Peoples of The Horn in the New African Diaspora: Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali, and Sudanese Émigrés in the United States and Canada, A Bibliographic Survey

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“I hear the government lets you keep a cow wherever you want in America.”
Abdul Qadir Musa, a Somali Bantu, as quoted in Newsweek, Sept. 2, 2002, p. 37.
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I. Context

With the increasing diversity that characterizes our times, the very face and story of our composite experience as North Americans is changing every day. New immigrant groups are appearing everywhere as we open our doors to the world’s tired and poor. Mary Pipher has captured this spirit of diversity and change in her recent book, *The Middle of everywhere: the world’s refugees come to our town*. (24) The title Pipher has chosen speaks interestingly and instructively to the ubiquity of this change. Her book focuses on the resettlement of various immigrant groups in Lincoln, Nebraska, where she has been extensively engaged in various resettlement efforts. Her point is that, whereas a place like Lincoln is sometimes depicted, albeit from a biased perspective, as “the middle of nowhere,” it has in a sense become the middle of everywhere, with various members of the world community coming to town and making it a real part of the proverbial global village.

The purpose of this bibliographic survey is to flesh out a portion of this composite experience of diversity and change by surveying the literature pertaining to the immigration of northeast African peoples to the United States and Canada since 1970. The nationalities on which it focuses—Eritreans, Ethiopians, Somalis, and Sudanese—are but a small part of a greater whole, yet their composite experience as recent

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1 Numbers in parentheses following a reference in the text refer to the citation in the bibliography with the corresponding number.
émigrés² to various North American communities exemplifies many of the issues that pertain more generally to resettlement and adjustment to a new and radically different life experience. These nationalities, along with many other immigrant communities, are victims of circumstances and events quite beyond their control that have in many instances caused untold and unimaginable misery, pain, and trauma.

The regional context of the African Horn and recent events occurring therein require at least brief amplification as a basis for understanding the focus of this essay. The Horn ordinarily is defined to include the national states of Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, the southern Sudan, and the diminutive state of Djibouti. In recent decades, each of these nation states has been beset with violence and national disintegration on a scale that has threatened the continued existence as viable political entities. While some of these events, such as the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, have received considerable exposure in western news sources, many of these disruptive events have gone largely unnoticed to many North American readers. More recently, they have sometimes received western press attention for their connection with international terrorism, rather than for any inherent interest in the region or its peoples per se.³ It is pertinent to add that many of the references to the region that do appear in the western press provide no more than surface explanations that contribute little to our understanding of these complex events.

² The term “émigré” is used throughout this essay as opposed to the more frequently used, though problematic term of “refugee”. The latter term carries a condescending connotation and, in addition, has a more specialized legal definition that does not always pertain to the context intended in this essay.

³ For a reliable and up-to-date survey of recent events throughout the region of The Horn, the reader is referred to the appropriate national sections in Africa south of the Sahara (London and New York : Europa Publications, 2004) 33rd ed. Each national section of 20-25 pages includes a lucid summary of recent historical and political events as well as economic and geographical surveys.
Throughout the past several decades, the instability and violence among the nations of the African Horn have caused massive displacement of peoples. To be sure, the focus on émigré literature as presented in this survey only touches a small part of this larger configuration of human displacement. By far the largest number of these displaced peoples never leave the region of the African Horn, as they often flee to a neighboring state only to be repatriated later to their homeland or to languish in “temporary” settlement camps in such cities as Aden, Mombasa, Khartoum, or Cairo. Indeed, those who do eventually succeed in migrating to North America are frequently the best educated and most affluent members of their societies who thus have the best connections and access to necessary resources. For those who do choose to settle beyond the boundaries of continental Africa, those who emigrate to the U.S. or Canada are once again but a part of a larger migration. In fact, émigré communities from northeast Africa are known to have settled in various European countries, as well as in Israel, Australia, and New Zealand.

