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## SANS PAPIERS: HUMANIZING DOCUMENTATION

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People everywhere should be free to come and go at will. That time will surely come when it will become possible to do so. It is not here yet.

—Chinua Achebe, *Home and Exile*, 93

### Introduction: The Untidy State(s) of Documentation

Images conjured by the term *sans-papiers* speak to the violent realities that immigrants and refugees have faced under both current and past US administrations. For many, this reality is not new; it is *renewed*, and for some, each passing minute brings a fresh attack. Immigration policies have been in flux throughout even our process of composing this chapter, and the constant, ever-shifting barrage of executive orders followed by Supreme Court rulings reveal not only the artifice of national borders but also a tactical effort to disorient, destabilize, and thus position vulnerable populations in a defensive and reactionary mode of survival that is utterly dehumanizing. We want to acknowledge the multiple and immediate experiences people face when attempting to enter the US, upon entry at US borders, and while living within those borders. And, we ask, what can this acknowledgment allow us to learn about teaching literacy in an age of dis- and mis-information? Humans who migrate—by choice, by force, and by an ambiguity in between—have become subjects of competing, sometimes contradictory, knowledges. It is often our students who are (mis)represented by migrant statuses—their lives discussed, objectified, and policed—and sometimes it is teachers, our colleagues (as Lava Asaad’s chapter in this collection makes visible) and ourselves who face such scrutiny (see Chapter 10 “‘I Am a Refugee and I Am Ok’: Instructor’s Identity in Resisting Classrooms”). Other times it is those we read about in assigned texts. Within these structures that create, sustain, and distribute information, all become subjects of knowledge, targets of campaigns, and objects of agendas. Teaching and researching literacy and literacy practices are crucial for making sense of this mess of public debate, policy, and competing interests.

More broadly, we question the categorical distinctions of immigrants and refugees and attend to the ways in which these classifications hold institutionalized colonial power. If knowledge is power, it has the potential to be both liberatory and dominating. We exercise care to avoid glossing over the nuance and complexity of lived experience; our intention is neither to participate in divide and conquer discourses nor is it to dismiss the heterogeneous contexts in which people arrive at US borders or live their everyday lives within those borders. At the center of this problem lies an important theoretical contradiction: “America” brands itself as the land of opportunity but is also a territory entrenched in discourses of border security (Grewal 159). This branding invisibilizes the nation’s white supremacist history and present-day conditions (see Regas’s transcript of the Baldwin and Buckley debate). It warrants emphasizing that at the root of this nation-state is the violent, deluded, anti-indigenous insistence that land can be owned/commodified and, thus, bordered and policed. Knowledge, information, and disinformation about these borders can shape our understandings of citizenship as a concept, right, and lived experience. This knowledge works to define and confine the “citizen” as both a unit of measurement and a term framed often by negation and, as Asaad’s work in this collection helps us understand, the interplay between permanence and contingency. Our work responds to this white supremacist, colonizer illogic with a public and self-directed call to protest, to reject a “business as usual” model for conducting analyses of “citizenship” within the classroom, on campus, and in broader communities.

We invoke the term *sans-papiers* because it can help describe and theorize the realities of those who cross borders without the so-called “proper” documentation. It has been adopted by political movements that resist border logics, and we utilize it as a critique of cosmopolitan forms of “global citizenship.” In *Empire*, Antonio Hardt and Michael Negri imagine a global political project in which a version of “*global citizenship*” grants the “full rights of citizenship in the country where [people] live and work,” a reform that would be “in step with the real economic transformations of recent years” (400). The right of “global citizens” would be “to control” their own movement, to move about freely across the globe *sans papiers* (400).

Our use of the term *sans-papiers* is not free of hesitation. Much of our scholarship and pedagogical practice is centered on problematizing the languages used by colonizing nationalist actors, and we recognize the vast and varied concerns that arise from choosing a French term to advance our ideas. We utilize this term, *sans-papiers*, to highlight the ways in which dis- and mis-information have been deployed in the name of “modernity” with the intent to maintain a policed “order.” As post-colonial feminist theorist, Kumkum Sangari, has observed, documentation has also enshrined colonial-branded “modernism.” Sangari writes that colonial “administrative documents” have linked language, civilization, and modernity in ways that encompass “a social order, ordered knowledge, and refinement” and appear to “include the entire field of writing” (132). There is a utilitarian impulse here: since the documentation logics we interrogate emerge from colonial practices, strongholds, and systems, we find it useful to employ this term, in French, to advance our critique.

