

# Global Transactions: Sudanese Refugees Sending Money Home

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## **Abstract**

*This paper draws on ethnographic research in America and Ethiopia to explore the phenomenon of Sudanese (Nuer) refugee remittance from those in the diaspora to those who remain behind in Africa. Specifically it locates the unidirectional flow of cash within transnational flows of people, goods, and information. This multi-sited study explores the impacts of these transfers on both sides of the equation. It documents the importance of remittances as a vital component of survival and investment in the future for Nuer refugees in Ethiopia. Similarly it raises questions about the siphoning off of resources on the social, cultural, and economic integration of Sudanese in the United States. Finally, it situates remitting behaviour within a broader socio-historical context to explain its centrality in maintaining a Nuer community across national borders.*

## **Resumé**

*L'article s'appuie sur des recherches ethnographiques menées en Amérique et en Éthiopie pour explorer le phénomène des versements que font les réfugiés soudanais (Nuer) de la diaspora à leurs compatriotes restés en Afrique. Il permet d'établir que le flux monétaire unidirectionnel se situe plus particulièrement au sein de la circulation transnationale de personnes, de biens et de renseignements. L'étude, effectuée dans divers lieux, analyse les conséquences de ces transferts pour les deux parties. Elle documente l'importance des versements en tant que composante vitale de la survie des réfugiés nuer d'Éthiopie et de l'investissement pour leur avenir. Ce faisant, l'essai soulève la question du détournement de ressources au profit de l'intégration sociale, culturelle et économique des Souadanaïses aux États-Unis. Enfin, il situe le comportement associé aux versements dans une*

*perspective socio-historique élargie pour expliquer le son rôle crucial vis-à-vis du maintien de la communauté nuer au-delà des frontières nationales.*

The slogan “Reliability you can trust” emblazoned on a map of Africa greeted me as I waited to meet friends outside Western Union in the sprawling, dusty Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa. Staring at this sign, I was struck by the vital role these ubiquitous money transfer offices that shuffle more than US\$20 billion each year<sup>1</sup> play in larger transnational processes. Quadrupling in size from fifty thousand agents in 1998 to more than two hundred thousand in 2004,<sup>2</sup> Western Union offices (and other businesses like them) serve as storefronts, or localizing venues, for the daily, lived experience of globalization. Therefore, in a world on the move, they offer a unique window into the linkages between refugees in the diaspora and those who remain in Africa.

This article draws on ethnographic research in the United States and Ethiopia to explore the phenomenon of Sudanese refugee remittances to their compatriots in Africa. It situates the unidirectional north-south flow of cash within more complex, multidirectional transnational processes involving people, goods, and information. Specifically, it explores the impacts of these transfers on both sides of the equation. It raises questions about the effects of this siphoning off of resources on the social, cultural, and economic integration of Sudanese in the United States over time. Similarly, it documents the importance of remittances as a vital component of survival and investment in the future for Nuer refugees in Ethiopia. I argue that under these circumstances, these money transfer offices were not just facilitating the flow of cash; they were catalysts for rapid social change among Sudanese in Ethiopia. Moreover, in commentary that engages contemporary debates surrounding the meaning of globalization, what makes this even more compelling is that these processes were occur-

ring among some of the most marginalized, disenfranchised, and purportedly powerless people on earth—refugees who had been pushed out of their country of origin, many of whom did not have a legal right even to reside in Addis Ababa. This finding lends support to the argument that we need to understand globalization in terms that extend beyond the narrow, economically bounded definition of “the growing liberalization of international trade and investment, and the resulting increase in the integration of national economies”<sup>3</sup> to one that appreciates “the intensification of global interconnectedness, suggesting a world full of movement and mixture, contact and linkages, and persistent cultural interaction and exchange.”<sup>4</sup>

This paper is based on ethnographic research I have been conducting since the mid-1990s with South Sudanese refugees who have fled the civil war that has engulfed their country since 1983. Most of my work has focused on those refugees who were resettled in the United States. Fieldwork undertaken in summer 2004 in Ethiopia was an attempt to understand more about the linkages between refugees in the diaspora and those who remain behind in Africa.

