Unit Five

5. Identity, Inter-Ethnic Relations and Multiculturalism in Ethiopia

5. IDENTITY, INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS AND MULTICULTURALISM IN ETHIOPIA

- The study of ethnicity and ethnic relations has in recent years come to play a central role in the social sciences, to a large extent replacing class structure and class conflict as a central focus of attention.
- This has occurred on an interdisciplinary basis involving social anthropology, sociology, political theory, political philosophy and history (Erikson, 2002).
- In this regard, the academic and popular use of the term ‘ethnicity’ is fairly, modern.
- After the end of the second world war, words like “ethnicity”, “ethnic groups” “ethnic conflict” and “nationalism” have become quite common terms in the English language, and they keep cropping up in the press, in TV news, in political programmes and in casual conversations
- Thirty-five of the thirty-seven major armed conflicts in the world in 1991 were internal conflicts, and most of them - from Sri Lanka to Northern Ireland - could plausibly be described as ethnic conflicts

The term itself –Ethnicity / Conceptualizing Ethnicity/

- The English origin of the term ‘ethnicity’ is connected to the term “ethnic,”–which is much older and has been in use since the Middle Ages
- The word ‘ethnicity’ is derived from the Greek term ‘ethnos’ which literally means “a group of people bound together by the same manners, customs or other distinctive features”.
- The European tradition regularly opted to use ‘ethnic group’ as a synonym for nationhood, defined historically by descent or territory (Vanderwerf et al., 2009:5)

CONCEPTUALIZING ETHNICITY…

- In the context of ancient Greek, the term refers to a collectivity of humans lived and acted together -which is typically translated today as ‘people’ or ‘nation’ (not political unit per say, but group of people with shared communality) (Jenkins, 1997).
- Contrary to its literal meaning however, ancient Greeks were using the term ‘ethnos’ in practice to refer to non-Hellenic, people who are non-Greek and considered as second-class peoples.
- Likewise, in early England, it used to refer to someone who was neither Christian nor Jewish (to refer to heathen or pagan).
- In its modern sense, it was only after the end of II World War that the term widely adopted and begins to use.
- Before World War II, while the term “tribe” was the term of choice for “pre-modern” societies and the term “race” was used to refer modern societies (Jenkins, 2001).
- The European tradition regularly opted to use ‘ethnic group’ as a synonym for nationhood, defined historically by descent or territory (Vanderwerf et al., 2009:5)
- Due to the close link between the term “race” and Nazi ideology, after the end of II WW, the term “ethnic” gradually replaced “race” within both the North American tradition and the European tradition.
- At the same time both traditions shared a joint aim to replace what had become a popular, but heavily compromised (due to the Nazi experiment), concept of ‘race’.
- Nevertheless, popular discourses, in both Europe and North America, have ‘racialized’ the concept of ethnicity, that is ‘race’ was largely preserved (in its quasi-biological sense) and has only now been used interchangeably with ‘ethnicity’

CONCEPTUALIZING ETHNICITY…

- The North American tradition adopted ‘ethnic’ as a substitute for minority groups within a larger society of the nation-state (referring to the Jews, Italians, Irish and other people considered inferior to the dominant group of largely British descent).
- Ethnicity is not a single unified social phenomenon but a congeries, a “family,” of related but analytically distinct phenomena.
- The foundations of ethnicity, the “markers” of ethnicity, the history of ethnicity, the aims and goals of ethnicity—these vary from case to case” (Eller, 1999).
- Ethnicity itself is an abstract concept, which includes an implicit reference to both collective and individual aspects of the phenomenon.
- ✓ The emphasis on culture as the point of departure for our understanding of the nature of ethnicity is not intended to mean that members of an ethnic group must always share one and the same culture to the exclusion of any other.
- Rather, it is intended to mean that persons who include themselves in an ethnicity would have a relation to a group who either now or at some point in the past has shared a unique culture.

CONCEPTUALIZING ETHNICITY…

Frederik Barth (1969)

- began with what actors believe or think: ascriptions and self-ascriptions.
- A categorical ascription is an ethnic ascription when it classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity, presumptively determined by his origin and background
- To the extent that actors use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for purposes of interaction, they form ethnic groups in this organizational sense
- Barth focused not upon the cultural characteristics of ethnic groups but upon relationships of cultural differentiation, and specifically upon contact between collectivities thus differentiated, 'us' and 'them' (Eriksen, 2002)
- Barth (1969), Cultural difference per se does not create ethnic collectivities. It is the social contact with others that leads to definition and categorization of an ‘us’ and a ‘them’

CONCEPTUALIZING ETHNICITY…

- ethnicity is essentially an aspect of a relationship, not a property of a group.
- it is not the ‘possession’ of cultural characteristics that makes social groups distinct but rather it is the social interaction with other groups that makes that difference possible, visible and socially meaningful
- difference is created, developed and maintained only through interaction with others (e.g. Frenchness is created and becomes culturally and politically meaningful only through the encounter with Englishness, Germaness, Danishness, etc.)
- Ethnicity as the actor’s pliant ascription of ethnic identity to organize the meaning of his social relationships within the requirements of variously structured social situations
- Clifford Geertz has elegantly defined ethnicity as the 'world of personal identity collectively ratified and publicly expressed' and 'socially ratified personal identity' (1973:268, 309)

THE BASIC SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL MODEL OF ETHNICITY

- Ethnicity is a matter of cultural differentiation-identification always involves a dialectical interplay between similarity and difference
- Ethnicity is centrally a matter of shared meanings - what we conventionally call 'culture' - but is also produced and reproduced during interaction
- Ethnicity is no more fixed or unchanging than the way of life of which it is an aspect, or the situations in which it is produced and reproduced.
- Ethnicity, as an identification, is collective and individual, externalized in social interaction and the categorization of others, and internalized in personal self-identification

Ethnic Group AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Ethnic Group

- The concept of ethnic group is the most basic, from which the others are derivative.
- It refers to ethnicity as the collective phenomenon
- Notably, the term ‘ethnic group’ is also attached with various meanings as ethnicity.
- Different definitions have been proposed to define ‘ethnic group’. According to:
- **Weber**, an ‘ethnic group’ is based on the belief in common descent shared by its members, extending beyond kinship, political solidarity vis-a-vis other groups, and common customs, language, religion, values, morality, and etiquette (Weber, 1978).
- **Anderson (1983**), described ethnic groups as “an imagined community” that possesses a “character and quality” (Anderson, 1983).
- F. Barth (1969), ethnic groups as a self-defined group based on subjective factors and/or fundamental cultural values chosen by members from their past history or present existing conditions in which members are aware of-and-in contact with other ethnic groups.

✓ This entailed that, ethnic group are defined out of group interaction in which members of a group keep their social solidarity, identified themselves as belonging to specific group based on their subjective communalities (language, myth of origin, and shared cultural entities) that defined in reference with others (Abbink, 2004).

✓ According to Frederik Barth (1969), Cultural difference per se does not create ethnic collectivities. It is the social contact with others that leads to definition and categorization of an ‘us’ and a ‘them’

Ethnicity

- By considering the various definitions provided to define ethnicity,
- ✓ Hutchinson and Smith's (1996) identified six main features that the definition of an ethnic group. This includes;
- A common proper name, to identify and express the "essence" of the community;
- A myth of common ancestry that includes the idea of common origin in time and place and that gives an ethnic group a sense of fictive kinship;
- Shared historical memories, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events, and their commemoration;
- One or more elements of common culture, which need not be specified but normally, include religion, customs, and language;
- A link with a homeland, not necessarily its physical occupation by the ethnic group, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples; and
- A sense of solidarity on the part of at least some sections of the ethnic's population (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996:6-7).

Ethnic Identity

- Ethnic identity refers to ethnicity as an individually experienced phenomenon
- **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 .
- Racial factors involve the use of physiognomic and physical characteristics,
- Natal factors refer to "homeland" (ancestral home) or origins of individuals, their parents and kin, and
- symbolic factors include those factors that typify or exemplify an ethnic group (e.g., holidays, foods, clothing, artifacts, etc.).
- Symbolic ethnic identity usually implies that individuals choose their identity, however, to some extent the cultural elements of the ethnic or racial group have a modest influence on their behavior (Kivisto&Nefzger, 1993).

Ethnic Identity…

- On the individual level, ethnicity is a social-psychological process, which gives an individual a sense of belonging and identity.
- Ethnic identity refers to ethnicity as an individually experienced phenomenon
- It is, of course, one of a number of social phenomena, which produce a sense of identity.
- Ethnic identity can be defined as a manner in which persons, on account of their ethnic origin, locate themselves psychologically in relation to one or more social systems, and in which they perceive others as locating them in relation to those systems.
- By ethnic origin is meant either that a person has been socialized in an ethnic group or that his or her ancestors, real or symbolic, have been members of the group.
- The social systems may be one's ethnic community or society at large, or other ethnic communities and other societies or groups, or a combination of all these (Isajiw, 1990).

Race –The Social Construction of Racial Identity

- **Race:** is an elusive concept like ethnicity –used in a variety of contexts and meanings;
- sometimes interchangeably with ethnicity, where the relationship between the two concept remain complex.
- When first appeared, ethnicity/ethnic identity was used in synonym with race or racial identity
- what was 'racial' before 1945 may be more publicly acceptable as 'ethnic' today
- **Racial Classification:** it was common to divide ***humanity into four main races:-Europeaeus, Americanus, Asiaticus, and Africanus***
- The “folk” and “scientific” notions of race
- The *folk Notions*, perceived race as *a non-overlapping and distinguishable categories of people*; which is fixed and/or natural (immutable) in its character

THE “FOLK” AND “SCIENTIFIC” NOTIONS OF RACE

- Modern genetics abandon race as a variable in biomedical research and tends not to speak of races, and this has two main reasons:
- *1. There has always been so much interbreeding between human populations that it would be meaningless to talk of fixed boundaries between races.*
  2. *The distribution of hereditary physical traits does not follow clear boundaries.* In other words, there is often greater variation within a "racial" group than there is systematic variation between two groups.
- Genetic studies concerning human variation show that humans are > 99% genetically alike. Surprisingly, of the <1% variation
- ✓ *[~85% is found within any human population or group (such as town/village/tribal or ethnic group),*
- ✓ *~10% is between any two groups, even those that are geographically close and*
- ✓ *~5% is between geographically distant groups such as two towns/villages from different continents*] (J Marks, 1995).

External and Internal aspects of ethnic identity

1. **External aspects:** refer to observable behaviour, both cultural and social, such as

(1), speaking an ethnic language, practicing ethnic traditions,

(2), participation in ethnic personal networks, such as family and friendships,

(3), participation in ethnic institutional organizations, such as churches, schools, enterprises, media

(4), participation in ethnic voluntary associations, such as clubs, 'societies,' youth organizations and

(5) participation in functions sponsored by ethnic organizations such as picnics, concerts, public lectures, rallies, dances.

2. The internal aspects of ethnic identity: refer to images, ideas, attitudes, and feelings.

- These, of course, are interconnected with the external behaviour. But, it should not be assumed that, empirically, the two types are always dependent upon each other.
- Rather, they may vary independently, as for example, a third-generation person may retain a higher degree of internal than of external aspects. We can distinguish at least three types of internal aspects of identity: (1) cognitive, (2) moral, and (3) affective.

THEORIES OF ETHNICITY

- The **Primordialist**, **Instrumentalist** and **Constructivist** are the dominant theoretical approaches in Anthropology envisaged to understand the nature and characteristics of ethnicity, ethnic identity and ethnic interaction.
- These theories broadly reflect changes of approach in anthropology over the past 20 years,
- i.e. the shift from cultural evolution theories, to structural-functionalist theories, to conflict theories, and finally to postmodern theories.
- These changes are related to the twin forces of modernity and globalization.

1. The Primordial Model of Ethnicity

- **The Primordialist approach** is the oldest in anthropological literature.
- It was popular until the mid-1970s.
- **Primordialism is an "objectivist or essentialist theory" which argues, that "ultimately there is some real, tangible, foundation for ethnic identification.**
- "Primordialist theories view human society as a conglomeration of distinct social groups.
- At birth a person "becomes" a member of a particular group.

PRIMORDIALIST APPROACH…

- Ethnic identification is based on deep, ‘primordial’ attachments to that group, established by kinship and descent.
- One’s ethnicity is thus “fixed” and an unchangeable part of one’s identity.
- The anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (1973), articulated ethnicity as a natural phenomenon with its foundations in primordial ties - deriving mainly from kinship, locality and culture.
- Further, Geertz is perfectly clear that what matters analytically is that ties of blood, language and culture are seen by actors to be ineffable and obligatory; that they are seen as natural. He is also concerned with the terms in which attachments are understood and mobilized locally; with what people believe.

PRIMORDIALIST APPROACH…

- Anthony D. Smith (1986), theorized the defining elements of ethnic identification as psychological and emotional, emerging from a person's historical and cultural backgrounds.
- He illustrated that the 'core' of ethnicity resides in the myths, memories, values, symbols and the characteristic styles of particular historic configurations, what he calls 'a myth-symbol complex'.
- Smith concluded that, 'primordialism' makes two distinct claims.

✓ Firstly, ethnicity and ethnic attachment is "natural and innate", which would never change over time, and

✓ secondly, it is "ancient and perennial". By this, ethnicity is an ascribed status and ethnic membership is fixed, permanent and primarily ascribed through birth. (Smith, 1986).

2. Instrumentalist (Situational) Theory of Ethnicity

- The instrumentalist theorists view ethnicity as situationally defined, depending on rational calculations of advantage and stimulated by political mobilization under the leadership of actors whose primary motives are non-ethnic
- Banks (1996) explained the instrumentalist understandings of ethnicity as an instrument of group mobilization for political and economic ends.
- By this, ethnicity is something that can be changed, constructed or even manipulated to gain specific political and/or economic ends (Banks, 1996).
- Proponents of this perspective advocate that in the contexts of modern states, leaders (political elites) use and manipulate perceptions of ethnic identity to further their own ends and stay in power. In this regard,

Instrumentalist (Situational) …

- ethnicity is created in the dynamics of elite competition within the boundaries determined by political and economic realities" and 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),** one of the leading advocator of this perspective, in contrast to Barth, "placed [a] greater emphasis on the ethnic group as a collectively organized strategy for the protection of economic and political interests" (Jones 1997:74).
- Ethnic groups share common interests and in pursuit of these interests they develop "basic organizational functions: such as distinctiveness or boundaries (ethnic identity); communication; authority structure; decision making procedure; ideology; and socialization" (Cohen 1974).

Instrumentalist (Situational) …

- Accordin**gly, Daniel Bell (1975) and Jeffrey Ross (1982)** emphasize the political advantage of ethnic membership choice.
- Hence, ethnicity is "a group option in which resources are mobilized for the purpose of pressuring the political system to allocate public goods for the benefit of the members of a self-differentiating collectivity".
- In more general terms, it refers to the actor's pliant ascription of ethnic identity to organize the meaning of his social relationships within the requirements of variously structured social situations (Okamura, 1981).

3. **SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY OF ETHNICITY**

The basic notion in this approach is that:

- ✓ ethnicity is something that is being negotiated and constructed in everyday living.
- ✓ It regards ethnicity as a process, which continues to unfold.
- ✓ It has much to do with the exigencies of everyday survival (ethnicity is constructed in the process of feeding, clothing, sending to school and conversing with children and others).
- Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this approach **is its subjectivist stance**, which sees ethnicity as basically a social-psychological reality or a matter of perception of "us" and "them" in contradistinction to looking at it as something given, which exists objectively as it were "out there".
- By this, ethnicity is more dependent on the socio-psychological experience of individuals, where it focuses on the interpersonal and behavioral aspects of ethnicity.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY…

- However, this does not mean that all “subjectivists” reject all objective aspects of ethnicity. Some, in fact give them significant attention.
- But, they all tend to make it dependent on the socio-psychological experience.
- In general, constructivists conceive ethnicity as situational, flexible and variable dealing with inter-personal ethnicity without initially reifying a concept of culture.
- Jenkins (1997) further noted that, as far as the flow of individuals from one ethnic group to another is possible, it is possible to argue that the boundaries of ethnicity are permeable and osmotic (Jenkins, 1997: 53).

THE END