

The World Peace Foundation, an operating foundation affiliated solely with The Fletcher School, aims to provide intellectual leadership on issues of peace, justice and security. It believes that innovative research and teaching are critical to the challenges of making peace around the world, and should go hand-in-hand with advocacy and practical engagement with the toughest issues. It regularly convenes expert seminars to address today's most pressing issues. The seminar, "Researching Sudan's Peace Processes" was held October 17, 2014.

This seminar note is organized around prominent themes that emerged throughout the seminar. Participants' responses were non-attributable for a more thorough discussion.

# "Researching Sudan's Peace Processes":

## Introduction to the Sudan Peace Archive

**Seminar Note**

17 October, 2014

*The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy  
Tufts University*

### OVERVIEW

This seminar arose from the World Peace Foundation project of compiling an archive of documents relating to the peace processes in Sudan and South Sudan. The main objective of the seminar was to introduce the archive to scholars working on Sudan and South Sudan and on African peace processes. A second objective was to examine the challenges of researching Sudan, South Sudan, with particular reference to their peace processes, and to extend the analysis to research into African peace processes more generally.

Over the last fifteen years, internationally-facilitated peace talks have become a central element in the governance and politics of Sudan and South Sudan. However, these peace processes have generally been conducted behind closed doors in a manner that is opaque to citizens, scholars and other observers. Those who participated in these processes therefore have an obligation to make their knowledge and documentation available, for the historical record and as a contribution to democratic openness. The Sudan Peace Archive was set up to provide a means for compiling, stabilizing, cataloguing and making available documents on those peace processes. The project was supported by the U.S. Institute of Peace and implemented with the technical assistance of the archivists of the Digital Collections and Archives, Tisch Library, Tufts University

## Researching Sudan and South Sudan

Research and writing on Sudan and South Sudan are contested, in much the same way that the country itself is contested. There is a rich diversity of research in Sudan, ranging from archeology to network systems analysis, with much in-between. Sudan’s universities have a particularly strong tradition of research and writing in the social sciences, including both empirical study of Sudanese society, and reflections on the fundamental and enduring question that lies at the heart of scholarship on Sudan: what is the Sudan and how is it imagined, in history, present and future?

Social science in Sudan was initially engendered by the colonial authorities with the aim of facilitating more effective domination of the country. However, social scientists at the University of Khartoum developed a radical critique of the post-colonial state, generating some of the finest anthropological work in Africa, and some excellent political scientific and economic research. The university witnessed an “unfinished liberation” that included vigorous debate on a range of issues including civil rights, women and gender, race, indigenous and black studies, and religious studies. However, under the economic pressure of falling salaries relative to those that could be earned by emigrating, and with the suppression of academic freedoms by successive military governments, that tradition is now fragmented and many of the best scholars are exiled from the country or from the academy. The center of gravity of Sudanese studies within Sudan has now been lost.

Recent years have seen a rich corpus of writings about the Sudanese peripheries, many of them by researchers working in the NGO sector. There are also studies of Sudan written by people who have hardly had the opportunity to travel there. Higher education in Sudan itself has massively expanded but its intellectual quality has diminished, and Sudanese academic publishing is virtually at a standstill. South Sudanese intellectuals meanwhile focus their attention on the war and its aftermath, rather than wider questions about the country as a whole. South Sudan’s universities are starting almost from scratch.

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Earlier generations of Sudanese scholars were intimately engaged in the country’s real political debates, and contributed enormously to the public arena. The alienation of government from the academy, and the fragmentation of scholarship on Sudan and the dispersal of Sudanese scholars, have meant that Sudanese social and political

scientists are now poorly connected to the key questions facing their country. The fact that key decisions are often taken in peace processes, convened by third parties and held behind closed doors outside the country, is symptomatic of this alienation.

This discussion was led by Prof. Richard Lobban (Rhode Island College, and the founding president of the Sudan Studies Association) and Prof. Abdullahi Gallab (Arizona, and the current president of the Sudan Studies Association).

## Researching African Peace Processes

Over the last twenty years there have been as many as 200 peace processes in Africa. Almost every African country has been involved as a party to a conflict, a mediator or a host of talks. Peace processes are therefore an important facet of African contemporary political reality. However, too little is known about the workings of peace processes, so that there is too much conjecture and surmise, and too little real research. For key research questions to be investigated and answered in a systematic manner, it is first necessary to develop the required databases and archives that can allow for rigorous research.