Ethiopia, one of nine countries that border Sudan, hosts approximately one hundred thousand Sudanese refugees. Ethiopia, while receiving some US\$211 million per year in remittances, or 2.6 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP), is one of the poorest countries on the planet, ranking second from the bottom of the list in per capita health expenditure in Africa with a life expectancy of about forty-five years. And it is within this adverse environment that Sudanese refugees must carve out a daily subsistence and attempt to plan for the future.

### ***Who Are the Senders?***

There are an estimated thirty million Sudanese. Three million have been killed by the war and another five million displaced. A very small percentage of those displaced have accessed official third-country resettlement placements. North America and Australia have emerged as key destinations for those southern Sudanese who have been resettled as refugees. Sudanese in Canada, Australia, and other places in the world are important to understanding the overall picture. Here, however, in order to provide an in-depth treatment of the subject, I narrow my focus to ties between Sudanese in the United States and Ethiopia.

More than twenty thousand Sudanese have been resettled in the United States since the early 1990s when these placement efforts got underway. About one-fifth of this population is comprised of the so-called “Lost Boys of Sudan” cohort. There are approximately three men to each woman, and the vast majority of the population is under age forty. On arrival in the United States, most lacked

formal schooling, and they have been integrated into the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder. Many ardently seek educational opportunities and are striving to carve out a place for themselves in the United States that allows them to meet their responsibilities here, while addressing the needs of those left behind. This arrangement means that those who are themselves least financially stable and most marginalized in society are shouldering the humanitarian burden for the after-effects of Africa’s longest-running civil war.

International migration scholar Nicholas Van Hear notes that “one of the most important influences refugees and other migrants can have on their countries of origin is through the remittances they send.”<sup>5</sup> It is important to clarify that in this case, as in that of many other refugee populations fleeing active civil conflicts, the impact is not necessarily limited to country of “origin” but also applies to neighbouring countries of asylum where many refugee populations reside. Van Hear goes on to describe the variety of methodological reasons that make it impossible to calculate what percentage of the annual \$100 billion in migrants’ remittances is sent by refugees. These limitations include: (1) remittance data is very patchy; (2) it is impossible to disaggregate refugee remittances from those of other migrants; and (3) refugees remit to a constellation of countries, not just their country of origin.<sup>6</sup>

On average unmarried Sudanese men living in the United States estimated sending about \$5,000 per year to relatives in Ethiopia and Kenya. For all of the limitations Van Hear identifies,<sup>7</sup> it is hard to assess whether these experiences are representative of the larger Sudanese refugee population. Within this relative data vacuum, one could hypothesize that an upper limit might be to assume that if each of the twenty thousand Sudanese refugees resettled in the United States were to send US\$50 per month (or enough to support one person left behind), this would amount to a total of US\$12 million per year. While Ethiopia is only one of several countries where Sudanese refugees are seeking asylum, this amount represents a still-plausible 5.7 per cent of the total annual remittances to Ethiopia of \$211 million.

While it is impossible to calculate precise amounts with available data, it is possible to describe the ways Sudanese refugees remit using both formal and informal avenues. Formal money transfer channels like Western Union, or its competitor Money Gram, are used heavily. Direct bank transfers are a theoretical option (particularly for sums where the sending fee exceeds \$50), but I did not interview anyone who exercised this option. Informal, but not casual, ways to dispatch funds include sending money with acquaintances making the trip back to Africa and utilizing

