

# About the Sudanese Ethics by Tore Nordenstam

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The primary studies of the social structure and the anthropological and historical components of the Sudanese society has been a product of the European scientific mentality. These preliminary studies constituted the prototype and the dominating methodology in the study of the Sudanese society. Not only they affected the other's (they group) perspective about Sudanese society but also the percept of the Sudanese

researcher himself. The initial studies should be deconstructed theoretically and methodologically in a way that get rid of the early ideological and political leverage constituted by the others.

In this respect, Tore Nordenstam (Sudanese Ethics) raises a number of theoretical and practical issues which deserve being (as we discuss this book) as starting points that must be widen in the future. In this paper I will concentrate on these issues:

### **1) The proposition of morals, ethics and values:**

In the first chapters, the book deals with the problem of ethics and its various anthropology. They also deal with the continual attempts to bridge the gap between what exists and what should be exists. 1960S, the era of conducting the study, witnessed a wide debate over the plausibility of the scientific study of ethics and values. If we look at what Joad said, "The problem of value today is the age-old debate about aesthetics and ethics"<sup>(1)</sup> we will perceive that the issues have not acquired the same degree of plausibility in the works of all researchers. For example Russell stated that "Ethics differ from science in that they are pure feelings and not concrete entities. Morals and

Values do not decide a real fact but create a hope in a thing or a fear from it; nevertheless, this may occur in a way that is convincing<sup>(2)</sup>.

At first scholars of sociology were reluctant to study values, in effect, they rejected studying values on account that sociology studies what exists. Durkheim based values on personal assessment. A person who is aware of values sees what has a benefit as good i.e. desirable and this is a psychological case. But later he connected values with human societies on the ground that the social systems and ideals differ from a human group to a human group and this proves that they emerge from the same source<sup>(3)</sup>. The analytic American School of sociology differentiated between moral s and ethics, morals are social behavior when social behavior is facts, whereas ethics are Social behaviors that are in the form of ideals. All American School of sociology, except the descriptive school, view ethics as social behavior and organize them on the basis of what is right and good, ethics reconstruct behavior by mental mechanisms which form ideals. Zananiki for 'example' sees sociology as one of the key cultural sciences that view values as the basis of social act, and sees social act as the ultimate unit

of analysis<sup>(4)</sup>.

The anthropologists were concerned with studying values in the pre-industrial societies. For example, Kluchhohn differentiated between instrumental values, which could be tested by means of their effects on behaviour, and conceptual values which he saw, albeit they could not be noticed, that they could not be dealt with. Nevertheless, Kluchhohn said that the conceptual values were studied in 1960's by researchers and scholars who had ignored them intentionally, before<sup>(5)</sup>.

Nordenstam sketched out the anthropologist Raymond Firth's description of ethical system and their methodology. Firth highlighted the relation between ideas and ethical norms and the other society systems.

This demonstrated that Nordenstam book expressed the theoretical debates of whether the scientific study of ethics is plausible. The Arabic translation of the book stated on page 39 that the best social report of ethical systems of foreign population is the one that defies the very simple images of the philosophers. It is obvious

that Nordenstam's theoretical approach is that philosophical concepts should benefit from social sciences theoretical and methodological insights.

## **2) The problem of studying the foreign monitor of the local culture:**

This age – old issue in social sciences is raised by the book, the relation between the interviewer and the interviewee is dialectical. More often than not, the concepts of the interviewer intervenes to form the monitored state of affairs, methodology in social sciences makes great efforts to control this relation. However, it remains problematic. The study raises the issue of the ability of the outsider to notice some aspects of the local cultural structure that can not be noticed by the insider. But the outsider is often accused of ethnocentrism.

The Issue raises much argument Ladd stated that (Anyone seeks to decide what to accept from other cultures fall in ethnocentrism). The translator of the book said, that the author's long residence in Sudan had provided him with knowledge of Sudanese society, a matter that by no means can be assessed.

Nordenstam book restarted discussing this methodological problem. The author considered the three informants, who were students at the university of Khartoum, as representatives of the culture of the Sudanese society thus they expressed the basic values of this society, but the informants represented a strata of people who had a type of western education and who had begun questioning many current concepts, consequently, it was quite difficult to adopt what they said entirely as they were part of a sub - cultural group with it's own characteristics.

### **3) Problem of Methodology:**

Tore Nordenstam, to a large extent, adopted the approaches and tools of sociology such as the interview; he had chosen three students from the department of philosophy in university of Khartoum as informants. On page 71 of the translated book, he said that the analysis of the Sudanese ethics was based on interviews with the three informants and on short articles written by them. On page 72 of the Arabic version he stated that the sample did not represent all students, from statistical standpoint.

This methodological approach should have

been followed by the writer. The writer should have followed the approach's rules which were violated. He did not follow the rule of selecting the samples and the way of representing, students did not represent the society of the study. The result of this methodological problem was a broad generalization that led to a wide description not reflecting the society of the study. In addition to this he created a theoretical pattern of the culture and values of northern Sudan society.

The author attempted to use insights of social sciences and this was an effort in the process of unifying sciences. Nevertheless, his attempt had raised more methodological questions than finding answers to them. Addressing such problems was a step toward developing methodology in social sciences.

#### **4) Values change in Sudanese society:.**

Tore Nordenstam study is a descriptive study of some aspects of the system of values during the era of 1960's. It is a synchronic study, to perceive the change in the Sudanese system of values, We should depend on a study that describe the change of the system of values in the

next periods, which look at the system of values as a variable which is determined by a host of economic, political, social and environmental changes that take place in the next periods. The lack of such studies makes it difficult to adopt such an approach. The study draws attention to the beginning of tensions in the systems of values which was an indication to changes in this system. The tension emerged in 1960s which was the outset of the national rule and the concepts of building the emergent state on the basis of modernization. This explains the attempts to reformulate the traditional values which were adopted by the educated strata of the University of Khartoum. This paved the way for change in all modern spheres of the society. The study hints to these changes. This was obvious from the responses of the three informants which may help in following these attitudes and their Leverage on later changes in the system of social values.

## **Conclusion:**

Tore Nordenstam study is one of the important studies about Sudanese ethics by western researchers; they institute a pattern and

an influencing Literature on the field of Sudanese studies. These studies carried out by western researchers form continual circumstances that have great influence on forming the insider awareness and his concepts about the dynamics of changes of Sudanese Society.

This study, among other related studies, can help us to understanding the nature of contact, its results and the related epistemological dilemmas. The study states a number of the theoretical and methodological issues which could be subject to further studies. Four of these issues are:

- 1) Concepts study: ethics, morals and values.
- 2) The outside monitoring of local culture.
- 3) The methodology
- 4) The changing values in Sudanese society.

### **References:**

1. Joad G. Guide to philosophy, Cambridge univ. press 1948.p208.
2. Russell, B. Human Society in Ethics & Politic (in Arabic), translated by Abdelkarim