Ministry of Science and Higher Education

Social Anthropology (Anth 1012)

A Freshman Common Course

Department of Anthropology

Hawassa University, 2013 E.C.

Unit Five:
Inter-Ethnic Relations, Identity and Multiculturalism

Unit Objectives

- This unit will come up with a conceptual and empirical discussions on ***ethnicity, ethnic identity, inter-ethnic relations,*** and ***multiculturalism***.
- **Violent conflicts** based on d/t forms of identifications & social categorizations such as ethnicity, race & religion pose one of the greatest challenges to human relationships in the 21st c;
- They influence how we think of others and ourselves; they play a role in our morality and political behavior; and they affect our social life & everyday existence in significant ways.
- Thus, this unit will help you understand the ***social construction of identity***, and ***process of group identification, categorization*** and its ***implications***.
- The various discussions in the unit incorporate a contextual discussion of ethnicity and multiculturalism in Ethiopia.

Unit Learning Outcomes

- Up on the successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:
- Conceptualize ethnicity, ethnic group and ethnic identity;
- Understand the basics of ethnic identity & ethnic group – as the outcome of a dialectical process of internal & external definition;
- Identify the major theories of ethnicity and describe their main arguments regarding the nature, characteristics and silent feature of ethnicity;
- Critique ethnicity as a dynamic aspects of social organization and ethnic boundaries as flexible and constantly reproduced through social interaction;
- Analyze how ethnic and other cognate identifications are socially constructed and manipulated as a powerful tool for economic and political ends.

ETHNICITY: *Identification and Social Categorization*

- **Ethnicity: *What's in a name?***
- ***how do you describe who you are?***
- ***What are the ways we tell for others who we are?***
- ***What do people mean when they talk about ethnicity?***
- ***Why does currently, ethnicity/ethnic issues dominate public and academic discourses?***
- ***Why does ethnicity seem to matter to***

Ethnicity: *What's in a name?*

- Since 1945, words like ***ethnicity, ethnic groups, ethnic conflict*** & ***nationalism*** become so visible in many societies & have grown in **political importance**, across the world.
- Likewise, **academic interest** in studies of ethnicity & nationalism has shown a parallel development.
- They become central to the politics of group **differentiation & advantage**, in the culturally diverse nations of Europe, North America and, across the globe, in general.

- Thus, **ethnicity** & **ethnic relations** replaced ***class structure*** and ***class conflict*** *and became* **central discourse in social sciences**
- Despite the proliferation of such studies however, the normative expression of ***ethnicity*** remains ***controversial or vague***. This's due to the fact that:-
  - Scholars found it- **unnecessary or are *reluctant - to define*** *the term*.
  - *Writers generally take it for granted that the term refers to* ***a set of named groupings***.

- ***Ethnicity*** *takes a* ***variety of forms*** *for different society or groups* – **cultural, social, economic, historical &/or political variables**.
- Used in various ways to refer to d/t **human groupings & analyze process of group interaction, categorization & construction of group identity**.
- Such variability makes ethnicity **challenging** to be conceptualized within a **single general framework**.

Ethnicity -A Short Historical Overview

- 1972, Modern use of the term '***ethnicity***' first appearing in the Oxford English Dictionary.
- It's derivate, the word '***ethnic***' however, is much older; derived from the Greek term '***ethnos***' - *translated today as '**people**' or '**nation**':*
  - It refers not to ***political unit***, but group of people with shared **commonality**.
  - Unlike its literal meaning, however -*in ancient Greek, the term **ethnos** was used to relegate non-Hellenic/second class people.*
- In early England, the word "***ethnic***" was used to refer to someone who was neither Christian nor Jewish.

Ethnicity -A Short Historical Overview

- **In its modern appearance**, the term ***ethnicity*** *(& its linked concepts)* is used in a **variety of contexts** with **d/t meanings**, mainly replacing the notions of '***race***' *–w/h was in public and scientific disrepute since* ***1945.***
- In this regard, after the end of the II WW, as a means to replace the notion of ***race and tribe.***
- In North America, '***ethnic***' was designed to identify ***minority groups*** within the nation state of the USA.
- The European tradition, in contrary opted to use '***ethnic group***' as synonym for ***nationhood***, defined historically by shared descent or territory.

Ethnicity -A Short Historical Overview

- The collapse of colonialism (1950s/60s) had brought even more confusion on meanings of ***ethnicity-*** i.e.,
- Post-colonial immigrants in Europe were identified as '***ethnic***' as an **immigrant minority** (*while preserving old definitions of historical ethnicity by descent or territory*).
- The fall of communism & the breakup of the Soviet-style Federations along 'ethnic' lines (in 1990s), further complicated this definitional issue:-
- media coverage of the wars on former Yugoslav soil, as '***ethnic conflict***' has seen the term '**ethnic**' degenerate into a synonym for ***tribal, primitive, barbaric*** and ***backward***.