what are termed “alternative remittance systems.”<sup>7</sup> Until the events of September 11, 2001, Somali remittance companies, or *hawala*, provided a regularly used, lower-cost alternative to send money from North America to Ethiopia. Interviews with Sudanese in the United States elicited a description of a process where people went to the home of a Somali immigrant and gave him money and details about the recipient. The Sudanese counterpart in Ethiopia would go to collect the money from the Somali man’s “brother” in Ethiopia. This system made transactions a few dollars cheaper than Western Union, particularly for sending smaller sums. Scrutiny of these Somali remittance companies has closed many of them or driven them underground. As a result, even if Sudanese still use *hawala*, they are no longer eager to disclose this in interviews. The other informal approach is to send funds and goods along with Sudanese who are making the temporary journey back to Africa, often to visit relatives or to negotiate marriage matters.

With each of these approaches come advantages and disadvantages. How African customers weigh these options has become big business for remittance companies like Western Union who have their eye on the markets ushered in by the post-Cold War surge in African emigration. In fact, more Africans immigrated to the United States during the 1990s than had come during the previous 180 years.<sup>8</sup> This was a result of both changes in U.S. migration policy and destabilization in numerous African countries as regimes toppled, resulting in a power vacuum.

Remittances are vital to understanding globalization and, as will be described later, many recipients depend on this cash flow for daily subsistence. Residing illegally in Addis Ababa, many urban Sudanese refugees are “unbanked,” making it risky to manage large sums of cash. Carrying cash on their person is perilous, as is hiding it in their rented accommodations. In light of these constraints, funds optimally are transferred on an as-needed (usually monthly) basis. While this option offers advantages to the sender who is most likely operating on a send-as-earn basis, it is decidedly more costly over time. Western Union, for instance, charges about US\$15 to send US\$50 from the United States to Ethiopia, the minimum monthly allotment needed to subsist as an urban refugee in Addis Ababa. Sending this amount in twelve monthly increments would cost US\$180 in sending fees over the course of a year; if the annual total of US\$600 were sent in one instalment, it would cost the sender only US\$50. While this fee structure encourages sending larger amounts less frequently, this does not always meet the needs of senders or recipients.

One of the alternatives, sending money with people travelling back to Africa on short-term visits, has the advantage of eliminating or diminishing transfer fees, but it also has

drawbacks. Certainly the lack of availability of someone trustworthy travelling when you wish to make a payment would present a barrier. Reliability may also be a concern, as travelling with large amounts of cash can present problems for the carrier when arriving in Ethiopia. Another drawback to this approach is the diminished privacy that the informal bureaucracy of Western Union affords: whom you are sending money to (and whom not), along with how much, becomes a matter of social scrutiny. The resulting gossip acts as a mechanism of social control, giving recipients some degree of influence on senders’ behaviour.

Formal and informal modes of remitting pose challenges. When using Western Union, the recipient usually is required to present identification and to know the answer to a “test question.” This can be problematic if the recipient is residing in Addis Ababa illegally and lacks documentation, does not speak Amharic, or is unable to travel to a Western Union agent location. In some cases, a Sudanese who does have documentation (*e.g.* by virtue of being registered as a student, married to an Ethiopian, or legitimately in Addis Ababa on a “pass” from the refugee camp) serves as a broker. The recipient needs to know that money is awaiting him or her. Practically, this requires contact through telephone or one of the omnipresent Internet kiosks. In Addis Ababa, some Sudanese with long-term connections to Ethiopia have access to a telephone or a post-office box. They take messages and deliver post for a small service fee. Access to a free Yahoo Internet account and use of Western Union can eliminate the need for this communication broker.

Even when the broker is eliminated, others in the community keep tabs on who is receiving remittances and how often. In my own experience, I found that numerous Sudanese in Ethiopia communicated with me via electronic mail to request assistance after my fieldwork there. These requests ceased when I began to send money to one individual to pay for his school fees, suggesting some sort of understanding that my resources were being channelled to a particular individual, rendering me unavailable to others. Sudanese remittance recipients report that there is an understanding that funds marked for educational costs must be used for that purpose. But money for food or rent is viewed as a corporate asset. If the money is being used improperly, *i.e.* for alcohol rather than school fees, this information is communicated quickly back to the sender, who most likely will stop payments or redirect them to someone else in the family who is deemed more responsible.

