Storyline for a videofilm
Kansas African Studies Center
January 17, 2007

**Who are the New African Immigrants**

*My name is John Janzen, professor of anthropology and former director of the African Studies Center at the University of Kansas. This film is about the Africans who have recently migrated to the urban centers of Kansas. From 2004-2006 the African Studies Center, together with African community leaders, and with the support of the Kansas Humanities Council, conducted a research and public programming project on the reasons for these migrations, the immigrants' own stories, and the communities that have formed. The New African immigrants have come from Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Nigeria, the Sudan, Sierra Leone; they have settled in Kansas City, Lawrence, Topeka, Olathe, Emporia, and Wichita.*

These ten thousand "new" African immigrants include: 4,000 Somalis, who came mainly as refugees, and live in Kansas City and Emporia; more than a thousand Kenyans, who are business people, or students become professionals, in Wichita, Topeka, and Kansas City; several thousand Nigerians who have come as students and professionals, and a few political asylees; 500 Tanzanians, including the Zanzibari group in Wichita, and others in Topeka, Lawrence, and Kansas City; 500 Ethiopians in Kansas City and Wichita, due to civil war, repression, and drought/famine; 750 to 1,000 Sudanese from all regions of the largest African country, who have come as refugees and political asylees; they include 500 southern Sudanese in Olathe, recruited single-handedly by Akot Arec; a few hundred Sierra Leonians have come as refugees.

- Titles
- Dancing women at JVS Refugee Party (KHC II:15:16-15:30…)
- Janzen with maps, speaks adjoining text
- Fading into faces and portraits…Children (KHC II:4:26-4:37; Somali girl KHC II: 8:14)

Somali women in literacy class (KHC X).
following civil war. Dozens of others have come from other countries across Africa for a variety of reasons.

Khalid Elhassan, Sudanese-American Associate Director of the Kansas African Studies Center, notes: (KHC VI:1:08-3:08)

...African immigrants in Kansas and Missouri...most of them came here with refugee status, or asylees, or other cases came in the lottery, with visas. So most of them are in the process of acquiring permanent status or becoming American citizens. ... I have had contact with African immigrants for the last ten years ...in Washington D.C., Texas, Iowa, here in Kansas City. ...
**Immigration, policy debates in 2006, and perspectives on scholarship**

Although this film focuses on a regional representation of the nearly one million African-born immigrants and their offspring who live in the United States, this group fits within a larger picture. Immigrants and U.S. immigration policy have stirred a lot of attention in 2006; while most Americans think of Mexican or Hispanic immigrants when they think "immigrants," in fact there are many other groups who have come to the United States in the past decade or two.

David Katzman, Professor of History and American Studies at the University of Kansas, notes the significance of migrants in American history.

(KHC IV 9:28-10:26)…the United States is made up of, and is dependent on, immigrants coming here, taking risks. The question: Why do people come? Why people move to explain why people move not just some people doing politics and then going back. People come from point to point or for economic or political or religious reasons… journeys circular and the only point constantly they move for a lot of reasons other than the myths our streets are paved with gold

- David Katzman describes America as a "nation of immigrants" (KHC IV 9:28-10:26)
The New African Immigrants project

The Kansas African Studies Center at the University of Kansas began this project following a 2004 seminar with representatives of immigrant African communities and helping agencies. Based on their endorsement, the Center sought a Kansas Humanities Council "We the people" grant for a year-long project of interviews, public meetings, and discussions on migration from Africa to the Central Plains. Project partners from the various African immigrant communities, who gave interviews and coordinated further contacts and meetings include: Farah Abdi of the Somali community; Martin Okpareke, of Nigeria; Akot Arec, a prominent figure in the Southern Sudanese community; Jessie Kwatamdia, an immigrant from Nigeria; Mohamed Badri, of the North Sudanese Organization of Kansas City; Mohamed Adam, of the Zanzibari-Tanzanian community of Lawrence; Hassan Kamara of the Sierra Leone group of Kansas City; Albert Rwakwaro, editor of a Kenyan newspaper in Kansas City, and Jane Irungu, Kenyan of Topeka.

