

Project Proposal



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council

SECTION 1: PROJECT PROPOSAL AND CASE FOR SUPPORT

Proposed Project Title:	Constitution-making in Sudan		
Project Summary: (Maximum 100 words)	Since independence in 1956, Sudan's constitution has repeatedly been a focus for rival projects to shape Sudanese society: to build the nation, to reform it, to overturn historical inequities or to guard against secular influences. In the contemporary context of a moment of transition in Sudan – after the 2019 revolution – this project will explore that history. In partnership with the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and with the Rift Valley Institute as a second partner, the project will provide the student with both a training in historical research and experience in disseminating research-based knowledge to policy audiences in government and in civil society.		
Name of non-HE Partner Organisation:	Research Analysts Department, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (secondary) Rift Valley Institute		
Name of Contact at non-HE Partner Organisation:	Dr Cedric Barnes Dr Mark Bradbury	Email Address:	Cedric.barnes@fcdo.gov.uk Mark.bradbury@riftvalley.net
Primary AHRC Subject Area:	History		
Secondary AHRC Subject Area (if Interdisciplinary):			
Does the project Include a creative practice component?	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
If you have listed two subject areas above, do you consider the project to be interdisciplinary?		YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	
If Yes, please briefly state why: (Maximum 100 words):			
Please provide full details of the proposal and make your case for support below: (Maximum 750 words)			
<p>Context</p> <p>In 2019, the regime of Omer el Beshir in Sudan crumbled in the face of mass popular unrest; a new transitional government was created, pledged to a far-reaching programme of reform including a constitutional conference and agreement on the principles of a permanent constitution. Shafie Khidr, seen by some as the 'godfather' of the transition, has hailed this constitution-making as the mechanism for a 'historic bargain' for Sudan's future (<i>al-Quds al-Arabi</i> 24 November 2019). Yet this is the third time since Sudan's independence that an authoritarian government has been overthrown and hope for the future has been placed on constitutional change to end chronic violence and persistent inequality: in 1964 and again in 1985 there were similar moments of political opening and optimism. That constitution-making has an unhappy record. On both those occasions, the process was bitterly contested and became mired in disagreements until military governments seized power. For much of the last sixty-five years Sudan has operated under various 'transitional' constitutions.</p> <p>Research questions</p> <p>This problematic history has now an urgent relevance to a process of transition which is the focus of substantial international attention and multiple projects of intervention and support. Yet the potential lessons of these processes have received little attention. Warburg's work (2003) has stressed the centrality of the debate over secularism, but otherwise the failure to agree on a constitution has been seen simply as further evidence of the shortcomings of a political elite shaped by colonialism and drawn almost exclusively from Sudan's northern riverain</p>			

heartland, unwilling to decentralize power, insensible to other perspectives and incorrigibly inclined to personal rivalries (for example Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, 2008); Mirghani al-Nasri's book (1998) is unusual in addressing constitution-making directly. The thesis of northern riverain dominance lies at the centre of much academic writing – and, indeed, political action – on Sudan (Lesch, 1998; Sharkey, 2008). Through close examination of the debates around the constitution, this project will build on that analysis, but will also ask whether it is too blunt and restrictive, and will provide new historical insight on why constitution-making has been such an intractable challenge in Sudan. The precise focus of the research will be a matter for discussion with the student, but central questions will be:

- Why did so many different actors see the negotiation of the constitution as a key tool for political work?
- How were those processes of negotiation devised: what assumptions drove the mechanisms established, and who was seen to have a valid voice, and how did the process itself constrain outcomes?
- Why was secularism so prominent in these debates?
- What other issues – the electoral system, transitional justice - were the focus of debate, and why?
- What kinds of external intervention or support were involved, and how far were these constraining or enabling?

The project will also seek comparative lessons from a third process: the negotiation of the 2005 transitional constitution for Sudan. This underpinned the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the process that led up the secession of what is now South Sudan in 2011. The research will explore how and why it was possible to reach agreement on that constitution, through considering the central questions outlined above.

