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Mobilising towards and imagining homelands: Diaspora formation among UK Sudanese

This article examines diasporic identity formation among Sudanese migrants in the UK. From constructivist perspectives, diasporas form when mobilisations towards a 'homeland' initiate processes of collectively imagining that homeland. These mobilising agendas have been analysed as either emotional and/or political and correspond to processes of collective remembering, forgetting, or future-making. Drawing on interviews with, and observations of, Sudan-born residents of the UK, this article examines diaspora formation among UK Sudanese. It asks what mobilising agendas unite UK Sudanese and what kinds of imaginative processes orient them towards their shared homeland(s). This investigation uncovers how multiple and seemingly contradictory processes of diasporic identity formation overlap within the same 'national' migrant community. It analyses how different mobilising agendas initiate imaginative processes of 'past-making' and 'future-making' which correspond to various types of diasporic identity. In doing so, this article contributes to debates within constructivist approaches to diaspora formation.

Keywords: diaspora, homelands, diasporic imagination, diasporic mobilisation

Word Count: 9000

Introduction

This article uses constructivist scholarship on diaspora to analyse diaspora formation among those born in Sudan[1] who are resident in the UK. Diaspora formation among Sudanese migrants presents an interesting case due to the ways in which Sudanese migration to the UK has intertwined with Sudan's divisive history of politicised ethnic and cultural violence. Debates within Sudan over its cultural and political heterogeneity have found violent expression during decades of civil war and in 2011, a new national 'homeland' was formed when Southern Sudan seceded from the North to create two separate nation states: Sudan and South Sudan. In the post-secession era, the political process of state-building in both states has been violent and divisive. The North, now officially the Republic of Sudan, is described as an 'uneasy coalition of multitudes and not a homogeneous nation' (Copnall 2014, 11). Given the UK Sudanese have origins in disparate and, in some cases, actively conflicting regions, ethnic groups and political

[1] In this paper, 'Sudan' refers to post-secession North Sudan. When referring to pre-secession Sudan, which includes South Sudan, 'Former Sudan' will be used.

parties, the notion of 'shared homelands' seem precarious from the outside. Despite this, the UK Sudanese are a very active migrant group in the UK relative to their size[2]. Initial internet-based research revealed that, in 2012, forty Sudanese or Sudan-related associations advertised around forty public events throughout the UK. While important studies have been conducted in relation to the Muslim Arab Sudanese diaspora in the UK (Fábos 2012a; Fábos 2012b), there is a need to analyse whether or not, and if so how, UK Sudanese from a variety of cultural, religious and political backgrounds negotiate their identities in relation to a post-secession 'Sudan'.

Using the literature on constructivist diaspora formation, this article asks why, how and what kinds of diasporic identities have formed among UK Sudanese. It does this through first identifying three key tenets of diaspora formation in the literature; a) a shared homeland, b) a mobilisation towards it, and c) an engagement in processes of imaging it. Following this, the relevant historical and contemporary patterns of Sudanese diaspora formation are traced and an outline of Sudan to UK migration culminates in a characterisation of the broader population of UK Sudanese. Following a description of methods, the framework on diaspora formation is employed to discuss the ways in which UK Sudanese have mobilised towards, and imagined, their homeland(s). In doing so, this research contributes empirically to the body of knowledge about the Sudanese diaspora, a community about which very little is known in relation to diaspora research. Through this empirical investigation, the article draws out some theoretical implications relating to debates around why and how diasporas form.

Diaspora formation

Diaspora is a concept which is being continually reimagined to extents that both frustrate (Brubaker 2005) and excite (Cohen and Story 2015, xvi). The core of the concept can be identified as communities of migrants who share a homeland to which they remain connected (Safran 1991; Bauböck and Faist 2010)[3]. While there are many points of comparison with transnational social movements or global civil society networks, the shared homeland is that which conceptually distinguishes diaspora from any other transnational community (Portes,

[2] There are approximately 22,000 Sudanese resident in the UK (IOM 2011) making it only the seventieth largest sending country for foreign-born UK residents (UN 2015). Statistics refer to Former Sudan.

[3] This study agrees with the definition of diaspora as linked to the act of migration and therefore does not engage with second-generation members of minority communities.

Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999). It is the '*sine qua non* of diaspora' (Cohen 2009, 117) or, as Brubaker states, diaspora is 'firmly rooted in a conceptual "homeland"' (2005, 2).

Within the primordialist tradition of identity theory, diasporas have been conceptualised as a natural consequence of the shared homeland (Anthias 2001). An 'ethnocommunal consciousness' is said to arise from shared ethnic roots, bloodlines and heritage (Safran 1991, 83-4). Critiquing this, constructivist diaspora scholars have argued that diasporas – like all identities – are not naturally given but are constructed by subjects within social and political contexts (Hall 1990; Gilroy 1997). As Brubaker (2005, 12) states, 'not all those who are claimed as members of putative diasporas themselves adopt a diasporic stance'. Following their rejection of the essentialist thesis which takes for granted the formation of diaspora in the presence of a shared ethnic homeland, it has been incumbent upon constructivist diaspora scholars to explain the *why* and *how* of diaspora formation.

