

# *Expeditionary Culture*

## *Field Guide*



## SUDAN & SOUTH SUDAN



**U.S. AIR FORCE**



# About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success (Photo a courtesy of Flickr © Rita Willaert).

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 introduces “Culture General,” the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment.



Part 2 presents “Culture Specific” Sudan & South Sudan, focusing on unique cultural features of Sudanese & South Sudanese society and is designed to complement other pre-deployment training. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location.



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# PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

## What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.



Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual

symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, representing the importance Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

## Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and

economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

### **Cultural Domains**

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize these behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as “cultural domains” – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems among others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the ways different cultures define family or kinship, a deployed military member can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

### **Social Behaviors Across Cultures**

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for



universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

## Worldview

One of our basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different according to our cultural standard.



As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Consequently, we assume

that individuals falling into the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

# 12 Domains of Culture



This collective perspective forms our worldview – how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for our actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

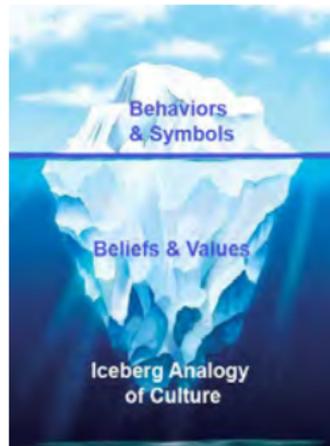
### Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is physical evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central facet of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have help shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.

### Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the



deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout the African Continent, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common among most African countries. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

## CULTURAL DOMAINS

### 1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.



Africa has a history that spans the entire existence of humankind. In ancient times prior to the emergence of written languages, history and wisdom were preserved across generations and

ethnic boundaries through oral folk legends or myths. Most early human evolution began as hunting and gathering cultures in East and South Africa, with countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa renowned for their early human sites. In the last several millennia, the development of agriculture and pastoralism (animal herding) replaced hunting and gathering lifestyles (Photo: *Kutubiyya Mosque* courtesy of CultureGrams, ProQuest, 2013).

Ancient civilizations evolved in all corners of Africa, inspired in part by peoples from the Middle East bringing trade, beliefs, customs, language, and on occasion, colonization. Far from being isolated empires, the African civilizations were intimately connected by commerce and marriage throughout various regions of the continent, and when confronted by outsiders, managed to adapt to their influences. Eventually, Arab traders introduced Islam to Africa and also instituted the Trans-Saharan African slave trade that lasted from the 7th to 19th Centuries.

The “golden age” of European exploration, which lasted from the 18th to mid-20th century, prompted the wholesale exploitation of Africans resources – first human assets through slavery, followed by natural resources such as minerals, precious gems and metals, and wildlife, thereby diminishing most of what was traditional and African.

The introduction of the European Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade altered the slave trade through both the sheer number of Africans enslaved and through the cementing of a racist ideology of Black inferiority to legitimize the institution of slavery. Slavery decimated the African continent for over 400 years through the forced relocation of an estimated 25 to 30 million Africans worldwide. This figure does not include those Africans who died aboard ships or during capture. While abolition of the slave trade dissolved the institution of slavery, it did not end the European



presence on the African continent nor did it drastically alter their attitudes towards Africans.

Starting in the mid-19th century, European colonialism served to redefine African ethnic relations on a large scale; however, as African societies began to resist colonial rule and seek their independence, widespread ethnic conflict and genocide occurred. Sustained westernization and globalization continue to shape the continent through poverty, disease, and social reform. A history still to be recorded, Africa's future identity faces many challenges in critical areas such as environmental change, ethnic strife, women's health and security, and education.

## 2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community.

Traditional African political organizations in the form of bands, tribes, and chiefdoms have existed for several millennia and continue to influence contemporary African governments. Uncommon in modern society, bands



are limited to hunting and gathering economies, such as the !Kung of the southern African Kalahari Desert and foragers of central African forests.

Tribes are still represented today across the African political landscape, although the use of the word "tribe" is sometimes misinterpreted due to its western notion of "primitiveness" and oftentimes substituted with the term "ethnic group." Lacking centralized authority, tribes are organized around segmented descent groups or in some cases age groups.

Everyday governance is discharged through councils of respected elders and sanctioned through ritual and other means. East African pastoralist groups such as the Maasai,

along with some West African tribes and the Berbers in North Africa, represent this type of organization.

Chiefdoms or kingdoms are ruled by kings or queens from a royal clan and generally incorporate millions of subjects. Kingdoms such as the Zulu or Swazi in southern Africa developed through conquest, while others like Ghana's Ashante developed through an association of related traditional states. However, colonialism eventually diluted the power and



reach of these empires, whose leaders were often retained as indirect rulers or figureheads.

Today, all three of these political organizations still exist, although in the confines of modern African nation-states created by

colonial powers who had little regard or understanding of African cultures. This juxtaposition of modernity with tradition has caused severe conflict throughout the continent.

Challenged to construct their respective “national” identities, regional leaders attempt to do so by diluting the traditionally cohesive power of ancestry. These national ruling elites, who derive their power from wealth and commerce rather than tribal affiliation, feel threatened by loyalty to these traditional organizations, labeling their rule as “tribalism.”

This “class versus descent” scrimmage for power has resulted in conflicts across the continent and a dramatic divergence of interests. As a means to overcome these and other issues on the continent, a 55-nation federation, the African Union (AU), was formed in 2002. AU's charter is to promote “greater unity and solidarity between African countries and peoples” by building partnerships in all segments of “civil society.”

### 3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer

individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society. Prior to the arrival of Islam and Christianity, the African continent consisted of orally transmitted indigenous religious practices. As in many societies, African indigenous beliefs influenced diet, subsistence patterns, family structures, marriage practices, and healing and burial processes. In essence, Africans constructed their worldview through their indigenous religions.



Today, the African continent is primarily either Muslim or Christian. Other faiths such as Judaism and Hinduism exist as pockets in different regions of the continent, primarily in urban areas. The historical trajectories of Islamic and Christian

expansion in Africa offer intriguing commonalities in how Africans across the continent initially reacted to the introduction of each of those religions. For example, it is common throughout the continent to find a blending of many elements of indigenous religious practices with local Islam and Christianity (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia).

Consequently, many African native religions share similarities with religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in their understanding of God as the creator and ruler of all life, although He is considered untouchable by humans.

However, unlike Christianity and Islam, many African indigenous religions believe that God is not directly involved in people's lives. To them there is a spirit world populated with former good and bad human beings. The good spirits intercede with God on behalf of their living families to whom they then relay God's will through dreams and acquired possessions. The bad spirits work to bring misfortune through sickness,



death, or natural disasters to those who behave inappropriately.

Many indigenous African religions revere "nature" spirits living in the sky, water, and forests. These impersonal spirits help protect people from harm and provide them with life's essential ingredients such as water, sun, and wildlife. This belief system is commonly referred to as animism.

Just as spirits mediate relations between God and humans, religious specialists act as mediators between spirits and humans to provide protection from harm.

#### 4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin"). The traditional African family with respect to marriage, family structure, and descent is a much different arrangement than is found in most American families. Likewise, there are several components of the traditional African family that are common to all African cultures.



First, perhaps the most difficult feature to reconcile to Americans is that of polygyny – the practice of a husband having more than one wife. A benefit of this arrangement is that it promotes societal alliances through marriage, procreation, and family wealth through female labor.

Second, due to polygyny, the family in most African cultures has historically consisted of an expanded set of kin or relatives that extends well beyond the American notion of a nuclear family. This arrangement created a family environment where children considered all siblings as "brothers and sisters" and all of the wives/mothers as "mother."

Third, the extended African family traces descent through either the male or female side of the family, a practice which differs considerably from the American family. Patrilineal descent (through the male side of the family) is the more common approach and usually features polygyny. The matrilineal (through the female bloodline) marriage pattern is more uncommon and almost always features monogamy – it is rare to encounter a wife having more than one husband.

Lastly, it is common for two or more blood lines (lineages) to share a common ancestor and collectively form a clan, which is the largest social unit. Clans do not have formal leaders or organizational structures. Membership is transferred from father to child and cuts across ethnic and social boundaries.

The dramatic social changes in Africa during and after colonialism in the last 4 decades have obviously affected the traditional family, and variations on these 3 features can be found across the continent.

## 5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles. Gender roles in Africa follow no single model nor is there a generalized concept of sex and common standard of sexual behavior.

Prehistorically, gender role differentiation in Africa's hunting and gathering cultures was based on a division of labor featuring different, yet complementary, sets of responsibilities for males and females, adults and children. Females gathered

over half the caloric needs from natural vegetation, while also reproducing and raising offspring. Males were primarily hunters but also assisted with gathering.

These gender patterns continued as agricultural practices advanced.



Females shared in farming while continuing to provide for the family's subsistence, and males produced the cash crops. Pastoralists like the Maasai of Kenya traditionally have featured males involved in cattle-raising and females in food production.

The 19th-century European colonial period introduced a cash economy into Africa, with female labor used to produce the cash crops. By inserting male authority over females, colonial administrators disrupted the distinct yet complementary male/female relationship that had been traditionally African.

More recently, western influence across the continent has dramatically altered the traditional gender roles. Educational and professional opportunities for females, along with increased family migrations to urban areas, have radically altered traditional male and female gender roles.

Likewise, the number of single parents and even child- or other relative-led families has increased with the predominance of HIV/AIDS-related deaths and warfare, further altering traditional gender responsibilities. Additionally, ethnic conflicts involving abuse of women are prevalent in many unstable countries, and while the rubric of traditional African gender generally remains, the forces of change are gradually ripping it away.

## 6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally. America is predominantly a monolingual society, where traditionally, fluency in a second language has been considered a luxury rather than a necessity.

Conversely, national survival for many societies in Africa required them throughout their existence to adopt multilingual



practices, if for no other reason than to preserve their native heritage.

You may find it challenging to comprehend the scope of Africa's linguistic diversity. There are over 2,000 African languages (many spoken-only) from 6 major language families, and perhaps 100 of these languages are used to communicate among the more dominant ethnic groups such as Berber, Swahili, Yoruba, and others.

Official languages of African nation-states are few, yet the linguistic diversity expressed across the continent (Nigeria has 250 languages) has prompted an awareness of the value of Africa's linguistic traditions. While most areas of the continent speak the adopted language of their colonial past – such as French and Portuguese in West Africa, French and Arabic in Morocco, and English in Kenya and South Africa – the majority of people also speak one or more traditional “indigenous” languages of their and other ethnic groups. As African independence spread throughout the continent, ethnic groups continued to depend on their indigenous identifiers, such as language, to celebrate their “release” from colonial rule and to

preserve a sense of indigenous identity.

While communication styles tend to vary by ethnic or social groups, Africans generally are friendly and outgoing people although they tend to communicate with reserve to avoid

confrontation. As in most kin-based societies, Africans believe that saving face or protecting one's honor and dignity are of utmost importance; therefore, they avoid public criticism and controversial topics at all costs – even to the extent of withholding their honest opinion or modifying the truth.

Africans admire and even expect extended greetings and small talk, and to attempt to rush or avoid social graces is considered disrespectful. Similarly, Africans avoid direct eye contact when communicating with new acquaintances and people of status,



particularly elders. They also are fond of non-verbal gestures, and it is common throughout African societies for members of the same gender to hold hands or touch while conversing.

## 7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.



The contemporary African educational system hardly resembles the traditional pre-colonial structure, whereby community elders were primarily responsible for preparing youth for adulthood. Their instruction included fundamentals of ethnic ritual and ceremony, along with customary protocol for their distinctive gender roles. A rite-of-passage commemorating their successful journey from childhood to adulthood served as a form of graduation.

European colonialism brought a more structured, formal educational system that catered to a small group of African elite who demonstrated potential to administer expanding colonial territories. Following independence, many African nations adopted the European system because they believed it would prepare them to be more competitive in intra-continental and global marketplaces, thereby enhancing their quality of life.

However, progress in developing and maintaining reliable educational institutions has been slow for a variety of reasons. Since most Africans live in rural environments, they continue to rely heavily on child labor for family survival, resulting in decreased school enrollments or early withdrawals. Likewise, widespread HIV/AIDS epidemics, ethnic conflict, teacher and resource deficits, and inaccessibility to remote rural areas also hamper progress. According to 2020 statistics, about 86% of

the continent's children were enrolled in primary school, leaving over 28.6 million African children without any schooling at all.

## 8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In low-context western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. Conversely, most African cultures are traditionally high-context societies, whereby people center their activities on socializing and establishing close associations, having little regard for the passage-of-time.

Only after establishing trust and honor will your typical African counterpart agreeably proceed with business. In his worldview, time is a precious commodity used to establish relationships



and form alliances. Any attempt to accelerate the tempo at the expense of social pleasantries will likely result in deadlock.

To an African, close physical proximity between individuals encourages cooperative trust, and for centuries they have viewed human linkage as

a core element to survival. This closeness is best represented in a traditional African village where strong kinship connections are evidenced by a display of close interpersonal relations among family members.

