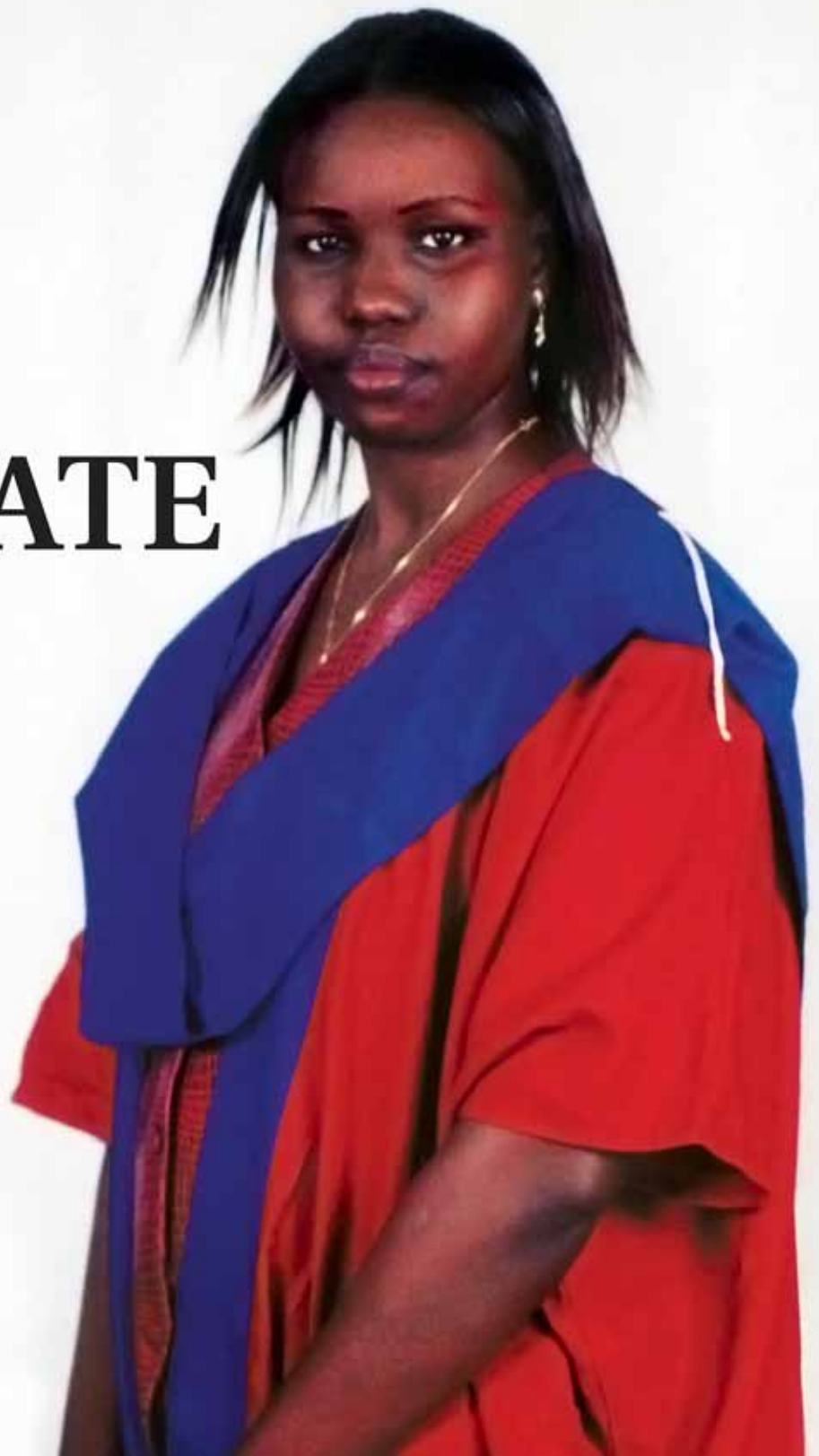


# THE GRADUATE FROM SUDAN



A **STUDY GUIDE** BY KATY MARRINER



<http://www.metromagazine.com.au>

<http://www.theeducationshop.com.au>

This study guide to accompany *The Graduate from Sudan*, a documentary by Vida Films, has been written for secondary students. It provides information and suggestions for learning activities in English, Geography, Media, SOSE, Religious Education and curriculum projects about the issues facing refugees living in contemporary Australian society.