Ethnicity -A Short Historical Overview

- Furthermore, later *asylum seekers, refugees & economic migrants* in W.Europe, N.America & Australia, with their ***uncertain legal status*** has relegated the term '***ethnic***' to a quasi-legislative domain (***to mean non-citizens***).
- To sum, the history of the term shows the ***plasticity*** of '**ethnicity**' –w/h, it is *used in d/t situations with d/t meanings*.
- **Jack David Eller (1999),** put it —***ethnicity*** is —vague, elusive and expansive.
- If this is the case, then, *how can we define or conceptualize* ***ethnicity*** *and the linked concepts of* ***ethnic group*** *and* ***ethnic identity***?

Conceptualizing Ethnicity

- Early, but influential sociological conception of ***ethnicity*** & ***ethnic group*** is found in the works of Max **Weber, entitled —*Economy and Society* (1922).**
- As per to Weber, an —***ethnic group*** is based on ***belief in common descent shared by its members***, extending beyond kinship, political solidarity vis-a-vis other groups, and common culture & language.
- In Weber views of ethnicity, notions of ***a subjective belief in common descent*** is central, i.e.,
- It doesn't matter whether or not an **objective** blood relationship exists, but whether it is ***believed*** to exist.
- Thus, Ethnicity exists b/c of a belief in common Descent.

Conceptualizing Ethnicity

- For Weber, the ***belief in common descent*** is likely to be a *consequence of* ***collective action/interest*** *or political motives,* rather than its cause.
  - It is ***collective political action*** that inspire a belief in common ancestry, claims Weber, where ***multiple traits*** provides basis for the held belief.
  - In this regard, ***shared language***, ***etiquette***, and ***ritual*** are particularly implicated in ethnicity.
- Thus, Weber argued, ***ethnic membership does not constitute a group***; it only facilitates group formation of any kind-
  - *B/c,* ***collective interests*** *do not simply stem from similarities & differences between people; it does, however,* ***encourage ethnic identification.***

Conceptualizing Ethnicity

- **Frederik Barth** (1969), a Norwegian anthropologist.

- Barth (1969), in his brilliant introduction to the seminal collection -"***Ethnic Groups and Boundaries***" (1969), outlined in detail the most **systematic model of ethnicity,** which since then, influenced ethnic studies in the academic world.
- Generally speaking, Barth's ***conception of ethnicity*** is centered on **three core ideas** –w/h can be sum-up as:

I. Ascriptions and Self-ascriptions

II. Social Interaction Over 'possession' of Culture

III. Ethnic Boundary Over 'Cultural Stuff'

Conceptualizing Ethnicity

I. Ascriptions and Self-Ascriptions:

- As per to Barth, ***ethnicity*** entails a social process of *categorical* ***ascriptions*** *and* ***self-ascriptions*** *(*i.e., *exclusion* – of & *incorporation* of –*membership*);
- A ***categorical ascription*** is an ***ethnic ascription*** –when it classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity (*like ones origin / backgrounds*);
- By ***self-ascriptions & ascriptions***, Barth asserts–ethnicity involves:
  - a categorical ***identification of self*** from '**others**' & s***elf-inclusion*** into a group (*it define group membership*) &
  - ***Categorization/***identification by ***others*** - i.e., *exclusion of membership*.

- Process of ascription & self-ascription implies ethnicity will emerge in the course of **social interaction**.
- For Barth, **contact** b/n groups is a precondition for ethnicity – it's essentially an aspects of social relationships.

Conceptualizing Ethnicity

- Process of ***ascription*** & ***self-ascription*** implies ethnicity emerge in the course of **social interaction**.
- Indeed, ***ethnic groups*** are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus, have the *characteristic of organizing interaction* between people.
  - *actors use **ethnic identities** to categorize themselves and others for purposes of interaction; they form **ethnic groups** in this organizational sense*.
- For Barth, **contact** b/n groups is a precondition for ethnicity –it's essentially an aspects of social relationships.