While conventional African concepts of time and space remain intact, throughout the continent western influence and globalization have stepped up the pace of African living, mostly in urban areas. Consequently, rural-to-urban migrations have reshaped traditional social and subsistence patterns.

## 9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Prior to 19th-century European colonization of Africa,

recreation served a vital subsistence role, whereby adolescents and adults alike participated in intellectually stimulating leisurely activities that concurrently served to develop essential hunting and pastoral skills.

Games of chance and skill were important to early childhood development, providing social outlets within and outside their community. Featuring wrestling, jumping and running; traditional African sport was steeped in religious ritual.



Along with colonialism came the introduction to Africa of western sports such as soccer, cricket, rugby and track and field. This emphasis on western sport continued to thrive with African independence and globalization, as seen in sporting events such as the Olympics and the World Cup.

Leaders such as Nelson Mandela skillfully employed sport to promote a unified South African nation. Importing the predominantly “white” game of rugby, Mandela used it to fuse a racially divided country following his election in 1992. This event is the theme of the motion picture “Invictus,” exemplifying how sport can serve to create national identities and overcome ethnic division. His efforts have inspired many other African nations to follow suit.



Likewise, East African countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia have produced the world’s dominant male and female distance runners, and South Africa, Cameroon and Nigeria emerged as strong contenders in the 2010 World Cup. African nations are now competing in leagues such as the International Basketball Association (FIBA) World Championships, and there is also a

growing number of African basketball players on US college campuses and in the National Basketball Association (NBA).

## 10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Despite having only 17% of the global population, Africa is a victim of many of the world's debilitating health disorders. According to the World Health Organization, 68% of the global HIV/AIDS cases and 95% of malarial diseases occur in Africa.



These and other medical conditions are attributed primarily to viral infection and widespread poverty caused by extreme climatic conditions and civil unrest, coupled with inadequate preventative measures. While extensive drought generates widespread famine, civil disturbances generate millions of displaced persons. Likewise, with only 64% of the Sub-Saharan African population having access to basic drinking water, water-borne bacterial diseases such as cholera and schistosomiasis are common.



Many people in Africa lack access to western medicine, and as a result depend on traditional health practices to combat disease. In addition, some traditional beliefs run counter to western medical practice and perhaps discourage individuals from utilizing those services even when they are available. This problem is further intensified by lack of federal regulatory healthcare management.

While modern healthcare procedures are more common in urban areas, many rural people rely on traditional practitioners who use a variety of plants and herbs to treat patients. Similarly, many families have their own secret remedies. While in some cases traditional medicine proves effective with fewer side effects than modern drugs, traditional practices do not adequately treat many of the more serious conditions.

On a positive note, western influence has stimulated some progress in combating Africa's health crisis. More resources are devoted to achieving basic human security by assessing disease symptoms early and with scientific accuracy.

## 11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Traditionally having an agrarian-based economy, Africa today remains predominantly agricultural, featuring less industrialization than most other parts of the world. Post-colonial adversities such as civil war, disease, poverty, and unstable dictatorships posed unusual hardship on several young African nations; however, Africa currently stands



at the cross-roads of economic development with many nations becoming some of the fastest growing regions in the world.

Colonialism institutionalized the exploitation of Africa's mineral resources, resulting in today's oil industry dominating the economic market in several coastal regions. A surge in global oil prices; a growing African middle class; and reduction in civil wars, foreign aid, and inflation collectively promise a more positive outlook for the future.

Countries such as Botswana, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and South Africa are economically the wealthiest on the continent, with regions such as East Africa showing signs of economic stability. Despite the economic upswing, much of sub-Saharan

Africa's future economic prosperity is held hostage by devastating diseases such as AIDS, particularly in areas of southern Africa, and the growing effects of climate change and man-made environmental degradation throughout the subcontinent.

## 12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Africa lags far behind most of the world in manufacturing capacity and output. Even the more economically-developed nations such as South Africa are competitively weak when compared to non-African industrialized nations. During the 1970s and 1980s, Africa experienced some growth in raw exports although this increase did little to boost long-term manufacturing capacity.

Today, Africa is experiencing an actual decline in manufacturing capacity due primarily to a lull in the global economy, along with other indigenous issues such as environmental stress, poor physical and organizational infrastructure, and a shortage of skilled personnel. Likewise, African manufacturing capacity is no match against global powers such as China and significant Southeast Asian markets.



International aid from both governmental and non-governmental organizations has helped African nations establish preliminary economic footholds. For example, many of them have dedicated industrial developmental zones to attract foreign investment and increase export-related manufacturing capacity, although Africa is far removed from having a significant role in the global marketplace in the foreseeable future.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize African society at large, we will now focus on specific features of Sudanese & South Sudanese society.

# PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

## 1. HISTORY AND MYTH

### Historical Overview

Dating back 3-4 million years to the early Stone Age, modern-day Sudan was one of the earliest civilizations (Kingdom of Kerma) to develop along the Nile River Valley, where it served as a trading hub between Central Africa and Egypt. By 1500 BC, the Egyptians extended their influence



southwards along the Nile River into an area that today comprises northern Sudan and southern Egypt, naming it the Kingdom of Kush (also referred to as Nubia). Consequently, Sudan's population today reflects a blending of Mediterranean (particularly Greek), Arab, and indigenous African populations that began with Egyptian rule.

In the 13th-century BC, Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II (known as



“Ramses the Great”) sanctioned the building of *Abu Simbel*, which were two massive rock temples (picture a courtesy of Wikimedia) in Nubia to honor himself and his wife, Queen Nefertari. The structures were also intended to display a show of force to the

Nubians. Ramses is considered the Egyptian Empire's most powerful and celebrated pharaoh.

While Egyptian power was at its height during the 14th-century BC, it began to diminish in the 8th-century BC when a lineage of Nubian chiefs having neither political nor familial ties with Egypt emerged. The first, Kush King Kashta, ruled from the Nile city Napata, further north of present-day Khartoum. The Nubian capital was later moved further south to the city of Meroe during the 3rd-century BC (Pictured: Pyramid in Meroe). Bounded by the Butana, a region bordered by three rivers (the Nile, Atbara, and Blue Nile) with fertile territories, Meroe became the most famous of Nubian kingdoms because its wealth remained anchored in commerce, along with iron production. Kashta's son Shabaka became the first Nubian king to live in Egypt and serve as Pharaoh. He is renowned for consolidating the Nubian Kingdom's control over Egypt from Nubia to the Nile Delta.



### **Advent of Christianity**

Although influenced by neighboring Christian nations to the north (Egypt) and southeast (Ethiopia), it was not until the 6th-century AD that missionaries from the Byzantine (Roman) Empire brought Christianity to Sudan. During its early Christian era, Sudan was affiliated with the Greek Orthodox Church of Alexandria, Egypt and later with Ethiopia's Kingdom of Axum, which along with Egypt was one of the first African nations to adopt Christianity.

### **Spread of Islam**

In the 7th century AD, Axum eventually declined due to a shift in control of major trade routes to Muslims in Arabia. Subsequently, Arabs invaded Egypt bringing Islam to Egypt and its border with Nubia (Northern Sudan). While Islam would eventually become a dominant feature in Sudanese society, Nubia remained Christian until falling under Muslim Egyptian rule in the 15th century. Of note, Muslim geographers named the area south of the Sahara Desert *Bilad al-Sudan* or "the land of the burnt faces." Sudan remained independent until 1821 when Egypt

[then part of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire] colonized the region (for slaves, ivory, and gold), establishing a Turko-Egyptian administration.

### The Blue Sultanate

While the Ottomans managed to colonize the Red Sea coast, they were initially unable to reach northern Sudan's interior where Funj tribesmen founded the Sultanate of Sennar or Blue Sultanate (outsiders sometimes refer to it as Black Sultanate) in its capital, Sennar, during the early 16th century. Becoming a renowned Islamic cultural center, the Sultanate flourished during the 17th and 18th centuries, extending along the Nile Valley from the Egyptian border to the mouth of the Blue Nile and beyond (Graphic: the 18th-century Sultanate of Sennar and surrounding states). Eventually, the Ottoman regime gained a foothold in the northern interior, absorbing the Sultanate and northern Sudan into the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, the greater part of Southern Sudan remained an area of fragmented tribes vulnerable to slave raiders.



### The Mahdi



Between 1881 and 1885, a Sudanese Muslim leader, Muhammad Ahmad Abdullah, led a successful revolt against Egypt and the Ottomans. Proclaiming himself the Mahdi or the “messiah of Islam,” Muhammad Ahmad sought to unite Sudan’s western and central tribes into a united Mahdist State. Assuming the name “Ansars” (the followers), which they continue to use

to this day, Mahdi forces drove the Egyptians from Sudan and established control. The Ansars are associated with Sudan’s largest political entity, the Umma Party (currently led by Sadiq al-Mahdi, a descendent of the Mahdi).

### The Anglo-Egyptian Condominium

Sudan remained independent until 1898 when joint Anglo-Egyptian forces under British Lord Horatio Kitchener (pictured

below) conquered the Mahdist State, with Egypt allowed to rule Sudan under British authority until 1956. Administered by a British Governor General, the new government (known as the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium) implemented a policy of Indirect Rule, particularly in the Arab Islamic north, where it remained a colony under military occupation with some functions of governance delegated to local tribal chiefs.



However, for the predominantly indigenous Black African South, the British had more ambitious plans for exploiting its natural resources. Relatively untouched by outsiders, southern Sudan consisted of a variety of indigenous ethnicities which retained their traditional tribal belief systems. Seeking to disrupt Islam's spread into the South, the British instituted the "Southern Policy" designed to promote an influx of Christian missionaries aiming to convert southerners to Christianity while also teaching them English as a unifying language.

These different regional approaches led to segregation between the north and south, with the educated and politically astute viewing this distinction as a British plot (to include northern slavers) to establish separate national boundaries. While perhaps not their intent, British actions eventually created division and animosity between the two regions. Consequently, the favored northerners were enabled to prosper, while marginalized southerners remained neglected.

### **Nationalism**

Sudan's nationalist movement began to develop in the northern Muslim provinces following World War I (1914-18), with the nationalists divided between those favoring unification with Egypt and those promoting a pro-independence movement.

After Egypt's independence in 1922, Sudan was realigned directly under British control. In 1942, the Graduate's General Conference, a nationalist movement founded by educated northern Sudanese, demanded autonomy from the British government. While Great Britain ignored Sudan's plea, it did

seek reform by decentralizing local governments and establishing a semi-elected legislative assembly. Boycotted by members of the National Unionist Party (NUP), the elections resulted in a pro-independent legislative assembly that in 1952 drafted a constitution calling for a prime minister and council who



in turn would form a bicameral (dual-chamber) parliament. On January 1, 1956, an independent Sudan was inaugurated.

As with the British, the Arab-led government in Khartoum continued to marginalize the South, reneging on promises to extend its federal system into the South. Similarly, Arab Muslims occupied most of the influential government posts, despite comprising only 39% of the country's total population. With the predominately

Christian South immediately alienated, Sudan was thrust into 17 years of civil war.

### **First Civil War (1955-1972)**

In 1958, General Ibrahim Abboud staged a coup that ushered in a 6-year military dictatorship whose emphasis on Arabization (Arab supremacy over indigenous Black Africans) of the South further fueled southern opposition towards the Muslim government. In 1964, Abboud was overthrown and replaced by a series of civilian governments, followed by Jaafar an-Nimeiri and the "Free Officers" movement seizing power in 1969 and introducing the Declaration of Regional Autonomy.

Forming the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), Nimeiri and his co-conspirators promptly suspended the constitution and all political parties, except the ruling Sudanese Socialist Union (SSU). Nimeiri's dictatorship was legitimized in a 1971 election (could only vote for Nimeiri). The next year in an effort to gain support from the Christian South, Nimeiri signed the Addis Ababa Agreement granting Southern Sudan autonomy.

United in peace for the first time since independence from Britain, Sudan started its recovery from war through expansion of cotton and sugar industries and the discovery of oil in the

south. Despite these efforts, peace and prosperity in Sudan lasted only 11 years. The North felt that it was overtaxed to assist southerners, while the South felt robbed of resources to benefit the North.

In 1983, after 10 years of relative tranquility, Nimeiri abolished the Addis Ababa Agreement, stripping the south of autonomy and instituting the Arabic language and shari'a (Islamic) law throughout the country. In retaliation, the South led a series of rebellions led by Dinka army defector John Garang (pictured), forming the Sudan's Peoples Liberation Movement and Army (SPLM/A) – events that launched Sudan into another 22 years of civil war (see *Political & Social Relations*).