To this end, three key innovations have been made in relation to understanding diaspora. First, the notion of a shared homeland has been 'liquefied' since it is not necessarily shared ethnicity which produces diasporic identities (Cohen 2009). Instead, all kinds of cultural, religious, national, political, and historical conceptualisations of a 'shared homeland' emerge as formative of diaspora (Axel 2002; Safran 2009). Second, it has been argued that diasporas must be 'invented or mobilized to come into existence' (Bauböck 2010, 315) or 'imagined' through processes of collective attribution (Anderson 1983). Thus, diaspora has been reconceptualised as a 'type of consciousness' (Clifford 1994, 312) or as a 'category of practice' (Brubaker 2005, 12). Finally, the 'shared homeland' is now seen as a product of collective imagining, rather than as having objective existence in and of itself (Cohen 2009). From constructivist positions, homelands do not produce diasporas. Instead, it is diasporas who produce their homeland following their mobilisation towards it and their engagement in processes of collectively imagining it. The following sections discuss the *why* and *how* of diaspora formation through explicating the various mobilising principles behind diaspora formation (*why* diasporas form) and the various imaginative processes initiated by them (*how* diasporas form).

Restorative remembering

One mobilising agenda which has been used to explain diaspora formation is the longing to belong. As some migrants experience feelings of alienation in the hostland, it is argued that this can bring about a mobilisation towards the homeland which is where feelings of 'belonging'

are associated (Silva 2009). This type of mobilisation can initiate 'restorative remembering' which involves imagining a home that 'might be recovered, or a past that can be restored' (Boym 2011, 151). Sinha (2014, 11) argues that diasporas engage in processes of 'searching for meanings through the world of memories' and this is seen through the re-production and celebration of homeland culture by migrant populations (Braziel and Mannur 2003). These restorative imaginings tend to focus on 'a return to the past […]; to where we came from, to what we have lost' (Prosser 2011, 137).

Shared longing can also mobilise diaspora even when the homeland itself is contested. In Alexander's (2013) study of the Bangladeshi diaspora in East London, the understanding of 'Bangladesh' is disputed among Bangladeshi diasporans. Yet the collective memorialisation of the Shahid Minar (a replica of a statue celebrating those martyred in the 1971 liberation struggle) 'incorporates multiple histories' (Alexander 2013, 592). Even though imagining the homeland is a site of 'struggle and contestation', collective commemoration provides the space to produce the Bangladeshi diaspora in East London (591). Furthermore, diasporic mobilisations need not relate to a locative homeland. As Axel (2002, 411) argues, for many diasporic communities, 'place, or place of origin is not the primary issue'. Rather, restoratively imagining a homeland can relate to the revival of a shared historical experience. For example, diasporic Sikh subjects have been 'constituted globally through torture and the production of knowledge about torture' which their community suffered at the hands of the Indian state (Axel 2002, 413). It is their restorative imagination which initiates the recovery and re-telling of a non-locative homeland in response to an identification of belonging to that experience.

Selective and reflective remembering

For many diasporic communities mobilising towards a homeland can be motivated by the need to forget, rather than the need to remember. Instead of initiating reconstruction and recovery through engaging in 'restorative nostalgia', this kind of mobilising principle can result in 'reflective nostalgia' where the emphasis is on the longing itself, rather than the place or time longed for (Boym 2011). As Boym (2011, 151) has argued, diaspora who are mobilised by the need to forget can engage in processes of selective forgetting of real memories which can, in turn, 'spur multiple forms of creativity' such as the fictional remembering of a romanticised or paradisal homeland past. In other words, 'root-seekers become root-makers' (Nelson 2011, 35) and engage in processes of 'affiliative self-fashioning' (Nelson 2011, 35). This is seen, for example, in Walle's (2013) observation of Pakistani groups in Norway who play cricket

together. The ways in which they talk about and perform the homeland ritual of the cricket game produces a 'utopian homeland'. Their imagining is a 'celebration of what they think Pakistan could have been', rather than what they think Pakistan is (Walle 2013, 301). The longing for the homeland to be a certain way, rather than the longing to remember it how it is, therefore initiates selective forgetting and reflective remembering.

In addition to imagining a paradisal homeland through romanticisation, processes of demonising homelands can also arise from diasporas mobilised around 'survivor's guilt' and a shared need to justify their exile. Within this type of diaspora mobilisation, the homeland is, again, not restoratively remembered but partially constructed. Among some diaspora identifying as 'conflict-generated', it has been argued that, in the interests of producing an 'exile identity', diasporas imagine the homeland as a place of suffering, violence and trauma, even when this does not reflect realities on the ground (Lyons 2007; Demmers 2007). This simultaneously justifies leaving the homeland and remaining away. Lyons (2007) has argued that the tendency among the USA Ethiopian diaspora to view the homeland in 'uncompromising and categorical ways' could be explained, in part, by their 'highly symbolic' reading of the conflict in relation to their migration away from it (Lyons 2007, 597). As Demmers (2007, 15) elucidates; some diaspora communities 'are sustained by narratives of trauma and violence' and this initiates processes of 'reflectively imagining' the homeland as a place of suffering.