Conceptualizing Ethnicity

II. Social Interaction Over 'possession' of Culture

- As per to Barth, though ***ethnic categories*** take ***cultural differences into account***, it is ***not the 'possession' of cultural characteristics*** that ***make social groups ethnically distinct***. This is b/c –as illustrated by Barth:

A. We can't assume *simple one-to-one r/nship b/n* ***ethnic units*** *and* ***cultural*** *similarities & differences.*

B. *Cultural groups are not necessarily ethnic groups.*

- Ethnic categories, Barth asserts, are ***not defined*** *by the* ***sum of objective*** *cultural differences, but only on those w/h the actors themselves regard as significant.*

- some cultural features are used by the actors as ***markers of identity/difference***, ***others*** are ***ignored*** or ***denied.***

Conceptualizing Ethnicity

- The **cultural contents** of **ethnic dichotomies** (*on the basis of w/h social groups defined & categorized into d/t ethnic collectives*) can be of two orders:

(i) **Overt Signals or Signs** - the diacritical features that people look for and exhibit to show identity (*such features as dress, language, house-form, or general style of life*).

(ii) Basic Value Orientations: the standards of morality and excellence by which performance is judged (& *can be used by groups to define identity & categorically mark d/ces*).

- Thus, one cannot easily predict which features will be emphasized & made organizationally relevant by the actors.

Conceptualizing Ethnicity

- In its most general notion, for Barth, ethnicity is a '***social organization of culture difference***'. (-*meaning what?)*
- It should also be noted that "***Cultural difference per se does not create ethnic collectivities***", argues, Barth (1969).
- If this is so, it's important to be clear about the r/n b/n ***culture*** & ***ethnicity*** or address **questions** like:
- ***Does* 'ethnic groups' *do not necessarily have a* 'distinctive culture'*?***
- ***Can two groups be* culturally identical *and yet, constitute* two different ethnic groups*?***
- ***What's the relationship between* culture *and* ethnicity*, after all?***

Conceptualizing Ethnicity

- Contrary to a widespread conventional view, Barth (1969), argued that '***cultural difference between two groups is not the decisive feature of ethnicity***':
  - It is **social interaction/contact** that make the difference possible, visible & socially meaningful.
  - It is the ***social contact*** with others that leads to definition & categorization of an '**us**' and a '**them**';
- To **answer** the ***questions*** *then:*
  - ***Yes***, some groups may seem culturally similar, yet there can be a socially highly relevant (& even volatile) inter-ethnic relationship between them.
  - ***Yes***, there can also be considerable ***cultural variation*** within a group ***without ethnicity/ethnic differences*** (*can you think of any such groups in Ethiopia*?)

Conceptualizing Ethnicity

- Thus, it's only when ***cultural differences*** are ***perceived as being important***, and are ***made socially relevant***, do social relationships have an ethnic element.
- Indeed, ***ethnicity*** is essentially an ***aspect of a relationship, not a property of a group*** (*it's not simply a matter of possession of cultural characteristics*).
  - hence, Barth's emphasis was not so much upon the ***content of ethnicity***, as upon the ***social processes***, which produce and reproduce - *boundaries of identification & differentiation between ethnic collectivities*.

Conceptualizing Ethnicity

III. Ethnic Boundary Over 'Cultural Stuff'

- Indeed, in ethnicity, Barth (1969) claimed, the focal point of focus should be the ***ethnic boundary***, **not** the ***cultural stuff/content*** that it encloses.
- **Ethnic boundaries** are *social-psychological boundaries*; -produced in the *course of social interaction* & led to –an '**us**' & '**them**' dichotomy;
- It's at this boundary that the *difference is created, developed and maintained*.
  - the production and reproduction of difference vis-a-vis external others is what creates the image of similarity internally, vis-a-vis each other.

Conceptualizing Ethnicity

- Besides, ***ethnic groups*** are not merely or necessarily based on the occupation of exclusive physical territories-but socio-psychological/cultural boundaries (*defined in r/n to others*).
- Indeed, after Barth, the focus in the study of ethnic differences has shifted from its ***contents*** to the study of ***cultural boundaries*** & ***social interaction; B/c -***
  - cultural characteristics are —'picked up' as markers of differences in the interaction process.
- For Barth, **culture** is not something *firmly stable, persistent, intact or bounded*, but a *changing, variable* & *contingent property of intergroup interaction* (*not a group's property*).

Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Identity

- **Brainstorming Questions:**
  - What kind of social category/collectivity is the ‘Ethnic group’?
  - Are there specific rules/standards for a group to be an ‘ethnic group‘?

Ethnic Group

- The term '***ethnic group***' is attached with various meanings –& d/t definitions have been proposed by d/t scholars;
- An early conception of ***ethnic group***, in this regard, is associated with the sociologist, Max Weber (1978):

  - an ***ethnic group*** is based on the ***belief shared by its members*** that, however distantly, ***they are of common descent*** *–B/c of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or b/c of shared historical experiences.*
- Anderson (1983), in his part described ***ethnic groups*** as —"***an imagined community***" that possesses a —"***character and quality***" (Anderson, 1983).