### Second Civil War (1983-2005)

As the second civil war began to escalate in 1983, public discontent for Nimeiri mounted and in 1985, his revolutionary government and the SSU were overthrown in a popular uprising



in Sudan's capital. The newly elected civilian government under Sadiq al-Mahdi made little effort to restore peace and stability, failing both to negotiate a cease-fire with the SPLM/A and suspend shari'a law in the South. Consequently, in 1989 Sudan's prominent Muslim

political party, the National Islamic Front (NIF), and the RCC retaliated with General Omar Al-Bashir (pictured) leading a NIF-sponsored coup that overthrew al-Mahdi's civilian administration. Bashir named himself prime minister and reinstated shari'a law nationwide.

Bashir imprisoned protestors in detention centers known as "Ghost Houses," closed newspapers, and strictly censored

broadcast media. Sudanese women and children were the foremost recipients of torture violating international human rights standards.

In 1990, Sudan's prominent opposition Islamic leader and founder of the NIF, Hasan al-Turabi (pictured, courtesy of AFP/Khaled Desouki 2009), established his dominance in the NIF. Inspired by the First Gulf War, Turabi also formed the Popular Arab and Islamic Congress (PAIC) as an international mechanism to promote Islamic revolution and anti-imperialism. Eventually, the PAIC's Islamic world views would infuse radical ambitions into much of Sudanese society.



Similarly, Turabi later hosted Osama bin Laden, Mullah Omar, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Hamas, Carlos the Jackal, and other radical leaders in Khartoum. Eventually, Turabi and bin Laden would form an alliance sealed when Osama allegedly married

Turabi's niece as a third wife. Consequently, Turabi arranged for bin Laden and al-Qaida to become an operative in Sudan, although they were later deported to Afghanistan. Through Turabi's influence as NIF spokesman, Bashir opened Sudan as a sanctuary for Islamist groups from neighboring countries, an event that along with other atrocities eventually influenced the UN Security Council to impose sanctions on Sudan in 1996 (see *Political & Social Relations*).

The SPLM/A continued to expand its reach as both Muslim and non-Muslim populations joined in protest of government anarchy and its imposition of Islamic law. Consequently, Bashir chose to sustain his military offensive against the South, which for the most part, was fought on southern territory at the expense of heavy casualties – there were more than two million southern Sudanese fatalities during the war with four-six million more displaced internally or in neighboring countries.

## Lost Boys and Girls of Sudan

Of those displaced southerners, over 20,000 of them were orphaned boys primarily from the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups in ages 5 to 15 whose parents were either killed in the war or displaced (see *Political & Social Relations*). There were also a few Lost Girls, although a larger number of girls than boys failed to escape. Fleeing to Ethiopia to avoid death or slavery, these boys then walked another 1,000 miles to the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya – about half of them perished enroute (Photo courtesy of DRP's Photostream Pro via Flickr).



In 2001, about 4,000 Lost Boys were offered asylum in the US; while others relocated to other parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. The girls who did make it to Kakuma were placed either with surviving family members or adopted by other families, although a few girls managed to relocate abroad.

Those refugee children relocating to the US were placed in 38 cities throughout the country, where they received government-subsidized accommodations for the first 3 months, although afterwards, they were on their own. Subsequently, a number of humanitarian organizations, particularly church groups and local African communities, became involved in helping the newcomers integrate into their new society.



Of note, some of these refugees achieved fame in their new home, particularly in the sports and entertainment professions. The most prominent is Luol Deng (pictured), who initially was granted asylum in Great Britain and at age 14 moved to the US. He became a basketball icon at Duke University and has been playing in the National

Basketball Association (NBA) since 2004. Similarly, millionaire Alek Wek was granted asylum in Great Britain where she achieved fame as a professional model (Photo a courtesy of Wikimedia).

### **Comprehensive Peace Agreement**

Peace talks brought a ceasefire in 2001 followed by an end to civil war in January 2002. Thereafter, a series of negotiations culminated in the SPLM/A and the Sudanese government signing a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005.

In July 2002, the first component of the CPA, the Machakos Protocols, was signed, serving as a joint statement of intent to end the war. It further established a 6-year interim period in which the South would be self-governed as the Government of South Sudan (GoSS). At the end of that period, the South was granted a popular vote to determine its future destiny – unite with the North or secede to form an independent nation.

Similarly, in 2004, the two regions agreed to share oil revenues and previously disputed territories, with sharia law enforced in the north, while non-Muslims in the South were allowed to worship freely. In January 2005, the CPA was finalized, with Omar al Bashir remaining President and leader of the northern region; John Garang installed as First Vice President (VP) and President of GoSS; and Ali Uthman Muhammad Taha as Second VP to head a transitional government of national unity.

### **Garang's Death**



It was only 3 weeks later that Garang was killed in a helicopter crash in the Didinga Mountains. This tragic event resulted in rioting and chaos from mourners protesting that his death was an act of sabotage. Investigations failed to confirm those suspicions. Garang is remembered as the only Sudanese leader in the country's modern history who fought for nearly 25 years to secure a democratic and secular, yet unified Sudan. His successor, Salva Kiir Mayaradit

(pictured previous page), was elected to Garang's position in 2010 by a 93% popular vote.

In January 2011, a referendum vote was administered in which the South voted to secede from the North and become an independent republic. Consequently, there were a number of obstacles Sudan had to overcome in preparation for termination of the CPA and official establishment of an independent southern nation. These issues included negotiations on citizenship, continued oil sharing, border demarcation, and Sudan's crippling debt of near USD \$40 billion. While the Republic of South Sudan became an independent nation on 9 July 2011, it did not occur without disagreement and continued conflict, as these issues were not fully resolved.

### Darfur Conflict

The Sultanate of Darfur (land of the Fur) existed as a loosely organized feudal society for about 5 centuries, which like Sudan's Muslim north, adopted Islam around the 18th century



during Arab expansion. Concurrent with early 19th-century Turkish-Egyptian rule in Sudan's northern interior, the Fur tribe formed the western Darfur state (depicted in darker shade to the left).

During Sudan's colonial era, the British ended a long succession of Sudanese sultanates in 1916, with Darfur absorbed into greater Sudan. Preoccupied with developing the fertile Nile River region near Khartoum, the British neglected the partly arid and somewhat barren Darfur region to the west. Consequently, at the time of independence in 1956, Darfur was basically impoverished and continued to be marginalized by the more prosperous Arabic North.

Darfur, like Abyei (discussed below), is comprised of a mixture of Arab nomads and indigenous Black African farmers from the Fur, Massalit, and Zaghawa communities (along with Arab Baggara) who through centuries of intermarriage have come to

share a blended heritage and the Islamic religion. While The Zaghawa subsists as camel herders, they do not claim to be Arab – an issue that only complicates regional conflict. Historically, most Darfurians have maintained cultural ties with their respective ethnicities (Darfur has over 40 ethnic groups), as opposed to conforming to a Muslim identity.



### Libya's Muammar Qadhafi

Tensions between Darfur's Arab and non-Arab residents emerged during Sudan's civil war, whereby Darfur became involved in various internal and external conflicts. With many Darfurian soldiers joining ranks with their northern Muslim brethren against the south, Libya's Colonel Muammar Qadhafi (pictured, courtesy Wikimedia) concurrently established Darfur as a military outpost in his quest to establish an Arab Libyan Sudanic empire by first overthrowing the Khartoum government (which was unknown to Bashir at the time and never occurred). Qadhafi's plan was to build a military presence in Darfur and expand his sphere of influence into neighboring Chad, already embroiled in civil war.



Ultimately, Qadhafi's military posturing in Darfur only served to promote Arab supremacy and ethnic tensions, leading to an Arab-Fur war (1987-89) that left thousands dead. When Bashir seized power in 1989, he partnered with Qadhafi and recruited *Janjaweed* ("devils on horseback" in Arabic) fighters to continue promoting Arab supremacy among Darfur's Massalit people and eventually win the war against the South. The *Janjaweed* forces consisted primarily of demoralized Arab nomadic soldiers who employed violent means to achieve "Arabization." Bashir found

it convenient and cheap to employ these ethnic militias to fight as his proxy forces, allowing him to “deny” involvement in the conflict.

Eventually, Khartoum’s relationship with Libya dissolved, with Bashir regaining limited control of Darfur, where he proceeded to disarm the Fur. In 1994, Bashir further divided the region into three districts, each having only a dispersed Fur minority, and installed administrations to sustain Arabization. Similarly, tensions continued to mount between the nomadic Arabs and resident farmers over land, grazing rights, and water.

### Modern Conflict

Consequently, an insurgency emerged in Darfur during the early 21st century. Inspired by SPLA’s success in the civil war, two main rebel groups – the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) – formed an alliance against the Sudanese government. In 2001, the rebels staged an assault that reignited the existing conflict in Darfur. Following a series of attacks and cease-fires, the SLA/JEM gained momentum against Sudanese military forces.

In 2003, the government retaliated with a *Janjaweed* (pictured) offensive designed to ethnically cleanse Darfur of Black Africans (see *Political & Social Relations*), according to genocide advocates. Villages were demolished with survivors fleeing to the desert and neighboring Chad – many of them dying enroute. In the course of 8 years, an estimated 300,000 Darfurians perished with nearly 3 million displaced (Photo is a courtesy of Wikimedia).



In December 2007, the United Nations assumed command of the African Union’s Darfur peacekeeping operation which was established in 2004. Following a number of attempts to broker a truce, in February 2010 the Sudanese government and the JEM failed to sign a ceasefire thereby shattering prospects for an eventual formal peace agreement, which has yet to be achieved. Then,

in May 2011, the JEM began supplying mercenaries to Qadhafi's forces fighting Libyan rebels.

### **Abyei District**

One of Sudan's most contentious political issues involves ownership of the oil-rich and fertile Abyei district. A spillover conflict from Sudan's civil war, the Abyei conflict has thus far resulted in more than 160,000 displaced persons and several casualties.



Concurrent with the January 2011 referendum vote in the South, Abyei

was scheduled to hold its own vote and choose allegiance with either the North or the South. However, the vote remained in deadlock, with the largely pro-northern Misseriya (Arab) nomads – who seasonally migrate into Abyei's fertile grazing areas – demanding a right to vote.

Conversely, Abyei's permanent residents, the southern Dinka Ngok tribesmen, insist that they alone should determine Abyei's destiny, claiming Abyei as their exclusive homeland and viewing the Misseriya as guests with no land rights. As the notable majority group in Abyei, the Dinka historically aligned with the Arab North to gain protection from slave raiders and access to formal education. However, subsequent northern repression has persuaded them to align with the South.

In June 2011, hostilities broke out in Abyei's neighboring South Kordofan (northern Sudan's sole oil-producing state) between the Sudanese Armed Forces and SPLA forces, displacing more than 60,000 non-Arab Nuban residents. On June 20, 2011, the Government of Sudan and the SPLM signed a joint agreement providing for temporary administration of the Abyei area, its demilitarization, and the deployment of an Interim Security Force for Abyei (ISFA) composed of Ethiopian peacekeepers.

**Myth:** (see *Learning & Knowledge*).

## 2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

### Official Names

- Republic of Sudan
- Republic of South Sudan

### Capitals

- Khartoum
- Juba

### Political Borders

- Egypt: north
- Red Sea: northeastern
- Eritrea, Ethiopia: east
- Kenya, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo: south
- Central African Republic, Chad, Libya: west



### Features

- Collectively covers over 967,000 sq. mi. and slightly larger than 25% of continental US land mass – Africa's largest and the world's 10th largest country prior to its 2011 partition.
- Terrain generally flat, featureless clay plain, with mountains far south, northeast, and west. Desert dominates the North.
- Divided into three geographic regions – northern desert, northeast Red Sea coastline, and southern tropics.
- The desert North [Nubian Desert to the east and Libyan Desert to the west (includes Darfur)] receives infrequent rainfall. Dry northerly winds produce sandstorms called *haboobs* – daily temperatures range from 40F-110F.
- Rainfall in the tropical South ranges from less than 4 inches in desert areas to about 60 inches in the savannahs and mountain rain forest. Annual temperature averages 80F-85F.
- The Red Sea Coast averages 60 inches annual rainfall, with a rainy season from April to October – downstream flooding is common. Climate is temperate compared to desert areas.

- The White Nile from the south and Blue Nile from the east merge with the greater Nile River near Khartoum.

### Sudanese Flag

Basically, a replica of the WWI Arab Revolt flag, it consists of 3 equal horizontal bands of red, white, and black with a green triangle on the left side. Red represents Sudan's struggle for freedom; white stands for peace, light, and love; while black symbolizes Sudan itself (in Arabic Sudan means "black"). The green triangle symbolizes Islam, prosperity, and agriculture.



### Southern Sudanese Flag

The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) entitled the South to display its own national flag (see *History & Myth*) consisting of three equal horizontal black, red, and gold bands and a blue triangle with gold star to the left. Black represents the identity of its 10.6 million people, while red commemorates the bloodshed that southern Sudanese sacrificed during the civil war, and green for agricultural potential. The star against a blue background represents the Nile River.



### Power Sharing

Historically, Sudan's political system has been plagued by political turmoil and civil war, which ended in 2005 when rival leaders implemented a peace agreement (see *History & Myth*). While Sudan was mandated a single-party political system in 1989, political associations were permitted as long as they upheld the constitution and refrained from advocating violence against the government.