*The Graduate from Sudan* is part of SBS's *Destination Australia* series. Through telling personal stories, the *Destination Australia* series explores what it is like to be a refugee, to leave your country of birth, family and friends, usually under duress, and make a new home in Australia.

**DURATION:** 54 minutes



*above: Victoria with family*

## Synopsis

*I always say I want to be a doctor. When I was in primary school everybody called me doctor, doctor. All my uncles and my family they were encouraging me because it was my passion. It's my dream.* – Victoria

**V**ICTORIA ACHUT battled her way through medical school and escaped a civil war in Sudan, but her biggest struggle yet has been re-starting life in the 'lucky country' with three children, an absent husband and mounting bills. When we meet Victoria in Adelaide, the day before Christmas in 2007, she feels stuck between a rock and a hard place.

While husband Manon has returned to Sudan to start a business, Victoria and the children have remained in Australia. A peace treaty has been signed in Sudan but Victoria is in no rush to return. She wants her children, nine-year-old Wol, seven-year-old Adut and two-year-old Adheem to grow up in an environment that is safe.

Determined to become a doctor in Aus-

tralia, Victoria finally secures an internship. If she makes it through the next year she will be allowed to practise as a doctor in Australia. She has dreamed of being Doctor Victoria since she was a little girl. Victoria is thirty-three years old and would rather to be earning a wage and paying taxes than receiving benefits from Centrelink.

The internship is in Luxton, a drought-ravaged country town three-hours drive from Adelaide. On the morning of the move, after finding new schools and childcare, organising a house to rent and while she is waiting for the moving van to show up, Victoria gets a phone call to say that due to some monumental bureaucratic misunderstanding the internship is not approved by the Medical Board. She is unemployed again.

As Victoria starts to contemplate returning to a still dangerous Sudan, the phone rings again. Victoria is offered an internship in a suburban Adelaide hospital. This time she is successful in gaining the position. Now it is up to Victoria to prove her qualifications. Victoria asks the hospital if she can act as an observer without pay while she waits for the documents to arrive from Sudan. They agree. She can go to seminars, observe on the wards and use the library.

An internship as a sole parent with three kids and without the support of extended family proves to be a bumpy ride. Victoria's life shifts into a higher gear. The alarm goes off at 6am. The family scramble to eat breakfast, find clothes, pack lunches, finish homework and be out of the door by 7.30am. Victoria drops Adheem at childcare, drops Wol and Adut at before-school care and then heads to the hospital. The afternoons are just as hectic, Victoria's long and tiring day continues once the family arrives home.

Four weeks later, just when the hospital is about to give her internship to someone else, the documents arrive. Victoria is overjoyed. She can register and start her intern year. However, when she gets to the Medical Board there is another hitch. They are concerned that it has been too long since Victoria finished her degree. Victoria must undergo a pre-assessment to prove that her skills and knowledge are up to date.

This setback is the last straw. Victoria decides that she will return to Sudan to complete her internship. It is a very miserable Victoria who drives to the hospital on Monday morning to tell Jenny Costi, the Education Officer, that she just could not face another disappoint-

ment. Jenny understands her position but asks Victoria to meet Mary Malone, General Manager of Modbury Hospital that afternoon. Victoria agrees.

Mary is very supportive. She outlines what will happen. Victoria must undertake a six-week assessment of her general duties by a supervising physician who will report to the Medical Board. She will also have a salary. Victoria accepts the position and the assessment begins. Positive feedback and her first paycheck are proof that Victoria made the right decision.

Despite being time poor, her role as an activist for refugee women continues. Politics and the war back home are never far from the lives of Sudanese Australians. Although technically there is peace, it is very fragile. There has been fighting in Khartoum, where Manon lives, and further south in

oil-rich Abyei, where her friend Rose's mother lives.

When the Medical Board finally approves Victoria's application, there is no time to celebrate. Instead Victoria must focus on what is ahead of her: four gruelling rotations of medicine, emergency, surgery and night duty. If Victoria fails to meet the standard at any time, her internship will be cancelled. Victoria works hard at understanding the differences in the medical setting between Australia and Sudan. Her shyness is an issue, but overall, her supervisors are impressed.

Life is even more hectic. The children spend long days without her and she feels guilty. But what can she do? Her friend Achol offers to look after the children for several days a week and often it is easier for Victoria to stay at Achol's house as well. With Achol's five children and Victoria's three, the

house is a constant hive of activity.