Imagining the future

There is no denying the importance of the past for diaspora formation. However, an 'obsession with roots' in diaspora studies (Hirsch and Miller 2011, 5) obscures the relationship between non-historical homelands and diaspora formation. To this end there have been investigations of the 'shared homeland' component of diaspora formation which go beyond its clear and important association with real or false memories. Some have argued that diasporas are best understood as transnational political communities that are produced for strategic ends by political entrepreneurs (Adamson 2012). In such cases, the 'homeland' is invoked by elites in order to mobilise the masses behind a political project which protects their own interests (see, for example, Betts and Jones' [2015] analysis of Rwandan diasporas). Similarly, Sökefeld (2006, 267) argues that 'sentiments of belonging, attachment to a home and ideas of a "place of origin" do not constitute the "substance" from which diasporas – like other identity groups – are made'. The concept of a shared homeland imagined by a diaspora could be purely cosmetic and in service of, or concealing, some other unifying facet of identity.

Another way to analyse diaspora who are mobilised around a political campaign could relate to their politically imagining a homeland future. Politically mobilised diaspora need not only be understood as the product of an elite-led strategic invocation of a 'homeland'. A diaspora could be mobilised by a collectively held, and historically constituted, desire for the political production of their future homeland. This is how many stateless diaspora mobilisations have been analysed (Baser 2015). For example, diasporic Tamil groups who are mobilised around the statebuilding project of *Tamil Elam* imagine a future homeland through their political activism. A shared homeland can therefore be a homeland that never was, which is not remembered, but created during processes of politically imagining its future.

Global Sudanese diasporas

Given that diaspora formation relies on mobilising towards some kind of negotiated 'homeland', Sudan's civil war, subsequent violent statebuilding, and the ways in which patterns of outward migration intertwine with those contexts makes Sudanese diaspora formation an interesting case. Clarke (2010, 55) has suggested that 'the historical conflicts, […] the struggles over autonomy and difference, have meant that any diasporic claims are made to particular constituencies rather than the whole'. The current research on Sudanese diasporas suggests there is a tendency for Sudanese abroad to orient towards parts of Sudan, and not all of it.

Assal's analysis of Sudanese in Norway, 70% of whom are refugees who arrived since 1990, suggests that 'they are split along Muslim and non-Muslim lines' and that there is 'specific resistance […] to mobilise across those lines' (Assal 2004, 181). He claims that 'Sudanese in Norway have very different backgrounds and histories, and many do not seem overtly interested in knowing about each other in a meaningful manner' (Assal 2004, 181). Sudanese migration to North America 'began in the mid-twentieth century and strongly correlates with conflict and political instability' (Abusharaf 1997, 520). Within that context, processes of diaspora formation among Sudanese has been strategically racialised. The Darfuris in the USA have 'forged strategic alliances that are deeply at odds with Darfurians at home, both in the forms of activism that they adopt and in their consciousnesses about who they are' (Abusharaf 2010, 74). Their support for the genocide indictment on President Bashir, which is highly contested in Sudan itself (Mamdani 2009), 'evinced a shift in subject positions that necessitates deeper epistemological explication of Darfurians' acquisition of a black identity in North America' (74). What it means to be in the Darfuri diaspora in the USA therefore, is conceived in contradistinction to the experience of Sudanese migrants of Arab ethnic

identification. Through their orientations towards Darfur from the USA 'Darfurian now signifies a newly assigned black identity' (Abusharaf 2010, 74).

In contrast, in Egypt, which is hostland to many of the Sudanese from Nubia, a traditionally Arab and Muslim region in the far North of Sudan, the 'Sudanese identity' is performed in contradistinction to 'blackness' which, in Egypt, carries a different symbolic content to the narratives of race in the USA. In particular, there are attempts made by the Sudanese in Egypt to form alliances of brotherhood which cut across territorial nationality and instead foster an 'Islamic citizenship' (Fábos 2012a). By contrast to this in the Gulf, there are attempts to eschew both the racialized victimhood apparent among USA Darfuris and the religion-based citizenship performed by Sudanese in Egypt and Norway. The gulf states, where most Sudanese residents have the official status as labour migrants (Fabos 2012a), are 'prepared to renounce the discourse of victimization' (Abusharaf 2010, 80) and attempt to mobilise across religious and race lines.

As these examples show, for those migrating away from Sudan, the diasporic stances made towards a homeland, are often part of attempts to initiate belonging in the hostland (i.e. belonging to the black community in the USA, and belonging to the Islamic community in Egypt). As well as this, the form and content of diasporic orientations made by Sudanese abroad are explicitly shaped by the types of migratory patterns made from specific places within Sudan to a specific hostland (i.e. the contrast between a majority of refugees in Norway taking an oppositional diasporic stance, and a majority of labour migrants in the Gulf states taking an inclusive one). In light of this, the Sudanese in the UK pose in interesting case since the broader population of Sudan-born residents of the UK comprise three phases of migration, each made from different regions and for different purposes.

Sudan to UK migration

According to census data, there are around 18,000 Sudan-born residents of England and Wales (ONS 2011) and an estimated 22,000 in the UK as a whole (IOM 2011, 17). The first migrations from Sudan to the UK occurred between 1955 and 1972 (Di Bartolomeo, Jaulin, and Perrin 2012, 1). As Fábos (2012b, 54) explains, migration to the UK was enabled by colonial linkages, to which only elite Arab Muslim men from Nubia and the northern riverine regions had access. Furthermore, it was specifically moderate or Salafi Muslims in opposition to the aggressive Wahabist Islamisation agenda of Sudanese governments for whom this journey was attractive. Many protested Islamisation from within the UK and, after their studies, many did not return

and were employed in the UK in professional roles (Ashu 2012, 14). During this time, migrations from peripheral areas and South Sudan were mostly made to other African countries, with only the exceptionally wealthy and educated reaching places such as the UK (Mohamed-Ali 2011, 6).