Under the CPA and an interim constitution, Sudan formed a power-sharing government with a dual-party system between the northern National Congress Party (NCP) and the southern Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). It embodied a two-tiered legal system consisting of civil and religious courts with three branches – executive, legislative, and judicial.

## Interim CPA Government

The interim CPA government operated under the guidance of two newly-established constitutions, the Interim National Constitution of the Republic of Sudan and the Interim Constitution for the Republic of South Sudan. The interim government consisted of a President serving as head of state with 2 Vice Presidents each representing the south and north respectively. Consisting of representation from both the north and south, the National Legislature was the official Sudanese parliament further divided between two chambers – the National Assembly and the Council of States collectively consisting of 500 appointed members serving 6-year terms. The existing National Judiciary was retained, as described below. On 9 July 2011, the CPA was terminated, with the South becoming an independent nation (see *History & Myth*).

## Republic of the Sudan (Former Sudan's North)

Historically, Sudan's legal system is based on both English common law and Islamic law. While Islamic law remains valid in the north, the CPA established some protection for non-Muslims in Khartoum. Islamic law no longer applies to the south (see *History & Myth* and description below).



Upon seizing power in 1989, then-President Omar al-Bashir transformed Sudan into a single-party state with the NCP its official political party.

Subsequently in 1997, Bashir formed a republic of 25 states with respective state executives and cabinets appointed by the President. When South Sudan became a country in 2011, it was comprised of the 10 southern states. Sudan is currently comprised of 18 states, three of which were created after South Sudan's independence.

**Executive Branch:** In August 2019, the ruling military council and civilian opposition alliance signed a power-sharing deal as the "Sovereignty Council," chaired by General Abd-al-Fatah al-Burhan Abd-al-Rahman and consisting of 6 civilians and 5 generals. In October 2021, al-Burhan staged a coup which dissolved the Sovereignty Council, but he has since reinstated it and is again serving as Chairman.

**Legislative Branch:** According to the August 2019 Constitutional Decree, which established Sudan's transitional government, the Transitional Legislative Council (TLC) will serve as the national legislature during the transitional period until elections can be held in 2022; as of early 2022, the TLC had not been established.

**Judicial Branch:** The National Supreme Court consists of 70 judges organized into panels of 3 judges and includes 4 circuits that operate outside the capital. The Constitutional Court consists of 9 justices including the court president; note - the Constitutional Court resides outside the national judiciary.

**National Congress Party:** Follows ideologies of Islamism and Arabism and its main supporters are from the north.

**Defense:** The Sudanese Armed Forces consists of land, naval (includes Marines), and air forces; as well as paramilitary defense force (the Popular Defense Forces). Numbering about 104,300 active duty members (2021 estimate), Sudan's defense capability is hampered by obsolete equipment and inadequate force posturing, although in recent years, oil revenues have allowed Sudan to unveil a 20-year force modernization plan. Of note, Sudan has purchased weapons systems from Russia, China, and Libya.

**Popular Defense Forces (PDF):** Formed in 1989, the PDF is a paramilitary force composed of 20,000 active members with 85,000 reserves who augment the Sudanese Army. Initially, the PDF was used to counter the SPLA, although their effectiveness weakened due to poor recruiting and training.



**Air Force:** Numbering about 3,000 personnel, the Sudanese Air Force (SAF) is estimated to have about 139 combat and transport aircraft in its inventory, with the Russian-built SU-25 being the most modern, and 5 batteries of surface-to-air missiles.

The SAF main operating base for combat aircraft is *Wadi Sayyidna* north of Omdurman, with transport aircraft located at Khartoum. Similarly, there are an additional seven auxiliary airfields available for use.

## Sudanese Air Force Rank Insignia



General



Lieutenant  
General



Major  
General



Brigadier  
General



Colonel



Lieutenant  
Colonel



Major



Captain



Lieutenant



Second  
Lieutenant



Sergeant  
Major



Technical  
Sergeant



Sergeant



Corporal



Senior  
Aircraftsman

## Republic of South Sudan (GoSS)

The Constitution of South Sudan and the principles in the CPA define the GoSS structure and responsibilities.

**Executive Branch:** The executive branch consists of the President (Salva Kiir Mayaradit as of 2011, pictured) elected to a 4-year term, First Vice President (Reik Machar Teny Dhurgon since 2020), Second Vice President (James Wani Igga since 2016), and the Council of Ministers. The President is the head of GoSS and Commander-in-Chief of its defense force. The President appoints the Vice President and Council of Ministers, approved by the Legislative Assembly. The 2015 presidential election is postponed until 2023 due to instability and violence.



**Legislative Branch:** A now obsolete Legislative Assembly was established to adopt a 2005 Interim Constitution of Southern Sudan signed into force by President Mayaradit on Independence Day 2011. The National Legislature currently consists of 2 chambers, a National Legislative Assembly (550 seats) and a representative Council of States (100 seats). Legislative members serve 4-year terms. The next parliamentary election is to be held in 2023.

**Judicial Branch:** Consists of the Supreme Court of Southern Sudan, Courts of Appeals, High Courts, and County Courts.

**Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM):** Established in 1983 after the collapse of the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement, the SPLM is the South's largest political representative. The SPLM transformed from a movement to a political party after the signing of the CPA in 2005 (see *History & Myth*).

**South Sudan People's Defence Force (SSPDF):** The SSPDF's vision is to transform itself from guerrilla army to a modern and disciplined national force under civilian authority. Its mission is to defend the South's interim constitution and protect its people and territory. As part of the 2005 CPA, the Sudanese Armed Forces and SPLA forces would integrate to form the South Sudan People's Defence Force (SSPDF). Although

progress on professionalizing and restructuring the force remains unclear, the SSPDF was estimated to have 185,000 active frontline personnel including the South Sudan Air Force which was formed in 2011. The South Sudan Air Force operated roughly 23 aircraft in 2021.



## Security Issues

**Terrorism:** In previous years, Sudan has been known to support radical Islamist groups in Algeria while also providing a safe haven and training camps for Osama Bin Laden and his al-Qaida operatives. These actions among others led to the US State Department designating Sudan as a “State Sponsor of Terrorism” in 1993.



In 1996, international pressure on Sudan led to bin Laden’s expulsion (he fled to Afghanistan) while concurrently al-Qaida operatives in Sudan bombed the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania

and a pharmaceutical company in Khartoum. That same year, the UN imposed sanctions on Sudan for alleged connections to the attempted assassination of Egypt’s president, although some were later lifted with Sudan’s demonstrated willingness to align with the UN in its fight against terrorism. The US has recognized Sudan’s counterterrorism measures by removing them from the “not fully cooperating” list in 2004; however, Sudan remains on the “State Sponsor of Terrorism” list.

**Internal Conflict:** (see *History & Myth*).

**Border Disputes:** The boundary between Sudan and Chad has been a hotbed for cross-border conflict, whereby several thousand Darfurian refugees have sought asylum in Chad since 2003 (see *History & Myth*). Similarly, Sudan has ongoing border disputes with neighboring Egypt, Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, and the Central African Republic. Of note, Kenya has been recipient to a majority of Sudanese refugees fleeing from the south during the civil war.

**Landmines:** Although banned by the 2005 CPA, land mines were used extensively during both civil wars and continue to pose a significant threat particularly in rural areas in the south. United Nations operations have been underway to have the mines safely removed (IRIN Photo © Steve Flores: Woman deminer in southern Sudan).



### **Relations with the US**

Turbulent US-Sudanese relations have existed since Sudan's independence in 1956, although they worsened in 1967 with Sudan protesting US support for Israel in its third war with the Arabs. Then, in 1973, the US was inflamed when the Sudanese government released Palestinians who murdered a visiting US Ambassador and a Deputy Mission Chief in Khartoum. Consequently, the US recalled its US ambassador to Sudan and imposed economic sanctions.

Relations remained static until 1976 when the US restored its economic assistance after Sudan mediated the release of 10 American hostages in northern Ethiopia. Although Sudan was one of the largest recipients of US foreign aid, the US later suspended support as a result of Sudan's 1989 military coup against the Nimeiri government.

US-Sudanese relations were further strained by Sudan's support to terrorists and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, although the turn-of-the-century brought improved relations as bilateral dialogue on counterterrorism occurred following the 9/11 attacks on the US. However, in 2007, the US again imposed economic sanctions for Khartoum's continued support of ethnic-cleansing in Darfur.

On January 13, 2017, the United States lifted economic and trade sanctions on Sudan due to cooperation with the Sudanese government in fighting terrorism, reducing conflict, and denying safe haven to South Sudanese rebels and improving humanitarian access to people in need.

## Ethnicity

Approaching close to 59.5 million, the Sudanese and South Sudanese population has an annual high growth rate of about 3.7%. Historically, its accessible geographic location rendered Sudan attractive to a variety of ethnic groups who migrated from neighboring countries and integrated with native cultures. Today, most Sudanese generally are categorized into three groups by region and descent – African, Arab, or a hybrid of the two – and are typically distinguished as “Arab” or “non-Arab.” Besides ethnicity, skin complexion is also a defining feature, both of which emerged as root causes of much internal discrimination and conflict (see *History & Myth*).



### Ethnic Groups

Consisting of 19 ethnic groups and 597 subgroups, Sudan's major ethnicities include indigenous Black Africans (52%), Arabs (40%), the non-Arabic Muslim Beja (6%), and other (2%). The darker-skinned Black Africans are Nilotic peoples (evolved from non-Muslims along the Nile River Valley) who predominantly occupy Southern Sudan to include the Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, and Nuba subgroups among others. They predominantly adhere to Christian and indigenous religions practices.

The north has a major concentration of Arabs along with non-Arabic Nubians (found along northernmost border with Egypt) and Beja (occupy the Red Sea Hills region). Other ethnic groups such as the Fur, occupying the westernmost Darfur region, have African ancestry but follow Muslim customs. Pockets of Fur populations also exist in the north and central regions of the country, along with Nuba in southern Kordofan.

### Non-Arab Groups

- **Dinka:** Numbering roughly 4-4.6 million, the Dinka comprise the largest Black African and the second largest ethnic group in Sudan. Besides their darker complexions, the Dinka along with the Tutsi of Rwanda and Masai of Kenya are believed to be the tallest ethnic groups in Africa. Traditionally agro-pastoralists found predominantly in the South (some reside in

other regions) along the White Nile, Dinka consider their cattle as the centerpiece to their culture and sacrificial element of their religious traditions (see *Religion & Spirituality*).



Similarly, Dinka use cattle to meet their basic subsistence needs, although during the rainy season, they generally exist as sedentary farmer. Having a long history of inter-ethnic rivalry, the Dinka comprise the predominant representation in the SPLM with the first (John Garang) and current (Salva Kiir Mayaradit) GoSS Presidents both of Dinka descent. [Photo: **Francis Bok**, a

Dinka native who was a slave to an Arab militia for 10 years during the Second Civil War (see *History & Myth*) and currently an abolitionist and author residing in the US – courtesy of Wikimedia].

- **Beja:** Consisting of about 1.24 million nomads, the Beja comprise the second largest Muslim group (after Arabs) residing in eastern Sudan. They are renowned camel breeders and known to be great warriors. Today, Beja men traditionally carry swords in public to demonstrate their proud



heritage. Years of drought have forced many of them to seek sedentary lifestyles, particularly cotton farming.

- **Nuer:** Totalling about 2.1 million, the Nuer occupy the Upper (White) Nile region where they conduct a nomadic lifestyle similar to the Dinka. However, despite their resemblance, these two groups traditionally have been rivals due to a competition for resources and a creation myth. According to the legend, God had two sons, Nuer and Dinka. To Dinka God promised an old cow, while to Nuer, God promised a young calf. One night, Dinka deceived God by imitating Nuer's voice, with God giving Dinka the young calf. Allegedly, God then instructed Nuer to avenge his brother's deceit by raiding Dinka's cattle

forevermore. Consequently, the two adversaries have battled for generations, even during the civil war. Of note, former SPLM Vice President Riek Machar is Nuer.

- **Shilluk:** The Shilluk number roughly 390,800 members and also reside along the White Nile. As with other Nilotic groups they are herders and farmers and are also skilled fishermen using nets and spears. Due to their sedentary lifestyle, they have been able to establish permanent settlements and establish a centralized political economy. A King represents the group and has considerable political influence.
- **Nuba:** Straddling the divide between north and south Sudan, this group personifies indigenous non-Arab traditions.



Occupying the Nuba Mountains and some of Sudan's richest farmland, the Nuba acknowledge different belief systems to include Muslim, Christian, and traditional religions. They also are renowned for their wrestling and sorghum beer (Pictured: Nuba woman, courtesy of Wikimedia).

