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Global Transactions
Sudanese Refugees Sending Money Home

Dianna J. Shandy

Drawing on fieldwork conducted in both the United States and Ethiopia, Dianna Shandy investigates the role of remittances—money sent by emigrants to family and friends in the home country—in creating connections between urban and rural spaces, and among nations. Shandy focuses on Nuer refugees, originally from the Sudan, but now living in the U.S. She discovers that the prospect of receiving remittances from abroad leads some Nuer to move to Ethiopia's capital city of Addis Ababa, where transferred funds can be more easily received. She also finds that remittances are not merely a transfer of wealth between relative "haves" and "have-nots," but also serve to maintain ties of reciprocity within families separated by warfare and emigration.

The slogan "Reliability you can trust" emblazoned on a yellow map of Africa greeted me as I waited to meet up with Sudanese friends outside the Western Union kiosk 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 play in larger, multistranded transnational processes, interweaving rural, urban, and global.

Remittances, or the sending of money by foreign workers to their home country, are a crucial part of these transnational processes. These remittances are often handled by money transfer offices that shuffle more than US$20 billion each year and play a vital and rapidly expanding role in helping people send money home (Simpson 2004). Western Union (2008), for example, mushroomed in size from 50,000 agent locations in 1998 to more than 320,000 in 2008 and now reports earnings of nearly US$1 billion a year, primarily through helping international migrants move money home (DeParle 2007a). Western Union and other money transfer offices like it serve as store-

Source: Adapted from *Nuer American Passages: Globalizing Sudanese Migration* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007).

fronts, 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. By exploring the impacts of these transfers on both sides of the transaction, it is possible to document remittances as a vital, yet precarious, component of survival for those who remain in Africa, especially for those who are victims of war-induced displacement.

This chapter draws on ethnographic research conducted in the United States since 1996 and more briefly in Ethiopia in 2004 to explore how remittances sent by Sudanese, primarily Nuer, refugees living in the United States to Nuer refugees in Ethiopia served as a catalyst for migration from refugee camps in rural areas to the capital city, Addis Ababa. The chapter argues that these financial flows, while addressing a set of unmet needs, impose a new state of vulnerability on those who left the camps for urban areas.

Who Are the Senders?

Nuer are a famous people in anthropology. They were the subject of three books by the well-known late British social anthropologist Sir E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1940, 1951, 1956), who described their pastoralist mode of subsistence, complex segmented kinship system, and religion. Evans-Pritchard conducted research with the Nuer in southern Sudan in the 1930s. Nuer existence revolved around the needs of their cattle, especially the need to move the animals from high to low ground and back again each year. During the dry season, the cattle were herded to lower ground where there was still water and grass. During the rainy season, the lowlands became a swampy lagoon, and the herds had to be moved to higher ground where rain had replenished the range. This transhumant lifestyle and the need to guard cattle against raiders from nearby tribes had shaped Nuer society.

Nuer society has suffered devastating shifts in the decades since Evans-Pritchard conducted his fieldwork. Most significantly, during 1983–2005 the Khartoum government, located in northern Sudan, was engaged in war with southerners, including Nuer, who were seeking self-government. This conflict in the Sudan frequently is attributed to social distinctions based on geography (North–South), ethnicity (Arab–African), and religion (Muslim–Christian). But, as the more-recent and ongoing Darfur crisis in western Sudan has illustrated, these are fluid categories. From a southern perspective, northern Muslim Arabs entered their land in the 1800s looking for ivory and slaves. Northerners were favored under colonial rule, which gave them more power and increased tension with people, such as the Nuer, living in the South. In 2005, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement between southern rebels and the Khartoum government went into effect. As of this writing, it remains unclear whether the peace agreement will endure and, if so, for how long.

The population of Sudan is estimated at 40 million. While it is difficult to develop reliable estimates for war-induced displacement and death, it is calculated that two million people were killed by the North–South war and another four million were displaced within Sudan. Approximately 650,000 took shelter in neighboring countries, including Ethiopia.