Having survived Medicine and Emergency, Victoria must now complete a rotation in Surgery. She is just managing to juggle work, home and community commitments when Manon calls and tells her that he wants her to buy a house. His business in Sudan is doing well and he can send a deposit. The timing is far from perfect, but a good Sudanese wife does not disagree with her husband. True to form, Victoria somehow finds the perfect house, organises the loan, moves house, enrolls the children in a new school, attends a friend's wedding and passes her Surgery evaluation all in the same week.

Night shift begins, Christmas is fast approaching and Manon will be arriving in a few days. The children are excited as they put up the Christmas tree and think about spending time with their father. Victoria is worried. Night shifts are tiring. When Manon arrives, Victoria must cook and entertain his guests – it is the role of the Sudanese wife.

Victoria, Manon and the kids spend Christmas Day together – their first in three years – and momentarily seem like a typical suburban family. When Manon leaves a few days after Christmas, the children are devastated. Victoria is physically and emotionally exhausted. However, after a few days off, Victoria picks herself up. She can't give up now.

## **Victoria Achut's Story**

Victoria was born in Rumbek in southern Sudan in 1974 and grew up in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum. Her Dinka name is Anib.

In Khartoum, Victoria's father worked as a policeman. The family lived a relatively comfortable life but faced some discrimination because of their background and beliefs. Sudan is controlled by the Arab elite, who are mainly Muslim. They look down on the people from the south, especially the blacks and the Christians, and this often made life difficult for Victoria and her family.



At the age of five, Victoria made up her mind to become a doctor; two decades later she won a Dutch scholarship to attend the School of Medicine at Ahfad University for Women. Victoria spent the next six years immersed in her studies while her friends were going out and enjoying themselves. The classes were given in English, which meant Victoria had to learn a third language in addition to Dinka, her mother tongue, and Arabic, the common language of Khartoum. Victoria was active in a number of student groups that advocated for change and peace. In her final year at university she met Manon Wol, a recent law graduate and member of the same groups. Most marriages in Sudan are arranged but Victoria and Manon chose to marry and their parents agreed. Victoria became pregnant with her first child, Wol.

She had barely finished medical school in 2000, when her father and other family members came under government scrutiny because of their ties to the Southern Sudanese Liberation Movement (SPLM), the political party representing the interests of the southern Sudanese. Victoria recalls that when her father went to Jordan for some medical treatment, he was accused of joining the rebels. Her parents and siblings fled to Canada. Then Victoria and Manon were questioned about their student activities. They decided to leave without telling anyone except their closest relatives. They travelled by train, boat and bus to Cairo. They took one suitcase and very little money. Victoria's graduation ceremony took place a few months later in Khartoum, but she was not there to collect her certificate.

Like many other African refugees in Cairo, Victoria worked as a housekeeper. She had to leave Wol and her second-born, Adut, with Manon, who was unable to get work. Then she met a Sudanese doctor who asked her to come and work at a non-profit health organisation for women.

Victoria applied to the UN High Commission for Refugees for official refugee status, and was awaiting a response when she heard from a cousin



*above: Victoria at school*

who recently had fled to Australia. He arranged to sponsor the family, and in 2002 Victoria, Manon and their two children arrived in Australia on Humanitarian Visas. She settled in Sydney, became an Australian citizen and, after a third child, attempted to get a medical internship. Competition from local graduates prevented her from getting a position in NSW, however, and so in 2006 she moved to Adelaide, which offered more opportunities for foreign graduates. In the meantime, Manon was also growing frustrated. He was a lawyer trained in Sharia law and felt there were few opportunities for him in Australia. The only work he could get was as a nighttime security guard at a pub. Encouraged by the signing of a peace agreement between northern and southern Sudan in 2005, Manon decided to return to Khartoum and establish a transportation business.

Victoria chose to stay in Australia. She had the option to work in Sudan and it would have been easier for her to get an internship there, but she was worried about the safety of her children. There is danger all the time, even though there is a peace agreement. She chose to stay,

believing her children would have a better life in Australia.

Victoria finally secured an internship at Modbury Hospital in Adelaide's north-eastern suburbs in 2008 and in 2009 she became Dr Victoria Achut.