- **Zande:** The Zande (Azande is plural) is believed to have migrated to southern Sudan from the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Azande are mostly hunters, herders, and farmers, and number roughly 781,600.
- **Fur:** Numbering over 894,000, the Fur are indigenous black African Muslims and descendants of Darfur – its largest ethnic group. The Fur are mostly agriculturalist and herders who settled around western Sudan's *Jebel Marra* Mountains. They primarily speak their native tongue (Fur); although they also speak Arabic (see *Language & Communication*).
- **Nubians:** Known as people of the Nile, the Nubians are the third largest Muslim group in northern Sudan, having a written history paralleling ancient Egypt 5,000 years ago (see *History & Myth*). Of note, the Nubians actually built more pyramids than the Egyptians, although Nubians are also known for their innovative farming skills along the Nile Valley and their iron technology. Since the fall for the Christian Nubian Empire in the

14th century, the Nubian culture has experienced notable transformation, particularly with the spread of Islam and Arab culture in the region). The Arabs soon outnumbered Nubians as a result of conversion to Islam and intermarriage. While Nubians in the region compose less than 5% of the population a number of them hold key professional and political positions.



## Arabs

Arabs who initially migrated to Sudan were merchants, nomads, and religious campaigners. Besides the Islamic faith, they also introduced Arabian spices, architecture, and literature to Sudan. Through intermarriage and “Arabization,” they sought to institutionalize their Islamic traditions (see *History & Myth*).

Arabs in Sudan consist of two primary tribes – *Jaalayin* and *Juhayna*. The *Jaalayin* are agriculturalist living mainly on the Nile River, while the *Juhayna* nomads consist of *Kabbabish* camel herders residing in western part of the country and *Baggara* cattle pastoralists occupying southern Kordofan (part of Sudan’s centermost region) and parts of Darfur.

Since the country’s independence, Sudanese Arabs have come to dominate and control key government positions – a privilege retained from the colonial era. (see *History & Myth*).

## Social Relations

The key to understanding contemporary Sudanese culture is to anticipate diversity across ethnic boundaries. There is no singularly concise description for Sudan as a collective society, as each major ethnic group and historical region has its own unique method of expressing its culture.



### Stratification

Wealth and access to power symbolize the pinnacle of social stratification in modern Sudan, especially in urban areas where

the educated elite constitutes a small, yet politically powerful segment of society. Similarly, an honorable rural tribal chief or a revered spiritual leader holds authority within his community.

In traditional society, ethnic lineage determined social status and wealth, although today they are based more on resources than heritage. For example, rural wealth is measured by the amount of livestock or grain a person possesses, while urban wealth is based on material possessions.



Arab northerners normally have greater opportunities to acquire an education and economic success than non-Arabs, although upper-class southerners are able to attend Christian missionary schools.

### **Favoritism**

Favoritism in the workplace is a common practice in Sudan, with kin groups generally promoting their members over outsiders. For Airmen working with host nationals, you can best avoid this practice by explaining official rules which forbid social discrimination.

### **Social Etiquette**

Sudanese consider it a personal honor to entertain guests in their homes. While many of them live in poverty, they are charitable people and genuinely hospitable. It is appropriate for a guest to present the host an inexpensive gift (non-alcoholic in Muslim households) such as pastries or fruit, although you can expect your host to initially refuse to accept your gift as a sign of humility. Eventually, he will politely accept it. Hosts usually serve refreshments, with guests obligated to graciously accept as to decline could be offensive. Distinguished guests often warrant a meal in their honor.



### 3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

In terms of religious orientation, Sudan is predominantly a Muslim nation (74%) with the remaining 26% consisting of indigenous religions (10%) and Christianity (16%). Muslim communities dominate the northern region, while Christian and indigenous religions exist primarily in the South. While Sudan's constitution provides for religious freedom, the ruling Muslim elite favored imposing Islamic (sharia) law on non-Muslims (see *History & Myth*) further marginalizing them as inferior citizens. [Sharia law is anchored in the Islamic holy book (the Qur'an) and the teachings of the final Islamic prophet Muhammad].



This maltreatment coupled with an Arabic tradition of enslaving Africans would become fundamental to an extensive north/south conflict (see *History & Myth*). It is noteworthy that the US shared a similar form of slave exploitation and civil war. After 22 years of civil war, a peace accord was brokered, thereby restoring religious freedom, along with inter-denominational cooperation. Today, it is commonplace for the various religious groups to unite in commemorating distinctive religious holidays such as the Christian Christmas and Easter and the Muslim Ramadan.

Similarly, it is customary to find a blending of fundamentalist Islam with the indigenous African traditions (see *Islam in Sudan* below), although a rather uncommon practice among Christians (of note, Christians and traditional Africans do share political ties) who tend to associate traditional African practices with evil or illiteracy.

## Muslim Faith

### Origins of Islam

Islam dates to the 6th century when the Prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca in the current country of Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that while Muhammad was meditating in the

desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing the Qur'an, or the "Holy Book," to guide their everyday life. (The Qur'an represents a core belief that helps shape Muslims' lifelong values and is comparable to the Christian Holy Bible and Jewish Torah).



### Meaning of Islam

Islam means "submission to the will of God" and acceptance of His wisdom. It is more than a religion to its adherents – it is a way of life.

### Muslim Sects

Islam is divided into two divisions: Sunni and Shi'a. Sudanese Muslims are

predominantly Sunni and distinguished by their belief that the leader (*Caliph*) of the Muslim community (*Ummah*) should be elected. Conversely, Shi'a believe the Muslim leader should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

### Five Pillars of Islam

There are five basic principles of Islam that all Muslims accept and follow.

- **Profession of Faith (*Shahada*):** "There is no god but God and Muhammad is His Messenger."
- **Prayer (*Salat*):** Pray five times a day facing toward the Ka'aba in Mecca. The Ka'aba is considered the center of the Muslim world and a unifying focal point for Islamic worship.
- **Charity (*Zakat*):** Involves an obligatory tithe or donation to the poor.
- **Fasting (*Sawm*):** Involves abstaining from food, drink, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan (30 days).



- Pilgrimage to Mecca (The *Hajj*): Annual pilgrimage to Mecca, which every adult Muslim who is physically and financially capable, is expected to perform at least once in a lifetime.



### Shared Perspectives

Many Islamic tenets parallel the other two major world religions, Judaism and Christianity. In fact, Muslims consider Christians and Jews “people of the Book,” referring to biblical scriptures, who share their monotheistic belief in one God. (Photo: Cathedral in Khartoum, courtesy of Wikimedia).

**Abraham:** All three faiths trace their lineage back to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam.

However, Christians and Jews trace their line back to Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac; while Muslims believe that they descend from Abraham and his Egyptian concubine, Hagar, and their son Ismail.

**Scriptures:** Much of the content of the *Qur’an* is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible’s Old and New Testaments, and Muslims view Islam as a completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets. However, Muslims believe Christians distorted God’s word and that Muhammad received the true revelation of God as recorded in the *Qur’an*.

**Jesus:** The three religions differ significantly regarding the role of Jesus. While Christians consider Him the divine Messiah who fulfills the Jewish Scriptures, Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Muslims recognize Jesus as having been a prophet, but do not acknowledge the Christian view of His divine nature. They do not believe in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

**View of Death:** Muslims believe that the time of death, like birth, is determined by Allah. Thus old age, illness, or accident are not considered the real causes of death. While people

grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death itself as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven.

### Concept of Jihad

The concept of Jihad, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's will to lead a virtuous life. It should not be confused with the publicized violence often associated with Jihad. Most Muslims are strongly opposed to terrorism, considering it contrary to Islamic beliefs.



### Ramadan

Ramadan is a month-long time for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this period, Muslims who are physically able are required to fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that denying their hunger tempers them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal – by fasting, one learns to appreciate the good in life. It is common for Muslims to break their fast at sunset with a light meal of dates followed by prayer and then dinner.

Ramadan occurs during the 9th month of the Islamic lunar calendar (see *Time & Space*) and observes 3 Islamic holy days.

- **Lailat ul-Qadr:** Known as “The Night of Power,” it commemorates Muhammad receiving the first verses of the Qur’an.
- **Eid-al-Adha:** Referred to as the “Festival of Sacrifice,” it honors Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (Isaac in the Christian faith), as proof of his loyalty to God. It is celebrated the same day the Hajj ends.
- **Eid-al-Fitr:** It is a 3-day “Festival of Fast-Breaking” celebrated at Ramadan’s end.

## Conducting Business

It is best to avoid scheduling meetings during Ramadan and on Fridays (Islamic holy day) between 1115 - 1500 (especially long, hot summer days) when most Muslims worship at the Mosque.

Likewise, work pace will likely become sluggish with shorter work days during the month of Ramadan. Westerners who routinely work in Islamic countries tend to plan in advance for Ramadan activities.

## Islam in Sudan

Arab Muslims brought the Islamic faith to a predominantly Christian Northern Sudan during the reign of the 14th-century Nubian Kingdom (see *History & Myth*), where it spread into remote areas and became institutionalized through intermarriage with local inhabitants.

**“Africanized” Practices:** Consequently, this cross-ethnic integration resulted in a hybrid religious approach, primarily in rural areas, with fundamental Islamic customs blended with traditional African beliefs (commonly referred to as “Africanized” practices). For example, a Muslim adherer may resort to the Qur’an for guiding principles of behavior while also applying prophecy, witchcraft, and magical charms to ward off evil spirits or heal seemingly incurable diseases.

Muslim nature healers called *faqih*, use amulets (bracelets and necklaces) as protection against these bad spirits – newborn babies and the elderly are considered especially vulnerable to evil spirits. In small rural communities, the imam (spiritual leader) is expected to conduct dual functions as spokesman for the Qur’an and village *faqih*. Of note, traditional Islam objects to these indigenous practices.

Similarly, the northern Muslim *Hofriyat* community practices religious rituals (known as *Zar*) to cleanse women of illnesses and infertility believed to be caused by evil spirits.

**Sufism:** It is a form of mysticism practiced by a Muslim sect divided into social orders or brotherhoods (*turuq*) headed by a

charismatic leader or Sheikh. Traditional Islam considers Sufi practices as heretical even though Sufis base their beliefs on Muslim laws (*sharia*) and pray in a traditional Muslim manner.

**Baraka:** Similarly, throughout much of the African Islamic world, the cult of the saint is predominant, whereby religious leaders are allegedly ordained with a state of saintliness known

as *Baraka*. It refers to a spiritual power capable of bestowing blessings or good fortune – similar to the concept of karma in Buddhism. Accordingly, it is believed that one's *Baraka* gains strength in the afterlife, and therefore, local clansmen will visit the gravesite of a departed



tribal chief with prospects of receiving *Baraka* (Photo: mystic nature healer, courtesy of Wikimedia).

## Indigenous Religions

Prior to the influx of organized religions (Christianity and Islam) into Sudan, most original inhabitants practiced animism, a belief in the traditional power of natural forces over human existence. Animists believe that the spirit of life or consciousness resides in all objects, both animate and inanimate, and consider natural objects such as trees and animals as sacred – a conviction that closely connects them to the environment.



Rarely based on sacred written doctrine, indigenous religious beliefs and practices are preserved mostly in oral traditions passed through several generations.

### Ancestor Worship

Most indigenous religions include ancestor worship or the belief that deceased family members exist in a spirit world that empowers them to influence the living. This custom has a pronounced influence on how Sudanese and Africans at large view the world and further serves to reinforce ancestral

affiliations. These ancestor spirits grant rewards or punishment in accordance with human behavior. Having divine powers to control life's major events, they also serve to prophesize and interpret the meaning of those events.

### **A Supreme Being**

As with Islam and Christianity, the fundamental objective of indigenous worship is a common belief in the power of a supreme being who created the earth and its people, although the various ethnic groups view their God from differing perspectives and have adapted their traditional practices to conform to their particular lifestyles.

### **Ethnic Traditions**

For example, the Nuer tribe correlates a creator with ancestral and nature spirits. Having experienced years of drought, the Nuer consider rain a virtuous creation to be revered.

The Dinka clan promotes the belief in one Supreme Being (*Jok*) having various manifestations. They too personify the creator as an embodiment of nature – for example, thunder represents God's voice and lightening His rod for punishing the disobedient. However, some Dinka mythology advocates God's omnipotence and the belief that humankind was separated from God through original sin, although they do not acknowledge an afterlife (heaven and hell). For them, their tribal chief acts as sole mediator with God.



During sacrificial rituals, Nilotic tribesmen sacrifice cattle as symbolic atonement for their sins.

For the Nuer and some Dinka, cattle represent the sustainment of family and community traditions (see *Family & Kinship*) and are believed to personify ancestral spirits. They also believe that spirits reside in bulls.

### **Witchcraft**

Many Zande tribesmen believe that witchcraft (*mangu*) is an inherited supernatural power whereby witches and sorcerers

are believed to use their powers to cause harm. To protect themselves from these evil spirits, clan members rely on psychics or priests to intercede with the spirit world on their behalf and use their divine powers to relieve people of hardship. Of note, Zande witch doctors have been a major catalyst in seeking environmental relief from widespread famine.