Even if the recipient is fulfilling his or her end of the agreement by going to school or supporting the family, remittances can still stop abruptly. The flow of remittances

is utterly dependent on the well-being and employment of the sender. A number of those without means in Addis Ababa had come there at the behest of their sponsor abroad, only to be stranded there when the remittances stopped. In some cases the Sudanese relative in the United States lost their job with the recent economic downturn. In other cases, the sender fell ill. Or, in still others, he got married and now had to worry about dependents in his newly formed nuclear family. This experience can, however, be gendered and marriage can also open opportunities for women to initiate sending remittances. For some Sudanese, this meant they could not get enough cash to return to the camp. For others, they preferred the option of remaining in Addis Ababa cadging a meal and a place to sleep off of others who did have a "relative." This option, at least, offered hope in a way that being "warehoused" in the refugee camp did not.

Clearly, if Africans who have been resettled in the United States are using resources to support families in Africa as well as their immediate families in the US, this has some impact on their integration into a new society. It may mean they are forgoing educational opportunities in lieu of income-generating ones. They could also eschew the entry-level job with upward mobility potential for the one that simply pays more per hour now. If parents are working more hours during shifts when their children are at home in need of care, this raises questions about how this sharing of resources will play out in the next generation.<sup>9</sup>

However, when considering these potential negative impacts on integration, two points must be considered. First, since many Sudanese refugees have access only to the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder in the United States, they may be barred from working the prime shift anyway. The second point has to do with positionality. Often it seems that some of the anti-immigration rhetoric that argues that remittances are a threat to social cohesion in the host country does not pause to consider the choices immigrants are asked to make: Do you invest in your family in the United States while your mother or other children are suffering in another country? It is truly expecting extraordinary acts of ordinary people to assume that Sudanese refugees are able to turn their back on loved ones suffering in Africa to invest fully in their new societies in the diaspora.

### ***Impact of Remittances***

With an understanding of who is sending the money, how, and with what implications for themselves and their families in the host country, this next section examines the impact of these funds on the lives of Sudanese recipients in Ethiopia. Here, I assert that these remittances do not just sustain people; they broker possibilities for dramatic social change

in the form of reconfigured residential patterns, local economies, and power structures.

### ***Shaping Residential Patterns***

Scattered throughout the third-largest city in Africa with its five million inhabitants, more than thirty-five Western Union offices dot the Addis Ababa landscape, with 188 locations nationwide. Living in the shadows of these offices are several thousand refugees from Sudan who are dependent on the remittances accessed through these offices for daily subsistence. To retrieve the resources housed within these kiosk-like structures, in a country where a shared taxi ride costs 12 cents and a filling meal less than a dollar, all you need is a control number, a "test question" (e.g. your grandfather's name), and a "relative" abroad. America, Canada, Australia, or even Norway will do. If not a relative, you might hope for a "friend," perhaps a school mate or someone you knew from your home town. These "relatives" are those Sudanese who found some way to migrate to another country, as described above.

Some Sudanese come to Addis Ababa when they receive instructions via telephone from a Sudanese sponsor living abroad that there is money awaiting them in the capital. Even the rumour that a relative might be thinking of sending money is enough to prompt people to make the journey. The money often is earmarked for educational costs for the individual to complete his (and it is usually male) secondary or tertiary education at one of the countless "private colleges." These school fees cost about \$39 per month, excluding basic needs like food, clothes, and shelter. It might also be earmarked for "treatment" for those who cannot get adequate health care in the refugee camps in Western Ethiopia. Others come to escape "security situations," due to vendettas levied against them or their families, because a relative might have been involved in killing as a soldier. Many are simply caught in the crossfire of recent flare-ups between camp refugees and local inhabitants that have driven even most of the international organizations that provide programming and services out of the area. While international agencies like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) treat refugees as victims in need of support, some local inhabitants view refugees as interlopers who deplete local assets such as firewood and who have access to resources like education and a steady food ration that locals may lack.