According to Jane Freedman, the *sans-papiers* movements in 1990s France were in response to “hard-line immigration politics” and often took the form of direct action on the part of undocumented immigrants, occupying space and going on hunger strikes in order to bring more

visibility to their struggle (82). This visibility helped cultivate solidarity across other feminist and antiracist movements (Freedman 92). Most importantly for us is the reimagining of identity and discourses of power, how the intentional use of the term *sans-papiers* is “an attempt to replace the more negative terms used to describe this group of people, and to denounce those truly responsible for this situation, not the immigrants themselves” (Freedman 94). This reimagining of discourse, revising of terms, allows a more nuanced view on locations of power. Terms such as *sans-papiers* afford a certain kind of rereading, shifting focus from the individual to the role of the state and the relationship between the seemingly “fixed relationship between state, citizen and territory” (McNevin 136). We use *sans-papiers* to point to the contexts of documentation. Like others in this collection (in particular chapters by Lava Asaad and Eric Leake), we emphasize context and history in our teaching to engage students in critical literacy and to look macroscopically at the roles of states and their competing definitions of additional terms like *nation* and *citizen*.

The work we present here blends anecdote with analysis. We attempt to humanize our theory and inquiry—humanize the very act of theorizing/analyzing by recounting and braiding into this discussion our lived experiences. We centralize anecdotal evidence to identify concerns we share about the circulation of/demands for “documentation” and generate literacy practices that are committed to representation and inclusivity. We believe the study of documentation can provide a significant inroad for teaching a kind of literacy that works to cultivate a global perspective with students. Our classroom practices have taught us that composition studies relies on, requires, and perpetuates deeply nuanced and cyclical acts of documentation: Drafting/revising written work is one such act. Documentation within composition classrooms functions in ways that often reflect the currencies and gatekeeper-subject power relationships playing out in the broader context of the nation state. Put very literally, it is unlikely for students to “pass” a composition class without producing/presenting various forms of documentation. They cannot pass *sans-papiers*. A rhetorical analysis of the logics of documentation helps us acknowledge what is normalized, invisibilized, and taken for granted. As teachers, we assess student performance via documentation; we emphasize such documents as evidence of certain kind of performances. Like Prendergast and Ličko, who highlight the materiality and rhetorical ethos of “paper,” we hope to use the term *sans-papiers* to draw attention to il/logics of documentation and the kinds of information and disinformation various documents purport to enshrine.

## Context: Citizens In The Profession

This piece emerges, in part, as a response to the 2015 National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) “Resolution on the Dignity and Education of Immigrant, Undocumented, and Unaccompanied Youth,” which identifies document-driven logics such as “acts of bias, indifference, and prejudice” that bar individuals “from equal access to public schooling, housing, and other public services.” NCTE resolved to “support teachers, administrators, and local education agencies in the education of immigrant, undocumented, and unaccompanied youth.” This resolution was prompted by the influx of unaccompanied children crossing into the US from Central America.

At present, we operate within a broader discourse of travel “bans,” walled national borders, revised US census categories, and a neo-nationalism that reinvigorates the casting of the immigrant figure as a scapegoat for gross inequalities in a neoliberal state. And recently, in addition to a ramped-up, xenophobic—what could only be called white supremacist—rhetoric decrying border crossings of indigenous, black and brown people, we see real material horrors in the form of repeated human rights violations through so-called “no tolerance” policies that criminalize/imprison asylum seekers and separate parents from children. In these contexts, we humbly consider some approaches to using writing classroom spaces to conduct textual analyses of these resolutions and practices in ways that forge meaningful, even material, interventions.

As Thomas P. Miller and Adele Leon, in the *Literacy in Composition Studies* special issue on *Literacy, Democracy, and Fake News* point out, the intentional spread of disinformation is not new. Suspicion of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants has always been a fundamental part of US nationalist discourse. Likewise, the stories of immigrants have long been a subject of interest to teacher-scholars who consider democratic citizenship a fundamental goal of college writing. Our core purpose is to expand/question/challenge/recontextualize the “citizen” as a unit of analysis in composition, very much inspired by Amy J. Wan’s *Producing Good Citizens: Literacy Training in Anxious Times* and Kate Vieira’s *American By Paper: How Documents Matter in Immigrant Literacy*. For instance, Wan reminds us all that,

for a student without legal residency or who feels like he or she has tenuous citizenship status, a class that calls for the promotion and cultivation of citizenship might mean that the student already has an impossible task to accomplish in the class, or such a class can even put a student in jeopardy by asking him or her to enter a public arena that they might prefer to avoid. (152-53)

The categories associated with citizenship simply do not describe the full range of experiences our students have/have had. Through our critical and anecdotal discussion of knowledge-making practices and documentation that follows, we examine how the notion of citizenship produces a document-driven logic that reduces human existence to a paper-pushing practice.