### Christianity in Sudan

Missionaries from the Byzantine (Roman) Empire and from Ethiopia's Axum Kingdom brought Christianity to northern Sudan during the 6th-century AD, although by the 15th century, Islam became the dominant religion.

During 19th-century colonialism the British endeavored to introduce Christianity into southern Sudan (see *History & Myth*).

Roman Catholicism is the predominant Christian religion in Sudan. Other faiths include Episcopal, Greek Orthodox, Presbyterian, and Pentecostal, among others.

Sudanese Christians are committed to proselytizing members of other faiths, using Christian holidays (also public holidays) as opportunities to promote their cause. Of note, Pope John Paul visited Sudan in 1993 and met with Islamic leaders in an attempt to broker peace. During this visit, the Pope canonized the first saint (Bakhita) from Sudan.



### Christian Missionaries

Christian mission work has grown in the south since peace was restored in 2005, with Christianity becoming common in refugee camps that often provide displaced persons returning from exile their only access to shelter, subsistence, and medical care.

## 4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

### Family Organization

Throughout Africa including Sudan, the family remains the singularly most important institution. An informal welfare system that ensures all its members are sustained, the Sudanese extended family unit generally is comprised of two or more nuclear families to include parents and offspring plus their families and other relatives.

Singular nuclear families comprised solely of the two spouses and their children are becoming more common in some urban areas, along with single-parent households who have lost family

members to displacement or death during famine and civil war (see *History & Myth*).



### Kinship Relations

Kinship bonds are significantly strong in Sudanese culture where war and famine have rendered support for family members unconditional. For example, in

devastated communities throughout southern Sudan, food-sharing is an inherent element of ethnic identity with kinship foundational to ensuring equitable food distribution.

### Male Authority

Sudan is a patrilineal and patrilocal society, which means authority and inheritance occur through the male bloodline, and it is common for the extended family to reside near or with the elder male head-of-household.

Regardless of their age and health, elder parents typically reside with the eldest son's family, where the younger wife will honor and serve her husband's elder family members. Sudanese elders (both sexes) are revered for their experience and wisdom and function as counsel for most family decisions.

### Marriage

As in most collective cultures, traditional marriage in Sudan is more of a social contract to ensure the continuation of family

heritage and economic wellbeing rather than a union based on love and romance. It represents the alliance of two families, and individual choice of spouse is limited. A marriage between first or second cousins (Muslim) or members of the same tribe (non-Muslim) is viewed as a means to perpetuate family lineage.

**Arranged Marriages:** Courtship is uncommon in Muslim societies particularly in rural areas where arranged marriages remain customary – a couple typically accepts parental judgment in coordinating their union. Conversely, in non-Arab communities and urban areas Western-style dating and choosing one's spouse are more popular practices.



Some kin groups of higher statuses avoid accepting potential in-laws of a lesser rank into their extended family unit, and the spousal selection process can be rather competitive. It is common for a young girl to be pursued by several men, with each suitor and his family seeking to bargain a marriage agreement with her male relatives.

**Bridewealth:** Usually, the prospective husband offers

competition hinges on which the most attractive bride price (*mahr*), a common practice in Muslim cultures whereby the prospective groom compensates the bride's family for loss of her labor. The donation can be material or service, although in Sudan, a payment in cattle is the most common transaction – with the exception of Dinka and Nuer tribes who revere cattle (see



*Religion & Spirituality*). Because it is reimbursable in a divorce, bridewealth tends to discourage marriage dissolution.

**Polygyny:** It is customary in Muslim society (predominantly northern Sudan) to practice polygyny, whereby a man may have up to four wives, with Islamic law requiring him to equally provide equally for them all. This tradition is anchored in the notion that

historically, men had a higher mortality rate than women, many of whom remained unwed or were widowed. Consequently, polygyny became a necessary means of providing for women and producing large families (work force). Of note, women are forbidden to have more than one husband.

Having some authority within the family, the first wife may select any subsequent wives for her husband. They are typically chosen for their ability to work, provide bridewealth, or produce offspring – traditionally, romance was not a primary consideration.



### Children

While parents and other adult family members share responsibility for child-nurturing, it is common in Sudan for siblings as early as age 10 to care for younger offspring. Boys and girls normally are raised separately and divided into age-specific groups.

### Divorce

Divorce is an acceptable alternative when marriage partners fail to fulfill their obligations or choose to participate in adulterous relations, which is the most common reason.

### Residence Patterns

About 67% of the population resides in rural areas, with the remainder urban. Most rural families live in simple mud homes with straw or grass roofs and one to several rooms (some with a toilet), while urban dwellers live in high-rise apartment complexes – many in slums. Within the home the sexes are socially segregated, with men more involved publicly and women more domestically (see *Sex & Gender*).

### Passage Rites

**Birth:** Newborns in most African societies represent the family's future and are usually the primary interest in a marriage. Following a birth, the mother usually stays at home with the baby for an extended period (varies by ethnic group), with family members caring for the new mother and child.

**Child Naming:** Naming conventions differ across ethnic boundaries, whereby some children are named soon after birth while for others not for several days or weeks depending upon gender. The father is responsible for assigning the name after consulting with family elders.

Names typically represent ancestral or religious connections, although in the south, they may stem from animal or nature themes. Since a majority of Sudanese share an agricultural tradition, it is customary for the newborn to be placed on the ground during the naming ceremony to represent its connection to the land. It is also customary in some kin groups to chant twice for a girl and thrice for a boy. Similarly, some groups (such as the Nuer) view the birth of twins as a blessing, while others consider it a curse.

**Adulthood:** Adulthood is usually based on time of marriage rather than reaching a particular age. For example, a daughter relies on the protection and authority of male family members until she marries and joins her husband's family, and therefore, achieves womanhood. For sons the transition from childhood to manhood is marked by a circumcision ceremony, with the son typically remaining part of his father's extended family.



**Marriage:** While marriage customs vary by location and ethnic group, most marriages involve a bridal preparation, with the bride kept in seclusion prior to the wedding. The educated urban elite tend to pattern marriage by European traditions.

**Death:** Traditionally burying their deceased within 24-hours, Muslims wrap the body in a shroud and bury it with the face and left side facing toward Mecca. A funeral consists of a short service at the mosque then the burial, followed by more prayers and a meal. Female relatives and close friends normally wear black clothing. Following the ceremony, a common expression of condolence is "God is great." It is unacceptable to laugh or joke and also improper to talk about the deceased's life.

## 5. SEX AND GENDER

### Gender Roles

Gender roles in Sudan are as much a contrast as the country itself. Having traditionally distinct and separate responsibilities, members of each sex learn at an early age about their contribution to maintaining family unity. As a consequence of long-term civil war and ethnic division, however, traditional gender roles have altered over time, due more-so to necessity than conformity to external influences such as Westernization.

**Men:** As in most African cultures, Sudan is a patriarchal society where men have the decision-making authority (see *Family & Kinship*). Similarly, men are expected to provide for and protect their families along with enforcing standards of behavior. In rural areas they typically conduct agricultural duties and handle most business dealings for the family.



Fathers teach their sons responsibilities of manhood to include occupational duties, respect for tradition, and conducting rituals. Elder sons are taught at an early age how to assume the father's responsibilities in his absence, although in concert with the mother's influence.



**Women:** Traditionally, the woman's role is focused predominantly on family and household maintenance, and in rural areas, they typically assist with chores outside the home such as planting and harvesting. Roles generally vary by region, whereby women in the non-Muslim South, as well as many urban areas,

generally enjoy more social freedom than those occupying the more structured Muslim North; particularly in rural areas where

certain traditions such as full-body attire remain customary (see *Aesthetics & Recreation*). As is typical in most African societies, Sudanese women traditionally have suffered socio-cultural discrimination and have had fewer professional development opportunities than their male counterparts. However, modern affirmative actions are gaining some women (particularly urban) more equality.

### **Social Change**

In southern and western Sudan, prolonged conflict has shifted women's responsibilities, with estimates suggesting that up to 45% of male heads-of-household have been killed or fled the violence. Consequently, many women have been forced to head their families in a traditionally male-dominated society where only 33% of jobs are available to them. Also, rape has been a tool of war exposing many women to continued harm.

Similarly, family displacement has altered traditional Sudanese society, particularly in some rural areas where kinship bonds have weakened as migrant widows and young adults seek employment in cities or abroad. This forced geographic relocation, along with social reform brought by Western influence in urban areas, has caused a decline in the extended family network in favor of smaller family arrangements that are more suitable to urban living conditions.



### **Female Circumcision**

Commonly known as female genital mutilation (FGM), female circumcision is widely practiced among Sudan's northern Arab society. Regarded as a rite-of-passage initiation into adulthood, FGM is considered necessary for rendering a young woman an attractive candidate for marriage – which traditionally has been their only means of securing a viable future.

Unfortunately, traditional FGM practitioners generally lack medical training, sometimes resulting in severe complications or death. Despite widespread opposition and legislation to ban female circumcision, the practice remains popular among proponents (to include women themselves) for preserving customs.

## 6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

### Official Language

Most common in the Muslim North, Arabic is the native tongue of about half the population and Sudan's official language of government, schools, and business. In the South and West, English is spoken widely, along with a variety of indigenous languages, and is considered an official language of South Sudan. Similarly, it is the language-of-choice to bridge ethnolinguistic boundaries.

### Ethnic Languages



While many Sudanese speak either Arabic or English, a wide variety of ethnic languages and dialects exist (particularly in Darfur and Equatoria to Sudan's far south) to preserve the various tribal traditions and are used daily as a first language. Of the various indigenous languages, Dinka is the most widespread in the South, with Nubian (5 dialects) and Bedawiye (belonging to the Beja tribe) common in the North (see *Political & Social Relations*). Dinka or "thuong jang" (meaning "people") uses the Latin alphabet rather than Arabic script, while Nubian exists more as a spoken language having no written standard.

### Communication Style

While social dynamics tend to vary widely by ethnic group, Sudanese are generally outgoing and friendly people who enjoy engaging in conversation, both with acquaintances and strangers. While they are known to be expressive in public settings (demonstrating both happiness and displeasure), it is best for outsiders to maintain their composure when interacting with the host nationals.



Generally, more conservative and deliberate than the non-Muslim South, northern Muslims prefer to assess a situation before acting. Similarly, they believe in fatalism or the concept that whatever happens is based on

“*Inshallah*” (if God wills it),” with humans having little control over daily events.

### Visiting

Social visits among friends and family are considered essential to fostering cohesive relationships. Most visits occur in the home where close friends, relatives, and neighbors often visit unannounced. New acquaintances visit by invitation and for only a short period.

In Muslim societies men, women, and children all socialize separately, while men and women in non-Muslim communities

often socialize together. Hosts serve light refreshments to their guests or full-course meal for distinguished visitors (see *Political & Social Relations*) (Photo a courtesy of IRIN Photo © Manoocher Deghati).



### Greetings

Sudanese value greetings and neglecting or rushing the welcoming process is considered disrespectful. To them salutations communicate warmth, and Sudanese commonly shake hands upon

meeting. Close friends and relatives casually embrace each other, touch each other on the shoulder while conversing, and hold hands while walking together. However, Muslim cultures tend to be more formal and traditional, whereby members of the opposite sex do not normally exchange physical contact.

Typical Muslim greetings include *salām ‘alaykum* (Peace be upon you) or *Ahlan wa sahlan* (Welcome), followed by *Kayf halak?* or *Kayf innakum?* (“How are you?”). Good friends normally exchange a casual *Salam* (Peace). Non-Muslims greet each other with Bari phrases *Do pure* (Good morning), *Do parana* (Good afternoon), and *Gwon ada?* (How are you?).

### Titles

Friends, peers, and children address each other with given names or nicknames, while adult relatives are respectfully addressed by title (aunt, uncle, etc.) and their given name. Professionals are addressed by title and surname.

When introducing yourself as an Airman to a host-nation counterpart for the first time, it is appropriate to use rank along with first and last name, for example, Major Shawn Smith (or just officer). Thereafter, use rank and last name. Similarly, when establishing a social relationship with the local people, it is best to wait until invited before using only their first name.

### **Criticism and Humiliation**

The concept of constructive criticism is not viewed positively in many African cultures. It is therefore best to avoid giving public criticism – to approach an issue critically, it is best to do so privately. Individual criticism in the presence of one’s peers could result in a loss of face – a serious insult to a Sudanese.

### **Language Training Resources**

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at [www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/](http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/) and click on “Resources” for access to language training and other resources.

### **Gestures**

- In Muslim societies, the left hand and shoe soles are considered unsanitary (although with Western influence, these traditions have declined in importance in many urban areas).
- Pointing with the index finger is perceived as impolite – it is proper to point with the entire hand, palm downward, and motion toward oneself.
- Finger wagging is considered threatening.
- Similarly, the “A-OK” sign is considered obscene.
- In Sudan it is polite to nod or shake your head to indicate “yes” or “no.”
- As a gesture of respect, it is customary not to establish direct contact, particularly with an elder or person of status.

