

A Memoir of Kassala, Sudan <Part 1>

Mixture of African and Arab culture

The Republic of Sudan (commonly referred to simply as Sudan) is located in the north eastern part of Africa. The population is around 34 million and the country area is five times that of Japan making it the third largest country in Africa. Prior to the separation and independence of South Sudan in July 2011, it was, in fact, the largest country in Africa.



Sorghum

Stone grilled mutton

Before the north and south separated, Sudan was divided by the predominantly Christian south which also hosts traditional religions and animism, and the north which is populated mainly by Arabic Islamists. However many different non-Arab ethnic groups such as Bejas, Nubias and Fulas also reside in north Sudan, and one cannot simply draw an equation of north = Arab = Islam.



Acacia

Onion field

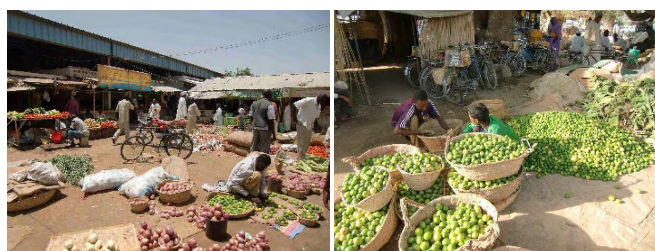


Arabic dish *mandi*

Fresh fruit juice

However for me, as someone who has worked in many “Arab” countries such as Syria, Palestine, Jordan and Egypt, the whiff of Arab in Sudan was very apparent. I have always considered Sudan to be a rather mysterious country, a place where African and Arab cultural elements mix.

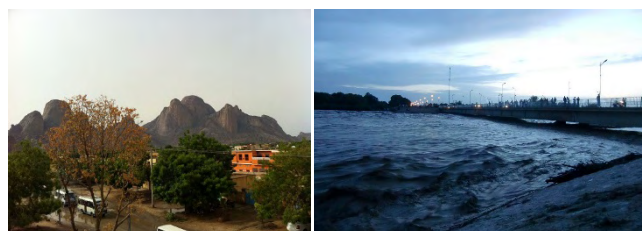
The word Sudan originates from Arabic meaning “black person”. Perhaps it means the black people who accepted the Arab culture from the Arabian Peninsula and the north and became Muslim. In addition to this north-south axis, there is an east - west axis of Sudan and Habesha (present day Ethiopia and Eritrea). These axes, enriched by the exchange of various goods and products, have formed a very colorful culture throughout history - very tangible results of interactions between various and very different indigenous cultures of the African continent.



Public souk (market)

Local specialty lime

The author has been involved in a JICA technical cooperation project in Kassala, Sudan, since January 2011. The project’s main aim is to develop the capacity of State Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Irrigations’ extension services. It has been supporting extension workers’ human resource development through joint work by developing pilot activities that target farmers and women.



Mount Totil

The seasonal river *gash*

In this six part series, I would like to use the limited space permitted in AAI News, to offer essays introducing cultural and social issues that exist in this attractive country based on my time and experiences in Kassala. I plan to discuss various topics as they come to my mind covering this and that; farmers, agricultural technology, food processing, food culture and plants etc. In the next part, I will discuss challenges for traditional rain-fed agricultural production and livelihoods of farmers and pastoralists.