Many of the interviews of the project were conducted by Melissa Filippi-Franz, graduate student in anthropology at the University of Kansas. Here she interviews Abdi Gutale of Somalia. Questionnaires, open-ended conversations, and participant observation covered 1. Basic Personal Identification, 2. Circumstances of Migration, 3. Work Experience, 4. Immigrant Status, 5. Identity, 6. Story-telling & remembering, 7. Socialization, celebrations, festivities, 8. Relationships with Americans and others in new situation, 9. Family

At 8:36, just after introduction of project participants and sponsors, introduce new footage of Melissa Filippi-Franz doing an interview.

Kola nut ceremony, at the African Market, Kansas City, May 1st: (KHC VI: 21:09-26:45)
matters, 10.Relationship with kin living near and far, 11. Community Organizations, 12. Most difficult aspects of migration; and 13. Religious affiliation. This material will be available at the KASC and the Kansas Collections of the Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas.

At the final meeting of the project in Kansas City on May 1st, 2006, Martin Okpareke, now with the Jewish Vocational Center, led some of the gathered project personnel through the widespread West African kola nut ceremony that is used widely in West Africa to welcome guests, bless projects, and share good will. Okpareke broke the kola nuts, asked project director to pray over them, and then shared them with all present. (fade in video sound)
"Voice" refers to the stories of migration, told by the immigrants. Formal interviews were enriched by stories told at public meetings. Here are some samples.

Omofolabo Ajayi (KHC IV: 1:26-2:35) relates how Africans coming to the U.S. first began to stay rather than return home. First, this kind of immigration from African countries, when did it start? In the past when Africans came here they planned to go back home, because there was hope for them. But from about 1986, Africans who came here began to stay. What qualified that hope? …So what happened in African countries? The economic factor? Colonization? It became globalization. (KHC IV 5:45-6:33)… the images of Hollywood in Africa of America the land of golden opportunity where all children have $1,000, and the trees are showering gold and silver—it's a very powerful image. But the reality for immigrants was that life is hard here. You pay. At the end of the month you sell your soul to credit card company. In Africa, they say "your life is good!" Oh yeah, but you pay.

Gloria Ngaiza relates how she came as a student (KHC III 30:00-32:55)
I completed the first degree in Tanzania—Africa 2001 and passed with an upper second degree honors. This made me the number one girl out of the 35 students that graduated that year. The vice Chancellor Rev. Dr. Fr. Charles Kitima gave me an offer for the scholarship in German for the second degree. They gave me a condition of taking the Germany language class for the whole year before I enrolled for the [need video of interview]
• Omofolabo Ajayi (KHC IV:1:26-2:35; 5:45-6:33)
• Gloria Ngaiza, Lawrence meeting (KHC III 30:00-32:55)
Voice, Identity, Community: New African Immigrants to Kansas

core studies in Mass communications. I just like the other quarter million international students who choose the USA for the persuasion of higher education: I wanted to come here. I wanted to take an advantage of opportunities for research grants, teaching assistantship and practical training or work experience. I also wanted to polish English more that I had started learning than starting another language. I knew the coming to the United States would enhance my carrier prospects in someway and also ensure me with the positive expectations. I had to choose one between the two. I chose the USA…. (32:55) …

Akot Arec tells interviewer Melissa Filippi-Franz about his coming as a refugee from Sudan, and how he and a woman from a local church created the Sudanese community of Olathe, Kansas.

… First of all, when I came to the United States was because of the war over-running our country. The war has been going on for almost 20 years or 22 years ago. And when the war started, I came, I went to Ethiopia, at that time I was young, and then from Ethiopia I went to Kenya, and then in Kenya I found my way to come to the United States. Catholic Charities paid for my ticket and they bring me here and they wanted to help me actually to settle here in the United States. Yeah.

Melissa: And how old were you when you left Sudan?