## Useful Translations

English	Sudanese Arabic
Do you speak English?	Hal inta betit-Hadath/betitkalam ingleezee?
Hello (Peace be upon you)	Salam 'alaykum
Response:	Wa-alaykum - salaam
Thank You	Shukran/ashkurak
Good morning	Sabaa al khayr
Good evening	Misa al khayr
Good night	Ieyla sa'eeda / tuSbaH 'ala Kheyr
Welcome	Marhaba
Yes/No	Na'am or Aiwa/la
OK	Tab'an/kways
Maybe	iHtimaal
What is your name?	Ismak munu?
My name is...	Esmi_____
I am pleased to meet you	Ana sa'eed lee- mookaabalatak
How are you?	Kayf halak? or Kayf innakum?
I'm fine, thanks, and you?	Ana bi-Kheyr shukran, wa-keyf inta?
Good-bye	Ma' as-salaama
Please	Min fadlak
Excuse me/I'm sorry	Lo samaht/ana aasif
Who?	menou?
What?	shenou?
When?	mitain?
Where?	wayn?
Why?	Ley?
How?	Keyf?
Help Me	Saa'id ni
Do you need help?	hal tureed moosaa'ada?
How much does it cost?	Bekam el ghorfah?
What time is it?	As-saa'a kam?
Yesterday	Embareh
Today	An-nahardah
Tomorrow	Bokra
Now	Delwatee

## 7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

**Literacy:** Age 15 and over who can read and write

### **Sudan**

Total population: 60.7%

Male: 65.4%

Female: 56.1% (2018 est)

### **South Sudan**

Total Population: 34.5%

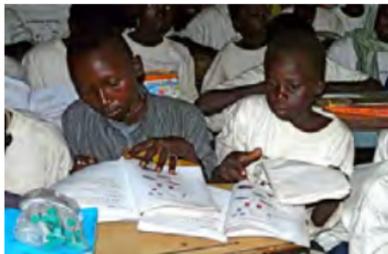
Male: 40.3%

Female: 28.9% (2018 est)

### **Historical Development**

While Qur'anic (Islamic) schools were common in earlier times, it was during the 19th-century colonial era that the British established Sudan's exiting formal education system exclusively for government officials and the wealthy. With the influx of missionaries spreading Christianity in the south (see *History & Myth*), educational opportunities emerged, although largely ineffective due to lack of resources. Following independence from Great Britain in 1956, schools remained concentrated in urban areas such as Khartoum and were therefore inaccessible to the predominantly rural population, particularly in the south.

The situation only worsened during the extended civil war, and despite efforts to reconstitute the nation since the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPU), resources in the south remain insufficient (Photo courtesy of IRIN © Erich Ogoso).



### **Traditional Education**

Prior to the introduction of formal schools, children were educated at home where they learned a variety of occupational skills devoted to supporting the family unit. Children would become apprentices to their parents and other family members. Even today in rural areas, some children learn family-related skills at home.

### **Education System**

Primarily in the North, the Sudanese government mandated free and compulsory primary education for children ages 6-13. Primary education consists of 6 years with an additional 3 years of middle school. Following completion of an additional 3 years

of secondary education, select students attend advanced institutions. Arabic is the primary language of instruction.

Prior to the CPU, secondary education and university attendance for most males was curtailed by compulsory military service. Nearly 67% of Sudanese and 40% of South Sudanese children are enrolled in primary school, with about 48% and 36%, respectively, attending secondary schools.

### Equality Issues

Traditionally, educational opportunities for girls were restricted to private Qur'anic institutions (*khalwa*), leaving most girls ill-prepared for formal secular education. Consequently, a high illiteracy rate among females has existed throughout the country, where parents traditionally feared an education would corrupt their daughters' morality.

Similarly, girls were expected to refine their household responsibilities in preparation for marriage and prospective bride-price payment to the family (see *Family & Kinship*). Conversely, education for boys was promoted to help them achieve public success and earn income for the family.

### Sudanese Folklore

Fireside storytelling is an ancient tradition throughout Africa, where myths are used to preserve history and wisdom across generations and ethnic boundaries. Even in contemporary life, a Sudanese family continues to perpetuate its traditions through informal media such as songs, proverbs, and folktales.

Sudanese folklore tends to underscore cultural themes unique to respective ethnic groups. In Dinka society, for example, where farm animals are considered a treasure, a recurring theme centers around cattle falling prey to a lion. Metaphorically, the lion's threat represents a disobedient Dinka member who is therefore branded a "wild animal" or a threat to the community. While used to teach life's valuable lessons, many of these myths are equally entertaining, as well.

## 8. TIME AND SPACE

### Concepts of Time and Space

As in many African societies, Sudanese have a relaxed view of time compared to Westerners, whereby they have little regard for time management and punctuality. Generally patient and tolerant in manner, Sudanese are more concerned about casual human interactions and relationship-building.

In a war-torn nation furthered plagued by famine and disease, the average Sudanese faces a lifespan shortened by about 10 years and therefore values quality time with family and friends.

**Flexibility:** Similarly, Sudanese are flexible when unforeseen circumstances such as family illness arise that would cause a delay or extended absence. Furthermore, they have a relaxed view regarding deadlines and work hours, considering a suspense date a general estimate rather than a mandatory commitment. Likewise, it is common for a host national to arrive late or leave early as long as they demonstrate work progress. This attitude does not mean they are not committed to their occupations – it just signifies that in their society, most personal issues take precedence over all other obligations.



**Personal Space:** When speaking with a casual acquaintance, Sudanese typically maintain a closer personal space than you may be accustomed to and tend to avoid direct eye contact (see *Language & Communication*).

### Time Management

In rural areas, timekeeping is managed by following the sun's movement throughout the day, with local residents scheduling events according to the sun's position.

### The Islamic Calendar

Particularly in the Islamic North, the Islamic calendar is used to determine the proper day to celebrate religious holidays and

festivals. It is a lunar calendar and contains 12 months, although it is 11 days shorter than the Western or Gregorian calendar. As



a result, from one year to the next, Islamic holidays fall 11 days earlier on the Western calendar than the previous year.

### **Sudanese Work Week**

The Sudanese work week typically begins on Saturday and ends early on Thursday. Weekends typically begin Thursday afternoon and extend through Friday (the Islamic worship day), although in rural areas, Sudanese may labor the entire weekend, particularly during harvest periods.

### **Conducting Business**

As mentioned earlier, Sudanese have a relaxed view of time, with few events following a schedule. You can anticipate for appointments to start late (when everyone is ready), and it is therefore imperative that you adjust to the local lifestyle, approaching the situation with good humor and flexibility.

Initial meetings often involve long greetings and small talk to establish relationships. You can anticipate inquiries about yourself and your family and will be expected to reciprocate.

Patience is necessary to building effective cross-cultural relations. Reaching consensus or agreement generally takes longer than Americans are accustomed to, and it may require several meetings to accomplish what you would generally handle via a routine phone call.

**Don't Forget Prayer Time:** Muslims take time during the workday for prayers, so it is important that you plan your business appointments accordingly. Since Friday is the Muslim day of worship, many northern residents will normally visit the local Mosque in the afternoon.

**Taking Photos:** Sudanese generally value their privacy and expect outsiders to respect this privilege. It is therefore wise to ask permission to photograph local citizens and landmarks (non-military). Also, a photography license may be required.

## 9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

### Introduction

African culture is depicted aesthetically through a variety of media from dress and appearance to recreation and artistic designs to music and literature (written and oral).

### Attire

Sudanese are a proud people who are dignified in their behavior and appearance. To them the way one dresses makes a statement about that person's attitude and self worth. Sudan is a conservative society where dress is modest for both them and their foreign guests – very relaxed in the South.

Both traditional and Western-style clothing are fashionable. For example, Sudanese professionals working in office environments typically wear Western-style clothing, while mostly rural people wear traditional attire.

### Traditional Dress

Muslim men commonly wear the *jelleba* (pronounced ja-laa-bah), an ankle-length pullover robe (usually white) with full sleeves made from cotton or wool, while women wear the *thawb*, a shorter and lighter-weight version of the *jelleba*. Occasionally worn as a jacket or an over garment, for many Muslims, the *jellaba* serves as their primary clothing.



Similarly, Muslim laborers typically wear loose-fitting pants (*sirwal* or *punjabi*), an Arabic garment having a draw string tied in front or on the side. Nomadic people wear heavy robes for protection from the desert heat and blowing sand.

**Men:** Muslim men also wear a short, rounded white prayer skull cap (*tagiya*), often worn with the *jelleba*. In some parts of Africa, although rare in Sudan, the *tagiyah* may be worn in a variety of colors. However, when accompanying the traditional headdress or turban (*imma*), the skull cap is usually white.

In rural non-Muslim areas, attire tends to vary by ethnic group. For example the Dinka may wear very little clothing (shorts or a lightweight dress) to adapt to high temperatures. Likewise, the traditionally Muslim *thwab* has gained popularity among Dinka men. If headgear is worn, it is used mainly as protection from the sun. The Beja are known to wear a toga-type garment (see *Political & Social Relations*).

**Women:** It is customary in Muslim societies for women to wear full-body clothing, with only the face and hands visible. However, different Muslim cultures promote ethnic variations of this practice. While not required, a few women wear a full-facial veil. The traditional attire for Sudanese women is a loose gown (*tobe*) draped over the head and wrapped around the ankles. While men also wear the *tobe*, the female version is typically more colorful and can be worn in a variety of fabrics each tailored to a specific occasion.

Women also cover their heads with a scarf (*tarha*), with some unmarried females wearing the *abaya*, a long usually black robe with a matching headscarf. Women who wear western style



clothing typically dress in a blouse with long sleeves and a modest skirt that customarily extends below the knee.

Dinka women traditionally wear a shorter version of the *tobe* extending from their neck to just below the knee.

Some women in the south go topless. Similarly, women are attracted to fine jewelry, with wealthy women easily identified by their expensive designs. However, most women wear modest locally crafted earrings and beads.

## Recreation

**Soccer:** Sudan's sport of choice, soccer (called football) has thrived since the 1920s, with its state league (considered to be the oldest league in Africa) established in Khartoum. Today, Sudan has three major soccer clubs with smaller versions active

across the country. Even in the remotest areas, children routinely play the game using an improvised ball.

**Basketball:** Although secondary to soccer, basketball is also popular, with one Dinka player, Luol Deng, achieving professional fame in the US and the National Basketball Association. Celebrated as southern Sudan's most popular athlete, Deng eventually arrived in the US after fleeing to Egypt during the civil war (see *History & Myth* and played for the Chicago Bulls.

Similarly, Manute Bol (another Dinka athletic hero) was a 7-foot 6-inch center who played in the NBA for 10 years. Today, he is remembered as one of the tallest players in the NBA and revered for his blocking ability.



**Track and Field:** While Sudan first competed in the Summer Olympics in 1960, it was not until 2008 that native Darfurian Ismail Ahmed Ismail (pictured) won Sudan's first Olympic medal – the silver in the men's 800-meter run.

**Wrestling:** Wrestling is an ancient sport unique to the Nuba people (see *Political & Social Relations*), who have been perfecting the sport for centuries. Known for their physical dexterity, Nuba wrestlers spend hours painting their bodies in preparation for competition. Historic paintings of Nuba wrestlers have been uncovered, some dating back to more than 3,000 years.



## The Arts

Sudanese art forms provide a general description of family lifestyles, gender relations, work ethics, and a variety of other aesthetic expressions. Its history dates as early as 5,000 BC as evidenced by the more than 200 pyramids constructed during the reign of various Egyptian Pharaohs (see *History & Myth*).

Similarly, Islam has had a vivid historic influence on Sudanese art expression, with calligraphy (decorative writing) one of Islam's most revered art forms used to replicate copies of the Qur'an (see *Religion & Spirituality*) and inscribe its verses on other artistic designs.

Symbolic of Sudan's predominantly non-Muslim rural culture, traditional art is a hallmark of ethnic expression, with a variety of animal skins and natural resources used to shape baskets, beaded jewelry, pottery, and leatherwork. Used to portray a connection to distant ancestors, Dinka body art (popular among women) involves painting skin designs using henna dye (a flowering plant extract) – a practice still common today. Also popular in rural areas are the customary lower-lip tattoos and shaved-head or dyed-hair designs. More contemporary art forms highlight the devastation from ethnic strife and famine.

## Music

Sufi Muslim (see *Religion & Spirituality*) gospel music (*madeeh* meaning "praise") is used to celebrate the prophet Muhammad, whereby the lead chanters tap a rhythm as participants sing along and sway to the music. Often accompanied by stringed and percussion instruments, *madeeh* represents a nationalistic blending of traditional and modern varieties.

In non-Muslim rural areas, music and dance are inherent in celebratory ethnic rituals representing traditional values. Typical examples include the Nubian spiritual *Kambala* dance (performed while wearing Buffalo horns) and the Dinka "leap dance" celebrating seasonal changes.