## Background

Sudan, in northeast Africa, is the largest country on the African continent. It is situated on the site of the ancient civilisation of Nubia. Sudan's neighbours are Chad and the Central African Republic on the west, Egypt and Libya on the north, Ethiopia and Eritrea on the east, and Kenya, Uganda, and Democratic Republic of the Congo on the south. Sudan achieved independence in 1956, but since then, Sudan has been ruled by a series of unstable parliamentary governments and military regimes. Ongoing conflicts mean much of Sudan remains off limits to foreigners.

In 1969, Colonel Jaafar Nimeiri assumed power and held it for sixteen years, surviving several coup attempts, and making numerous policy decisions to outflank opponents and keep aid



*above: A reflective Victoria*

donors happy. Most importantly, by signing the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement he quelled the disquiet between the north and south for more than a decade. The institution of fundamentalist Islamic law in 1983 exacerbated the rift. Differences in language, religion, ethnicity, and political power erupted in an unending civil war between government forces, strongly influenced by the National Islamic Front (NIF) and the southern rebels, whose most influential faction is the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA).

In December 1999, just when the country's domestic and international situation seemed to be improving, President al-Bashir dissolved parliament, suspended the constitution and imposed a three-month state of emergency. The subsequent elections in December 2000 were boycotted by opposition parties, giving al-Bashir an easy win. By 2002, the situation in Sudan had improved – the economy had stabilised and a ceasefire was called. In February 2003, black African rebels in the western Darfur region rose up against the government, accusing it as guilty of oppression and neglect. The army's heavy-handed response,

assisted by pro-government Arab militias, escalated to what many have called genocide. The government's campaign killed close to 200,000 Sudanese and uprooted millions more.

In January 2005 a deal was signed ending Sudan's civil war but by October 2007 SPLA quit the national unity government, leaving the peace agreement on the brink of collapse. The SPLA claimed that the governing party, the National Congress Party, had ignored its concerns over the boundary between the north and south and how to divide the country's oil wealth. Attacks in the Darfur region in February 2008 forced as many as 45,000 people to flee their homes. The government claimed it was targeting the Justice and Equality Movement, a rebel group that has become increasingly powerful and is believed to be linked to the government of Chad. Civilians in the region, however, say the attacks have continued after the rebels escaped.

- Locate Sudan on a map of the world. Use the internet and print texts to find out more about Sudan and its people, Sudanese culture and Sudanese refugees in Aus-

tralia. A useful starting point is <<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107996.html>>.

- Recent events in Sudan can be researched by visiting <<http://www.sudantribune.com>>.
- <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/827425.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/827425.stm)> provides a chronology of key events in Sudanese history.
- A significant number of refugees who have recently settled in Australia are from Sudan. Find out more about Australia's acceptance and support of Sudanese refugees and Sudanese communities in Australia. Use your research to compile a short history of the Sudanese in Australia. The following organisations and associated websites offer information to assist you complete this task:

- The Tomorrow Foundation works with the Southern Sudanese community living in Melbourne. Their program creates links and understanding between the new arrivals and the Australian community. <<http://www.tomorrow.org.au>>
- The Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service. (STTARS) is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation with no political or religious affiliations. STTARS assists people from a refugee and migrant background who have experienced torture or been traumatised as a result of persecution, violence, war or unlawful imprisonment prior to arrival in Australia. <<http://www.sttars.org.au>>
- The Sudanese Online Research Association <<http://www.sora.akm.net.au>>
- Working in small teams, use online news services and newspapers to locate news stories about Sudanese refugees and communities in Australia. Read the articles and discuss the dimensions of each story. Draw conclusions about the role of the media in influencing community perceptions about Sudanese refugees.

## Key Creatives

### Producer and Writer – CATHY BEITZ

Cathy Beitz began her career in film as executive producer/producer of the telemovie *Madness of Two*. Beitz moved to the United States in 1985, where she directed retail commercials and corporate videos, before directing the award winning documentary, *They Called Me Kathy*, the story of Katharine Hepburn's childhood. For the past decade, Beitz has lived in Adelaide and has been busy making documentaries for television, including two one-hour films for Channel 4 in the UK about the trial of British nurses in Saudi Arabia, a seven-part series on great Australian train journeys for the PBS Network in the USA and *Ayen's Cooking School for African Men* for SBS.