Ethnic Group

- Scholarly definitions of '***ethnic group***' usually reflect contact and inter-relationship b/n groups;
  - Social groups that are distinguished from one another on the basis of ethnicity.
  - Ethnic categories are created out of the very contact between groups.
  - Hence, ethnic groups imply ethnic relations, & ethnic relations involve at least two collective parties;
- Schermerhorn (1996), define ethnic group as *a unit of population having* ***unique characteristics in relation with others****, binding with common language, myth of origin, and history of ethnic allegiance* (1996: 17).

Ethnic Group

- F.Barth (1969), define ***ethnic groups*** as;
  - a ***self-defined group based on subjective factors*** or fundamental cultural values chosen by members from their past history or present existing conditions, where **members are aware of-and-in contact with other ethnic groups**.
  - Group distinctiveness strongly depends on identification of self and ascription by others.
- Indeed, ethnic groups are defined out of group interaction & constitute an identity as defined by outsiders & insiders (*Identity is a matter of the outs as well as the ins*).

Ethnic Group

- **Hutchinson & Smith's (1996),** identified **six** main features that emphasized in the **definitions** of an ***ethnic group*** *(but, not the rule or the exception):*
  - A ***common proper name*** –that identify & express the "essence" of the community;
  - A ***myth of common ancestry*** –shared idea of common origin –(*that gives groups a sense of fictive kinship*);
  - ***shared memories of a common past*** or pasts;
  - One or more elements of ***common culture***;
  - A link or ***symbolic attachment*** to ***ancestral land*** (*not necessarily its physical occupation by the ethnic group*);
  - A ***sense of solidarity*** on the part of at least some sections of the ethnic's population.

Ethnic Identity

- **<u>Reflect your views on the following questions:</u>**
  - What is the basis of one‘s ethnic identity?
  - What is the relationship of the individual to the ethnic?

- **Ethnic identity** is an ***affiliative construct***, where an individual is viewed by themselves and by others as belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group.
  - Affiliation can be influenced by ***racial, natal, symbolic,*** and ***cultural factors***.

Ethnic Identity

- ***Ethnic identity*** is a ***psychological*** and ***social phenomena*** –w/h gives an individual a ***sense of belonging and identity***:
- **Psychological**– individuals on account of their ***ethnic origin***, locate themselves ***internally*** by states of mind & feelings to one or more social systems/group.

- **Social**- the internal psychological states (self-definition) of closeness express themselves ***objectively*** in ***external behavior*** patterns that shared by others.

Ethnic Identity

- Ethnic identity has thus, both **objective** and **subjective** aspects:
  - ***Objective aspects*** refer to observable behavior, both cultural and social (*can you state few examples*?);
  - The ***subjective aspects*** of ethnic identity refer to images, ideas, attitudes, and feelings;
- The subjective aspects can be interconnected with the objective aspects, but not necessarily dependent upon each other.
  - *Can you think of empirical cases in Ethiopia, where the subjective aspects have become important factors, even when the objective markers are significantly weakened?*

Theories of Ethnicity

- Since the mid 20th c, a perennial debate have been undergone about the ***nature*** of ethnicity;
  - *Is it essentially unchanging and unchangeable aspect of individual and/or group identity? Or*
  - *Is it situationally defined & strategically or tactically manipulable?*
  - *It is capable of change, at both the individual and collective levels?*
  - *Is it wholly socially constructed?*
- There are **three** dominant **theoretical approaches,** envisaged to understand the *nature and characteristics of ethnicity, ethnic identity and ethnic interaction*.

The Primordial Model of Ethnicity (PME)

- This is the oldest model -traces its root from the German Romantic philosophers, especially J G. von Herder.
- Herder proclaimed the primacy of emotions and language and argued for the "atavistic power" of the **blood** and **soil** that bound one closely with one's people.
- Indeed, Primordialism is an "***essentialist theory***" w/h claimed that "*ultimately there is some* ***real, tangible, foundation for ethnic identification***".

The Primordial Model of Ethnicity

- The anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (1973), who systematized the model, articulated ethnicity as;
  - a natural phenomenon with its foundations in ***primordial ties*** -deriving mainly from **kinship**, **locality** and **culture**.
- Primordialist theories view human society as a ***conglomeration of distinct social groups***:
  - Ethnic identification is based on deep, 'primordial' attachments to a group (*w/h there from the very beginning*);
  - At birth a person "becomes" a member of a particular group
  - One's ethnicity is thus, "***fixed***" and an ***unchangeable*** part of ***one's identity***.

