

## Introduction

The goal of developing a coordinated network of scholars whose research focuses on Sudanese in the diaspora was first proposed by Ibrahim Elnur and Amira Ahmed in 2006 at the International Sudan Studies Association meetings in Bergen. This initial meeting to set up a ‘Sudanese Diaspora Research Network’ (SDRN) was followed by subsequent meetings discussing ways to move forward. Most recently, five [\[1\]](#) of the original network members met at the Refugee Research Centre, University of East London (UK) for a three-day workshop to propose future directions for the SDRN, discuss funding options for conferences and projects, and begin work on organising a conference.

## Meeting Objectives and Goals of the Network

The objectives of the meeting were threefold:

1. To solidify the network and prepare for a conference
2. To set out a research agenda and identify potential projects
3. To suggest ideas for practical outreach that the network might pursue.

**Research Network and Conference: To help us with the first objective, we have been compiling a list of scholars who are pursuing or who have published research on Sudanese in the diaspora. The aim is to be as inclusive as possible, and to use network members to help us identify additional scholars and publicise the work of the SDRN more broadly.**

*Research Agenda:* A partial bibliography of published and grey literature on Sudanese nationals living outside Sudan was prepared for dissemination. This exercise shows that there is an important body of research stretching back decades on Sudanese who form communities in particular locales or states and which provide an in-depth understanding of people’s lives in specific places. More recently, a complementary area of inquiry has developed on mobile Sudanese, their social networks and transnational strategies, and diasporic notions of home and belonging. These studies build upon insights from transnationalism and diaspora studies.

Manger[\[2\]](#) (2006) proposes that there is a distinction between people IN the diaspora and people OF the diaspora. In the case of Sudanese, research on Sudanese IN the diaspora focuses on nations and national boundaries—people leave Sudan and make lives and communities in new national settings, send remittances to Sudan and organise return. Research on Sudanese OF the diaspora is less concerned with the geographic location of Sudanese but rather explores the ‘diaspora dynamic’ which exists and reproduces independently of nation. This approach moreover recognises that ‘diaspora’ is a social institution rather than a ‘given’ and may or may not arise as a migration pattern. We also discussed the importance of including IDPs inside Sudan as part of the ‘transnational social field’ that contributes to a diaspora dynamic. Both of these processes are occurring simultaneously and have historical roots. By collecting available research on Sudanese both in and of the diaspora, the SDRN is able to take a broad historical view of diasporic dynamics and processes; this may lead in time to conceptual and

methodological contributions, as well as a more complete picture of the experiences of Sudanese in the world.

The collaborative nature of a research network supports a number of potential contributions. One contribution could be ‘mapping the diaspora’, including parts of the world not generally studied as part of the current interest in Sudanese migration such as Sudanese in the ‘east’ (Malaysia, Indonesia, and India are three countries with a historical connection to Sudan, e.g. the Sudanese Muslim scholar Surketti). Another potential contribution benefits from new advances in technology and the development in sophistication of Social Network Analysis. These tools would be extremely useful in mapping the Sudanese diaspora, offering the potential of both methodological and conceptual innovations that would allow researchers to collect quantitative data on networks. Meeting participants also noted that the Sudanese diaspora is extremely heterogeneous in terms of place of origin, ‘vintage’ of migration, type of trajectory, and so forth, and that it lends itself as a framework for comparisons. For example, some research presents previously segregated Sudanese communities with no interaction even abroad, while other research indicates fluid movement among categories. Under what conditions might barriers between communities be reproduced or fall away?

*Practical Outreach:* We noted the existence of several networks of Sudanese professionals—Group for Alternative Policies for Sudan (GAPS), the Sudanese Research Group (SRG), Sudan Knowledge, Gurtong Peace Project, to name a few—which aim to connect Sudanese with skills and expertise with the needs of Sudan. As academic researchers, we propose that the SDRN make its contribution to the development of universities in Sudan and the support of regional universities in particular. In this way, members of the SDRN could contribute their specialised competence to supporting Sudanese universities to conceptualise, develop and manage university research programmes. This might mean individuals or small groups spending time at regional universities, helping to stimulate funding of projects, and running workshops on institutional and research development.

## **Funding**

We explored two types of funding:

1. Seed money for establishing the network and for holding a conference
2. Money for projects—applied research/outreach and diaspora research/diaspora dynamics/dynamics of mobility in transnational space

Currently, members of the SDRN are approaching a number of potential funders for the establishment of a research network and for holding a conference. Members of the network with university or other institutional affiliation are particularly invited to contribute ideas and suggestions for obtaining funding to set up the network. We envision further funding possibilities as collaborative projects develop between researchers at different universities and national contexts. Additionally, we seek to keep the parameters of what constitutes the ‘Sudanese diaspora’ open-ended, including regions where there has not been much previous research but where interesting and important questions are developing.

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[1] Ibrahim Elnur, Anita Fábos, Leif Manger, Cordula Weisskoppel, and Carol Berger; Amira Abderahman, Abdel Salam Sidahmed and Munzoul Assal were unable to participate.

[2] Manger, Leif (2006) TITLE OF YOUR CONTRIBUTION—MY COPY HAS GONE MISSING! In Munzoul Assal und Leif Manger (eds.). *Diasporas Within and Without Africa. Dynamism, Heterogeneity, Variation*. Uppsala. The Nordic Africa Institute.