The second phase of Sudan to UK migration occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s. President Al-Bashir's National Congress Party (NCP) came to power in 1989 and rebellion in the peripheries intensified and peaked in the 2003-2005 Darfur rebellions. The International Criminal Court issued in indictment which claimed the violence in Darfur was 'a plan to destroy in substantial part the Fur, Massalit and Zaghawa groups on account of their ethnicity' (Moreno-Ocampo 2008). While contested in Sudan itself, the politics of naming 'genocide' had implications for Sudan to UK migration and the journey previously reserved for riverine Muslim elites was temporarily opened to those from a variety of ethnic heritages in impoverished regions in the North: Darfur, Blue Nile, South Kordofan, and East Sudan (IOM 2011). Many of those arrived with the status of fleeing genocide and comprise the approximately 2,480 Sudanese in the UK with official refugee status (CARIM 2015).

The third type of Sudan to UK migration, occurring since Southern secession in 2011, can be characterised as an exodus of political elites and student protesters, coming from all over Sudan, usually via Khartoum. In the post-secession statebuilding era, as well as facing armed rebellion from the peripheral militia such as the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the Rashida Free Lions, professional and student populations in Khartoum have mobilised against the NCP. Political opposition parties such as the Democratic Union party (DUP), Sudanese Congress Party (SCoP), and social movements such as *Girifna*, *Sudan Change Now* and the *Sudan Shadow Cabinet* have intensified their opposition to the NCP on the basis of their neglectful, incompetent and nepotistic governmentality. The increasingly oppressive regime is limiting political space and suppressing all forms of dissent with arrests and violence. As such, those arriving in the UK since Southern secession are generally elite members of opposition parties, or Khartoum-based students. Because of the politicised nature of these migrations to the UK, a small number of pro-government Sudanese have also arrived with the task of monitoring opposition exiles (McElroy 2014).

Against this background, Fábos (2012a, 2012b) has analysed instances of diaspora formation among Sudanese in the UK by focusing on the Muslim Arab constituency within it. To build on this, there is a need to analyse the Sudanese in the UK as a broad population of

Sudan-born residents from Muslim, as well as other ethnic backgrounds. In addition, there is a need to understand how the context of post-secession statebuilding has implications for compulsions and expressions of belonging among those who have made journeys from the same national homeland but in very different historical and geographical contexts. This paper therefore contributes to the empirical picture of the UK Sudanese, and on the global population of Sudanese abroad, by focusing specifically on how Sudan-born residents of the UK adopt diasporic stances.

Methods

Understanding if and how diasporic identities form within this broader population of Sudanese resident in the UK was approached with a qualitative methodology. A constructivist theoretical framework in which diaspora formation is intersubjectively produced through collective imagining called for narrative as opposed to numerical data. It was therefore important that the research methods captured a 'rich and experiential account' which avoided 'setting out a limited set of responses' but rather left spaces open for free and subject-centred responses (Fontana and Frey 2005, 698). As such, this paper takes data from 41 semi-structured interviews with 27 UK Sudanese residents (4 female, 23 male) and 9 non-Sudanese involved in working with Sudanese groups (4 female, 5 male). Five interviewees were interviewed more than once and interviews lasted between 1 and 3 hours. All semi-structured interviews were conducted in English except one which was done through a translator. To begin with, participants were selected at Sudanese community events which had been advertised in public forums. Once this initial contact had been made, a snowball sampling technique was used, 'essential when it is impossible to "map" the population from which a random sample might be taken' (Redclift 2016, 4). It was important to reach representatives from the three different phases within the triptych of Sudan to UK migration. Therefore, Sudanese interviewees were selected in the following proportions: Migrated pre-1989 (8), migrated between 1989 and 2011 (10), migrated post-2011 (9).

These interviews were combined with observations of 15 public events organised by Sudanese groups, during which a further 70 informal interviews were conducted with Sudanese event attendees. Only four out of seventy informal interviews were conducted through a translator: the vast majority of participants had at least conversational English. This observational aspect allowed for the 'interrogation' and 'contextualisation' of interview data (Sanchez-Ayala 2012, 125). All semi-structured interviews received written consent and all participants have been anonymised.

Not being Sudanese myself, but rather a British researcher, investigating why and how UK Sudanese engaged in diaspora formation was done from an outside perspective. As noted by Kim (2014, 24) researcher positionality both 'enables and inhibits particular kinds of insights'. On one hand, insights could have been inhibited because of problems arising from accessing a community to which I visibly did not belong. On the other, occupying an 'outsider position' could have been beneficial for validity. Participants perceived me as 'a curious stranger' (Sanchez-Ayalas 2012, 119) with neutral or independent views on Sudan. As such, their explanations of their homeland orientations were revealing specifically because they were delivered to someone who they perceived to be relatively uninformed.