Akot: I was 12 years old. … I went to refugees camp called Egham,… on the border between Sudan and Ethiopia. …

Scenes from Kakuma camp in Kenya where Akot Arec spent part of his 12 years as a refugee.
I was there for seven years… and then in 1991 the war broke out in Ethiopia, so we went to Kenya… [where]… I proceeded… to a camp between Somalia and Kenya, I went to that camp and that’s where I want to do my process, Ibo, it’s called Ibo, yeah, I get my [inaudible]. There and I was allowed to come here.

Akot: You know, I won my safety, it’s God’s plan, because you know human being you can’t… or try to do something in your, but you will not know, God is the one who has a plan to everybody. Coming to America, I might say I’m the laughing person who came here by chance because when I went to the camp, there were thousands of Sudanese who were in the camp, waiting to come to the United States. But it didn’t take me long, there are some people lower than who are almost 5, 6, 7 years in the camp. … I was accepted, do my process, and I was the first one allowed to come to the United States.

… when the war broke out in Sudan, I was young. I was still young. I would not, I have never dreamed of a better life because the life there was just, if you, the life is day by day. If you sleep like today you know that you are lucky to live today and then tomorrow you don’t know what will happen. You might die tomorrow. That’s how the life was in Sudan. One could never sit down and think about what the future will hold for you. What we think most of the time, maybe next would be 2 or 3 days or next month or 2 months from now you will not be alive. That’s how we’d been living in Sudan. And when I came here, I never sit down also and plan what to do in my future. I’m always thinking about what I should do.
When I came here, I went and found a job with a company that made candy and chocolates. I worked there for 4 years or 2 years, and then in Olathe I was the first Sudanese who was settled by Catholic Charities. When I stayed there, there was another three Sudanese who moved from Missouri to stay with me from Olathe. Later on, the life was very difficult for us, so they moved back to Missouri. And I was left there in Olathe by myself. I feel like I was on a different planet because I didn’t have somebody to talk to. I didn’t have anything fun to do. Then just thinking about what happened in my life, what happened in my country, what would be the next future, that’s what I had been thinking about. And there is a time I think like I need to move out in Olathe because it was not good for me and I feel like I was not fitting in that community. But because God planned, God just kept me there for a while and then later on I went and met a[n American] lady in the church, who was praying for Sudan. And she’d never seen Sudanese guy… I think she saw what was happening in Sudan on the TV, and so she had been praying about Sudan for peace in Sudan. So when I went to her church, I met her and she was just crying because she never seen somebody from Sudan. She invited me to her house and then she asked how I came to the United States and what happened in Sudan. I told her all this and then she told me, “What can I do now to help you?” I told her that if you want to help me I need the Sudanese to come to Olathe, so I can help people I could talk to. She said that she would try her best. Then I start calling the people I know in different states. And then she buy the
bus ticket to transfer the family from different states to Olathe that was in 2001. And then when this family came, those families had friends also, and started inviting friends and then they have family members in Egypt, Cairo, who want to come here and some have family members in Kenya who want to come here. And that’s how we formed the community. Now we are over 400 people in Olathe.
Identity

"Identity" refers to the self-image and concept of the immigrants, as well as the image others have of them. "Who are we?" they first ask. "Who are they?" others ask of them. Jane Irungu, Director of the Global Awareness Program at the University of Kansas, formerly Swahili lecturer, eloquently addressed issues of identity at a Public Meeting on March 27, 2006 at the Lawrence Public Library.

(KHC III 12:15…) so I ask myself who I am, especially in America, I'm an African, but also a Kenyan, also a Kikuyu, and very specifically, I am from central province, so somebody from Kenya will know who that sequence means… you have to place me in that and I can go on and on and make it more specific… When I'm in America, they call me what they want to call me, I construct my own identity, because it means who I am… Some call me an African, some call me an African American… but what I am trying to say is that I am the only one who can identify myself. Because when others identify me here, mostly they identify me wrongly, they give me the wrong definition. … I'll give you an example when we when to the hall to travel abroad, we filled out the forms, with a lot of check boxes. When I cam to America, there were seven check boxes for identity. African America, black, Hispanic, etc., are you alien, resident alien, are you other? I was so not checking these, none of those are who I am. ..I am not African American. (16:39) OK, who are you? If I am in Kenya, I am white, but if I'm nere I … am I black? Possibly. But I am not call myself black I am still trying to process the idea of being black. I never thought of myself as such. But it is still a process to identify myself.... I was used to identifying myself as Kikuyu from a part of the country yes I...

