General Overview Of Sudanese Culture

Arab countries are so close in distance yet so far in their cultural values. Even within the same country, cultural beliefs and habits may differ between North and South, East and West. If two people are born in the same country does not mean that they share the same religion, social behaviors, or cultural beliefs. Sudan, or as officially known, The Republic of Sudan is a country located in the Northeastern region of Africa. The Sudan shares it's north borders with Egypt and Libya. Before 2011 (the year when the south became a separate country) the Sudan was the largest county in Africa and fro such a big country there were multiple common religious beliefs within the people of Sudan. The majority of the Sudanese population consists of Muslims and the rest consists of Christians and indigenous believers (Stanford, E., 2007).

The Sudanese society shows a high emphasis on the importance of children, although boys and girls are raised separately. Out of the already low literacy rates, boys get their education from the ages 5 to 19 years old, while girls stop at the age of 10. Girls tend receive less education than boys as society thinks that domestic skills are more valuable (Stanford, E., 2007). As a society ruled mainly by Islam religion, Family is highly treasured in Sudan and family members are expected to respect elders and follow their orders.

In general, the experience that I had during my interview was not only enlightening, but it also gave me a different view of how Arabic countries can differ on so many levels including socially, culturally, and religiously. For the purpose of this assignment I went with two people from Sudan (in the picture: Mike on my right, and Eddy on my left. Both of them used these nicknames as a shortcut for easier pronunciation) where I had the pleasure to spend some time with them, ask them some questions, and attend the Friday prayers at a local Mosque.

First we went to Mosque where they introduced me to the Imam who is actually from Egypt. The Imam took me into an in-depth tour of the Islamic religion and prayers. He explained the five daily prayers and their importance to Muslims, the purpose of the Friday prayer (Muslims believe that Friday is chosen by God as a dedicated warship day and it forms a unity between the people of the Islamic community). Soon after, the prayer started. I stood to the side and observed the prayer through. The Imam started the recitations of sermon, and as of respect for the Imam and the prayers, conversation during the sermon is prohibited. Once the recitation of the sermon is over, the Imam starts reciting verses of the Holy Quran while one of the people takes the lead in the prayer and the rest follow his lead.

After the prayer was over, people gathered in a little hall that had little tables. People sat their and talked about various kinds of subjects, mainly politics and religion. I was not allowed to take pictures anywhere around out of respect for the place and the people, which is why we ended up taking the picture in the hallway of the building. Later we sat in the hall where I got introduced to a lot of Arabic people from different Arabic countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, Palestine, Egypt, and Iraq. Finally, after all people have left, I got to talk to Mike and Eddy about some of the aspects of the Sudanese culture.

We first discussed the social attributes of the Sudanese culture that differ to that of the United States. In the Sudanese Society it's typical for a woman to have certain limitations as far as

gender roles go. Although there are some differences between different ethnic groups and religions, women almost always suffer from disadvantages in many areas of public life such as work and education. In general, women's duties in communities are limited to house work and raising kids. Children are very important in the Sudanese culture especially boys as they will grow to support their parents and carry the name of the family. Boys and girls tend to be raised separately. Only a small portion of girls ever finish their education, on the other hand, boys are expected to stay in school and learn various kinds of academic subjects. Their many organizations working on changing the view of society on the importance of women education.

Marriages are usually arranged by the parents and it's usually between cousins or members of the same tribe, and even though it's arranged by the parents both the man and the woman have a say in whether to accept or deny the marriage. It is a requirement that the man is financially stable and capable of providing for his family before marriage.

The majority of the Sudanese population consists of Muslims with a small percentage of Christians and other religions. Although religions other than Islam are a minority, all religions are respected by the society. Sudan is an ethnically rich country. The country is is mainly divided into two groups, the Arabs and the non-Arabs; both groups are ethnically mixed and the people are almost always physically indistinguishable. The Arabs are divided into tribes that are presumed to descent from a common ancestor (Spaulding, Al-Shahi, Sikainga, Collins & Sabr, 2019). Family is a very important part of Sudanese society. Children are to respect and obey their elders, and men must support and take care of their families once they're adults. Unlike the United States, family is not limited to parents and siblings, but also extended family. Extended families tend to live near by, and sometimes family members live on the same street. According to the Islamic law, family inheritance goes to the oldest son.

The Sudanese society share some similarities with American society when it comes to dressing for work. Both societies share a dress code that is generally formal for both genders. The dress code highlights the importance of the fresh and clean look. In Sudan, the manager or supervisor is expected to be polite and calm at all times. The manager/supervisor expects to be treated with respect by their employees. Many Sudanese men and women suffer from mental illness due to economic and financial problems but less than half of them have the access to a proper mental health services.

A common thing both Mike and Eddy agreed on is that when they moved to the United States they both suffered a hard time getting used to many social aspects that were completely different in Sudan. For example, personal space was a big issue and nearly got Mike in a fight at a shopping mall when he first moved to the United States. In Sudan, it's normal for people especially from the same sex to stand really close to each other, and even hold hands when walking. In the crowded mall Mike didn't know how much Americans valued their personal space and kept standing closer, almost touching the person in front of him in a line. Of course that person had the wrong idea of what was going on and started yelling at Mike and eventually called security.

After a two hour conversation with the both of them, it was time to leave. I overstayed my welcome at the mosque's hall and both Mike and Eddy needed to go back to their jobs. I thanked them both for the greatly enlightening and informative time I spent with them, although I owed them lunch for taking all of their lunch-break time.

References

1. Global Affairs Canada - Affaires. (2018, September 19). Cultural Information - Sudan. Retrieved from https://www.international.gc.ca/cil-cai/country_insights-apercus_pays/ci-ic_sd.aspx?lang=eng.
2. Sabr, M. el D., Unit, E. I., Collins, R. O., Al-Shahi, A. S., Spaulding, J. L., & Sikainga, A. A. (2019, September 13). Sudan. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/place/Sudan.
3. Stanford, Eleanor. “Culture of Sudan.” Countries and Their Cultures, 2007, https://www.everyculture.com/Sa-Th/Sudan.html.

Additional Information

- During my interview I asked both Eddy and Mike many questions including (but not limited to): Gender role in Sudan, religion and ethnic groups that exists in Sudan at this time, Family importance, Dress code in work place, Children and education, Marriage, ...etc.
- During the interview I asked them to describe marriages and ceremony customs in the Sudan. According to Eddy, there are usually a different traditions between different tribes but many believe that a lot of money should be put into marriages to save face and show off to other families. For example, when Eddie got married he spent over $100,000 on the ceremony alone.