The data was analysed using the framework on diaspora formation which focused on type of homeland, type of mobilising principle, and process of imagination. Sumathi and Sivanandam (Sumathi and Sivanandam 2006, 187) claim that 'data analysis means a search for patterns in data' and this form of 'thematic coding' (Gibson and Brown 2009) was used to group together interviewee responses. Using the categories derived from the literature, diaspora formation was identified through examining a) what 'homelands' are UK Sudanese oriented towards (locative and non-locative); b) what has motivated the orientation towards it (emotional and/or political drivers); c) what processes of collective imagining are taking place (selective forgetting, restorative, reflective and/or political imagining).

UK Sudanese and diaspora formation

This research has found that UK Sudanese collectivised within the associations shown in Table 1. Many were members of multiple associations and, while some were well established and sustainable many associations appeared and disappeared during the time of fieldwork. From within these associations, numerous diasporic identities were formed which can be analysed as three distinct, yet overlapping, types. First, there are orientations towards regional or ethnic homelands. These orientations are mobilised primarily by a sense of duty to the people remaining at home. They unite people who have migrated in all three phases of Sudan to UK migration. This diasporic mobilisation is brought about during imaginative processes which, to some extent, aim to restore traditions but are principally focused on selectively imagining suffering, trauma and underdevelopment in the homeland.

Second, there is a mobilisation towards the historical experience of genocide. These mobilisations occur in a coalition of regional associations from the peripheries, and also UK chapters of peripheral political parties such as the JEM, SPLM, and the Beja Congress. In

general, this excludes political elites from Khartoum-based political parties who have recently arrived but includes those whose migration preceded 1989. The mobilisations towards this 'non-locative' homeland (Axel 2002), are driven by two distinct motivations among the UK Sudanese: on the one hand, there is a political motivation to use the term 'genocide' in order to bring about political conditions which are favourable to groups opposing the NCP: on the other hand, there is an emotional need to produce an 'exile identity' (Lyons 2007). Imagining this type of homeland involved the commemoration of genocide during public demonstrations and advocacy events using both 'selective remembering' and 'reflective remembering' (Boym 2011).

Finally, there is a mobilisation towards 'Sudan' as a national homeland. This is largely a political mobilisation of government-critical groups; political opposition parties, social movements and rebel affiliates from all three migration phases. There is no shared political agenda behind this mobilisation. Rather, what unites them is a shared emotional motivation to belong to the political process of statebuilding. The process of imagining which produces the Sudanese diaspora is therefore not a political imagining of a homeland future, but rather the 'reflective imagining' of the Sudanese diaspora itself as an important political player in Sudanese statebuilding. These three diasporic identifications have not resulted in the formation of isolated diasporic groups: many individuals have interchangeable and overlapping diasporic identifications. Attendance at community/cultural meetings and political alliance meetings were roughly the same (average around 50 attendees). Demonstrations in UK cities were usually attended by around 50 activists and an annual protest in London regularly brought together around 250 - 300 Sudanese. The following sections detail these distinct and overlapping diaspora formation processes among UK Sudanese.

Regional and ethnic diasporas

Within the broader UK Sudanese population, there are multiple associations who orientate towards to ethnic, or regional 'homelands'. For example, *Darfur Union* (regional), *Massalit Community in Exile* (ethnic), *Nuba Mountains Solidarity Abroad* (regional). Some associations are well established and sustainable, others came and went within the time of fieldwork. In cases where associations do carry the 'Sudanese' moniker, such as the 'Manchester Sudanese Community', this national identification is often only rhetorical and many ostensibly 'Sudanese' diaspora associations conceal a tacit but upheld regional or ethnic entry requirement. Farooq, a leader of [Community Association 1] explained 'there are multiple

"Sudanese Community Associations" because every regional, tribal and political identity group wants to have their own association' (Feb 2014). Joy, vice chair of a London-based Sudanese community association described the organisation as 'mainly Northern [Nubian] or Kordofanian' (Jan 2014). In the same way Assal (2004) found there were non-Muslim and Muslim splits in the Norway diaspora, there is a sense that the shared homeland towards which UK Sudanese choose to collectively orientate often relates not to Sudan, as a nation state, but to specific regional parts of it or even specific ethnic communities within it.

The motivations towards these regional or ethnic homelands are complex and varied. In line with Silva (2009), there was evidence of a need to recover a lost sense of belonging. For example, Zahir said 'We should not forget our small country, Darfur. Wherever we go, we should keep our identity and remember that we are Zaghawa. I am speaking with my friends in my mother tongue to remember this' (Oct 2014). However, much more prevalent than this need to belong, was a need to atone for leaving. As Douhiba explained, 'we never wanted to leave but we are forced to do it […] it's not easy to be away and to feel that you are not doing anything […] We are trying to do what we can from here. We are trying to help' (Jan 2014). This gave rise to a sense of responsibility to connect with the people of a region or ethnicity. Farid claimed 'it is the worry for your family that provides the motivation to stay connected' (Sept 2014). When explaining why they were part of regional diasporic groups, most interviewees did not refer to feelings of alienation and the need to recover a sense of belonging, but rather explained that they had a duty to connect back to it.

