in *Cross-Marked*, who were born in other countries. Additionally, the United Nations tells us, there are over 5 million internally-displaced persons (IDPs) in Sudan, the largest number of displaced persons in the world, and that women and children comprise 80% of all refugees in the world. These are not small numbers. We know that back in Sudan "early marriage, cultural traditions and the lack of adequate school facilities pose

particular challenges for girls" (UNGEI, 2007), and that some of these conditions remain in Australia. With so much information at hand, what can explain the dearth of research focussed on Sudanese young women in the diaspora? As mentioned in earlier chapters, much of the documentary focus on the Sudanese refugee and integration experience centres on young men. The young women of *Cross-Marked* restate the need to "create new stories" (Nyadol Nyuon) and "move on" (Grace Mabor). These young women are not as interested in reflecting on their pasts as they are on their futures. Do ethnocinematic projects, then, have a role to play in making these stories heard, and can these films still serve as tools for social change? Will they be 'watchable' to those whose only exposure to the Sudanese diasporic experience is the Lost Boys films, which rely upon standard narratives of overcoming adversity?

Cassity and Gow conclude that "Teachers play a key role for the African students in terms of reaching their educational goals" (2006:13), a point repeated by the co-participants in all six films of this series. While teacher networks are important, and community and family networks are crucial to assisting former refugees in schools, this project suggests that teachers also have their own reflexive work to do in order to confront their potentially subterranean feelings of racism, resentment and/or refugeity. *Cross-Marked* seeks to contribute a new narrative about refugees, about Sudanese-Australian women, and about intercultural encounter. That the films do not focus on the binary of an imagined/recounted traumatic past and a dramatic emergence into the relative safety of Western culture is consciously part of this new re-framing. The refugee escape story is not the only narrative which characterises these young people as they construct new lives. In many ways, according to these co-participants, it holds them back. We can easily recognise in films of this kind an objectification of the refugee experience, one that always ends with 'arrival'. But arrival is not the end. In many important ways, arrival is only the beginning of a much greater narrative, and *Cross-Marked* seeks to bring to life these fifteen young women for African and non-African viewers who would prefer to pretend that residence in a Western nation is enough to ensure equal access to capitalist futures, and

success.

Whose Films, Whose Voices?

In traditional 'ethnographic documentary' terms, should these young women be making the films for themselves? Yes, most definitely, and some of them will go on to create autoethnographic films/books/artworks about their own experiences. But is there a place, indeed, a deep and urgent need, for intercultural collaborations? I believe there is. *Cross-Marked* was never intended to 'study' a community characterised by culture or race and draw conclusions about their collective experiences. It began as a dialogue between one teacher and a handful of students, a dialogue based on listening. Surely documentary film can be used effectively to facilitate this kind of conversation. In both pedagogical and ethnographic terms, collaborations of this kind offer richer opportunities for action over reflection.

Technically speaking, there have been times when I've believed I attempted too much. If I'd engaged the co-participants with a film crew, the footage would undoubtedly have been better. But my own engagement with my co-creators would, I believe, have been compromised. The co-creation would have been primarily between the film and editing crew, and the films would not have been *ethnocinematic*. I wanted to *be* with them, at their own individual locations, in a personal way, and for better and for worse, that is what occurred.

Additionally, if my own film skills had been more developed, I may have been able to assist the co-participants to enhance their own skills further than I did. But as my journal repeatedly reveals, my limitations – as a teacher, a filmographer – informed this project and at times levelled the playing field in ways that an 'expert' may not have been able to offer. My core desire to involve the co-participants in the filming of their own documentaries meant that my roles were ever-changing. While this was frustrating at the time, with hindsight I believe it created the conditions for a mutual learning journey that would not have been possible for someone with a more highly developed sense of themselves as a filmmaker. Ultimately, *Cross-Marked*

documents the dual journeys of the co-participants and myself, and models the kind of mutuality of which bell hooks speaks in regard to transgressive education: where teacher and student, co-creators, are equally willing to cross boundaries and step into new territory. The films document a shared community of education from two sides of the fence, and as such are imbued with highly personal and sometimes out-of-focus perceptions of one another.