Among those who took shelter in neighboring countries, beginning in the early 1990s, some 30,000 or so southern Sudanese were resettled in the United States as refugees. As a refugee population arriving in the United States, most lacked formal schooling beyond the secondary level and have been integrated onto the lowest rungs of the socioeconomic 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 to family in the United States, while addressing the needs of those left behind. While some do manage to return home to visit family left behind, in most cases, responding to the needs of family in Africa involves sending money home. This arrangement means that those who are themselves the least financially stable and most marginalized in U.S. society are shouldering the humanitarian burden for the aftereffects of one of Africa's most devastating civil wars.

Migration scholar Nicholas Van Hear (2003) 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." It is important to clarify that, in this case, as of that for many other refugee populations fleeing civil conflicts, the impact is not necessarily limited to country of "origin" per se and applies to neighboring 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 $300 billion (see DeParle 2007b) global flow of migrants' remittances is sent by refugees. These limitations include the patchiness of remittance data, the impossibility of disaggregating refugee remittances from those of other migrants, and the fact that refugees remit to a constellation of countries, not just their country of origin.

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, and its competitors, are used heavily, as are informal avenues. 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" (Omer 2004). Until 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 prior to 9/11 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 these transactions a few dollars cheaper than Western Union's, particularly for sending smaller sums. Scrutiny of these remittance companies and allegations of money laundering and ties to terrorism have closed some 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.

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. Hume (2002), for example, documents that more Africans immigrated to the United States during the 1990s than had come during the previous 180 years. Almost axiomatically, new immigrant groups mean new pathways along which remittances will flow.

Impact of Remittances

With an understanding of who is sending the money and how, we can examine the impact of these funds on the lives of Sudanese recipients in Ethiopia. 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. Through this lens, the impact of refugees who are resettled in the United States or in other Western countries is amplified beyond the small numbers of persons who board planes. We will see that remittances from U.S.-based Nuer serve as a catalyst for movements from refugee camps to the capital city in Ethiopia.

Shaping Residential Patterns

More than 35 Western Union offices dot the Addis Ababa landscape, with 188 locations nationwide in Ethiopia. Living in the shadows of these offices are several thousand Sudanese refugees who depend for daily subsistence on the remittances accessed through these offices. To retrieve the resources housed within these kiosk-like structures, all you need is a control number, a "test question" (e.g., your grandfather's name or the town where you were born), and a "relative" abroad. If not a relative, you might hope for a "friend," perhaps a schoolmate or someone you knew from your hometown.

Some Sudanese come to Addis when they receive instructions via telephone from a Sudanese sponsor living abroad that there is money awaiting them in the capital. Even the rumor that a relative might be *thinking* of sending money is enough to prompt people to make the journey from rural areas to the city. The money often is earmarked for educational costs for the individual to complete his (and it is usually a male) secondary or tertiary education at one of the countless "private colleges." Others come to escape danger as in the case of what one woman described as a "security situation" due to a vendetta levied against her family, because a relative was "involved in killing" as a soldier. Many are simply caught in the crossfire of flare-ups between camp refugees and local inhabitants over control of and access to resources. Others come to Addis as prospectors of sorts, hoping to get information to establish a connection with a lost relative or friend abroad. A few come to Addis directly from the Sudan, as in the case of one woman, her husband, their three children, and the woman's sister. In this case, the family sold what cows remained in their herd after the latest assault and made their way on foot westward, traveling many days to cross the border into Ethiopia. They bypassed United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) camps en route to Addis Ababa, where they hoped to receive remittances from a relative in the United States. This case highlights the limitless reach of globalizing processes, where even the seemingly most isolated regions are tied into a larger system along whose lines cash, information, and even people flow relatively unimpeded, even in the midst of a civil war. Urban areas serve a unique role as an important node in actual and hoped-for flows of resources.

The demographic profile of the Sudanese who arrive in Addis also is 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 shifts to three to one. Therefore, while roughly equal numbers of males and females may leave Sudan for Ethiopia, many more men continue on to the capital city. This gender imbalance is repeated among the first waves of Sudanese arrivals in the United States (see Shandy 2007).