The processes of imagining which are driven by these mobilisations to some extent involve the revival and celebration of regional or ethnic traditions. For example, during events, many people wear traditional dress and celebrations of music and food comprise efforts to restoratively remember the homeland. As Joy described, 'people come together to organise parties, to teach the youth about culture' (Sept 2014). However, attempts to revive the regional or ethnic cultures were often a side-story at diasporic meetings which were primarily focused on activism for homeland development. Sahar explained 'the purpose of [Darfur association] is to go about development for Darfur. People have nothing, it's very bad' (May 2014). Nadim recounted 'in August, they sent us [Massalit in Exile] a photo of a school in an IDP [internally displaced persons] camp where the classroom was completely destroyed. They were asking to see if we could help. We raised money here and sent it there – they started building two classrooms' (Sept 2014). While underdevelopment is a reality in peripheral areas of Sudan, it

is significant that these aspects are almost exclusively what is being remembered during diasporic mobilisations.

Not only was the homeland selectively imagined as a 'homeland in need' but it was imagined as specifically in need of diasporic assistance. Sahar explained 'We have to help them because if we don't, nobody else will' (May 2014). Often claims were made to be the only group of people with the appropriate access, skills and incentives to bring about development of homeland regions or ethnic groups. Abdul claimed 'we are perfectly positioned to help from here. In fact, it is much easier than when you are there [in Sudan] to help'. Zahir claimed, 'we are, at the end of the day, elites of those communities back home and we can help them to develop' (Oct 2014). As such, regional and ethnic diasporic identities are mobilised by a sense of duty arising from the need to atone for leaving. They are formed during processes of selectively imagining a homeland in need, and specifically in need of its diaspora.

Genocide diaspora

As well as the above mobilisation towards regional or ethnic homelands, there was also evidence of a mobilisation towards a shared experience of 'genocide' as a 'non-locative' homeland (Axel 2002). Unlike Abusharaf's (2010) observations of the USA mobilisations, this is not an exclusively Darfuri mobilisation. Those participating in this mobilisation were from Darfur, Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile, East Sudan and some from Khartoum. Importantly, the mobilisation specifically excluded some of the Darfuri political elites who arrived more recently and who disagree with the genocide indictment. The mobilisation therefore cut across ethnic belonging.

Processes of collective memorialisation are initiated during public demonstrations. 'Stop genocide in Darfur', 'Stop genocide in Nuba Mountains' and 'Al-Bashir to ICC [International Criminal Court]' are common slogans at Sudanese demonstrations and advocacy events (Observations: June 2013, May 2014, June 2014). Additionally, the campaign literature from a demonstration in June 2013 states 'General Bashir is waging new wars on the people of the Nuba Mountains, the people of the Blue Nile and the Bija people of Eastern Sudan. This regime must be stopped from replicating the genocidal acts committed against the people of Darfur'. Another campaign text from April 2014 states 'Genocide is a crime of "double intent". Al-Bashir has explicitly expressed his abhorrence of certain ethnic groups – for example, with his description of black non-Arab citizens as "black plastic bags" that must be cleared from the area'. As well as this, images comparing Bashir to the devil or Hitler appear on campaign

posters. This denotes the highly 'selective remembering' which produces this kind of diasporic identity. The homeland is continually constructed, not generally as a victim of underdevelopment, but specifically as a victim of genocide.

The mobilisation towards this non-locative homeland can be analysed as having two distinct and overlapping bases. First, there are clearly political interests in generating a genocide identity among those belonging to political movements such as the JEM and the SPLM-N. At the local level in Sudan, the indictment is seen by rebels as a means to delegitimise the NCP in the eyes of the international community and, in doing so, improve their chances of gaining power (Nouwen and Werner 2010). The same motivation is reflected in diaspora, as Mohamoud, a member of JEM's UK chapter, argued 'The main point is to get the UK to use their power to stop the crimes. One way of doing this is to get them to recognise that there is a genocide'. According to Shahid, affiliated to the SPLM-N, the campaign for genocide recognition 'is helpful because Bashir is trying to be the centre of change. When we send a message like that [that Bashir has committed genocide], the international community have difficulty accommodating him' (April 2014). Therefore, there are politically strategic mobilisations towards constructing the homeland as a genocide victim, in line with Adamson's (2012) claim that diasporas can be constructed opportunistically by power-seeking political entrepreneurs. This motivation clearly gives rise to a process of 'reflective' as opposed to 'restorative imagining' since the genocide is not 'remembered' but rather deliberately constructed.

This mobilisation towards a 'genocide as homeland' is in direct tension with those UK Sudanese whose political agendas reject genocide recognition. In particular, the newly arrived political elites, whose opposition to the government is based on incompetence and neglect, and not ethnic identity politics. For example, among members of some social movements, such as the *Sudanese Shadow Cabinet*, *Sudan Change Now*, and *Girifna* there is a specific resistance to the memorialisation of Sudan's conflict as genocide. As Mohammed explained 'It's not ethnic discrimination. It's not a problem between African and Arab. It is rooted in ideological differences between the *Sheikhs* and the *barbas*. The problem in Darfur was not caused by racial discrimination' (March 2014). Similarly, Douhiba argues 'They always divide people from Sudan from African to Arabs. This is what we didn't want to happen […] We have Christians, Indians, Jewish people in Sudan and the government tries to create problems for all ethnicities' (Jan 2014). These groups are committed to a different reading of the history of civil war. Therefore, many UK Sudanese specifically exclude themselves from mobilising towards

'genocide' as a homeland. To this extent, there is no attempt across all UK Sudanese to 'incorporate multiple histories' (Alexander 2013, 592) because the multiple histories are mutually exclusive.