ARTS-BASED PEDAGOGY: New Ways of Being

If autoethnographies can offer "new possibilities and meanings, and open new questions and avenues of inquiry" (Ellis, 2004:215), arts-based research gives us the tools to open the way. Brearley (2008:5) summarises Denzin's provocations for creative researchers, which include the consideration "How can we integrate the cerebral and the creative?", and *Cross-Marked* attempts this. Through engagement with a creative project which includes the co-participants as co-creators, it has nevertheless resulted in practical educative recommendations for students, researchers and teachers. Grace's film *Slowly By Slowly* foregrounds the need to see beyond these young women's refugee pasts. She exhorts teachers and other students to treat Sudanese-Australian students the same as other students, and reinforces their need to fit in, to belong. She laments the lengthy period of time required for many Australian students to warm to new students with sometimes poor language skills. There are implications here for teachers: students will welcome African-Australians if they see it modelled by their teachers and other adults around them, and teachers who are overtly inclusive will establish positive patterns of integration that will be mirrored in the student body.

Perhaps the most striking feature of this cacophony of voices that is *Cross-Marked* represents the multiplicity of perspectives that populate the Sudanese-Australian communities just in greater Melbourne alone. For a community that is often characterised as monolithic and singular, *Cross-Marked* documents the broad (and sometimes contradictory) perspectives which collectively express the views and values of only some of the Sudanese diaspora in resettlement today. These multiple truths are valuable –

to educationalists, researchers, and fellow Australians in general, for what they tell us about Sudanese-Australians, but also for what they remind us about ourselves. This diversity is a strength of the both communities and of *Cross-Marked*.

In **Still Waiting,** Nyadol Nyuon addresses racism in schools and encourages teachers and administrators to acknowledge its crippling 'absent presence'. Her own remarkable academic achievements remind us not to underestimate these students based on race or cultural background; to see beyond the refugee; and to provide individual, appropriate pathways for students as they develop. **Chick Chat at the River Nile** encourages students and teachers of both language centres and mainstream schools to help former refugees integrate quickly into mainstream schools. The co-participants here remind us to provide adequate language support during and after the transition, and warn that a failure to do so is 'killing them'. Mainstreaming is not enough, but it is vital. While students must play their part, schools which abnegate responsibility for continuing language support are setting these students up to fail.

Achol Baroch, in **Singing Into Language,** offers practical suggestions for both language learning and social integration. Her film extends the common uses of ICT, media and popular culture in classrooms, to include audio or video recording of crucial lessons so that language learners may be able to replay the key points over and over in their own time so that additional listening and reading instructions and content will offer added opportunities for students to revisit material addressed in classrooms. But she also clearly calls for more democratic classrooms, where teachers facilitate stronger students assisting the weaker ones in their shared journey toward academic success. Most importantly, Achol reminds us that students deserve to be given the chance to attempt mainstream school, and that there are multiple integration outcomes for participation which go far beyond academic achievement.

Lina Deng's film *Neir Chi Puj (Educated Girls)* highlights the need to nurture student leaders within the community of former refugee students. By seeing their African peers in positions of responsibility and authority, Sudanese-Australian students will be encouraged to increase their own engagement with the system. The nurturing of students, she points out, begins with the act of listening to them, not 'educating them' in traditional hierarchical ways. Angelina Kuol's film *In Transit/ion* reminds teachers to dialogue with their students involved in the process of resettlement. Additional obstacles, such as transportation and family obligations, need not inhibit their learning if their existence is integrated into the fabric of school structures. She echoes previous co-participants in a call to provide adequate language support at school, and while she highlights that in many ways former refugees are the same as their peers, she reminds us that in some areas they still need considerable extra support. She stresses that the best way to get help is not from teachers, but from friends.