Research methods

The project will involve a combination of documentary research and interviews with individuals who participated in or have direct knowledge of the processes, in Sudan and elsewhere. Documentary research will be undertaken in the archive at Durham (for the 1960s and 1980s); in the National Record Office (including the newspaper collections) and the National Library in Khartoum; and in the papers of the Sudan Communist Party and National Democratic Alliance in the Institute for International Institute of Social History collections in Amsterdam. This project comes at a particular moment of opportunity, as access to documents in the National Record Office has become much easier in the transition period, making available archive resources for the 1960s and 1970s that were previously closed to researchers. This will be supplemented by work in diplomatic collections in the UK and US national archives.

All these collections will be approached as evidence in themselves, not just as sources: the project will be informed by an awareness that the nature and preservation of this documentary record itself may tell us about the exclusions and silences of the negotiations, and the student will seek to triangulate the evidence offered by different documents and the interviews to identify those processes.

The effects of COVID on the research programme are difficult to predict; fieldwork is not expected to start until late 2022, however.

Please provide details of any resources and facilities, including details of any high cost equipment, fieldwork, training, etc., that may be required to complete the project successfully, and where you will seek these resources (e.g. NBCDTP; partner resources; departmental/school funds). Please include estimated costs:

(Maximum 200 words)

Research timetable and associated costs:

12 months in Durham (research and language training; research on Durham material; during this time the student will spend a total of 10 weeks in London for archive work and induction with RVI)

[6 months placement with FCDO London – if Northern Bridge approve this]

1 month archive work, Netherlands and US

9 months Sudan: interview/archive work

9 months Durham (analysis, drafting; a total of 6 weeks in London for work on dissemination)

3 months with FCDO London [this will be moved earlier if the placement above is not approved by Northern Bridge]

8 months Durham (completion; a total of 3 weeks in London for events/dissemination)

Costs: language training (Durham): £1,450; rail travel within UK 10 return journeys @ £100: £1,000; the periods spent in London will be done in the most cost-effective way possible, but will involve some overnight stays while the students's normal residence is elsewhere: assume total of £1,000; international travel flights and visas £3,000; accommodation in Sudan 9 months: £2,700.

Funds will be sought from NBCDTP and department resources.

Please outline the arrangements for communication between the partner organisation and academic host organisation in regard of the project management and the monitoring of academic progress:

(Maximum 150 words)

Willis has an established relationship with Dr Cedric Barnes, who will be responsible for the student while they are working with FCDO and Dr Mark Bradbury (the CEO of RVI) and Magnus Taylor (who runs the Sudan programmes of RVI and will be directly mentoring the student) and will communicate with them weekly whenever the student is with their organisations. There will be formal meetings (virtual or physical) involving Willis, Berridge, Barnes and Bradbury at set points in the project: the first after 3 months and then at 6 monthly intervals thereafter, with a short written report submitted by the student in advance of each meeting and a timetable agreed at each meeting for the next 6 months of work. Barnes, Bradbury and Taylor will also receive copies of the regular progress review documents produced by the department.

What benefits will accrue to the student and the partner organisation as a result of your collaboration?

(Maximum 300 words)

Involvement with Research Analysts will give the student direct experience in the process of providing research-based knowledge to policy makers in government; by the latter part of the studentship the student will draw on their own research to do this. There will be an intellectual gain to the student, as the experience of working with policy makers will provide insight into the longer history of international interventions in Sudan and the challenges and problems of these. The student will gain experience of involvement in the writing of briefs, the provision of answers in response to specific questions, and participation in meetings with those involved in making and implementing policy. Through RVI, the student will gain direct experience of the – slightly different – skills and processes involved in research-based advocacy work: preparing material for wider dissemination through social media, organizing public events and producing publications, discussing research with partner organisations. Involvement with RVI will also give the researcher excellent access to Sudanese civil society organisations. This will allow them to discuss the co-production of research outputs; given the continuity of some individual and group involvement in advocacy around the constitution, this access will also provide an introduction to potential interviewees.