As well as the political mobilisation towards a genocide homeland, others within the mobilisation used the term with far more elasticity. For many, their use of the term 'genocide' does not denote a government-sponsored annihilation of 'Negroid ethnicities', as claimed in the ICC indictment. Rather, 'genocide' is deployed to indicate the scale of marginalisation and poverty caused by the civil war. As Mahjid described 'genocide is accurate, look at the civilians, […] Thousands of people have been killed, their villages have been razed. If that's not genocide what is?' (April 2014). For Mahjid, the conditions for 'genocide' had been met because of the scale of civilian suffering. It had very little to do with the intentionality to destroy an ethnic or racial group which is so central to its legal definition. Abdul stated, 'people are being targeted because they belong to political parties. They are committing genocide on a political class!' (Observation, Jan 2014). Being unaware that military aggression targeted at political parties is explicitly not 'genocide', in legal terms, Abdul indicates the definitional openness with which the term 'genocide' is invoked by many of those involved in this mobilisation.

As such, some of those mobilising towards genocide as homeland were emotionally, rather than politically motivated and many making these claims for genocide recognition did so while being unaware of the political currency it carried. When motivated emotionally, rather than politically, processes of imagining involved selective remembering of suffering through drawing on real memories of humanitarian crises. This mobilisation is distinguished from the 'reflective remembering' used by those constructing the genocide for political ends. Therefore, within the UK Sudanese, there is a loose coalition of political and emotional mobilisations coming together to imagine a homeland of genocide.

Sudanese diaspora

As well as orientations towards regions, ethnicities or genocide experiences as 'homelands', orientations towards the homeland of the 'Sudanese state' also occur among UK Sudanese. While some ostensibly 'Sudanese' associations conceal another shared identity, the Sudanese identity does also form a pin point of collectivisation. For example, organisations such as *The Sudanese Campaigning Alliance, Sudanese Alliance of Political Forces,* and the *Sudanese Revolutionary Front Abroad* tend to be umbrella political campaigning alliances, as opposed to cultural organisations, in which representatives of political parties or social movements come

together to form a broader 'Sudanese' group. These Sudanese associations are specifically split into pro and anti-regime Sudanese. As Abdul claimed 'the ones on the other side [pro-regime] can have their Sudan, and we can have ours' (June 2014). The pro-regime contingent are often referred to by the anti-regime Sudanese as 'the other Sudanese'. It is widely known among UK Sudanese which 'Sudanese organisations' are pro or anti-regime. This cuts across common class (university educated), and religious (Muslim) identifications which are often shared by both pro and anti-regime Sudanese.

Among the anti-regime contingent, there is no shared political agenda beyond a vague desire to change the government. This charter of [Sudanese political alliance] expresses the desire to consolidate as one diaspora on the project of Sudan's recovery from civil war:

> because we know Sudan is heading for complete collapse, influenced by social injustice, authoritarianism, racial hatred [which affects] religious cohesion and social peace. We have decided to […] work as a group/collective united with different people who focus on democracy, protest, pluralism, difference. (Extract from Agreement of [Sudanese political alliance] 2013)

In their orientations towards 'Sudan' as homeland, the groups which were disparate in processes of memorialisation, have agreed to 'work as a group/collective' and be 'united with different people'. Zahir, from the JEM UK Chapter, stated

> The people from Darfur are completely separate from those in the North [Nubia] and they are believing that there are problems between us. I told them what we are doing as Darfurians is wrong […] they are our friends and not at all our enemies. Let us work together in the short and the long term. In the short term to get rid of the government and in the long term to build Sudan together (Oct 2014).

Zahir, expresses a desire to collaborate with those in the North [Nubia] and Khartoum, with whom no common ground could be found when 'remembering' the 'genocide'. He hopes they can 'work together' to change the regime and 'build Sudan together', thus indicating the desire to politically imagine a future homeland with those whom no agreement on the homeland past could be found.

However, these attempts to perform as a united 'Sudanese diaspora' are undermined by admissions of infighting and the realisation that the only point of agreement is the need to change the government. Nadim observed 'When the Darfuris go out on demos, the Communists

will go as well but it doesn't mean anything' (Sept 2014). Often meetings of political alliances end in arguments and no concrete plans are made about how to implement plans to 'build Sudan together'. Talib, a *Girifna* member, was angry that political alliance meetings mostly end in disagreements and no actions are agreed. He said 'I came all the way to Manchester from Liverpool for this meeting and it was a waste of time. We just spend the time arguing and don't do anything!' (Feb 2014). As such, processes of politically imagining the homeland future consistently fail before they have begun.

The political differences within the alliances are, to some extent, based on historical inequalities which reflect divisions in Sudan. These are exacerbated by the hierarchies produced by patterns of arrival. For example, Dawood, a member of the UK chapter of the Beja Party who arrived in the late 2000s stressed the often exclusionary politics being played out in diaspora alliances. He claimed that the [Alliance] was deliberately excluding the participation of his party: 'We are not getting invited. You put this name and not that name on the [invitation] list. Why?!' (Aug 2014). Those who have recently migrated from the impoverished East often meet in the UK with those from established communities of professionals who arrived before 1989 and are marginalised from decision-making. The power relationships between the established diaspora (from Nubia and Khartoum) and the newer arrivals (from impoverished Darfur, East Sudan, Three Areas) are therefore made prominent in the attempts to mobilise towards Sudan as a homeland.

As well as this, disagreements stem from what kind of political change is needed in Sudan. Shahid explained 'Everybody has a different idea about what will happen' (April 2014). In this sense, the kind of statebuilding envisioned in diaspora was to some extent determined by the time of leaving Sudan. Many who had migrated before Bashir's reign were arguing for reunification with South Sudan and the implementation of John Garang's socialist 'Vision of a New Sudan'. However, this strategy was seen as outdated by some members of newer political parties from Khartoum such as the SCoP and the DUP. Others, from the student-led social movements such as the *Sudanese Shadow Cabinet*, want to implement a constitutional revolution. These plans are objected to by reformists in the political establishment, as well as those in rebel movements, JEM and SPLM-N, who also have their own ideas about Sudan's future as a state.

In the face of political differences which prevent any meaningful statebuilding activism from taking place, the collective mobilisations towards Sudan as homeland nevertheless continue. This is because mobilisations towards Sudan are being made, not in the name of

political opportunism, but by a coalition of individuals motivated by an emotional need to belong to a national homeland which is changing without them. For example, Sulyeman admitted that many of the UK Sudanese believe that 'if we really want to change things, we have to go back. If somebody doesn't say that, he is lying' (June 2014). Abdul expressed concerns that 'There are many voices […] but our voice is not that strong, it should be stronger. We will drive the change' (June 2014). Douhiba lamented 'It is very sad to leave your country. But, we are very connected to Sudan and we are here to shape the new Sudan' (Jan 2014).

Despite the difficulties in negotiating a shared homeland future, there is awareness among the UK Sudanese that their involvement in Sudan's political development partially relies on them uniting as a national diaspora and using their diasporic positionality to demonstrate their relevance to Sudan's growth as a state. As Musa explained, 'In 75% of our political activities, we work together because if we work together, we can do something' (May 2014). This exemplified the recognition among the various Sudanese groups that speaking together as one diaspora, increased their chances of being part of statebuilding. As Sahar noted 'we need to work together to build peace in Sudan. We will be strong if we can work together' (Sept 2014). Therefore, there is sufficient incentive to construct a national Sudanese diaspora, comprised of all regional, ethnic and political groups from all three phases of Sudan to UK migration, despite having no shared process of political future-making. It is precisely because of this emotional need to belong to statebuilding that many among the UK Sudanese recognise their need to mobilise as a Sudanese diaspora, as opposed to, for instance, a Darfuri one or a Nubian one. Even in the absence of a shared place of *origin* or *destination,* a collective mobilisation towards the Sudanese state sustains. A Sudanese diaspora emerges during processes of imagining the Sudanese diaspora itself, as a means through which the individuals within it can belong to Sudan's statebuilding project.

Conclusion

This article has asked why and how diasporic identities have formed among Sudan-born residents of the UK. It concludes that there are three distinct types of diasporic identifications being made by UK Sudanese: a) mobilisations towards regional or ethnic homelands which are motivated by a responsibility towards the people left behind. These produce restorative remembering among those from the same ethnicities and regions which are selective of homeland underdevelopment, b) mobilisations towards the experience of 'genocide', as a homeland, which are motivated either politically and/or emotionally. These produce reflective

and selective remembering among a coalition of political party actors and members of solidarity groups across the peripheral areas in Sudan, c) mobilisations towards Sudan, as a new state, which are motivated by the emotional need to belong to homeland statebuilding. Given that these produce failed attempts at shared political imagining among all kinds of government-critical political parties, social movements or campaigning groups, Sudanese diasporic identities are therefore produced during processes of imagining a united Sudanese diaspora.

Following this empirical investigation, some theoretical implications can be drawn relating to the questions of *why* and *how* diasporas form. First, the case of UK Sudanese diaspora formation demonstrates the fluidity of emotional and political diasporic mobilisations. Mobilisations which are seemingly politically-based can include emotionally motivated members. They may not necessarily have been co-opted in, but may share in processes of imagining in order to meet their own parallel needs. Political diasporas can also form in the absence of any shared political agenda, when it is emotionally expedient to conjure the illusion of a single diasporic project. This can result in a diaspora formation in the absence of a shared mobilisation towards either a homeland past or future. These political and/or emotional motivations are also affected by the experience of leaving and the act of diaspora formation becomes part of attempts to reckon with those, consolidate them, and come to terms with them.

This investigation also shows that diasporas can form during processes of *parallel* remembering or *parallel* future-making, as opposed to 'shared' or 'negotiated' remembering or future-making. Processes of remembering genocide in Sudan did not happen through 'the incorporation of multiple histories' (Alexander 2013, 592). Rather, political groups constructed their own version of genocide in parallel those who were defining genocide as humanitarian crisis. Yet, they were part of the same diasporic mobilisation towards the experience of genocide. Furthermore, the mobilisation towards Sudan as a statebuilding project, involved separate and isolated future-making in parallel political groups within broader Sudanese alliances. Overall, this investigation highlights the robustness of the shared need to belong as the central kernel of diaspora formation: it can initiate and sustain diaspora formation in the absence of the shared need to remember a homeland or shape its future. It demonstrates that diaspora formation can happen in a very conscious and deliberate way, as a means to an end, rather than as a consequence of a shared emotional or political motivation.

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