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The questions to be posed about peace processes range from the particular to the abstract. Among the most specific issues are: role of women in peace negotiations and the continuing resistance to including them; the recurring question of the representation of unarmed groups; and the roles of non-African technical experts in supporting negotiations. What are the merits and demerits of professionalizing mediation? How best should the sponsors of peace processes handle the trade-off between the political status of the mediator and how much time that individual could devote? Should the parties’ negotiators be educated on the particular rules and procedures of peace processes?

Among the deeper issues that could be analyzed are the financial and opportunity costs of the current model of peace negotiations, and potential alternatives. For example, how could we measure the cost of a delay in peace talks—in terms of lives lost while the war continues, as well as more immediately measurable costs? Could the funds be better spent on “buying peace,” that is, establishing funds to buy the acquiescence of competing forces, a practice that underwrites the real politics of many patrimonial states in any case?

The manner in which peace talks generate their own logic, and function in a space isolated from wider society, also demands attention. This addresses the question of “success” in peace talks—in particular, what should be the measurement in cases in which the negotiated “solutions” collides with the subsequent reality of implementation? To what extent do agreements reflect wishful thinking rather than practicality, and are borne from the mediators’ and negotiators’ concern with simply getting to a formal agreement?

The discussions on these points underlined how mediators are plagued by lack of institutional memory, and emphasized the importance of thorough documentation of peace talks, so that the appropriate lessons could be learned. This session was led by Mulugeta Gebrehiwot (Addis Ababa) and Vladimir Zhagora (formerly of the United Nations).

## A Case Study from the Sudan Peace Archive

A case study of the negotiations in June 2011, that led to the Framework Agreement between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM-North on the conflict in Southern Kordofan, illustrates the value of the archive. Alex de Waal showed a number of documents that can be found in the Archive, including drafts of the ceasefire agreements, drafts of the political and security arrangement texts, notes from meetings between the mediators and the parties, and other documents, to show how the text of the Framework Agreement evolved during the talks, how and why it was structured in a particular way, and why certain elements were included and excluded. Among other things, these documents helped explain who was opposed to the agreement from within the Government of Sudan delegation, giving clues to why President Bashir reneged on the agreement shortly after it was signed. He also presented some documents from the 2006 Darfur peace talks that clarified the positions taken by the government and rebels at the time of the talks—positions that were rather different to those they later publicly claimed. He explained that, for the time being, the most interesting internal documents were not open-access, but can be made available upon individual researcher request.

The discussion ranged over the nature of the documents in the archive, including how and why they were produced, and which peace processes were covered, and the structure of the archive itself. It was explained that the archive includes only those documents available to the mediators, and the parties’ own records have not been included.

## Ongoing Research Relevant to the Archive Project

The final session was an opportunity for doctoral students to present their ongoing research.

Allard Duursma (Oxford University) presented his research into “African ownership” of peace processes, which was a quantitative investigation into how African-led mediation efforts compared with other, non-African international efforts. Having carefully explained his research design and how he managed to control for the numerous extraneous factors that could influence the research findings, he demonstrated evidence for the effectiveness of African mediation, and outlined hypotheses for why it might be more effective: the legitimacy of African third parties; the African security culture; and the leverage that neighbors may have over the warring parties. His findings were that there is a significant positive effect of African mediators, with some exceptions. He found that mixed mediation could be highly effective, if the third parties coordinated, but had a negative impact if they were competing with each other. He found that the positive impact of African efforts applied to mediation but not to peacekeeping. The discussion explored many potential reasons for these findings.

Stephanie Schwartz (Columbia University) presented a draft paper that explored concepts of nationalism that were prevalent during the CPA negotiations. This included the parties’ and the mediators’ explanations for ethno-national violence, and solutions for that violence. Different explanations would lead to different proposed solutions, for example prioritizing autonomy/separation, or prioritizing democracy. She interviewed members of the U.S. and British diplomats deployed in support of the mediator, finding that the peace agenda was driven by concern for what was “manageable”: this led the mediators to focus on a small number of elite actors to the exclusion of others. The discussion focused on the as-yet-incompletely documented history of the peace talks, and questions of manageability and complexity, and the desire to have a “good enough” solution.

Both scholars noted that their research would benefit from the availability of new documents found in the Archive.

## Conclusion

The challenges of conducting research in Sudan and South Sudan, coupled with the secrecy that pervades the processes of mediating peace combine to produce a serious gap in understanding matters of significant political import to the history and politics of the Sudans. Further, peace processes while widely exercised are not widely understood. Frequently the record is established based on final documents or the memoirs of leading figures; rarely are the actual material products of such processes made available for study.

The WPF Sudan Peace Archive is a contribution to filling both of these gaps.

**For more information about the WPF Sudan Peace Archive or to access archive materials, visit our website at: <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/World-Peace-Foundation>.**

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