Critical literacy teacher-scholars operate today within a rhetorical situation that has positioned the category of “undocumented” as a central focus of public debate. “Undocumented” is also a term that is nonconsensually affixed to identity, rather than a description of status. For instance, rather than referring to an individual as being “in undocumented status,” they are labeled an “undocumented individual.” Under the guise of “national security,” we had an administration that functioned like George Orwell’s Ministry of Truth, rewriting facts each day. In this way, we have a complex literacy problem to confront, a situation in which what is knowable is in flux, and the power of dis-information dispossesses the right to self-determination. As Wan suggests, we continue to live in “anxious times,” and literacy continues to be leveraged to define what “habits” count as “good citizenship” (37). In this collection, Eric Leake also cites Wan to employ strategies that “go beyond the individual rhetorical event” when examining the idea of citizenship (see Leake’s chapter “The Multiple Lives of News Stories: Civic Literacies and Rhetorical Transformations”).

Within higher education, Wan observes, “the classroom served as a citizenship-producing space”

and has “had in it traces of the importance of productivity and work” (131). We see this implication today in the language of “deliverables”: learning outcomes, best practices, program goals, strategic plans, and assessment loops. So, even though universities aim to produce the new “global citizen” (148) or other “certain kinds of good citizens through curricular changes,” Wan also observes that “the efficacy of such changes is far from proven” (155). In co-writing this piece, we have been taken by the phrase “global citizen,” wondering how a world *sans papiers* would (re)define this egalitarian ideal. Of course, when many programs define “global citizen” for higher education, they often mean a future employee of an increasingly globalized marketplace—not quite the kind of radical disruption of status quo the two of us would like to imagine.

Below, we consider expanding the concept of citizenship or jettisoning it entirely, making the practice of and preoccupation with documentation more transparent through writing pedagogy. Any such overture toward pedagogy involves centralizing the “intersectionality” (Crenshaw) of literacy and citizenship in the course texts we assign, teach, and analyze with our students. The notion of documentation is often inextricably linked to colonizer logics (or illogics and normalized delusions) of how human bodies pass through time (birth to death) and space (physical, geographic location). This passage follows a linearity that warrants interrogation, which, if done in the space of our classrooms, could enrich writing pedagogy and analyses of literacy as both an emblem and embodiment of citizenship (or vice versa). One of our broader goals is to spark dialogue about how these documents, their production, acquisition and/or absence, reflect the kinds of “papers”—artifacts that *purport to recount with objectivity* but in reality argue and persuade—that are produced and circulated within the scope of writing classrooms. First, we consider the birth certificate as an object of inquiry for classroom analysis. We explore the contexts surrounding its importance and question its implied universalisms. Then, Shereen uses personal anecdote to theorize a colonial linearity imposed on her own birth certificate. Afterward, Mike reflects on his experience as a literacy sponsor in refugee communities. We conclude by reflecting on the relevance of these objects of inquiry for teaching literacy in an age of forced migration and disinformation.

## The Birth Certificate

As an artifact often meant to embody proof of personhood, citizenship, and a voucher for inalienable rights, the birth certificate is often presented as universally valuable. In the US, it is a document embedded in/sanctioned by the federal government but processed by state offices. Its global universalism, however, is only a perception as it is, in fact, wildly inconsistent in how it is issued and overseen. In a document published by the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in 2005 titled “The ‘Rights’ Start to Life: A Statistical Analysis of Birth Registration,” the case is made that “[b]irth registration, the official recording of the birth of a child by the government, is a fundamental human right and an essential means of protecting a child’s right to an identity” (1). UNICEF argues that birth registration is important for both legal and statistical reasons (1). According to UNICEF, individuals have a right to an identity that then “tracks major life events from live birth to marriage and death” (The ‘Rights’ Start to Life 1). The document enshrines

the struggle with explaining this “right” to a legal identity and outlines a very limited landscape of human life. That the concept of marriage is included highlights the false universality of this right to registration, since marriage itself is fraught with cultural and legal expectations and may have no connection to a human birth.