FCDO will derive intrinsic benefit from the project: the UK government is closely involved in support for political transition in Sudan, and will welcome research insights that improve this programme of support. In terms of process, the student will provide support to the Research Analysts team in their role of providing evidence-based advice. For RVI, there will be a significant public engagement benefit from the project, allowing them to produce better-evidenced briefings and advocacy material to audiences in Sudan and internationally. The proposed research will complement this programme, and connect to long-running projects such as the Sudan Open Archive (<https://sudanarchive.net/>)

Please briefly state what financial (if any) or in-kind contribution the partner will be making over the duration of the award:
(Maximum 100 words)

Research Analysts will provide working space and mentoring to the student in the UK throughout the period of their placement and in subsequent period. Mentoring will primarily be provided by Dr Barnes, but will also involve other members of the Research Analysts team for specific assignments. Research Analysts will also arrange for the security clearances required to work within FCDO. RVI will not provide dedicated workspace (as the student will spend limited time there physically), but will provide workspace on an adhoc basis as well as individual mentoring from Magnus Taylor, the member of staff responsible for the Sudan programme.

Please describe the nature of the collaborative arrangement and the activities the student will be taking with the organisation:
(Maximum 300 words)

This project is modelled on a successful previous CDA cooperation with Research Analysts (Natalie Moss, supervised by Willis 2011-15). In the second year of the project, the student will spend a six months' placement with Research Analysts in FCDO in London, gaining experience of processes and the ways in which research-based knowledge is involved in policymaking and implementation; this will allow the student to work directly with experienced members of the Research Analysts team in the daily tasks of providing evidence and advice. In the final 18 months of the project the student will spend a further three months with Research Analysts; it is expected that by this time, in addition to continued working with other staff, they will be able to bring their own research skills and knowledge to the role. Over the course of the first year of the student will spend a total of three weeks with RVI staff in London, focussing on specified tasks relating to other aspects of RVI's Sudan work, and particularly the dissemination of this to users. In the final eighteen months of the project the student will spend a total of four further weeks with RVI, focussing specifically on Sudan-related tasks relevant to the doctoral research, and making use of the networks and opportunities provided by both institutions to present findings from the research to relevant audiences through briefings, public statements, blogs and other means. This may include making documents available through the RVI's Sudan Open Archive, where this is appropriate.

SECTION 2: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

First Supervisor:	Justin Willis	School/Department:	History
Second Supervisor:	Willow Berridge	School/Department:	School of History, Classics and Archaeology
Additional Advisor:		Organisation/Institution:	
Additional Advisor:		Organisation/Institution:	

Explain how the expertise of the supervisory team and external advisors will allow them to support the proposed project and the selected student:
(Maximum 500 words)

Justin Willis has significant research experience in Sudan (as well as extensive experience in research elsewhere in Africa). He was an editor of *The Sudan Handbook*, co-author of *Elections in Sudan: Learning from Experience* (which was the result of research funded by the UK government) and was course director of the RVI's Sudans Course for a number of years. He has supervised 12 doctoral students to completion and is currently supervising a further three. He has published widely on African history, with his recent work focussing on the

period since the 1950s. Willow Berridge is the author of the only English-language historical monograph on Sudan's 1964 and 1985 revolutions and she has extensive previous experience researching in Sudan, including use of the combination of newspaper, archival and interview sources that will drive this project, and she will be able to provide direct mentoring for the student in the dealing with Arabic-language documents, based on her own extensive experience in working with these. Berridge's monograph on the Islamist intellectual Hasan al-Turabi also explored the Islamists regime's efforts at constitution-making and the theories of divine sovereignty that underpinned it. She has taught on the RVI's Sudans Field Course and has presented to a number of policy audiences including the FCO and State Department. She is currently co-supervising two PhDs.