### Producer – TRACY RIDDIFORD

Tracy Riddiford has spent the best part of fifteen years working in the education film industry. Her career began with Video Communicators (a division of NWS9 Adelaide). When she resigned from her position as Marketing and Distribution Manager in 1996, Video Communicators were the most successful Australian education film producer. In her short time as a freelancer, Riddiford worked in production on several commercials and on a lifestyle program for Channel 10. Since forming the partnership with Cathy Beitz and creating Our Bizness Productions and Vida Films, Riddiford has written, produced, directed and published highly successful educational programs for the international market. In 2007 she was Executive Producer on the documentary *Ayen's Cooking School for African Men* for SBS.

### Director and Writer – LAUREN DREWERY

Lauren Drewery works as a writer, producer, director and story editor in partnership with filmmakers in Australia, Canada, the US and Italy. Recent

## Director's Statement

In late 2007, producers Cathy Beitz and Tracy Riddiford and I heard about a medical graduate from Sudan who had been trying for several years – without luck – to get an internship in a local hospital. She was on the verge of packing up her children and going back to Sudan, despite the continuing violence and insecurity that had made her a refugee seven years earlier. Her name was Victoria Achut.

Cathy and Tracy, with Sieh Mchawala, had previously made the documentary *Ayen's Cooking School for African Men*, which featured a group of Sudanese Lost Boys trying to make a new start in Adelaide, and were searching for a Sudanese woman who might make strong character for a 'companion' film. We arranged to meet Victoria because her story raised an intriguing question: what kind of refugee would abandon the comfort and security of Australia to return to a precarious life in a war zone?

It was clear from our first meeting that Victoria was a force to be reckoned with and that her future – whether in Australia or Sudan – was going to make a fascinating story. Victoria agreed without hesitation to participate in the film because she wanted to dispel the myth of refugees as dirty, uneducated and looking for a free ride. She saw her own potential to make a big contribution to Australian life, as both a person and a professional. Victoria's equally engaging young children (Wol, Adut and Adheem) also agreed to go along with the film.

The next day, I arrived at Victoria's house with a camera to ask her about her life and her plans to return to Sudan. A week later there was an amazing turn of events: after being turned down countless times, Victoria finally was offered an internship in South Australia. Would she stay or would she go? *The Graduate from Sudan* started taking shape from that moment and soon developed a life of its own.

Over the next year, the crew (often just one person with a camera) followed Victoria as she struggled to secure an internship and pass increasingly difficult tests of her skills and abilities while trying to raise three often unruly children on her own. The film witnessed two Christmases, one and a half house moves, a reunion with her husband, much chaos and many arguments and laughs.

During that time it became clear that Victoria's dream of becoming a doctor had a price. Her children clamored for more attention, her mental and physical wellbeing were threatened and her career ambitions caused friction with her tradition-minded husband. In addition, her training in Sudan had not adequately prepared her for a modern, western medical environment. There were many moments when Victoria's ability to achieve her dream was in doubt.

The production had its own set of challenges, with the crew having to stick closely to Victoria and the children for many hours, days and weeks. The potential for stress and conflict was enormous. We often showed up at the Achut home unannounced and sometimes filmed from the time the family woke up in the morning until they went to bed at night. We attempted to respect the bounds of privacy while insisting on capturing key moments, and the family tried to put up with the ubiquitous camera and seemingly strange questions on top of the ups and downs of everyday life. Patience wore thin on many occasions, but everyone – filmmakers and family alike – was committed to seeing the film through.

The end result is – we hope – an accurate and uncensored picture of how a refugee family gets on with life in a new land. It takes us beyond simplistic notions of the 'lucky country' and 'land of opportunity' to reveal a new sense of Australia, where, for many people like Victoria Achut, refuge is not an end but a beginning.



documentary credits include *The Love Market*, *The War on Ideas*, *The Secret Files of the Inquisition*, *The Lost Ship of Venice* and *Born to Fly*. She also makes short educational films for good causes, including most recently, *The Making of a Farmers' Market*.

- The website for Vida Films can be found at <<http://www.vidafilms.com.au>>.
- Use Lauren Drewery's director's statement (on page 6) to generate discussions of *The Graduate from Sudan* and the filmmaking process.

## Using *The Graduate from Sudan* in the classroom

Teachers may select from the following activities to support students' viewing and close analysis of *The Graduate from Sudan*.