The language UNICEF uses to describe the importance of birth registration reifies a hierarchy between those who recognize its value and those who do not. “The ‘Rights’ Start to Life” makes the point that birth registration “is often overlooked due to the continuing lack of awareness that registration is a critical measure to secure the recognition of every person before the law” (1). One problem we identify in this document *about the birth certificate* is how culture is seen as an “obstacle” (UNICEF, “Rights” 2). A cultural explanation for a “lack of awareness” implies a certain measure of modernity that we question. The cultural explanation entrenches the universal quality of birth registration. What if birth registration itself was considered a cultural practice rather than a universal mandate? And how is the “birth to marriage and death” trajectory bound in (western) colonizer illogics of linear time, which exclude, ignore, dismiss, and marginalize cultural practices that view time as cyclical or nonlinear? Analyzing artifacts like the UNICEF report in the space of writing classrooms can generate the kinds of critical discussions we believe are needed to unpack the vast and varied, tacit and overt contradictions contained within “sanctioned” forms of documentation as well as the ubiquitous spread of mis- and dis-information.

We observe a tension in how the UNICEF document makes an argument about rights, while using a rationale of tracking and statistics. At the start, the document states, “Birth registration serves two major purposes: legal and statistical” (UNICEF, “Rights” 1). The two purposes are constructed as separate, but within the discourse of this document, there really only seems to be one overarching purpose: tracking data via rigid categorizations no matter how artificial and forced these may be. The legal dimension serves the purpose of the statistical one. We acknowledge that birth registration might be important for safeguarding resources, but the document itself constructs statistical tracking and surveillance as a right in itself. Statistics involve a particular mode of information, not necessarily “dis” or “mis”-information, but of a particular type for a particular agenda, not innocent or objective, but subjected to collection methods, interpretive reporting, and the rhetorical expectations of a given audience.

We push back at this idea. If one is secured a right to identity, how fixed is that identity? How is one’s statistical place malleable? Does the right to recognition come with the right not to be recognized? In addition to these more abstract questions, we wonder to what extent culture, constructed as an obstacle at the very moment of birth, becomes the object of blame and derision in other facets of social life. It is this kind of questioning that *sans-papiers* brings to the forefront.

### *Shereen’s Narrativized Theory of Naming*

Leading up to and certainly after the 2016 US presidential elections, I have questioned the extent to which postcolonial theory, abstract models of globalization, and theories of mobility, displacement, culture, and identity can address the on-the-ground, everyday struggles facing immigrants and refugees. In the composition classroom, I cannot encourage class discussions about language and

literacy without invoking questions around transnational experience as well as indigenous and settler colonial relationalities. My lived experience of racial, linguistic, immigrant minoritization—often shared by my students—is frequently reflected in the texts I read/assign/teach, and these texts equip us to expand canonical and colonizer boundaries surrounding literacy, knowledge production, and rhetorical traditions. My students and I also question what circulates as “texts” within our writing classroom: Are printed, published, or digital and digitized artifacts the only adequate/accessible objects of textual analysis? What are the underrepresented or historically dismissed sites that reveal the interconnectedness of literacy and citizenship? On both a personal and pedagogical note, I have wondered what is missing from my own arsenal of theory when it comes to analyzing lived experience of Othered/“alien” forms of citizenship in the US.

A few years ago, I was trying to acquire the updated, correct version of my Canadian birth certificate in order to move forward with a US work visa application. While seeking this document, I was flagged and told I had submitted incorrect information about my mother’s “unmarried” last name. My mother was given four names at birth, one of which—because it is modifiable from feminine to masculine form—yields a fifth name. I had filled out my application with the name I had always known to be the one she used as her unmarried last name and had no way of knowing that this was not the name that appeared in government records. Because this document was holding up my US visa application process, I felt a wave of panic but also anger, frustration, and disdain for a Canadian institution that purports to welcome immigrants but makes no accommodations for lived experiences that do not fit neatly within a Euro-colonizer system of names and naming.

On my birth certificate, there were two names allowed for each one of my parents: a first and a last name. My mother has three names that by colonizer metrics would all count as first names. She has one so-called “middle” name and one unmarried “last” name. And so, it turns out, she had experienced the kind of ascription, name scrambling, nonconsensual editing, and recategorization that inflexible government forms unapologetically demand. I was able to resolve this issue with some research, guesswork, and luck. Certainly, compared to the obstacles present in many indigenous, immigrant, enslaved, and refugee experiences, my problem was simple and easy to resolve. But this moment underscored the assumed logic and unquestioned linearity of first, middle, last naming practices that are at once ethnocentric and dogmatic. This moment, my ongoing reflections of it, and choice to share it here, imbue my audience (reader) and me (storyteller) with an individual and collaborative responsibility: To consider how this anecdote is a site for knowledge production while inviting a process of meta-interrogation into the privileged/hierarchical knowledges that led to this situation in the first place. That is to say, my experience and retelling of it has pedagogical value in the teaching of literacy as a knowledge-making practice.

Names and naming shape my lineage; they are personal, and they reveal my very long ancestral and very real present-day collision with colonizer logics. My family’s names have been constructed as illogical, but I reject and twist this characterization: My history of names and naming render the colonizer’s documents illogical, incorrect, and inaccurate. These documents are unauthorizable by the very “subjects” (in this case me) they allegedly represent. As immigrants, we can be and are agents of our own logics, not simply or solely the victims of the “master” logics imposed upon us.

But spinning the narrative in this way does not diminish the governing power differentials that shape material realities. Generally speaking, immigrant narratives frequently include references to both consensual and nonconsensual name changes and/or issues surrounding (mis)pronunciations. These narratives are nuanced in ways that cannot afford to be overlooked; many explanations of consensual name changes or altered pronunciations take place in order to appease or acquiesce to governing bodies and thus raise questions about the broader conditions within which consent is given. In the micro narrative I am presenting here, I aim to experiment with and harness agency from multiple vantage points and in doing so, reorganize accepted logics of linear power relations.

My current research examines racialized immigrant temporality and reveals how documents used in and for border crossing are further vexed by colonizer logics or illogics of linear time. The repeated pairing of “logics” with “illogics” in my work attempts to achieve three things: 1) It exposes the existence of premeditated strategies used to normalize a singular (and authoritarian) understanding of order; 2) It insists that what is tacitly familiarized as “logic” is a delusion rooted in a white supremacist agenda; 3) It insists that “logic” is, in actual embodied experience, subjective. I have theorized immigrants as time-traveling figures, addressing some of the ways in which transatlantic immigration from right/east to west/left, is plotted on America-centric maps. Where the Americas are depicted as left, west, and first, a transatlantic voyage may be viewed as “backwards” and the traveler as “behind the times” (Silva and Inayatulla 192). But this image can be flipped as well—from victimization to agency. I argue, simultaneously, that the time-traveling immigrant and our “papers” are unplottable/unfilable within a colonizer system that relies on linearity, singular trajectories of advancement, and unidirectional notions of progress. In this light, our identities also become unplottable and unknowable. We remain or become the keepers and arbiters of untranslatable literacy practices—untransposable and unknowable within the colonizer discourses used to exclude, shame, infantilize, or police us. There is also an immediate need to observe how settler colonial privilege plays out whenever we, as immigrants, follow, perform, acquiesce to, or become assimilated by linear principles of organizing. This is not to say that agency and choice around translatability come, universally, without pain. Rather, unjust distinctions surrounding who is “deserving,” “cooperative,” and/or “coercible” emerge when we examine the indigenous and settler occupancy of the Americas. Reflecting on and addressing settler privilege is an exigent step toward intervening in anti-indigenous ideologies and advancing any effort to decolonize (Walia).

Insistence on linearity, for me, conjures another personal account wherein my father’s name was reversed as he was immigrating to the US. His cultural understanding of a “first” name was quite literally the name that appears first, which in his experience meant his family name. This was the manner in which he filled out his immigration paperwork when arriving in the US, and subsequently, the reason why, now, my “last” or “family” name is actually my father’s first name, and a part of my lineage is forgone. The experience I describe is anything but unique— it is a common household misfortune, one of many ironic yet strategic instances where documentation results in erasure. It is contradictory: a simultaneous danger and source of power to be unknowable, unplottable, unfillable within a colonizer system of record keeping and documentation. This kind of unknowability can be used to reveal the absurd and defective hierarchies of knowledge that have led to domination.



As I reflect upon my experiences here, I discover connections that can be made to my work in composition classrooms and writing programs on a broader scale.