The Primordial Model of Ethnicity

- Anthony D. Smith (1986), theorized the defining elements of ethnic identification as ***psychological*** and ***emotional*** sentiments.
- As per to Smith:
  - the '**core**' of ethnicity resides in a **myth-symbol complex**, i.e., in the myths, memories, culture, values, symbols etc.
  - as a '**core**' of **ethnicity**, the **myth-symbol** complex, form the ***psychological*** and ***emotional*** sentiments of people –*defining elements of ethnic identification*.
  - the ***durability*** of an ethnic group depends on the ***diffusion*** & ***transmission*** of its ***myth-symbol complex*** to its unit of population and its future generations.

- **Ethnography:** is a descriptive study of a particular contemporary culture by means of direct extensive fieldwork.
  - It provides a comprehensive account of particular society, or culture in as much detail as possible.
  - These detailed descriptions (ethnographies) are the result of extensive field in which the anthropologist observes, talks to, and lives with the people he or she is studying.
  - During ethnographic fieldwork, the anthropologist gathers data that he or she organizes, describes, analyzes, and interprets to build and present that account, which may be in the form of a book, article, or film.

The Primordial Model of Ethnicity

- Smith (1986), concluded that, '***primordialism***' makes ***two distinct claims*** about **ethnicity**:
  - (**I**), ethnicity and ethnic attachment is "***natural and innate***".
  - (**II**), it is "***ancient and perennial***", which would never change over time (Smith, 1986:12-13).
- By this, ethnicity is an ascribed status and ethnic membership is fixed, permanent and primarily ascribed through birth.

Instrumentalist (Situational) Theory

- For this theory, ethnicity as an instrument of group mobilization for political and economic ends.
- It views ethnicity as ***situationally defined***, depending on ***rational calculations*** of ***advantage*** & it can be changed, & constructed or even ***manipulated*** to gain specific political and/or economic ends.
- *manipulation of ethnicity as group mobilization is stimulated by actors whose primary motives are non-ethnic*.
- In the contexts of modern states, argues proponents of this theory, political elites use and manipulate perceptions of ethnic identity to further their own ends and stay in power.

Instrumentalist (Situational) Theory

- In this regard, **ethnicity** is created in the *dynamics of elite competition* within the boundaries determined by political and economic realities.
  - By this, ***Ethnic Groups*** are to be seen as a product of political myths, created and manipulated by culture elites in their pursuit of advantages and power.
  - Abner Cohen (1974), further explained ***Ethnic Group*** as "*a collectively organized strategy* for the protection of economic and political interests":
    - ethnic groups share common interests, in pursuit of w/h they develop "***Basic Organizational Functions***".
- Taken to its extreme, some instrumentalists regard ***ethnic group, not as a community at all*** but as a ***rational and purposive association.***

Constructivist Theory of Ethnicity

- For this theory, ethnicity is ***socially constructed*** in the course of social interaction & process of everyday living.
- *It regards ethnicity as a process, which continues to* ***unfold*** *& has much to do with the exigencies of everyday survival.*
- F. Barth, the leading figure of this approach, argued that the identity of a group is not a matter of a "***quality of the container***" (i.e., *an essence or a fixed, objective reality*), but what emerges when a given social group interacts with others;
- by this, ethnic identity emerges out of process of group interaction with other social groups;

Constructivist Theory of Ethnicity

- The central aspects of this approach is its ***subjectivist stance***;
- Ethnicity, Barth insisted, is based on the ***perception of "us" and "them";*** not on ***objective reality*** belonging to a cultural group.
- ethnic boundaries were psychological boundaries; ethnic culture and its content were irrelevant.
- ***Ethnic group*** is hence a result of group relations in which *ethnic boundaries* are established through 'Mutual Perception' of "**us**" & "**them**"; not by means of objectively distinct culture.

Constructivist Theory of Ethnicity

- Emphasizing on *Ethnic identity* Barth illustrated that;
- **Ethnic identity** is an "*individualistic strategy*" in w/h individuals move from one identity to another to "*advance their personal, economic and political interests or to minimize their losses*".
- Depending on each social interaction, a person's ethnic identity can be perceived or presented in various ways.

To sum, for the social constructivist model:

- ethnicity is ***dynamic*** that changes through time & space (*it is a* ***dynamic aspect of social organization***);
- ethnic identities are constructed, deconstructed & reconstructed.

- To conclude:
  - most social scientists from Weber to Barth agreed today that ***ethnicity is a constructed, artificial category, the characteristics*** and ***boundaries*** of which have been **renegotiated**, and **redefined** over the years to **suit different contexts and objectives**.