Researcher's Reflections

> *July 3, 2008*
> *I want to recommit to my desire to ask the students themselves what should be different. This is the 'gap' I feel is missing in educationalist circles. Some of the co-participants have identified themselves and their own behaviour as needing to change, some haven't. But I am focusing on what schools can do differently in this project, because so much of the rest of the world focuses on what the students must change to meet the new challenge. (Process Journal)*

In many ways, my initial aims for this research have remained the same. However, I have also come to recognise a number of tensions in the performance of my multiple roles as teacher/researcher/activist. I have experienced the tension between what the researcher wants to put into the films versus what the creative artist wants to include. I have struggled with seeing the school system alternately from these students' points of view and from a teacher's point of view, despairing sometimes at the seeming irresolvability of the two. I have also come to see how deeply my own emergent identities impact on my teaching and being, in relation to former refugees, Sudanese-Australians, and others in my life. Ultimately, I have come to accept these multiple and sometimes seemingly irreconcilable

differences – as hooks calls us to do – as spaces of possibility. I see my old self, my beginning researcher, much as I do Jemima in *Vanity Fair* – well-intentioned, perhaps, but dangerously off the mark. With *Cross-Marked*, a journey of my own has begun which coincides with the journeys of these young women. And this, it now seems to me, is the core of a pedagogy of freedom which is authentic and necessary in the early 21st century.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY and REFUGEITY: New Ways of Knowing

Hooks' "multiple ways of knowing" (2003:78) is the language of creative research and critical pedagogy, too. Hooks is describing the opportunity to push boundaries, question rules and systems of being. *Cross-Marked* contributes to a redefinition of what schools should and can be. For people of colour, for former refugees, but ultimately for all of us – gay/straight, foreign/local, women/men, any and all. In her chapter "Critical Pedagogy and Teacher Education: Radicalizing Prospective Teachers" (2007), Bartolomé reminds us of ideology - the "deep, embedded psychological structures" (Bartolomé, 2007:265) which we bring as teachers to our work. Critical pedagogy of course holds that teaching is always already a political act. Bartolomé asserts that teachers must "develop political and ideological clarity in order to increase the chances of academic success for all students," (2007: 266) and that in order to do this, prospective teachers must "explicitly explore how ideology functions as it relates to power" (2007: 265) This approach rings true for anyone working with students from refugee backgrounds. Teachers or students from these backgrounds will recognise the "exclusionary, harmful and fundamentally undemocratic values and beliefs that inform dominant educational practices" (2007:266), not only in the United States (where Bartolomé works and researches), but in Australia and most other capitalist nations. The need to transform these practices, values and beliefs is urgent, and is reflected in the films made by these Sudanese young women.

It is true in Australia (as in the US) that, despite increasingly multicultural and multi-lingual student bodies, the overwhelming majority of training

teachers are white, middle class and female. Bartolomé examines the obvious culture gaps that therefore arise from the discrepancy between the teacher and student bodies. These trends also emerged in my research in informal ways.

Co-participants frequently acknowledged miscommunications between teachers and students, not just regarding curriculum, but in general dialogue – which added to the students' feelings of alienation at school. While some students reported teachers as openly hostile and/or unhelpful, most identified their difficulties in the classroom as being related to miscommunications or misperceptions on the part of the teachers. Like Lina Deng describing miscommunications around studying maths in Arabic versus English, and Grace Mabor lamenting English teachers who wanted stories of lions and tragedy in Africa, miscommunications and misperceptions stalk these students at every turn.