Although works on the northeast African émigré communities settling in these countries are outside the scope of this essay, suffice it to mention a few recent publications of note for their thematic relevance. Nurrudin Farah, the internationally known Somali novelist who currently lives in Cape Town, has made a major contribution to this field with his *Yesterday, tomorrow : voices from the Somali diaspora* (16), for which he interviewed Somali residing in Italy, Switzerland,

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4 The Somali Bantu, a group of nearly 12,000 disadvantaged and underprivileged Africans who trade their origins to Mozambique, Malawi, and Tanzania as descendants of slaves who were sold by Arab traders to Somali taskmasters in the nineteenth century, are an exception to this generalization. They have recently been granted asylum as a class by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, an unprecedented INS decision, which qualifies all of them to emigrate to the U.S. A sizable body of literature is already available on this special class of immigrants, including websites (151), articles (79), and newspaper accounts (115, 126, 135).
Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The issues he raises regarding Somali identity and adaptation to new life circumstances are very relevant to Somali communities residing elsewhere in the world. Another work of special note is Greg Gow’s extensively researched *The Oromo in exile: from the Horn of Africa to the suburbs of Australia*. Gow discusses issues of Oromo cultural identity, language use, and perceptions of home among members of this community of exiles are, in many respects, more able to express their culture abroad than within the politically repressive and contentious context of ethnic politics within the cultural mosaic of contemporary Ethiopia.

II. Sources and Challenges

Having considered this broader context of The Horn and the new African diaspora, let us now look at the literature documenting the experiences of northeast African émigrés in the United States and Canada. The literature is itself diverse, including a variety of genres and categories that pertain in various ways to these experiences and which are intended for different groups of readers.

Looking first at the category included in the bibliography as books and monographs (see Bibliography, Part I), there are three distinctly different types of sources. There are first of all books that are intended for young readers. These include works that vary markedly in their success or lack thereof in presenting a story from the perspective of émigré children in their own voices, to those of marginal value that seem to present the subject matter only through a filter or cultural barrier that seldom seems to represent the voices of émigré children in their own right. The

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5 The reader should bear in mind that “literature” as the term is used in this context refers to various subjects and disciplines of inquiry and to a variety of formats, including both printed and electronic information resources.
Color of home, (5) the story of a Somali schoolboy newly arrived in the U.S. who expresses his homesickness by painting a picture of the home he left behind, is especially noteworthy for its success in representing an authentic émigré perspective. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the book Somali Americans (4) includes information on how to become an American citizen with the tacit assumption that every Somali will want to undergo naturalization. Representing the author’s biased agenda as to the importance of assimilation and naturalization, the work is marginally useful at best as an expression of the Somali émigré experience. Other titles in this category of books for young readers fall perhaps somewhere between these two extremes in their success at presenting the émigré experience apart from Western author bias. These include two titles in the Journey between two worlds (1, 3) series published by Lerner Publications, A Sudanese family and An Eritrean family, both of which are heavily illustrated showing life in Sudan and Eritrea as well as in the US. As experienced by newly arrived émigré families. Another book intended for young readers is Of beetles and angels: a true story of the American dream, (2) a remarkable story of an Ethiopian/Eritrean youth, Mawi Asgedom, who left his country at the young age of three to escape civil war, emigrated to the U.S., and sixteen years later delivered the commencement address at his graduation from Harvard University. 6 Also worthy of mention as books intended for young readers are the two titles in the series In their own voices (6,8) that tell the stories of Somali and Ethiopian teenagers who describe conditions in their homelands that led them to flee and to seek a new life in the United States and Canada. Yet another children’s

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6 Asgedom has also written or produced various media sources in connection with his career as a motivational speaker. These are not included in this bibliographic compilation.
book is *Faraway home*, (7) a fictionalized account of another Ethiopian émigré family living in the U.S. One other title that might be used beneficially in the classroom to introduce American students to these new arrivals is *One day we had to run!* : refugee children tell their own stories in words and paintings. (9)

Several scholarly monographs have recently been published that focus on various northeast African émigré communities in the U.S. and Canada. *Wanderings : Sudanese migrants and exiles in North America* (10) is a historical and sociological account of Sudanese emigrants residing in the U.S. and Canada from the early 20th century to the recent emigrants who have been forced from their homeland by the Sudanese civil war. Based on the author’s dissertation, the work explores the changing identity of Sudanese living abroad as well as such topics as secondary migration, patterns of adaptation, and female circumcision. A work focusing more specifically on the experiences of Muslims living in the West is *Muslims in the diaspora : the Somali communities of London and Toronto*. (11) A third contribution to the scholarly literature is Jon Holtzman’s work on the settlement of the Nuer in Minnesota, titled *Nuer journeys, Nuer lives : Sudanese refugees in Minnesota*. (18) A much earlier work to appear in this genre but nevertheless worthy of mention especially as a contribution by an Ethiopian author is *Ethiopian refugees : beyond the famine and the war*. (21)