Renowned contemporary performers include Nubian exile Mohammed Wardi and southern Sudan's hip-hop star and former child-soldier Emmanuel Jal (pictured, courtesy of Wikimedia). In 2005 Jal partnered with



northern composer Abdel Gadir Salim to release an album *Ceasefire*, a cross-cultural exchange designed to promote national peace. Western music is also popular, particularly that

of legends like reggae's Bob Marley, soul's James Brown, and pop's Michael Jackson. Rap is also popular.

## Literature

Popular contemporary literary forms include poetry, short stories, novels, and folklore collections. Often recited orally, Sudanese poetry is predominantly an expression of the country's complex African and Arab heritage.

Currently residing abroad, popular novelist Tayeb Salih wrote *Seasons of Migration North*, and *The Wedding of Zein*, examining gender roles and Western - Arab relations. Similarly, Leili Aboulela who currently lives in Scotland wrote her first novel, *The Translator*, to depict the travesty of living in exile as a young woman. She also won the Caine Prize in African Writing in 2000 for her short story "The Museum."

In 2005 three young Dinka authors living in the US – Benson and Alephonsion Deng and Benjamin Ajak – published *They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky*, portraying a child's perspective of war. Similarly, Dinka Christian Francis Bok wrote *Escape from Slavery*, recalling how Arab raiders captured him when he was 7 and forced him into slavery, while Mende Nazer, a black African Muslim, relates her years of servitude in *Slave: My True Story*.

## Public Holidays

- Independence Day (January 1)
- Unity Day (March 3)
- Labor Day (May 1)
- Africa Freedom Day (May 25)
- Revolution Day (June 30)
- Ramadan (Muslim)\*
- Easter (Christian)\*
- Sham el Nessim (Spring Holiday)\*
- Mouloud (Prophet Muhammad's Birthday– Muslim)\*
- Islamic New Year\*
- Christmas Day (December 25 – Christian)

\* Dates vary based on Muslim Lunar calendar or Christian Gregorian calendar.

## 10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

### Dining Customs

Mealtime is a ritualistic tradition throughout Africa, where family members congregate to enjoy social time and fellowship. Similarly, special occasions would not be complete without participants sharing a meal, and it is unprecedented not to invite guests to share mealtimes and festive occasions.

Traditionally, most Sudanese consume only two meals daily – one in the morning and the main family meal in the afternoon or evening. While urban restaurants are highly westernized and popular among individuals and tourists, most local families cannot afford to eat out.

### Dining Etiquette

Dining etiquette usually follows customary ritual, particularly in Muslim communities governed by Islamic law. For example, men and women dine separately, usually in different rooms. In traditional rural areas participants usually sit on the floor with pillows and congregate around a small table. If guests are present, the meal usually commences with beverages and social time, followed by a ceremonial hand washing from a water basin passed around the table along with a towel.

Generally, the Sudanese dine from a communal dish using their right hand to pick up morsels of food with bread. However, in the more Westernized urban areas, eating utensils are popular. In non-Muslim homes where both genders typically dine together, women remain modest by covering their knees with clothing. In Muslim households, men and women usually are segregated in separate rooms, particularly when guests are present.



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While it is customary for the host to encourage guests to take more food as a sign of hospitality, it is acceptable to eat only as much as desired. During meals, participation in conversation is considered polite.

It is also appropriate for a guest to stop eating when the host has finished. The meal typically ends with another hand-washing followed by beverages and more social time.

## Diet

Meals typically include vegetables, fruits, meat, salad, and bread. While diet typically varies by region and ethnic group, there are a few universal Sudanese dishes, with the most common meal consisting of fava beans stewed for several hours (*ful*) with oil (*zeit*) and spice (Egyptian heritage) and served with specialty flat bread (*kisra*). An alternative bean dish similar to “baked beans” (*Fasuliya*) includes tomato sauce, while a popular morning meal consists of yellow lentils served as a broth. Prominent vegetable dishes include stewed potatoes (*batata*), okra (*baamiya*), and peppers or eggplant (aubergines) stuffed with rice (*maashi*) (Photo is a courtesy of Wikimedia).



In the north millet porridge and mashed fava beans are popular dishes, with wheat used to make a round, thick bread (*gourrassa*). Easterners commonly eat a banana paste (*moukhabaza*), which they adopted from neighboring Ethiopia, while in the west dairy products are popular, along with a porridge (*kawa*) made from dried meat and sorghum. Southern cuisine typically substitutes dried fish for meat in porridge (*kajaik*). Nile Perch is a popular northern fish variety, where it is commonly fried and served with red peppers.

**Meat:** A variety of meat kebabs cooked on skewers or flat stones over charcoal is the most common meat dish, although in the western region, a Sudanese version of schnitzel – flattened and breaded meat (*agashay*) – is popular. A popular breakfast dish is fried chopped liver (*kibda*).

**Beverages:** Both tea (*sha*) and coffee (*gahwa*) are popular beverages in Sudan, along with juices and carbonated drinks. Sudanese typically prefer their tea and coffee to be very sweet and oftentimes includes milk or spices. Hibiscus tea (*kerkaday*) also is common.

A specialty coffee drink (*jebena Sudanese*) is made by pan-roasting coffee beans with spices in a specialty ceramic pot (*jebena*) over charcoal. The grounds are then strained through a grass sieve and served in small cups.

While alcoholic beverages are prohibited by Islamic law in the Muslim north, bootleg beer, wine, and a drink distilled from fermented dates (*araki*) are available in urban areas. Both domestic and export beers are popular in the south.

**Fruit:** Popular locally grown fruits include dates, mangoes, guavas, oranges, pineapple, and bananas.

### Health Issues

Sudan suffers from extreme poverty, widespread disease, and a poor health care system. Because of poor sanitation and an insufficient potable water supply, infectious and parasitic diseases such as malaria, meningitis, and tuberculosis are common. Similarly, HIV/AIDS (over 2.3% of the adult population is infected in South Sudan, 0.2% in Sudan) and childhood illnesses such as measles and malnutrition, among others, are widespread. There are also a number of exotic ailments such as Guinea Worm disease, sleeping sickness, and river blindness, among others, predominant in the South.

**Inadequate Facilities:** Concentrated primarily in urban areas, medical facilities are understaffed and void of modern equipment and treatment. Therefore, a majority of the population does not have access to proper healthcare.

**Life Expectancy:** Poor health and living conditions collectively have caused a significant decline in the life expectancy rate, particularly in the south – there are by far more deaths from health issues than war or terrorism. The national average at birth for Sudan is 67 years, with South Sudan's average being 59 years. The infant mortality rate is about 52 deaths for every 1,000 births (averaged between Sudan and South Sudan). Also, nutrient deficiencies among mothers has led to one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates and one of the lowest survival rates for children under 5.



## 11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

### Economic Overview

Although sustained civil war and severe drought all but devastated the south's economy, conditions improved temporarily since the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) (see *History & Myth*). Despite some progress in South Sudan, extreme poverty remains with the need for food assistance increasing since 2013 due to conflict drought. The economies of both countries receded in 2020. Sudan's GDP declined by 3.63% while South Sudan's GDP declined an estimated 5.4%.

### Agriculture

Employing about 38% of Sudan's population and 60% of South Sudan's, this sector's major cash crops include cotton (second to oil in exports), sugar, gum arabic, and livestock. Nearly one-third of Sudan is suitable for agriculture, with abundant rainfall sustaining crops and pasturelands in the south and irrigation systems along the Nile supporting activities in the north. Of note, the government-owned Gezira Scheme located in the Al Jazirah state near Khartoum is one of the world's largest irrigation projects.

While advanced technology provides for large-scale production of export commodities, subsistence farmers largely rely on primitive methods (livestock and basic tools) to cultivate their small plots. Crops for domestic consumption include peanuts, sorghum, wheat, cassava, fruits, and sweet potatoes.

### Pastoralism

Livestock grazing occupies about 50% of Sudan's land mass, particularly in southern Sudan where pastoralists herd cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and chickens. A major supplier of sheep to the Arab world, pastoralism significantly contributes to Sudan's export market. (Photo a courtesy of IRIN Photo © Peter Martell).



### Natural Resources

Sudan's natural resources include petroleum, small mineral reserves, and hydropower (see

*Technology & Material*). While the primary forests are located in the South, many have been cleared for farming and as an energy source.

Oil is the leading revenue-generating export, with Sudan holding Africa's 5th largest reserves primarily in the South's Muglad and Melut basins. Oil's discovery in 1979 placed Sudan on a path to economic viability until the civil war erupted in 1983 (see *History & Myth*). Actual oil exportation began in 1999 and has been mainstay to stabilizing the economy. Sudan's largest pipeline, the Greater Nile Oil Pipeline, extends nearly 1,000 miles to Port Sudan on the Red Sea.

### Foreign Economic Relations

Sudan's primary export and import partners are UAE and China. China actually replaced the US as one of Sudan's primary trading partners following US-imposed economic sanctions on Sudan in 1996 (see *Political & Social Relations*). Similarly, PetroChina has taken the lead in developing Sudan's petroleum industry, holding 40% of shares in its Greater Nile Petroleum Corporation.

### Services

Comprising 36% of Sudan's and 54% of South Sudan's GDP, the service sector is comprised of administration, retail, and tourism subsectors and employs 23% and 45%, respectively, of the workforce (mostly in government). Having little tourism, Sudan is one of Africa's least visited countries.

### Banking

Each government has its own separate banking system – the Bank of Southern Sudan (BOSS) and the North's Central Bank of Sudan (CBOS) – and currency.

**Currency:** North Sudan's unit of currency (pictured) is the Sudanese pound (SDG), with 1 USD equaling 54.00

SDG. It is printed in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, and 50 pounds, with coinage based on units of 1, 5, 10, 20, and 50 piastres. The South Sudan pound (SSP), with an exchange rate of 165.91 SSP to 1 USD, features the image of its deceased founder Dr. John Garang on one side and images of its culture and wealth on the other side.



## 12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

### Technology

The industrial and manufacturing sector comprises about 23% of Sudan's gross domestic product (GDP), employing only 17% of the population, while it comprises 37% of South Sudan's GDP and employs 16% of its population. Oil production is Sudan's most viable industry (see *Economics & Resources*). Other products include processed foods and beverages, textiles, leather, chemicals, processed metals, and cement. Of these products, leather (from goat and sheep skins) is the only significant export (primarily to Saudi Arabia), and the food processing industry is the largest employer. Sudan also exports livestock to Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

### Energy Sources

Only 60% of the population has access to the national power grid, mostly in Khartoum and Sudan's central regions. Outlying areas either use diesel-fueled generators to provide electricity or rely solely on flammable natural resources for energy. Consequently, unregulated wood harvesting for fuel has resulted in major deforestation and soil erosion in the south. To remedy this problem, the government is harnessing hydroelectric power to provide electricity to isolated areas.

### Transportation

By any measure, Sudan's transportation network is inadequate, although functional, primarily because of government neglect, years of war, and sporadic weather patterns. Many villages and essential resources remain remote and inaccessible. Bus transportation is Sudan's most the reliable and inexpensive travel mode.



**Roads:** Sudan has over 19,263 miles of roadway with paved connections between Port Sudan, Khartoum, and the oil fields in the southern and central regions. The remaining two-thirds of Sudan's roadways are unpaved and mostly impassable during inclement weather. South Sudan did not have a single paved road until shortly after its independence in 2011. Now, South

Sudan has a road network over 56,047 miles, but only 168 miles of paved road.

**Railroads:** Consisting of close to 4,506 miles of track, Sudan's two railways provide external links to Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea and internal connections between Khartoum and the cotton-growing central regions. Rail service is used primarily to move heavy freight and agricultural products, although it is in need of major repairs. South Sudan's 154-mile track connects Babonosa (Sudan) and Wau.

**Inland Waterways:** Navigable routes along the Nile River provide significant inland transportation within Sudan's northern and southern regions, with two major water routes connecting



Kusti to Juba in the south and Kuraymah to Dunqulah in the north. There is also weekly ferry service to Egypt available on Lake Nasser in the north.

**Airports:** Sudan has 17 airports with paved runways, 6 of which provide international service with Khartoum International the largest. South Sudan only has 4 airports with paved runways.

### Telecommunications

Sudan has 5 major telecommunications providers, with landline service modest and mobile connection widespread. There are 3 television and 14 radio stations in Sudan, all of which are state-controlled and government-censored along with print media. Despite tight government regulation, Sudan's news media operate with more freedom than many neighboring countries.

With more than 4,000 Internet cafes, urban residents rely on the internet to access government-censored media, while rural residents are limited to the mail service and word-of-mouth for information. Mobile phone subscriptions for Sudan and South have reached 80 and 20 per 100 inhabitants, respectively. Sudan's Internet penetration rate has reached 31%.

### Environmental Concerns

Environmental issues include wildlife exploitation, inadequate potable water and sanitation, soil erosion, deforestation, overgrazing, desertification, and drought.



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