• Ensemble singing, dancing, waving white cloths (KHC II 26:18-27:13)

• Jane Irungu at the Lawrence meeting (KHC III 12:15-21:05)
I'm black, black, but you are putting us into one category...(19:00)
So who am I what is my identity? It's a depending on the environment I construct my identity, as I want to define it. Depending on the environment. The core of who I am that has never changed. African Kikuyu doesn't change.. But the other one who helps me meet with people, that one shifts. The same with the language. I can shift the language depending on who I'm relating to.. American friends, English. Kikuyu or Swahili for my African friends. The language can shift depending on who I'm talking to (20:47)
I shift what I eat, depending on what is available (20:58)....
So who I am has not changed... (21:05)
Community

"Community" refers to the ways immigrants establish or maintain networks with relatives, friends, and neighbors, how they organize to address challenges in finding their way in America. A number of associations have emerged among new African immigrants: such as:

- The Somali Foundation
- East African Association
- United Sudanese Association
- Southern Sudanese Assoc. of Greater Kansas City
- Jump Start Sudan Inc. see website http://www.Justgive.org
- Akot's organization
- Tanzanian Association
- Zanzibari-American Association

The Somali Foundation hosts meetings such as this one to assist Somali immigrants—most of whom are refugees—with health programs, English language classes, driving classes, women's programs including classes on nutrition, financial management, and childcare; youth recreation, cultural celebrations, translation and advocacy work. Farah Abdi, the Foundation president, explains:

VII: 00:00-exerpts:
… over the town there are not many facilities that we can use or if even some facilities we don't have the access to …most of our children need housing and family housing and where are we going to move? …and we have to make a housing …. And a basketball court (1:44) and … they cannot because … our culture because … national holidays…or Muslim feasts … second point that is community and other African communities and … (3:05) … new need to investigate … the way that
we can provide [services...] (3:40)

Mohamed Aburass, former member of parliament in Sudan from the Nuba Hills region, and now a taxi driver in Kansas City, describes the beginnings of the United Sudanese Association.

The Sudanese refugees who came over here, and me one of them (38:00) –I came as a refugee in 1999—and as we came over here we thought about how to gather ourselves, without saying "who is a refugee?" "who is a lottery," and who is someone else in Sudan. When we go out of Sudan, everyone is a brother. So we gathered ourselves over here and we have an organization called the United Sudanese Association … we are doing our work from our homes …we are at the beginning (38:53) we don’t have a letter, we meet in our homes, and now we are trying to find out where to go.

... This association which we are having, we have activities. ...how to teach our kids our culture. So we have a class right now and they are doing their activities (41:35) they used to do it by the weekend for two hours ... The second activity is to keep our community together that if anybody has any kind of celebration where anyone has deceased or passed away, we come together, as is our culture ... we come to sit together. We hold celebrations like national celebrations, in Sudan we used to do it like religious celebrations like Ramadan, we also do it amicably over here. (42:36) We have also another activity, sport, we have a Sudanese team, sport activity weekend, to gather these people together... (42:40)

David Katzman comments on how immigrant organizations are a characteristic feature of the immigrant experience that has shaped American society.

• David Katzman (KHC IV 16:40-17:27)
Issues faced by new immigrants

The public meeting in Kansas City on May 1, 2006, brought together thirty-five immigrants and community people to hear the challenges of migration in especially the Sudanese and Somali communities. These included:

- The difficulty of educated professionals finding work in area of their training;
- Maintaining culture and religion, and training the youth;
- Seeking unity amongst groups where there has been civil war and division. This was emphasized in comments by Mohamed Aburass, president of the United Sudanese Association, together with Mohamed Omer of the North Sudan Association (KHC VIII 37:55ff).