Yet another genre represented in the monographic literature is biographical and autobiographical accounts. Two works in particular are worthy of mention here, both by a Somali woman émigré, Waris Dirie. The first and better known of these two works by Dirie is *Desert flower : the extraordinary journey of a desert nomad* (13)
Dirie underwent the custom of female circumcision and later fled her country to speak out against the practice, as she says, “for the little girl who has no voice.” She is also an internationally known fashion model, with several websites to her credit. Her second book, Desert dawn, deals with her life in the U.S., her criticism of western values, and a return journey to Somalia, her native land.

The second general category of materials included in the bibliography is what collectively might be called the resources of praxis (Bibliography, Part II). It includes needs assessments, policy studies, resource guides, background papers, and instructional materials intended for use by various practitioners involved with émigré resettlement and education. It includes a number of ERIC reports on various instructional issues such as those prepared by the Center for Applied Linguistics, a private, non-profit agency based in Washington, D.C. Another private agency that has issued some useful publications for émigré orientation is the Ethiopian Community Development Council of Arlington, Va. Also, the Refugee Service Center of the U.S. Department of State and the Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Services have issued various guidebooks and resources intended for use by the émigré support network. Various state social service departments and local action groups have also issued materials that belong in this category, including both videocassettes and printed materials. These sources provide much-needed information on such issues as health and health attitudes, consumer education, employment, renting an apartment, and other issues confronted by émigré groups in their efforts to adjust to a new life.
It seems unlikely that the sources identified to date as “resources of praxis” is any more than the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Much of this literature is intended to address a local need and is conducted or issued by local action groups. Thus, many of these sources may not yet have seen the light of day in the bibliographic sense. Agencies, school districts, and citizen action groups that have compiled such mission-oriented materials need to be encouraged to share them more widely for the broadest possible benefit. While the ERIC database is an excellent source for materials pertaining to instructional issues such as ESL and reading instruction as they pertain to émigré communities, there does not appear to be a central gathering agency where other resources in this category are shared with a larger audience.

It is evident from a perusal of Section III of the bibliography (Theses and Dissertations) that the study of émigré populations is a frequent research topic for graduate students completing degrees in U.S. and Canadian universities. The topics undertaken in these studies generally pertain to the varied issues and challenges of resettlement. Roughly half of these studies bear authors’ names that appear to identify them as nationals from the émigré communities themselves. While the titles indicate perhaps disproportionate attention on Ethiopian Americans, it should be borne in mind that this is the largest and best-established émigré population from the African Horn, particularly in the greater Washington, D.C. area. Not surprisingly, most of the theses and dissertations have been completed since 1990, an indication of this recent phenomenon in American society.

Newspapers documenting the émigré experience of peoples from the African Horn (Bibliography, Part V) fall rather naturally into two categories. There are first
of all newspapers and newsletters published by the various émigré communities themselves. These have appeared both in print and, to an increasing extent, on the Internet. The latter has great potential for reaching the broader global communities of émigrés and drawing them together into an effective information-sharing network. These sources are frequently bilingual, often with parallel sections in a language spoken within the area of the Horn as well as in English. Some are exclusively in the language of the homeland. These sources tend to be an active forum for the discussion of political issues “back home”, with human and minority rights receiving prominent attention. Indeed, the extent to which the émigré communities are free to utilize the émigré press to criticize governments back home would be unprecedented were they still based in their countries of origin. Sharing experiences with other émigrés in the host country and beyond, as well as serving as a support network for new arrivals, are also of frequent interest and concern in the émigré press. They also serve as an effective forum for cultural, literary, and community information.

The challenge pertaining to the émigré press is that the sources lack any systematic sense of bibliographic control or access. As with the resources of praxis discussed above, many publications of various émigré groups have not been systematically identified or collected. Hence, these important sources remain largely unavailable to those beyond their primary readership who may wish to utilize them for study or for their general information content. It is significant to point out that a database search in *Ethnic NewsWatch*, for example, does not yield information gleaned from this body of literature, but only from the western press. This seems most unfortunate when one considers the counterbalancing benefit of the émigré press
when compared to the often superficial coverage of western press accounts of the émigré experience. In this context, it is worthy of special mention that the Middle Eastern and African Section of the Library of Congress has made efforts to collect publications of various northeast African immigrant groups that are based in the greater Washington, D.C. area. The collection thus assembled, particularly through the systematic efforts for Joanne Zellers of MEAS, includes newspaper issues, newsletters, broadsides, and pamphlets issued by various émigré groups. Other efforts of this kind must also be undertaken if the record of the émigré experience is to be preserved. Still, the lack of electronic access to these sources will continue to be a challenge.

The other category of newspapers covering the émigré experience is, of course, the western press. Frequent articles have appeared in various local and national newspapers as the émigré groups have settled in various communities. While these sources are generally somewhat informative in fleshing out the variety of issues and circumstances that accrue in each community situation, they are nevertheless but surface explanations that often fail to explain the complex factors leading to African emigration and settlement in the U.S and Canada. One journalist, Melinda Robins, (91) has analyzed American news coverage of the émigré experience by considering the accounts of the Sudanese “lost boys” appearing in various major U.S. newspapers. Her conclusion was that the causative factors leading to their forced migration and precarious journey to freedom were largely ignored in these accounts.

Certain connections between individual northeast African émigrés and American popular culture have figured prominently in western press sources. The career of
Waris Dirie, the Somali fashion model, has already been mentioned above in connection with her books (13,14). She has also served as a Special Ambassador for the United Nations Population Fund, and has been interviewed by Barbara Walters on American television. Another well-known international fashion model hailing from the region of the African Horn is Alek Wek, a Dinka from southern Sudan who was introduced to the world of fashion while living with her family in London. She has since become a world traveler with considerable attention in the popular press (156). Her photograph has appeared on the cover of Elle, and she has been featured in the New York Times, Newsweek, and People. A search of her name on Lexis/Nexis American yields dozens of hits. She also serves as an advocate for émigré rights and is affiliated with the United States Committee on Refugees (155). Another such connection of the émigré community with American popular culture is the crowning of Meron Abraham, an Ethiopian-American, as Miss Virginia 2004 (109, 111). Yet another popular connection of émigrés from the Horn is found in the NBA with the former career of Manut Bol, a Dinka who measures a towering 7’ 5” in height. References to these popular figures are, in fact, too numerous to include in the accompanying bibliography.

The final category of sources to be considered in this essay is the rapidly growing number of web sites on the Internet. These are first of a general nature that pertain to the region of the African Horn overall, such as those maintained by various government agencies and advocacy groups concerned more widely with the rights and needs of asylum seekers and émigrés. Other sites have a more specific focus that pertains to an individual country or interest group within the émigré communities.
Many are mounted and maintained by immigrant groups themselves and provide an important source of information that draws these communities together. These are listed in the final section of the bibliography (Section VI).

Continued efforts must be made to document the published record of the African émigré experience in this country and in elsewhere. To be sure, there are undoubtedly many publications that have not been identified that would fit the scope and purpose of this bibliographic compilation. In addition to those areas already mentioned in the text above, three areas of significance are mentioned here as challenges for future development of this effort. First of all, there are undoubtedly many scholarly papers that have not seen the full light of day bibliographically speaking and that have not been found. Secondly, there are special collections of publications such as those assembled in the private library of community leaders of the Ethiopian Community Development Council in the Washington, D.C./Arlington, Va. Area. Efforts like those already completed by Joanne Zellers at the Library of Congress must be made to preserve these publications for future generations of researchers and other interested individuals. Finally, ongoing efforts are being made to assemble a list of relevant statistical publications that document the flow of émigrés coming to the United States and Canada on an annual basis.
III. Bibliography

I. Books and Monographs

A. Books for Children and Young Adults


B. General Works and Monographs


II. Resources of Praxis: Instructional Materials, Videocassettes, Handbooks, Mission Reports, and Policy Studies


   A booklet that uses holidays and traditional observances in five countries, including Eritrea, as instructional material for ESL classes.