Therefore, 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 distinctive role in fueling rural to urban migration in Africa, resulting in residency practices that are intimately linked to local economies.

Reconfiguring Local Economies

Destruction of the means of livelihood is one of the principal reasons people become refugees. In Ethiopia, for Sudanese refugees whom I interviewed, daily survival is subsidized by humanitarian agencies if the refugees remain in the refugee camp, where they are provided what most concur are inadequate rations. In refugee parlance, those Sudanese in western Ethiopian camps are being warehoused—left for an extended period in camps with no immediate solution in sight. Those Sudanese I encountered in Addis had rejected the fate of being forgotten by the rest of the world and sought to procure some additional support. Furthermore, when asked why they came to Addis, many said they had feared for their lives while gathering firewood in the areas surrounding the refugee camp. Leaving the camp to gather wood, or for any other reason, was especially perilous in western Ethiopia, where tensions between locals and refugees ran particularly high and even resulted in the gunning down of seven Ethiopian government refugee workers as they drove in their jeep in December 2003 (Lacey 2004).

Hearing that so many people went from the camp to collect wood, 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 collected firewood not for their own personal use but as a commodity to sell.

Since formal employment is illegal for most refugees in Ethiopia, they must work in the informal economy or rely on remittances. Therefore, given the limited options to earn an income, most Sudanese rely on direct or indirect access to remittances from Nuer living abroad.

Optimally, those who live in Addis 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 installment of cash to meet a designated need, such as medical care. The monthly infusion of cash is fundamental to the survival of Sudanese in Addis, but it is important to appreciate that these remittances support a way of life that is more complex in Ethiopia than was the simple subsistence in Sudan. 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 had returned 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. Colonial infrastructures, wage-labor employment, Christian conversion, formal schooling, and urbanization are documented as key catalysts of significant social transformation (see Bond 1982; Comaroff 1985; Little 1966; Mayer 1961; Schapera 1947; Scudder and Colson 1980). Among the Nuer, one thread of continuity running through their entire documented history is the dominance of cattle in marking social status. In the past decades, educational attainment has been grafted onto this arrangement. In the climate of the Sudanese civil war, cattle-keeping, while still pursued, was risky. Similarly, educational credentials did not guarantee access to employment or, as experienced by Nuer in the diaspora, employment commensurate with educational qualifications (see AbuSharaf 2002; Hutchinson 1996). Within this chaotic and fragmented social order, access to a remitting sponsor abroad has emerged as a marker of status and a promise of human security.

Cash Flows in Context

For a long time, remittances have served as a lifeline for many in developing countries, including those in Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and even Europe. Because the frequency and amount of remittances to Africa have increased only recently, much less is known about them. One of the key factors fueling increases in remittances to Africa is the concomitant increase in emigration from Africa to places like Europe, North America, and Australia. In this section, we will explore the North–South flow of cash within a more-complex set of multistranded and multidirectional transnational flows involving people, goods, and information.

In the case of Sudan, as previously discussed, millions of people were displaced by the war. Of these, several hundred thousand flowed across the border into neighboring countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Congo, and Egypt. And, among the refugees who crossed an international border, approximately 30,000 were selected for resettlement to the United States since the early 1990s. The United Nations and many national governments, including the United States, define a refugee as a person who has a well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, and who has left his or her home country. How the United Nations or national governments apply this definition when they seek to certify individuals as refugees varies.

It is important to appreciate 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 that I followed in both the United States and in Ethiopia, the family living in Ethiopia pooled all of the blankets they had just been given by the UNHCR and sold them to enable the eldest living son to undertake a perilous journey from the refugee camp in Ethiopia to a camp in Kenya. The camp in Kenya was known to be offering resettlement slots for the United States. Others I interviewed in Ethiopia described a process where "resettlement forms," which enable people to apply to have their case considered by UNHCR, were scarce. When forms did become available, they were distributed on a representational basis—such as one per family—throughout the camp. Families then designated individuals to apply for resettlement. If the individual was selected for resettlement abroad, it was broadly understood that the individual owed a certain debt to his family for having been the one chosen to apply. Flowing from this was the expectation that one way the individual could repay this debt would be through remittances.