### BEFORE viewing *The Graduate from Sudan*

#### Dreams

- 'Everybody needs a dream.' Do you agree?
- What do you dream of achieving this year? What are your dreams for the future? Should you dream big? Do dreams come true? How? Why are dreams important? Do your dreams make your life meaningful? Do dreams build false hopes? Allow students time to write in response to some or all of these questions. Provide a soundtrack of songs about dreams for students to listen to as they write. Spend time listening to students' responses to the questions in either small groups or as a class.
- Spend time reading the lyrics of the songs about dreams. What do the lyrics suggest about the purpose and values of dreams?

#### The Lucky Country

Every year, the Australian government issues 6,000 visas to refugees from war torn lands. Since the Second World War, 675,000 refugees have been accepted by Australia and a mil-

lion Australians today are descended from these new arrivals.

- Why is Australia sometimes called the 'lucky country'?
- What stereotypes are associated with people who have come to Australia as refugees?
- Have members of your family been forced to leave their country of birth or homeland and seek asylum elsewhere? Did any members of your family come to Australia as refugees?

#### Working Families

- Who are the wage earners in your family? Talk to them about the demands of balancing work with their responsibilities at home. Share your conversations with the class. Do you have to help at home because of your parents' commitments beyond the family home?
- What are the challenges of being a working mum? Interview your mum about the challenges of juggling the competing demands of work and family.

#### Definitions

- Dinka: The Dinka people are the largest tribe in Sudan. The term Dinka is often used to describe this people or their language.
- Graduate: A person who has successfully completed a course of study or training. The term is usually used to describe a person who has been awarded an undergraduate academic degree.
- Humanitarian Visa: In 1981 the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) was introduced to assist people who did not fit neatly into the refugee category, but who were subject to human rights abuses and had family or community ties with Australia. The recently revised humanitarian visa system is designed to encourage asylum seekers to remain in their country of first asylum, rather than seeking the assistance of people smugglers to abandon or by-pass effective protection opportuni-

ties in order to obtain a preferred migration outcome.

- Intern: A recent medical graduate receiving supervised training in a hospital and acting as an assistant physician or surgeon.
- Refugee: A refugee is a person who: ... owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country ...  
– Article 1, The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

### AFTER viewing *The Graduate from Sudan*

- Did you enjoy watching *The Graduate from Sudan*? Share one of your favourite moments with the class.
- What moments of *The Graduate from Sudan* did you find inspiring?
- Use Think, Pair, Share to establish the central concerns of *The Graduate from Sudan*. Create an A3 collage of words and images that offers a response to a concern explored in *The Graduate from Sudan*. Use these responses to compose a class mural that reveals the concerns of the documentary.
- Why is it important to tell the story of people like Victoria?
- Write a brief synopsis of *The Graduate from Sudan* for publication in a television guide.

### Close Analysis

#### VICTORIA ACHUT

- Allow students to share their personal impressions of Victoria Achut.
- Compile a list of adjectives to describe Victoria Achut. Link these adjectives to moments in *The Graduate from Sudan*.
- What does Victoria want to achieve?
- What moments of *The Graduate from Sudan* demonstrate Victoria's commitment to her dream?
- Victoria is strong and resilient.

What brings her undone?

- Writing as Victoria, make a list of the pros and cons of the decision to remain in Australia.

*I don't want to live on someone else's tax. I have to work. I have the capacity to work, I have the qualification. How can I just sit at home and be on social security? It's very bad, it's painful.*

– Victoria

- Victoria does not want to be dependent on Centrelink payments. What does Victoria's desire to earn an income and be a taxpayer reveal about her view of self and her status in Australian society?
- Use print and electronic texts to learn about the role of women in Sudanese society. What moments and statements reveal Victoria's acceptance of the gender roles imposed by Sudanese culture? What moments and statements reveal Victoria's challenging of the gender roles imposed by Sudanese culture?

## VICTORIA ACHUT: wife and mother of three

*My husband didn't want to come to Adelaide. He's trained as a lawyer and he did all his studies in Arabic and it was hard for him to adjust with the system. He was working as a security guard in a pub. He was doing night shift everyday, coming – working from 8 til 6am. He worked seven days, even on the weekends. It wasn't easy. He saved all the money and he took the money to Sudan, to open up that business.*

– Victoria

- In what ways does Manon support Victoria's dream?
- How does he show his love for his wife and children?
- Does Victoria's internship place stress on her relationship with her husband, Manon?
- Do you think Manon expects too much of Victoria?