Bartolomé alerts us to the prevalent Western ideology that we are all equally responsible for our own success or failure as being a cornerstone of (American) western nation traditions. And that,

> when people believe that the system is fair, that is, that (African Americans and Latinos) have the same opportunity as White Americans, they will usually do two things: 1) they blame the minorities themselves for any disadvantages they experience rather than blaming White racism or other oppressive aspects of the system; and 2) they oppose policies designed to increase minority opportunities such as bilingual education and affirmative action. (Bartolomé, 2007:266)

When applied to an Australian educational context, it is easy to see the ways in which a lack of political and ideological clarity often translates into teachers uncritically accepting the status quo as 'natural'. It also leads educators down an assimilationist path to learning and teaching, rather than a culturally responsive, integrative, and transformative one. Pre-service teachers are, along with their professional colleagues, too often trained to "reproduce the existing social order" (Bartolomé, 1998; Bloom, 1991 in Bartolomé, 2007:266). She points to some characteristics of effective teachers of minority students: "caring, knowledgeable, and skilled practitioners…[with the] ability to recognise the subordinate status [of non-

white students], and [who make]…efforts to validate the cultures and identities of children in school." (2007:266). One effective way to validate the cultures and identities of children in school is through the arts, which base their methodology, content and application on the creative integration of the individuality of the participants. Arts practices (in schools and in general) rely upon the unique perspectives, voices and experiences of their participants.

This research likewise relies upon these crucial components of the co-participants' individuality in creating, developing and circulating these films. While some co-participants were content to share their stories (with minimal technical participation), they actively engaged in editing, in critically reviewing footage, to reject or accept their representation in the finished product. Others dynamically engaged in shooting and editing, writing outlines, scripts or storyboards, and in 'staging' scenes for shooting. All of these processes involved extending skills in reading, speaking, writing and problem-solving, and could easily be integrated into the classroom experience.

Equally importantly, we can all access experiences of refugeity in our own lives, and *Cross-Marked* highlights the usefulness of doing so. This project invites teachers in all pedagogical contexts to apply their own experiences of refugeity directly to their work: not only in *reflection*, but in action, in classrooms, so that students, too, begin to see the refugeity of themselves and their teachers equally. This kind of risk-taking is the only way we will begin to level the playing field. An acknowledgement of common moments of refugeity opens the door for collaborative work in the form of arts-based methodologies. *Cross-Marked* calls for educators to recognise the arts as tools of literacy, authentic language acquisition and – perhaps even more importantly – of social integration. It demonstrates a model for peer-driven collaborative projects with teachers as facilitators rather than power-brokers. It offers arts projects as capacity-builders: films like the series *Cross-Marked* have currency in both educational circles and the 'real worlds' of the co-participants (in professional, peer and further education contexts). The

importance of the co-participants owning and speaking not only in, but for their films, cannot be underestimated: in a very real sense, these films belong to their co-creators as much as to me as the researcher, and they can be (and have been) used by both of us. (Lina has used her film in applying for community- and arts-based work with service providers, and Nyadol has used her film in public talks.) Ultimately, the films succeed as examples of radical pedagogy in which the co-participants have been able to critically reflect upon their lived experiences, upon the oppressive structures and systems which act upon them, and to consider necessary action to continue the struggle.

Film as a Stepping Stone

These films, on their own, will not ensure equity in access to education for their co-creators. But they do go some distance toward helping create these conditions for the students who follow them. And there have been notable ongoing outcomes for some of the co-participants: Lina has been employed by a local organisation, the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), in various community arts projects and research; Nyadol is moving toward securing a contract for the book of Sudanese women's stories *Women of War*; Achol is using her film as an audition piece to gain the acting work she dreams of. Some have gained publicity from the films, others have moved on. But when asked whether they had ever been asked about their schooling experiences before, every co-participant responded with a resounding "no". If imagination and critical thought are the cornerstones of creative endeavour, *Cross-Marked* has attempted to engender in the co-participants a process of imagining and critically assessing a sense of their own uniqueness, of framing their own critical understanding of their performances of identity, and their relation to the systems and structures around them. This kind of thinking, and the filmmaking that is an enactment of it, has garnered respect from the young women's friends, families, and teachers.