SECTION 3: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

Please provide details about the research environment the selected student will be joining and its suitability:

(Maximum 500 words)

Durham University is the UK's academic centre for study of Sudan, and the home of the Sudan Archive. The History departments at Durham and Newcastle have a total of seven full-time, non-fixed-term staff working on African history; three of these (Berridge, Leonardi and Willis) work on the history of the Sudans. The Durham University Centre for Contemporary African History provides a forum for regular cross-disciplinary seminars involving colleagues from departments of Anthropology, Geography and the Governance and International Affairs/Politics in Durham and Newcastle. Durham regularly hosts visiting scholars working on Sudan and other parts of Africa, and there is a thriving community of Africanist doctoral students in humanities and social science disciplines across the two universities, including several interdisciplinary supervisions. At Newcastle, the project would speak to two important research themes in the School of History, Classics and Archaeology at Newcastle: Empires and After, and Conflict and Revolution.

The two universities offer a programme of research training that is both rigorous and supportive, which will be crucial to negotiating the ethical aspects of the project. The training programme covers speaking to policy audiences and managing overseas fieldwork, as well as advanced training in undertaking, transcribing and analysing oral historical interviews. The training also offers a close engagement with questions about the relationship between power, knowledge and the historical record that are central to this project; this will enable the student to reflect on the moral and intellectual challenges of a project that involves working with the UK government and with other external actors seeking to shape Sudan's transition.

Ethics training is central to the doctoral training programme. The student will be working on a topic which is by nature sensitive, and their relationship to FCDO may complicate this further. Securing proper informed consent from all those involved as interviewees will require absolute transparency in respect of that relationship, and the training programme will enable the student to develop a robust protocol and documentation for this, which will be evaluated and (if necessary) improved through the internal ethics procedures at Durham. The training will also enable the student to establish clear procedures for the handling of research data to ensure that this is treated securely and confidentially in line with academic best practice; again, procedures for this will be evaluated as part of the ethical approval process.

SECTION 4: STUDENT SPECIFICATION

For further information about this Collaborative Doctoral Award and to submit an expression of interest, please contact:

Lead Supervisor (or alternative Contact)	Justin Willis	Email:	Justin.Willis@durham.ac.uk
Expressions of interest must be received no later than:			20 December 2020
Expressions of interest should be accompanied by the following documentation:			A personal statement of not more than 500 words explaining why you are interested in this opportunity, and how you think your skills and experience are appropriate.
Interviews for shortlisted candidates are expected to take place:			Week commencing 25 January 2021

APPLICANT SPECIFICATION

Note, applicants must also meet the criteria for the acceptance on a doctoral programme as set out by the host institution's Postgraduate Admissions Service.

Education and Professional Qualifications	Essential Criteria	Undergraduate degree in History or a related discipline, with at least a strong upper second Masters degree in History or a related discipline, with at least a Merit
	Desirable Criteria	Previous study of African history and politics
Research and Impact Experience and Training	Essential Criteria	
	Desirable Criteria	Previous research experience relevant to modern African history; previous experience of advocacy
Professional Practice and Job-related Experience	Essential Criteria	
	Desirable Criteria	Previous experience in research analysis and/or civil society
Interpersonal Skills	Essential Criteria	Strong communication skills; an ability to engage audience attention and to establish relationships of trust with interlocutors
	Desirable Criteria	
Other Factors	Essential Criteria	In order to pass FCDO vetting, applicants need to have a minimum of two years' residence, including 12 months of continuous residence, in the UK in the preceding ten years. The student will need to sign an agreement with FCDO covering standards of behaviour, propriety, values and confidentiality
	Desirable Criteria	Speaking/reading ability in Arabic; previous knowledge of Sudan