... when the war took place it was just like Northern Sudan and Southern Sudan. And after a while they said "Muslims against Christians." After a while it was "Arabs against Africans." It got very bad. When we came here all these sides were affecting

- Public meetings bring out discussion of issues
- Aburass forcefully making point of need for unity amidst multiple Sudanese immigrant associations (KHC VIII
us. So those people who came straight from the field the camps in Kenya, they came here and didn’t want to speak with those who came from Khartoum. And that is a problem for us. This is a kind of deterrent for how we come together. ...you try to get rid of me, you try to destroy my house, what can I do with you? What am I going to do with you? When I find you this is a good time for me to get rid of you. (40:28)

But I’m not going to do like that now. We are doing our best, and giving ourselves the time, for us to come together.

Challenging corrupt regimes at home that drove people into exile, yet concentrating on positive building of new lives in America, as stressed by Farah Abdi, president of the Somali Foundation (KHC VIII:43:55)

... local community issues and the subject that we started at the immigrants in this country ... it seems that issue has shifted to outside the country ... but back to the issue of this topic I think we need to define when we work without a negative ... I’d like to say that – you know – the subject is different, but it’s all about the community of refugees it could be helping or education ... ideally this is very important (44:42) ... it's not good for us to have a mindset back home (44:54) we are here we need to come together and make change ... socially, economically, and become ... this community in this multinational country we need to help each other we need to come together and show positive, not negative, we need to show our positive side, not negative (45:39) ...

• Farah Abdi emphasizes importance of building communities here (KHC VIII)

What the new African immigrants bring to our region
The new African immigrants have enriched our society.

They represent a relatively skilled group of people, with eagerness to work, adapt, and accept American society's terms as this group of African taxi drivers at Kansas City International airport attests, amongst them doctors, dentists, and teachers who have not found work to match their education;

The new African immigrants represent cultural, religious, and societal traditions with integrity. They hold positions as scholars, journalists, technicians; they have founded churches and mosques, as the Masjid Al-Hudah in Kansas City demonstrates;

The new African immigrants have brought unique African cuisine and food traditions. The African Market on Main Street in Kansas City provides a wide range of African food groceries, and a West African restaurant;

follow Emmanuel Birdling, of
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Nigeria, as he shops for yams and palm oil. (KHC VI 7:12-8:09)</th>
<th>Emmanuel Birdling shops at African Market (KHC VI 16:36; 7:12-8:09)</th>
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<td>Or visit the Tonfiq Halal Market, or the Nacmacaanka Banadir Somali restaurant elsewhere in Kansas City.</td>
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<td>African artistic skills have enriched American life. These men and women dance at a celebration in Kansas City of the signing of the North-South Sudanese peace treaty in 2005. (KHC X stills and brief video)</td>
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Significance of the "New African Immigrants" project

Khalid Elhassan, Associate Director of the Kansas African Studies Center, explains the importance of the "New African Immigrants" Project:

*We believe that this project is important because the wider Kansas and American society needs to know who the new African immigrants are, why they left home, why they have come here, and what distinctive cultural perspectives and practices they bring. Our project is one of civic education and cultural awareness raising. As the only African Studies Center in Kansas—and the Central Plains—we believe we can fulfill our mandate of educating the public about Africa by getting better acquainted with the new African immigrants who are also now our new neighbors and fellow citizens.*

Credits:
Kansas African Studies Center, University of Kansas
Project Director: John M. Janzen,
Project Co-Director: Khalid Elhassan
With assistance of: Leonce Rushubirwa, Garth Myers, Abdi Gutale, Interviews: Melissa Filippi-Franz;

Community Participants:
Martin Okpareke, Jewish Vocational Services; Steve Weitkamp, Catholic Charities; etc.

Interview volunteers:

Photography: