

# PEANUT SALAD

# SALATAT DAKAW

# سلطة دكوة



3–4  
SERVINGS

PREPARATION  
TIME: 15<sup>MIN</sup>

## INGREDIENTS

6 to 8 tablespoons unsalted peanut butter  
100 mls lukewarm water  
1 lime (juiced)  
3 to 4 tablespoons sesame oil  
1 tablespoon malt vinegar salt and pepper (to taste)  
1 green pepper (diced)  
1 red onion (finely chopped)  
2 tomatoes (diced)  
2–3 coriander leaves (as garnish)

## DIRECTIONS

In a mixing bowl, add peanut butter and 100 mls of lukewarm water and mix into a paste.

Add lime juice, sesame oil, sriracha sauce, salt and pepper whilst continuing to mix until the peanut butter loosens into a thick paste.

Add the chopped vegetables and fold gently into the paste.

Taste and re-add any of the previous ingredients as appropriate. Garnish with sesame oil and coriander leaves, then serve with warm, flatbread.

## OPTIONAL

Olive oil can be used instead of sesame oil. Spring onion can be used instead of a red onion for a milder onion flavor. Carrot can be included in the salad for a sweeter taste.

## HINT

Adding more water and/or peanut butter helps bulk out the sauce and cancels out the tanginess of the lime.

Only add enough water to loosen the peanut butter, since the chopped vegetables contain additional water.

This salad complements fried meats and oven-cooked dishes.



# AND IN SUDAN, A FAMISHED FOOD CULTURE

Walk into any Sudanese kitchen and you will find a vigorous commotion reminiscent of the kitchens of busy restaurants. Complete with whistling pressure cookers, bubbling stews and industrial portions of chopped meats and vegetables that could feed a small village, a Sudanese kitchen is its own microcosm. A crochet of crisscrossing bodies in long, flowing colourful garments glide urgently past each other through clouds of billowing steam to prepare food. The thick warm air is sliced with the hearty chatter and laughter of the women caught in it. The many patois, aromas, colours, and flavours that permeate Sudanese kitchens are not a coincidence—they are the result of years, even centuries of exchange and influence from West Africa, the Mediterranean, and South Asia. The beauty of this culinary promiscuity lies in the deliciously adventurous food culture and unique tastes and textures the Sudanese dining experience offers.

Sudanese cuisine consists of a generous share of stews and gravies—often eaten by hand—fresh and cooked salads, dips, lime, peanut, rice dishes, sweet and savory pastries, unique breads, and decadent desserts. In line with other Muslim-majority countries, lamb and chicken are the preferred meats. However, beef is also cooked, as well as fish if it is easy to obtain. The crowning glory and jewel of a Sudanese *seniyya*, or food tray, is considered the *kisra* and *mullah*. The former are wafer-thin sheets of fermented sorghum with a mild tangy taste that provide a carb base for stews such as *mullah*—a thick meat-based gravy bursting with flavour. The appearance of the dish is admittedly unremarkable and does not betray its lusciousness—a quality repeatedly found in Sudanese foods, turning every dish into a terrific surprise.

Up until recently, most homes in Khartoum, Sudan's capital city, were readily open to passersby. The front doors of many houses across Sudan still have a string or wire on the exterior attached to the inside lock, allowing those who feel comfortable enough to simply let themselves in. It was therefore not uncommon for a group of diners sitting in a tight circle around a *seniyya* at the end of a meal, to be entirely different to those at the start. This fluidity of personal borders and the sharing of intimate moments allowed friendships to bloom or strengthen, and maintained the glue integral to the survival of communities. There is a Sudanese expression that roughly translates to, “we ate together” used figuratively to mean, “we were on good terms” or “there was harmony between us.” For a long time in Sudan, the sharing of a meal has signified peace between two parties.

But the opportunities available to honour the food culture in such a way and feast collectively are increasingly fewer and far between. Self-styled as the “bread-basket of the world,” Sudan still depends on imports for the provision of even the most basic food items. Higher tariffs on imported goods have resulted in higher sale prices. These price hikes, in addition to chronic inflation rates (reaching almost 40% yearly) and the inability of the state to match it in wage growth or subsidies, have created an impossible economic terrain and make it increasingly difficult for people to focus on anything but their own survival. Poverty is high, employment opportunities are low, meaning the vast majority are suffering in the throes of food insecurity.

The dreams of a nationalised, self-sufficient agricultural economy that coloured the economic optimism of the '70s died with the eruption of Sudan's second civil war between the centre of power in Khartoum and today's South Sudan. Subsequent incarnations of these agricultural schemes have

repeatedly failed. The reasons are complex and involve both domestic challenges and foreign debt-based pressure, but the crux of the failure lies in the government's answer to these intersecting influences: the imposition of an austerity, security state, effectively putting agricultural development on the back burner. Very few of those uninhibited expressions of social communion are possible under these unforgiving conditions—a loss greatly mourned by the population.

An exacerbated situation appears to have taken hold across the recent border with South Sudan, where people's level of food insecurity is close to famine. Both food crises in Sudan and South Sudan are largely constructions of their respective states and completely avoidable. The images and stories of these crises outwardly circulated to the world, however, never fully capture their complexities. In particular, Western narratives of African poverty, supplemented with racialised images of starving children, operate to create a pornography of violence and suffering, encapsulating a Western voyeuristic *schadenfreude*. The function of this coverage is clear: to eclipse the root causes of these crises and arouse a banal sentimentality that justifies the NGO-industrial complex.

Sawsan, a tea lady, and her family have been getting by on vegetarian foods for a number of years following spikes in the prices of meat. Sudanese food is a meat-heavy cuisine, interspersed with vegetables. Thus the lack of meat not only decreases the quality of nourishment in the food but saddens Sawsan for its bastardisation of some of her favourite dishes. Her family enjoy *fuul*, *fava beans*, cooked in onions and tomato, garnished with feta cheese, cumin and sesame oil. Anwar, a taxi driver, and his young family also enjoy bulky legume-based meals like *adas*, red lentils, cooked into a thick soup with cumin, garlic, and lime juice. They are able to afford eating small portions of this only twice a day, with a lengthy gap between meals, ensuring they do not eat past their capacity.

The poorest in the community eat *boush*, made, in its simplest form, by mixing the water from cooked fava beans, salt water used to preserve feta cheese, and some stale bread. This type of *boush* was once available free of charge or for very little at local corner shops, where it was common to see groups of young men sitting on plastic soda crates, hunched over large *seniyyas*, and enthralled in discussion or boisterous laughter. However, these scenes are quickly disappearing from Khartoum's streets as even *boush* incurs its own price hike. With the government's policies of dismantling all controls on prices and the elimination of almost all budgetary subsidies, there seems to be no end to the exploitation and social

expropriation of everyday citizens in sight.

As these hardships continue to grow, so grows the gap that separates the rich and the poor of the country. Khartoum's young upper-middle class and rich generation are shielded from the effects of inflation by wealth and thus isolated from the harsh social realities it engenders in the communities that surround them. This disconnect extends to the food relations that dominate in this social class. Sudanese cooking and collective feasting represent both a means of survival and a community-strengthening exercise, a cultural expression and a social lubricant in all aspects of a Sudanese community life. However, the capital city's affluent generation have adopted new forms of community building that do not centre around and are not mediated through Sudanese cooking and feasting traditions. The wealth and capital they've accrued to the detriment of their fellow citizens, allows them to engage in an expensive café culture—an ostensibly more refined, polished, and modern environment in their minds.

The emergence of this phenomenon is multiplex. There is certainly something to be said about the social and perhaps intellectual alienation this more liberal, Western-educated or influenced class experiences from Sudan's conservative society and by extension its traditions. There is yet more to say about capitalism's restructuring of the work day which relegates cultural labours, that do not feed the needs of the market (such as home-cooking), to the margins. However, neither of these fully explain the pervading disinterest to invest in the food culture by a generation who wield the most access to the resources that could ensure its survival.

In these conditions, the food culture is stripped of its functional purpose in society—it does not inform young people's relationship to food or their community, and adopts a merely aesthetic or symbolic value. Sudanese cuisine and other aspects of material culture are experienced almost through nostalgia rather than active participation. An impulse towards the new and original, bolstered by a capitalist logic of consumerism, alienates young people of this social bracket from the labour necessary to ensure the cuisine's survival. Thus, the gravity of its potential loss does not register. For the bourgeois, culture becomes not a participatory activity—it is fossilised and boxed into inertia, its ghost only summoned and repurposed as a cultural sensation at official events or as superficial confirmation of a stable identity. The idea of Sudanese cuisine overshadows the dimensions of its actual preservation, and though some might transcend this contradiction to actively sustain it, for most it is far easier to revel in its symbolic cachet. For this majority, food culture is no longer a kinetics of life—an expression of a

lived Sudanese condition nor a physical translation of heritage—but simply a sacrifice made or currency exchanged in return for a modernised, Western-oriented, globalised consciousness. The principle of this exchange is Heisenbergian: the more this homogeneous globalised consciousness is internalised, the less capacity there exists for knowledge of self and land.

The contrast between the conditions of the poor and rich in Khartoum and their differing relationships to food betrays a fundamental paradox that defines this tragedy: the conditions of possibility for a thriving food culture (and social transformation in general) exist. They exist in the form of undistributed wealth, untapped wealth, and the enormous talent and human resources with which the country teems, but rarely mobilises. Massive areas of arable, idle land are facing desertification as their poor inhabitants—lacking the resources to unlock the land's potential—struggle to feed themselves with overpriced goods. The inequality and injustice are unmistakable, and yet they persist quietly, unabated, almost hoping the poor forget their misery. The rich of Khartoum nervously feign obliviousness to this reality while continuing to accrue money and capital, tightening the walls that separate them from “the wretched of the city” and further ensconcing themselves in their social bubbles. The political tension in Khartoum is invisible but palpable—if a transformative revolution is the storm, this is the electric, pregnant silence that precedes it.

Sudan's food culture, along with its peoples' resilience, are eroding from within. A famished (food) culture is the hallmark of an oppressive society, starved of life and vim, stunted in its tracks. In order to restore the lost glory and vigour of the cuisine, we must revive its language of social communion and *joie de vivre*.

The Sudanese Kitchen, a cookbook initiative, hopes to revitalise interest in the protection and celebration of an endangered cultural form through the active “doing” of culture. The upcoming cookery book combines family and regional recipes presented within a culturally relevant context. Readers will learn about the history and development of Sudan's cuisine, tracing the origins of its various influences through space and time. Inspired by the dearth of information on an as-yet undiscovered but dazzling universe of cooking styles and recipes, this project also brings the dishes of an often misrepresented and misunderstood country to a wider audience through pop-up events. Aimed at both Sudanese and non-Sudanese readers, the work hopes to become a compelling record of the beauty of Sudanese material culture and an indispensable resource for its preservation for the generations to come.