On a programmatic level, we demand specific forms of sequenced documentation to determine how students move through composition courses. This can include anything from evidence of prerequisites and/or course completion indicators on transcripts or other official records, to syllabi and assignments from “other” courses/institutions that determine credit equivalencies, placement, and the like. These are examples of the kind of documented “evidence” that hold programmatic currency and they are worth problematizing in the specific context of my institution—a four-year college within the CUNY system. I am a full-time faculty member and have served as the Writing Program Director at York College, located in Southeast Queens. Our mostly Black and brown student population reflects the racial, linguistic, ethnocultural economic heterogeneity of the borough. Students who attend York, regardless of whether they come from families and communities that have recently immigrated or have ancestral roots in the US, report facing frequent scrutiny about their documentation. They often describe the skepticism they confront in the context of both administrative paperwork (enrollment/transfer/graduation status) and participation in writing courses (preparedness for “college-level” work/”proficiency” in English/originality of ideas). Many students identify this scrutiny and skepticism as racially biased microaggression, which aligns with the taxonomy advanced by scholars of educational psychology and counseling (Torino et al.).

In the classroom setting where students are asked to compose and submit papers, we see documentation and/or the need for documents functioning in ways that can be recorded, measured, graded. These documentation practices that take place in the scope of programmatic and classroom operations may not be intrinsically flawed; however, we can afford to examine the ways in which the documents we require, demand, circulate, and value in composition may be subject to colonizer logics of time and “order.” I question how we might manifest more expansive metrics and practices in the field and work to value forms of documentation that may be unfamiliar or have historically gone unrecognized.

As a writing scholar, teacher, and program administrator, I would like to examine the linear structures and il/logics that govern the writing classroom and our programmatic philosophy more broadly. Toward this effort, a central question might ask how expanding the breadth of course texts circulated, assigned, and taught in writing courses can yield analyses of undocumented/undocumentable artifacts and literacy practices. Additionally, could this question lead to more productive outcomes when posed as a collaborative effort with students? From a programmatic standpoint, (how) does the sequencing of writing courses and the order in which “skill” and “knowledge” are developed vis-à-vis learning objectives, course goals, and the like reveal linearities and limitations worth scrutinizing? Ideally, these questions might reveal the particular ways in which document driven literacies function in writing classrooms, how these literacies mirror what takes place in terms of national borders, and how they can afford to be problematized and reimaged.

### *Mike's Literacy Sponsorship*

One area in which the logic of documentations can be both clearly visible and potentially

challenged is in stories of refugee experience, or broader issues surrounding forced migration. My own knowledge of state, territory, and citizenship has developed from a tension between pedagogical “best practices” and contemporary anxieties. I remember being trained as a writing center tutor years ago, and although my training was “progressive” and what I would probably call “feminist” in its approach, I sometimes think back at the ways in which people who came into the Writing Center were represented. For instance, in 2003, I worked at the University of New Hampshire Writing Center, and I remember how the director asked if I could meet with Dominic, a student who had an “extraordinary” story, described as “extraordinary,” I assumed at the time, because of his status as a refugee. Dominic was a member of a group known as the “Lost Boys of Sudan,” refugees who had recently been resettled in the US to go to school. Ten years prior, they had arrived at Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, where they lived until the United States—in a very public way—decided to resettle them. UNH had recruited several of these southern Sudanese students from the Boston area in an effort to promote its business and agricultural programs. Producing a kind of white savior narrative, David Chanoff describes the Lost Boys of Sudan in this way:

As children they had lived in conical grass houses and followed their cattle. As refugees they had slept in mud huts, subsisting on a daily bowl of corn porridge. And now here they were, in Durham, New Hampshire, trying to comprehend a computerized milking operation with pulsating vacuums, sterile tanks, and high-tech cooling systems. (36)

This article, which serendipitously interviewed the same students I had met at the UNH Writing Center, is troubling in a wide variety of ways, most of all by perpetuating the idea that the Lost Boys were somehow “pre-modern,” or “ancient,” and were coming into contact with modern civilization for the first time on the UNH campus. I have written elsewhere about how such problematic representations promote a kind of “will to transform the Other” (MacDonald, “Emissaries of Literacy” 418), but here would like to spend more time on my relationship with Dominic.

When Dominic came to the Writing Center, he wanted help with his first-year composition personal research essay. We sat in a back office, and I followed standard writing center “best practices” for working with students who identified themselves as non-native speakers of English, asking him if I should read his paper out loud and telling him that I would take notes while we worked, encouraging him to do so as well. This encounter began a writer-tutor relationship that lasted three semesters, ending right before I was to leave for graduate school and he was to earn a bachelor’s degree in business. UNH would also deem this “extraordinary,” a testament to the quality of its programs, as the university often organized events promoting the successes of the “Lost Boys,” documenting their presence on campus. An article in *UNH Magazine*, an alumni publication, celebrated Dominic’s graduation. It describes one of his professor’s feelings, how she was “proud that UNH was one of the first universities to reach out to the Lost Boys” and how “They have given a lot more to us than we have given to them” (Giraud, qtd. in Stuart). These kinds of promotional pieces, along with Chanoff’s article, represent a type of documentation, one that serves a particular agenda and tells a particular kind of story celebrating not only the refugee figure, but also the sponsor.