Film as Language Acquisition Tool

Cross-Marked goes some way also to demonstrating that language acquisition is happening for these new English learners everywhere, all of the time. The young women themselves, in their films, document the ways in which they learn best, and the contexts in which this happens. By and large, it is not happening in classrooms but in the public pedagogy of which Giroux speaks. From movies to television to music videos to peer competition, the young co-participants of *Cross-Marked* discuss and demonstrate in their performances that language learning relies on feeling safe, collaborating with others who speak their own language, and modelling from various others. These are things that can all be achieved effectively through film or other arts-based modes.

The performers in *Chick Chat at the River Nile* passionately debate the competitiveness present amongst their peer group as to who can learn the quickest, speak the best English. They discuss improving these skills through authentic exercises like learning the words for everything in their bedrooms, their homes, the lyrics to the songs they like, or the terms necessary for visits to Medicare. But in this film, co-participant Naomi, who speaks so little English, can 'have her say' just as well as the gregarious and articulate Sarah Kut, who has much better English language skills. Naomi can still make her opinions understood: for the viewing audience through the use of subtitles, and amongst her peers because they too remember having so little English. By virtue of them working from personal experience, the tasks are rich, enlivened by stories from home, and co-operative amongst the collective. Most classrooms remain a long way from this kind of learning, and yet the tools are there – in projects like *Cross-Marked* and in satellite schools like the River Nile Learning Centre.

Recognising Subjectivities Through Film

Lastly, *Cross-Marked* does give the young women who participated a chance to reflect on the services they've been given – and whether or not they were adequate. Lina, Achol and Nyadol discussed feelings that they could be better, and had ideas of how. The River Nile students and Grace Mabor

identified ways in which they themselves could have done things differently. Many of the co-participants have reported that the critical reflection involved in the filming sessions put them back in touch with wanting to return to school. The chance to discuss their educational experiences with one another (and, perhaps, with me) reignited it as a real possibility, opened the box they had closed either recently or long ago. And for ongoing university students like Grace and Nyadol, the chance to discuss their educational experiences reminded them how important it is to them, despite the disappointments they have encountered. It reminded them how crucial it is to speak to younger, newer Sudanese-Australian young women, who may be struggling themselves, or who may in the future. For Nyadol, it is a chance to reverse her sister's 'shame' of being Sudanese during the time of the Liep Gony heartbreak, and to refocus on the need for healing, and for sharing responsibility for what's not working, rather than submerging ourselves in shame and blame. It is, simultaneously, as ethnocinematic collaboration, a chance for us all to reflect on the events and ideologies that have brought us to this place, and to emerge with new notions of coming together. After completion of her film, Nyadol and I came together for a series of taped conversations, some of which examined the collaborative process of making her film. This excerpt underscores the need for a continuing conversation between collaborators in intercultural projects, the difficulties and the very real possibility of improving research strategies and outcomes for both researchers and co-participants.

Anne: How important is intercultural collaboration? We all have to make change in our own communities, but we need each other too. How do these two things work together to benefit everyone? We talked a little about it when we were doing the film. The type of films we're calling ethnocinema—

Nyadol: My worries about intercultural and intercultural collaboration are in what context are we analysing the findings? The biggest challenge is to be able to present communities positively (to themselves), not within another cultural context or comparing them to another cultural understanding. Most of the time that cultural understanding tends to be from the West. It's really hard to escape that limitation, especially if you are an academic in the West, because you've got to write within these guidelines to make your work to the academic standard in the West. But in the process I argue for the person in the minority in the sense of their representation in academic and media contexts–

Anne: Ethnocinema is about the relationship that is formed in the collaboration, and it's also about who it's made for. Is it really possible to go and study 'the Other' anymore, and is that desireable, for any of us? Aren't we all Other in some way or another?

Nyadol: Depending on what angle you're looking at it from—

Anne: And acknowledging it.

Nyadol: We can still have the same conversation. We can still argue the boundaries and perimeters of where it's disadvantaging to minority groups. It's still necessary to challenge the status quo.

Anne: Which is what critical pedagogy does. My question is: can this troubling of oppressive systems be acted upon in ethnocinema, and what might that look like? Is there, for you, a value in collaborating?

