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**FILM REVIEW: LOST BOYS OF SUDAN**

Heather Franzese<sup>1</sup>

*Release: 2003*

*Directors: Megan Mylan & John Shenk*

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Upper-middle class teenagers in Kansas gather in one teen's living room to enjoy pizza and sing songs about Jesus. Peter Nyarol Dut, a "lost boy" from Sudan, looks on with curiosity. He doesn't know the words to sing. It's a typical scene in his new life in America. As he explains it, he's a poor person without parents among the children of the rich. But rich or not, they are hospitable and offer Peter the high school education he could not get in war-ravaged Sudan.

When *Lost Boys of Sudan* was filmed, the twenty-year old war had already killed two million people and sent thousands more to refugee camps in neighboring Kenya. Several thousand young boys got a chance at a new life in America. They had heard about the wonders of the great country that invented basketball. "This journey is like you are going to heaven," said one friend, waving them off. Director Megan Mylan followed two young men, Peter and Santino, through their first year in the US to watch whether it would be the heaven on earth they anticipated. The film moves effortlessly from one vignette to the next, endearing the viewer to the two lost boys more with each scene. "Living upstairs scares me," Santino says. "I am afraid we will fall through the floor."

Their experience could be seen as garden variety study abroad culture shock. The boys learn how to buy deodorant, how to drive, and how to avoid stares by not holding hands with other boys, as is done back home in Sudan. But fundamentally, they live out the collision of two societies: one oriented around the individual versus one where collective identity reigns. "I will not forget our Dinka culture," one vowed as he left Sudanese soil.

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One month later, over Sonic burgers, they remark how in America everyone is busy and time is money. They now understood the new cultural imperative: “When you come to the US, you make it all alone.”

Immersed in an individualistic society, Peter and Santino each must make a choice about whether and how to succeed on his own. One pioneers out after the life he came for, the other reacts to whatever world he wakes up in – to vastly different outcomes. Were their stories not real, it would be easy to dismiss the film as propagandizing the American dream. But as in the myth, risk is rewarded in the stories of these two boys.

The recent release of *Lost Boys of Sudan* redux, titled *God Grew Tired of Us*, signals the exigency of acknowledging the tortured path of those forced to start a new life. Today, 20 million people around the world are refugees or otherwise displaced from their homes. Nine million of these are children like Peter and Santino ([www.ninemillion.org](http://www.ninemillion.org)). Many are welcomed into new homes and communities, as Peter was in Kansas. But enjoying hospitality is not quite the same as being home. At home, Peter knows the words to all the songs.