*How can a man live on his own forever and visit his family once in a year? A*

*family should be together. There is no wife that can live on her own with the kids and the husband be somewhere else. It doesn't work like this, to me.*

– Victoria

*'My dad's going to be here this Christmas.'*

– Adut

*'My dad is going to come.'*

– Adheem

*'My kids all the time they want their dad, they want to be with him. And it's not up to me. Cause it's not my choice.'*

– Victoria

- Use these claims to initiate a discussion of how Manon is regarded.

*I grew up in a very bad situation; there was war in my country in Southern Sudan for over two decades. I faced discrimination because of my religion, because of my race, because of my colour, but my kids are in Australia and they are living in a peaceful environment, there is no war. I want them to be in a multicultural society where there is no discrimination. I want them to have a good education. And be useful people in the community, in the Australian community.*

– Victoria

- Victoria's three children are eight-year-old Wol, six-year-old Adut, and two-year-old Adheem.
- Describe Victoria's relationship with Wol, Adut and Adheem.
- How does Victoria show her love for her children?
- How does Victoria's internship at Modbury Hospital disrupt her children's lives?
- What are the challenges faced by sole parents? Are these the same challenges that Victoria faces as a sole parent?

*Sometimes I feel pity on them because I'm not spending a lot of time with them. Sometimes they have to be picked up by my friends on the weekend so that I work, you know. I feel bad sometimes, but there is nothing I can do.*

– Victoria

- Should Victoria feel guilty?

- Do the children cope in Victoria's absence?
- Why does Victoria value her friendships with other Sudanese women?

## VICTORIA ACHUT: intern

- Victoria claims her life as an intern is far from the Hollywood version. Do you agree?

### Swings and roundabouts

*'Every time I feel that I'm going to get through it, something happens.'*

– Victoria

- *The Graduate from Sudan* begins with Victoria driving to the town of Loxton in South Australia's Riverland to find a house to rent and schools for the children because she has accepted a position as an intern at the local hospital. How does Victoria react to the last minute news that the offer of the internship has been withdrawn?

*'I hope it will be my last interview.'*

– Victoria

- Victoria is asked to attend an interview at Modbury Hospital. Why is the position at Modbury Hospital attractive?

*'Being an observer you're just coming to observe what the interns do, so that when you start work it's easy for you.'*

– Victoria

- Until the documents proving her qualifications arrive from Sudan, Victoria asks if she can be an observer without pay at the hospital. What does this request tell you about Victoria?
- Victoria's resolve falters when she receives the news that her internship cannot be approved until she has proved that her knowledge and skills are up to date. Were you surprised by her reaction and her decision to return to Sudan? Is the Medical Board's request unreasonable?



## Assessment

Victoria works on probation as part of a medical team led by Dr Denes Marantos. She has six weeks to demonstrate that she can perform at the level of an intern.

- Victoria works long days often without a break. What do these days involve? What motivates her during this time?

## Medicine

'I would like to see her get better with patients, more confidence.'  
– Dr Marantos

Victoria's first rotation is in the medicine department.

- Based on the scenes that show Victoria at work, write a brief report that evaluates her performance.

## Emergency

'It's a matter of exposing them to the pressure of the department but without putting them under too much pressure at the same time.'  
– Dr Bament

- Do you think Victoria's clinical and communication skills have improved?

## Surgery

'What sort of things did you have trouble with?'  
– Scott Watkin

- Victoria tells Scott that her time in Surgery has been 'trouble' free. What moments and statements prove this to be the case?

## Night Duty

'It's the first time for me to break bad news on the phone to someone. It's just someone whose mum passed away and I have to call him, tell him the bad news.'  
– Victoria

- Night duty is a twelve-hour shift from 8pm to 8am. Do you think

that night duty is the most challenging of all of the rotations?

## VICTORIA ACHUT: community activist

Victoria is an active member of the Australian branch of the Sudanese People's Liberation Party, which represents the interests of the mainly Black, non-Arab Southern Sudanese in Arab-controlled Sudan. She also organises events to support African refugee women in Australia.

