

At the tipping point

By JOHANNA ZULETA

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JOHANNA ZULETA is a Special Advisor to FIRST. She is a connector acting between the corporate world, international politics and the arts. Founder of La Zuleta, a creative solutions agency. She has lived in Colombia, the USA, Greece and France, and has been based in London since 2002. Johanna has developed projects in collaboration with some of the UK's leading cultural institutions, such as the Tate, Barbican, Southbank Centre and the British Council.

Left:
Report Editor, Johanna Zuleta and visionary modernist Ibrahim El-Salahi, at the opening of his exhibition *"By his will we teach birds how to fly"* in London

Right:
The Sudan National Museum, established in 1971 in Khartoum

Let me take you through the highlights of being a newcomer in Sudan. I reached Khartoum on my birthday and this arrival became a present in itself. The journey that then unfolded has enriched my life and I have experienced many firsts in Sudan. This was my first time in Africa and the first time I lectured as a guest at a University. My lecture took place at al-Ahfad University, which was the first female university in the country and was initially established in 1907 as a school by the founder Babiker Badri.

The crafts in Sudan are exquisite and I relished my time at the Omdurman Market. It was also the first time I attended a film festival hosted in the middle of a bridge, the first time I crossed the desert, the first time I rode a camel (nothing quite prepares you for the vertigo!) and I learnt how to watch for the signs of a sand storm. By the time I was back in London, I had undoubtedly fallen in love with Sudan, and began planning my return trip.

I was born in Colombia in the 1980s and I came to see that Sudan and Colombia have many significant parallels. Sudan needs strong advocates to carry the torch and to push forward significant shifts in how Sudan is perceived globally so that a wider story can be told. When I took part in the Sudanese coffee ceremonies I always asked for the extra spice which is a local secret. The coffee was then served to me in clay pots and it came with a delicious kick of cardamom. This enchanting coffee should be appreciated



internationally as Sudan pushes forwards. The British habit of teatime is still strong in Sudan and if you try the Hibiscus tea from Cofftea you will want it for life. I can't wait for them to distribute it in London.

The Sudanese hospitality is as much a pleasure for the visitor as it is a code of honour for the host. Also a national sense of discretion is evident in this report. The biggest contributors to society in these pages wanted to either tone down their good deeds or not to mention them at all. They did not want to promote their own generosity but instead to focus on the positive changes taking place in Sudan.

The Pyramids in Meroe are older than the Egyptian Pyramids and there is a deep past to explore in Sudan. Contemporary culture is thriving and one of the distinguished contemporary figures perhaps its most celebrated citizen worldwide is the artist Ibrahim El-Salahi (1930). He has major exhibitions under his belt at the Tate Modern, Ashmolean Museum and Moma among others. And in literature, you ought to read the multi award winning author Leila Aboulela.

Now is a very exciting moment in Sudanese history. It is the beginning of a new phase where the country will be stabilising commercial relationships with the global markets. The one thing I can vouch for, after what I've seen and from the selective industry leaders I have met, who have built great generation-to-generation family businesses, is that they have very deep roots and set very solid grounds for the future. **F**