Both of these examples illustrate the ways in which refugees living in places like the United States are enmeshed in reciprocal arrangements with those left behind. At one time their family invested in him (usually it was a male); now is his time for repayment. In other words, 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. Those in the diaspora who remit are perhaps obtaining some peace of mind. Yet, they are also maintaining a stake as a member within a complex web of social, political, and economic ties. Beyond repaying debts, Nuer are also investing in their future when they remit to those who remain in Africa.

Knowing the different reasons for and uses of remittances informs us of how rural, urban, and global arenas are inextricably interwoven. The refugee living in upstate New York is bound to his brother living in an African capital city, and they are both linked to still another brother residing in a rural area

and maintaining the herd of cattle. Many hold out hope for a lasting peace in the Sudan, and we are in the midst of witnessing the role of remittances in easing the transition back to African society for those who choose to return.

Conclusion

In this chapter 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 refugees from southern Sudan sending 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 and reshaping residential patterns, local economies, and power structures. Viewed in this way, remittances need to be incorporated in our understanding of factors precipitating rapid social change in Africa.

These remittance processes provide a dynamic view of globalization on the local level and an alternative way of appreciating North–South cash flows. Instead of aid flowing in through the usual cast of governmental and nongovernmental donor agencies, this case has offered possibilities to explore the impact of cash trickling directly into the hands of ordinary people and, perhaps, contributes to a broadening of how we understand globalization as a complex phenomenon socially mediated from below.

Urban areas are central to these multistranded, multidirectional transnational processes, and they are also a nexus that links the rural and the global. The money transfer offices described here play a vital role in this vast interweaving of people, place, and space. Yet, the flows of cash need to be seen within their social context.

Highlighting the roles of resettled Nuer in supporting those left behind provides a window into the complex and dynamic social worlds of people who are assumed to be functioning within a minimalist, survival-based framework. A greater appreciation of the sociocultural factors informing forced migrants' decisions and behavior has significant implications not only for the ways we theorize the human condition but also for the kinds of programmatic responses that are built upon these understandings.

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Hyderabad
Continuities and Transformations

Karen Isaksen Leonard

Her curiosity aroused by a celebration in Los Angeles of the 400th anniversary of the Indian city Hyderabad, Karen Isaksen Leonard began to explore Hyderabadi emigration to the United States and other countries. She describes the changes and disruptions that came to Hyderabad beginning with Indian independence from Britain in 1947, including the division of Hyderabad State and the imposition of an unfamiliar "official" language. The pace of change has only increased as Hyderabadis become more active participants in the global economy and leave home—often permanently—to pursue educational and work opportunities. Through her analysis, Leonard demonstrates that those who have been "left behind" can suffer the same feelings of disruption and loss as do those who have departed.

This study began in 1990 in Los Angeles, when a notice in California's Indian ethnic newspaper, *India-West,* caught my eye: the Hyderabad Deccan Association of California was celebrating Hyderabad city's 400th anniversary. I attended that celebration at a local community center along with 1,000 Hyderabadis—I had had no idea there were that many Hyderabadis in the Los Angeles area. The evening of festive Hyderabadi food, Urdu speeches and poetry, and gorgeous Hyderabadi fashions made me long to return to my roots in Indian and Hyderabadi history after almost a decade of working on other topics, and I resolved to study Hyderabadis abroad to see why they were leaving their homeland and relocating elsewhere. I realized the members of my social network in Hyderabad would be good resources, as their children were among those emigrating.

When I first worked in Hyderabad in the 1960s, people from there rarely moved out. Hyderabadis used to fend off non-*mulkis* (noncountrymen, foreigners, or outsiders), people coming from Madras and North India. They

Source: Adapted from the author's book, *Locating Home: India's Hyderabadis Abroad.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).