*I moved from Sudan to Egypt. In Egypt I moved house two times. And I came to Sydney, in Sydney I moved house two times as well. I came to Adelaide, then I've moved two times. I don't like moving. And now I am moving again – to the Riverlands.*  
– Victoria

*Many women come from conflict regions, they have endured all sorts of violence, all sorts of hardship and most of them are sole parents, and I don't like to use the words single mothers, because most of them are sole parents, they have left their husbands behind, they have separated because of the war and they are looking after a number of children on their own, but they are still doing very well.*  
– Victoria

*There is always a myth about refugees, when people talk about refugees, all they have in mind is illiteracy, poverty, someone with lack of abilities, but that is not true. Refugee women are resilient, refugee women are strong. If you're only empowered you can do a lot. Because refugee women do not need pity, they need empowerment. We have to acquire the skills and knowledge and use these skills to be effective members of the Australian community. That's what we need.*  
– Victoria

The plight of refugees does not end when they land on our shores. The transition to a new life is an arduous process. Victoria's story draws our attention to the challenges facing all refugee women.

- What does Victoria's story tell us

about the difficulties faced by refugee women?

- How has your understanding of the issues facing people who come to Australia as refugees changed since watching *The Graduate from Sudan*?

## Dr VICTORIA ACHUT

Victoria successfully completed her internship at Modbury Hospital in May 2009.

- Did you ever doubt Victoria's ability to achieve her dream of becoming a registered doctor?
- Victoria achieves her dream. What do you think her future holds?

## Production Values

- Examine the opening and closing sequence of the documentary. *The Graduate from Sudan* begins with Victoria dealing with a basket of washing. The documentary ends with Victoria celebrating her achievement with her girlfriends. What are the filmmakers' intentions?
- Deborah Mailman narrates *The Graduate from Sudan*. Discuss the role of the narrator in *The Graduate from Sudan*.
- Following a family over the course of a year obviously requires a huge investment of time, energy and patience on the part of both filmmakers and subjects. The filmmakers also faced the challenge of filming in both Victoria's home and the hospital. As a class, discuss the challenge of achieving an honest portrayal of Victoria's story. Do you think the presence of a film crew influenced the behaviour of the participants?
- Consider those images that work in a symbolic way, such as the framed photograph of Manon, the Christmas tree, the basketball ring, Victoria sweeping, Victoria's first payslip and Victoria's many hair-styles. Add your own ideas to the list. How do these images inform your understanding of the story and the participants?

## Analytic Responses

- 'The Graduate from Sudan reminds us about the importance of dreams.' Discuss.
- What does *The Graduate from Sudan* tell us about personal commitment and about passion?
- 'Victoria Achut is not prepared to settle for less.' Discuss.
- 'The Graduate from Sudan is an inspiring and uplifting documentary.' Discuss.
- 'The Graduate from Sudan is an important community resource.' Do you agree?

## Creative Responses

- Draw on the narrative, action, dialogue and images to write a feature article about Victoria Achut.

Before you begin writing, decide on the publication that will feature your article. Will your article appear in a publication for the Sudanese community of Adelaide or in a hospital newsletter? Will you write for a broadsheet newspaper that tackles news in a serious and intelligent way?

When you have made your decision, think about your likely audi-

ence and the format of your article. Use vocabulary and adopt a tone that best suits the publication that you have chosen. Download appropriate images from the internet to include in your article.

Ask your teacher to act as your editor and don't forget to devise an attention-demanding headline.

- Write the speech that Victoria makes at a party to celebrate her becoming a registered doctor. Who would she thank? What would she say?

- With the exception of the indigenous population of Australia, all people in Australia share the legacy of migration.

Create a digital story about an individual's experience of migration.

A digital story uses multimedia tools and visual and audio resources from personal archives. Most digital stories are approximately two to five minutes in length. Digital stories are a unique and powerful way to tell a story. You will need to construct a storyboard, write a script and source photographs and other keepsakes to compose the

story. Then there are other decisions. Who will narrate the story? What sounds and music will be part of the digital story? What is an appropriate title? You may want to include a dedication, and don't forget the end credits.

When you interview the subject of your digital story, give the person time to talk and allow for moments of silence as they reflect. Listen attentively and respect their privacy. Follow up on interesting answers with another question. Take notes or record your subject's responses. When you have constructed a storyboard and draft of the script, ask the person for their comments and make appropriate changes.

Further information about digital stories can be found on the website of the Australian Centre for the Moving Image <<http://www.acmi.net.au>> and by typing the term 'digital stories' into a reliable search engine.

## References

- *The Graduate from Sudan* Press Kit, 2009.
- *The Graduate from Sudan* Post-production Script, 2009



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