Remembering that initial meeting, I now return to how I perceived the writing center space, how my perception changed as a result of that reflection, and how unprepared I was when confronted

with the kinds of descriptions of human suffering Dominic included in his essay. As children, the “Lost Boys of Sudan” had been caught in the middle of a violent civil conflict. They were forced to walk thousands of miles, during which many died of starvation, dehydration, animal attacks, and repeated attacks from both the Sudanese government and the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (Bixler). I learned of this not through the media—though they were featured on programs like *Oprah* and *60 Minutes*—but through Dominic’s writing. As I read his paper out loud, I remember this section in particular:

The worst part in this journey was the river called Gilo. This river is on the Sudanese and Ethiopian border. The majority of these children did not know how to swim and the enemy did not give them a chance to use the boat. Each of them has to choose one option whether he will die through gunshot or otherwise drown in the river.<sup>1</sup>

Textbook writing center pedagogy at the time was not necessarily global in its scope, and I remember feeling ill-prepared to confront my own contradictory reactions to this passage. I was familiar with some of the descriptions in his essay. Similar images are continually circulated in the American popular press, especially as representations of Africa. But, my understanding of refugee experience had always been mediated, always removed and distanced, always made sense of as something that happened “out there.” I had only common knowledge of the idea of the refugee, a flat, static representation of “huddled masses” and child sponsorship commercials. My knowledge of refugee experience was a product constructed specifically for a certain kind of consumption in the US. In fact, while UNH might have treated Dominic’s story as “extraordinary,” something to be celebrated and then commodified, a white savior narrative, his story was in many ways not “extraordinary” but instead provided insight into the kinds of human suffering that are not only common in many parts of the world but also directly implicated us (in this case literacy sponsors residing in the US) through legacies of colonialism and practices of advanced capitalism.

These memories have prompted me to consider using memoirs of refugee experience in my writing and cultural studies courses at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. In response to universities including terms like “global citizen” in their various mission statements (Wan 154), the classroom risks becoming an idealized cosmopolitan space, one in which “global citizenship” is a lip-service learning outcome without any clear ethos. Teaching global citizenship as a literacy practice is a project burdened by vague terms, neoliberal institutional agendas, and contradictory outcomes. For instance, I have assigned refugee memoirs as a means of “cultivating a global perspective” in the classroom and the extent to which students reading narratives of refugee experience reproduce or challenge expressions of sympathy, pity, hope, or despair in their written responses (see “Cultivating a Global Perspective Through Refugee Narratives” for a reflection on this kind of assignment). Here, I would like to consider how certain kinds of knowledges about citizenship and border-crossing have been a source of tension in this mission of “global citizenship.”

Dearborn, Michigan is a different context than Durham, New Hampshire for doing this kind of work. With its large Arab, Lebanese, and Muslim populations, and its relationships with the larger, Detroit metropolitan area, students are far more familiar with various migration stories, refugee communities, and the experiences of those *sans-papiers*; many students have such experiences in

their family histories. While assigning memoirs that depict refugee experience can help situate ideologies of border security as central to class discussion and student writing, such assignments prompt me, as an outsider to many Dearborn communities, to reflect on my motivations for asking students to read these texts. My main concern is that I communicate these motivations to students, that we read stories of forced migration not to be “exposed” to the Other, but to look for places within each text where the larger rhetorical and historical contexts of literacy, citizenship, and migration are evident. Still, the genre of a refugee memoir has a certain kind of baggage that comes with it. There is a reason why books like Dave Eggers’ *What is the What* or Ishmael Beah’s *Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* make American best-sellers lists.

It follows that written responses in my own classes were often contradictory, sometimes reproducing discourses of American exceptionalism, sometimes expressing a more reflective stance of ethics and responsibility. Within this contradiction, though, I believe are opportunities for critical engagement with the assigned texts. It is these more reflective moments that I feel speak best to defining the “global citizen.” Even though memoirs go through a complex and contradictory production process themselves, with editors and ghostwriters tailoring the narrative for consumption by Western audiences (Moynagh 47), through close-reading and rhetorical analysis, we see how refugee memoirs challenge the status quo, such as the continued acceptance of state-sanctioned violence. Most relevant to us in my class, we see how English literacy and US higher education are promoted across the globe as the torch carried by the Statue of Liberty, that education in the US promises not only a new life, but a potential return to country of origin and an opportunity to rebuild. As scholars who study the historical links between literacy, citizenship, and economic development attest, this promise is a “myth” (Graff), perhaps one of the more insidious attempts to disinform at the global level.