Others come to Addis Ababa as prospectors of sorts, hoping to get information to establish a connection with a long-lost relative or friend abroad. This process is facilitated by the Nuer cultural injunction to not refuse someone who needs a meal or a place to sleep. Food can always be made to stretch a bit further. Even if the bed is full, there is

still room on the floor, as I found in one case where a dozen high-school-aged boys shared a room just ten feet square with one bed. They took turns as to whose night it was to get the bed and who got the blanket on the hard cement floor. In this way, even those without an immediate link to those abroad still benefit in terms of having food and shelter needs met. While one of these boys may have been receiving remittances from a relative abroad, the other eleven tapped into this resource and kept themselves afloat, if only barely.

A few come to Addis Ababa directly from the Sudan, as in the case of the woman, her husband, their three children, and the woman's sister whom I met in a dirt-floored, shack-like dwelling. In this case, the family sold what cows remained in their herd after the latest assault from the devastation of the war in Sudan and made their way on foot over many days across the border to Ethiopia. They bypassed UNHCR camps en route to Addis Ababa. The purpose of the journey was to seek treatment for their three-year-old daughter, who suffered from stomach pains. By skirting the refugee camps and heading directly to the capital where they hoped to receive remittances from a relative in the United States, this family's experience speaks to refugees' perception of the inadequacy of the response of the so-called "international community" in meeting their basic needs. It also highlights the spuriousness of viewing refugees as powerless and fleeing willy-nilly without a plan. And finally, it emphasizes the limitless reach of globalization, where even the most seemingly isolated regions are tied into a larger system along whose lines cash, information, and even people flow relatively unencumbered, even in the midst of a civil war.

The demographic profile of the Sudanese who arrive in Addis Ababa is also revealing. Cash flows facilitated by expanded global networks reshape residential patterns. Gender ratios in the Ethiopian refugee camps are reportedly about half male and half female. This ratio of men to women in Addis Ababa shifts to three to one. (This gender imbalance is repeated among Sudanese in the United States.<sup>10</sup>) Therefore, while equal numbers of males and females leave Sudan for Ethiopia, many more men continue on to the capital. Reasons for more Sudanese males than females in Addis Ababa include: access to the cash necessary to make the trip from the camps to Addis Ababa; the pursuit of secondary and tertiary education as a predominantly male activity; and the issue of protection and security. I did interview a few women who were in Addis Ababa without a husband or immediate male relatives. They lived with other women and their young children in compounds. I met one Ethiopian woman, married to a Nuer man who was living in the United States with one of their children and another wife. The woman instructed me to contact the

father when I got home to tell him to take the second child who was living in Ethiopia or to send monthly support for the child. Personal security was also an issue. I interviewed one man who had been beaten the night before just for being Sudanese.

In these ways, money transfer offices act as a sort of siren, beckoning those with little hope and an elevated tolerance for risk to Africa's urban slums. Thus, remittances play a dubious role in fueling rural to urban migration in Africa. This overview of residency practices is intimately linked to a discussion of local economies.