Nyadol: There's a value in mutual collaboration, which is respectful to different experiences and cultures that each participant brings to the interaction. As long as one person is not dominated by another, and as long as that person's information is regarded with as much credit as the other participant is bringing in. It's important because we need to learn from each other. Coming from an African background, I still value traditional knowledge, even though tradition is sometimes seen as a sort of backward thing. I criticise some of it, based on the information that I've gained from a new way of analysing life which is the western perspective and learning in schools, but it doesn't override that knowledge. To me, there is no knowledge that is superior to other knowledge. Be it scientific or traditional I think all knowledge is an opinion. Even science the religion of providing pure knowledge has also been criticised in some areas as just a cultural perspective.

Anne: That's right—questioning the very nature of objective knowledge--

Nyadol: That's the place I come from. I come more from a constructivist approach – that everyone constructs their reality – and that reality is important. Because everyone's perspective is as important as the other's perspective. That might put us into a position where everything is relative, but at least we can acknowledge that all knowledge is knowledge. And I look at the knowledge I gain from the west as useful, but it doesn't by any means make me look at the traditional understandings I have and say they're primitive or low-rated, even though that's what it is sometimes

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perceived to be in academic contexts.

Anne: Yes but I'm saying we share a community. Not just from living in Australia together, but I'm sharing particularly with my students, sharing an education community, in which we both have investment. Now essentialists might say that Sudanese young women must make films about yourselves, publish your own articles about yourselves. And on one hand I believe that, and on another hand I don't. It's too essentialist to say that the 'good' film would be me doing my film about being an orphan, you doing your film about being a refugee—we're both more than that.

AH: But aren't there two different issues? One issue is certainly how to address the problems, concerns, celebrations within our own given communities, and then I think there's a separate issue which is about getting along, relating together, about how do we 'be' together at school, or anywhere else.

Nyadol: I'm not against interaction. I'm more afraid that the approach has always been that 'we know who you are', because we have a PhD in it or 'I have studied this.' And that approach ignores someone's ability to construct themselves and their own reality, and it's very disempowering, and I think that's why a lot of services don't work. They have an approach that takes away people's responsibilities, knowledge and abilities to solve their own problems and generate their own solutions. If you take that away, what you give me just becomes aid. It doesn't really matter what kind of aid you give—

Nyadol: It's a difficult question to answer.

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AFTERWORD: Marked Crossings

…cultural practices are political and pedagogical acts. In a critical queer pedagogical practice, they become part of teaching and learning to transgress in insurgent ways that aid and abet cultural change and inclusive education. (Grace, 2001:6)

See film *"EthnocineME"*

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FILMOGRAPHY

Slowly By Slowly, co-created by Grace Mabor and Anne Harris. 2008. *5:06 mins.*

Neir Chi Puj (Educated Girls), co-created by Lina Deng and Anne Harris. 2008. *9:04 mins*.

Chick Chat at the River Nile, co-created by Anne Harris and Nyankir (Margaret) Ajak, Jalab Beet, Amani Deng, Noura Douka, Diana Dyagai Eli, Sarah Kut, Grace Mabor, Arillette Murekezi, Nyayany Thong, Lizzie Tung-Marua, Naomi Wei. 2008. *14:40 mins.*

Singing into Language, co-created by Achol Baroch and Anne Harris. 2008. *9:28 mins.*

In Transit/ion, co-created by Angelina Aluel Kuol and Anne Harris, 2008. *6:03 mins.*

Still Waiting, co-created by Nyadol Nyuon and Anne Harris, 2008. *10:14mins.*

EthnocineME, co-created by Nyankir (Margaret) Ajak, Achol Baroch, Lina Deng, Anne Harris, Angelina Aluel Kuol, Nyadol Nyuon, Ruth Redden, Maria Vella. 2009. *7:45 mins.*

TOTAL RUNNING TIME: 62:20 minutes

These films can be accessed online at: http://web.mac.com/amharris

or by searching by name in Youtube