   A conference to discuss the language and cultural orientation needs of Somali and Sudanese refugees prior to their arrival in North America.

   Relates the story of the recent life of Benjamin and William Deng, two young Sudanese who left Sudan in a mass exodus of refugee boys in 1987. This group became known as the “Lost Boys,” and in 2001, the U.S. government began a project to resettle them in the United States. William went to Houston, Texas, and eventually was reunited with his grandmother and other relatives in Kansas City.

   Intended to provide information for American sponsors involved in Ethiopian refugee adjustment and resettlement in the United States.

Accompanies the set of *Newcomers to America* videos (see below) and contains answer keys to the pre-/post-tests and worksheets, as well as objectives and procedures, for each of the videos. Each video is intended to address a specific issue confronted by refugees attempting to adjust to American life and society. The project was funded by the State of Oregon Refugee Program and by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, Dept. of Health and Human Services.


All videocassettes in the set are dubbed in Amharic.


A documentary film on the practice of female circumcision, written and directed by a Somali woman.


40. Robillos, Mia U. *Somali community needs assessment project: a report prepared for the Somali Resource Center*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, 2001. ED464982

Assesses the needs of Somali immigrant and refugee groups living in Hennepin County, Minnesota, and determines how those needs could be met.


   v. 1. Analysis across cases – v. 2. Cases portrayals. Includes information on Ethiopian
   immigrants to the U.S.

44. __________. Dept. of State. Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. Ku
   Soo Dhawaada Dalka Mareykanka : Buugga tusmadda Qaxootiga = Welcome
   Services Center, 1996. ED403372
   Provides Somali-speaking refugees being resettled in the United States with general
   information about what they will encounter and the services they can receive in their first
   months in the country. Full text English ed. available at:
   http://www.culturalorientation.net/guidebook.html

III. Theses and Dissertations

45. Abusharaf, Rogaria Mustafa. “Sudanese-new world migration : the social history
   of Sudanese international migration to the United States and Canada.” Thesis

46. Asefa, Webeshete. “Level of education and job satisfaction : the case of
   Ethiopian refugees and de facto refugees in Houston, Texas.” Thesis (Ed.D.)—
   Texas Southern University, 1985.

47. Asres, Alem. “History of the Ethiopian Student Movement (in Ethiopia and
   North America) : its impact on internal social change, 1960-1974.” Thesis
   (Ph.D.)—University of Maryland, 1990.

   Ethiopian expatriates in the United States.” Thesis (Ph.D.)—University of

   Woman’s University, 1996.

50. Ericson, Vicki Hanson. “Health care beliefs and practices of Somali immigrants.”

   displacement, and host-related factors in the resettlement of Somali refugees in

52. Hughes, Margaret McLean. “A Comparative study of adult socialization in


IV. Articles


   A Somali Bantu refugee family leaves its travails behind in Somalia and Kenya to take up life in Phoenix, Ariz.


87. ________. “‘I have a name’: the gender dynamics in asylum and in resettlement of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees in North America.” *Journal of refugee studies* 6, no. 3 (1993): 203-225.


V. Newspapers

A. The Émigré Press

97. *Al Ra’y al’akhar*. Fort Worth, Tex. : Lonestar, 1994-
Sudanese-American newspaper published in Arabic, with some articles in English. Filmed by the Middle Eastern Microfilm Project for the Center for Research Libraries.

“The online version of Dhambaal Somali Newspaper. It covers news, current affairs, social and religious issues, literature and issues that are important for Somalis in the diaspora. Includes links to other sites; based in Toronto.

Published quarterly in English.

101. *Ethiopian mirror*. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Tesfaye Davino, 1994-


108. *Qorahay Online*. [http://www.qorahay.com/haaq4.htm](http://www.qorahay.com/haaq4.htm) News service principally in Somali, with occasional articles in English, such as a protest by the Ogaden community in the U.S.


**B. U.S. Newspapers**


115. Corbett, Sara. “This is now. This is a can opener. This is a cereal box. This is life free from terror: the long, long, long road to Fargo.” *New York times magazine* (April 1, 2001): 48+.