### ***Reconfiguring Local Economies***

Destruction of the means of livelihood is one of the principal reasons people become refugees. Paradoxically, refugees, or asylums seekers as they are sometimes called, are often denied the right to work in their host countries. In Ethiopia, for Sudanese refugees, daily survival is guaranteed only if they remain in the refugee camp, consuming what most concur are inadequate rations. In refugee parlance, those Sudanese in western Ethiopian camps are being "warehoused," or left for an extended period in camps with no immediate solution in sight.<sup>11</sup> This was especially perilous in western Ethiopia, where tensions between locals and refugees ran particularly high, resulting in the gunning down of seven Ethiopian government refugee workers in their jeep in December 2003.<sup>12</sup> Those Sudanese I encountered in Addis Ababa had rejected the fate of being forgotten by the rest of the world and sought to procure some further support, usually to pay for continued education. Since formal employment is illegal, this means people must work in some sort of informal economy or rely on remittances. Options for employment in the informal economy seemed very limited for this population. When I asked people why they came to Addis Ababa, many said they had feared for their lives while gathering firewood in the areas surrounding the refugee camp. I heard this story from so many people that I couldn't fathom the insatiable consumption that would necessitate so much wood, envisioning all of western Ethiopia ablaze. It was only later that I understood that people sought firewood not for their own personal use, but as a commodity to sell. Gathering firewood or selling their and their family's meagre camp rations were the only two ways to make money to pay the exorbitant US\$20 bus fare for transport from the camps to Addis Ababa. Gathering firewood was considered a hazardous activity, as this was resented by local Anuak inhabitants and often prompted bloodshed. Given the limited options to earn an income, most Sudanese relied on direct or indirect access to remittances.

Optimally, those who live in Addis Ababa receive monthly remittances of US\$50 to US\$100, while those who

remain in the camps tend to get what people called “one-time payments,” or an instalment of cash to meet a designated need, such as medical care. This infusion of cash is fundamental to the survival of Sudanese in Addis Ababa, but it is important to appreciate that these remittances support a way of life more complex than simple subsistence.<sup>13</sup> I encountered no Sudanese in Ethiopia who could be considered prosperous by Ethiopian standards, with the exception of those U.S.- and Australia-based Nuer who were back on temporary visits to see family or to look for a wife. However, inequities do exist among Ethiopia-based Nuer, and these remittances introduced or, in some cases, reinforced power hierarchies.

### ***Altering Power Structures***

The transformation of African societies and ways to access power within them has dominated African Studies literature since the mid-1960s. Wage-labour employment,<sup>14</sup> Christian conversion,<sup>15</sup> and formal schooling<sup>16</sup> are documented as key catalysts of significant social transformation.

Among the Nuer, one thread of continuity running through their entire documented history is the dominance of cattle in marking social status.<sup>17</sup> In the past decades, educational attainment has been grafted onto this arrangement. In the current climate in which civil war rages on, cattle keeping, while still pursued, is risky and educational credentials do not guarantee access to employment or, as experienced by Nuer in the diaspora, employment commensurate with qualifications.<sup>18</sup>

Ironically, those in the diaspora may appear, at first glance, to be worse off than their African counterparts. In one case I followed, one brother worked in the United States in low-level positions in factories and meat-processing plants to support not only his U.S.-based family but also his brother who was attending law school in Ethiopia, among other relatives. I paused to consider which brother was better off in this situation. The U.S.-based brother was constantly exhausted from working the night shift and caring for the children when his wife left for her day-shift job. His educational aspirations were deferred. The Africa-based brother, on the other hand, dressed in a three-piece suit each day to attend law school in a private college in Addis Ababa, and enjoyed a certain level of status from this experience. While this example does raise some important questions about how these two men’s lives and relative experiences of being successful will unfold over time, it is important to recognize that superficial markers of status such as clothing do not speak to overall well-being. And, despite appearances, the brother who was attending law school lived a very hand-to-mouth subsistence existence in which he was utterly dependent on his brother abroad for

his every need. Within this chaotic and fragmented social order, access to a remitting sponsor abroad has emerged as a marker of status and promise of human security.

### ***Cash Flows in Context***

Remittances serve as a lifeline for many in developing countries. In this section I suggest that it is crucial to understand these north-south cash flows within a more complex set of multi-stranded transnational processes involving, people, goods, and information.

