

## TELLING THE STORY THEIR WAY: THE ARTS & SOCIAL ACTION IN THE SUDANS

11 January 2016 | Room 4429 | SOAS, University of London

**Speakers:**     **Ali Mahdi Nour** (Albugaa Theatre Sudan, UNESCO Artist for Peace)

**John Martin** (PanArts, London)

**Chair:**         **Angela Impey** (SOAS)

The chair welcomed everyone to the third seminar of the series on Sudan and South Sudan organised by the Centre of African Studies, SOAS in collaboration with the Society for the Study of the Sudans (UK).

Dr Impey introduced the seminar by noting that there is a tendency in to relegate art, music and theatre to the scholarly margins in highly conflicted countries such as the Sudans, yet in practice, these expressive forms play a significant role in promoting communication and in shaping the social and political life for ordinary citizens. She then introduced the two speakers for the evening: Mr. Ali Mahdi Nour, an acclaimed Sudanese stage and film actor and theatre director from Khartoum, who has a long history of humanitarian work in Sudan, and John Martin, Director of Pan Intercultural Arts in London, who has introduced forum theatre in schools in South Sudan in order to tackle current social problems.

Ali Mahdi's presentation began with a brief photographic history of his work with theatre for development in Sudan from the 1980s to the early 2000s. He then described his subsequent establishment of theatre in conflict zones, which uses highly dynamic, participatory methodologies to promote peace building and social reintegration in conflict and post-conflict regions of Darfur.

John Martin discussed the approach of 'Pan Intercultural Arts' to the use of theatre, music, art and creative writing in promoting agency amongst marginalised communities both in the UK and in South Sudan. He was quick to point out that working with vulnerable groups in London, such as with gangs involved in knife crime, produces similar challenges to those faced when working with child soldiers. He contested the popular notion that art and music becomes peripheral in times of conflict. On the contrary, it is often artists who contribute reflective or critical voices and who offer a glimmer of hope to traumatized nations. He concluded his presentation with a discussion about his work in South Sudan, which involved the establishment of theatre groups in 24 secondary schools across the country and their use forum theatre to promote open dialogue and reflect on local needs, interests and experiences.