116. “The Emerging Franklin County.” *Call and post* (Cleveland, Oh.) 87, no. 32 (Oct. 1, 2003: 4A.

A brief note on demographic change in Franklin County, Ohio due to the extensive influx of refugees including a large Somali community.


127. Mehren, Elizabeth. “Culture collision brews in Maine: the arrival in Lewiston of 1,500 Somali refugees in 18 months has the city straining to provide social services and maintain civil harmony.” *Los Angeles times* (Oct. 20, 2002): A16.


133. “Serving as a model: when she’s not on a catwalk, Sudanese-born Alek Wed is an advocate for refugees.” *Los Angeles times* (April 16, 2002): E2


VI. Web Sites

   A site for and about Somali women. Includes brief articles on “Gender wars in Canada,” and “Raising children in the Somali diaspora.” Links to related sites, including the Somali Women’s Organization of Toronto.

   Website of the Eritrean Liberation Front, with news on Eritrea, interviews of important political figures, historical profiles, articles, announcements, and an online newspaper, *Gedab news*, with information in English, Arabic, and Tigrinya. Links to entertainment and Eritrean businesses.

144. Citizens League of Ethiopian Americans (CLEA) [http://www.ethioamericans.com/MembershipForm.htm](http://www.ethioamericans.com/MembershipForm.htm)
   Chiefly a political organization providing a forum for addressing issues of concern to the Ethiopian-American community, to influence U.S. policy toward Ethiopia, and to help Ethiopian-Americans to organize as an effective voting constituency.

   Very extensive site, with annotated, searchable directory of Web-based information on Ethiopia. Allows Ethiopians and friends of Ethiopia to interact using the millenary Ethiopian alphabet (fidels). Includes news items and events pertaining to Ethiopian-American and other Ethiopian groups abroad. Founded by Kitaw Yayeh-Yirad.

   Eritrean home page, with directory of electronic information for and about Eritrea and Eritreans, including communities on the Web.

   A dating and matchmaking service for Ethiopian Americans with profiles and testimonials of success—“a solution to the matrimonial problem of Ethiopians in North America.”

   A global index of businesses serving Ethiopians, with listings for restaurants, nightspots, professional services, and much more. Includes extensive information on Ethiopian businesses in various U.S. metropolitan areas.

149. Ethiopian Community Development Council.
   “ECDC seeks to empower African newcomers; giving hope for their future and helping them quickly become self-sufficient, productive members of their communities in their new homeland.” Extensive site on various aspects of émigré resettlement, with links to documents and government agencies involved in émigré resettlement. Sponsors the National Conference on African Refugees annually and publishes a newsletter, *ECDC news*.

   A network for Ethiopian students at various universities in the U.S., “dedicated to making available its resources to individual students, who are dealing with different issues in
their academic life.” Includes a newsletter and journal. Based in Alexandria, Va. And Washington D.C., with various affiliated groups throughout the U.S.

151. Somali Bantu Cultural Orientation Project.  
http://www.culturalorientation.net/bantu/sbtoc.html  
Site established by the Cultural orientation Resource Center, Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, D.C. for service providers and others assisting in the resettlement of the Somali Bantu in the U.S. Notes of history, society, education, language, etc., with a bibliography of sources.

152. Somali Immigrant Aid organization (SIAO) http://webhome.idirect.com/~siao/  
An information site intended for various community agencies involved with providing services to the Somali community in Toronto. Lists services provided, including needs assessment projects, health and community education, job training, etc.

Extensive directory of Somali sites on the Web, including companies, organizations, individuals with home pages, news sources, and many more. [NB: some links from this site are broken.]

154. Sudanese Association for Northern California, SANC  http://www.sancnet.org  
“a social charitable nonprofit organization dedicated for serving the Sudanese community in northern California.” Community events, the SANC Monthly Newsletter.

A private, non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C. Includes country reports, photographs, and instructional materials, interviews of various African émigrés.

http://www.refugees.org/news/crisis/sudan_m.htm  
Biographical information on Alec Wek, including an interview, her work with the USCR, and information on the Sudanese refugee situation.