First, it needs to be appreciated that while refugee status is conferred at the level of the individual, the experiences of Nuer refugees demonstrate the ways in which the actions of individuals were undertaken on behalf of family (or corporate) groups. In one case I followed in both the U.S. and in Ethiopia, the family pooled all of the blankets they had just been given by UNHCR and sold them; the eldest living son was selected to undertake a perilous journey from the refugee camp in Ethiopia to a camp in Kenya that was known to be offering resettlement slots. Others I interviewed in Ethiopia described a process where “resettlement forms” that enabled people to apply to have their case considered by UNHCR were scarce. When forms did become available, they were distributed on a representational basis throughout the camp. Therefore, to even have access to a form to apply for resettlement, people were obligated to their family for having been the one selected to apply.

Therefore north-south cash flows, while seemingly asymmetric in terms of who is giving and who is receiving, need to be seen within a larger temporal and spatial context. These reciprocal arrangements allow the person who benefitted from access to resettlement to meet social and familial obligations. At one time the family invested in him; now is his time for repayment. In so doing, however, those in the diaspora who remit money are perhaps obtaining some peace of mind and most assuredly securing a stake as a member of a complex web of social ties. One thirty-year old Nuer man I interviewed in the United States who had spent a year in university in Cairo, after a long day of filling out papers and forms for school, commented, “Refugees are cowards.” When I asked him what he meant, he included himself in that category and said, “The real men stayed to fight in Africa; the ones who left were cowards.” His words, according to the African repatriation literature, capture the dilemma faced by those who return home after wars or upheaval.<sup>19</sup> For him, as for many other Sudanese, sending money home is an opportunity to assuage some of the negative feelings they have in grappling with what psychologists might call “survivor’s guilt.”

In addition to psychological comfort, senders also invest in their futures by securing rights in marriage through the

transfer of bridewealth cattle. They may also invest in familial cattle herds for those living outside of the camps in western Ethiopia. One man in the U.S. spoke of trying to help his camp-based family purchase a home in a nearby town (for about US\$2,000). Many hold out hope for a lasting peace in the Sudan. If this materializes, a history of remittances will ease the transition back to African society for those who choose to return.

Those who remain in Africa take advantage of the opportunity to send items home with those returning to the US after brief sojourns abroad and crochet antimacassars and bed covers in fluorescent pinks and yellows. They also send beaded items, often with a Christian motif, to decorate the walls of people's apartments to remind them of home. Items like the Bible in Sudanese languages are also unique items that are hard to obtain outside of Africa and are desirable to send.

In addition to goods, those who remain in Africa might perform services for those in the diaspora like obtaining a birth certificate for immigration purposes. In addition to the bridewealth funds discussed earlier, some of this money is used to recruit and provide upkeep for the betrothed with the groom's family. There are other family obligations like the care of the young and the elderly. In one case, a U.S.-based man sent money to enable his brother in Africa to marry a second wife. Neither brother was interested in taking a second wife at the time, but they made this arrangement to honour their father's request. By the U.S.-based brother supplying the cash and the Africa-based brother providing the service, they worked together to meet familial obligations.

### Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to present an overview of a largely undocumented practice that is difficult if not impossible to identify from a macro-level standpoint. This ethnographic view of Sudanese refugee remittances to their compatriots in Ethiopia highlights the vital nature of these resource flows in sustaining life under very difficult circumstances. More than just sustaining life, however, these remittances alter social life in unexpected and powerful ways through shaping residential patterns, local economies, and power structures. Viewed in this way, remittances need to be added to scholars' paradigm of factors precipitating rapid social change in Africa.

These remittance processes provide a dynamic view of globalization on the local level and an alternative view of north-south cash flows. This paper has offered possibilities to explore the impact of cash trickling directly into the hands of ordinary people, in contrast to aid flowing in through the usual cast of governmental characters to be

doled out as they deem fit, and, perhaps, contributes to how we understand globalization.

### Notes

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