### Conclusion/Implications: Teaching Literacy to Counter Mis-/Dis-Information

Our vision for moving this discussion forward draws upon postcolonial feminist theories that challenge the kinds of white-washing, universalist tendencies present in terms like “global citizen” (Alexander and Mohanty). One problem we have begun to identify here is that efforts to endorse a progressive, democratic view of citizenship in the college writing classroom can risk overgeneralizing the citizen as a unit of measurement. This universalization makes citizenship appear “natural,” erasing the experiences and contributions of students in our classrooms/communities who are not recognized as “legal” citizens. Birthright citizens are perceived to live in a world of rights, although we know that there are violent hierarchies that plague birth-based citizenship as well. People who do not have access to documents often live in a world of fear and uncertainty. Both truly reside in a realm of surveillance dominated by white supremacist market logics, disguised as security, and meant to manage/police people.

We try to practice what we teach. We see in our own teaching how unjust distinctions between “natural”/“naturalized” and “undocumented” or “undeserving” individuals play out in our students’

experiences of college admission, matriculation, and inevitably, the local site of the writing classroom. Like other writers in this collection, such as Eric Leake as well as Thomas Girshin and Tyrell Stewart-Harris, we teach critical literacy through keywords, representations of knowledge, information, disinformation, which are all in play when we talk with students about the texts circulating in their lives. The two of us often employ versions of close-reading and rhetorical analysis as we examine assigned documents, works of art, and documentary artifacts in collaboration with our students. We both advocate for an affirming student-centered pedagogy that works to place texts within their larger historical contexts of production and circulation. This can be done with refugee narratives or government documents, of course, but also through personal writing and reflection. Approaching each text as an artifact that communicates a certain kind of performance for particular historical agendas helps us work with students to see how any narrative we compose is itself a performance (Inayatulla). Students deserve transparency in both the documents they receive and the documents they produce. In that light, we would like readers to approach all documents related to teaching as objects of inquiry. Our efforts here work toward that kind of transparency as a way to respond to mis- and dis-information.

As we speak to calls such as the NCTE resolution above, or the special issue of *Literacy in Composition Studies on Literacy, Democracy, and Fake News*, we think about how we define literacy in our own classrooms. For instance, if we think about popular conceptions of “*information literacy*” as “finding and assessing information” (Miller and Leon 11), our goal is to work with students on projects that wade through and make sense of the illogical logics of document bureaucracy. By asking students to research a document relevant to their own lives/interests, its history, its production, its effects and inconsistencies, and perhaps any stories about it they might come across, we can attend to the larger *contexts*, the larger rhetorical situation of those documents. As Jacob W. Craig notes, we might speak to a “critical understanding” of the “rhetorical possibilities” of information literacy practices more broadly (37).

In the classroom, we might look to stories like Shereen’s, through which she can trace a genealogy of nonconsensual naming and colonizer logics prompted by her own birth certificate. We might think of stories of forced migration and consider Mike’s suggestions that close-reading the complexities of border-crossing can reveal important historical context. Examining United Nations reports, memoir, anecdote, and theory can help us situate document-driven logics within the contexts of production and consumption. In our own research, we have come across “heirloom” birth certificates, for example, documents that reflect an official birthright status but are meant for display and celebration. We also observed revisions to the 2020 US Census and its implications for the visibility, invisibility, and surveillance of immigrants, Arab-Americans, and members of the LGBTQ community. In our efforts to think of our localized classroom spaces as global or transnational “contact zones” (Pratt) we see potential in presenting these kinds of documents to students for their careful consideration.

We agree with Lava Asaad in Chapter 10 of this collection that the “citizen” cannot be our only unit of measurement in the writing class. In fact, the very notion of classroom citizenship can afford to be problematized, resisted, and perhaps replaced or jettisoned. We would like to initiate dialogue about how the document-driven policies and practices we have touched on here are emblematic of

the kinds of documents/papers elicited, produced, and circulated within the microcosmic context of writing classrooms and the macroscopic contexts of writing programs.

## Notes

1. Dominic's writing excerpted with IRB-approved consent.

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