Unit Five

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

5.1. Identity, Ethnicity and Race: *Identification and Social Categorization:*

- All animals recognize differences between “self” and “other”. In human societies, these differences take on enormous significance, partly because humans are so individualistic rather than being clone-like automatons, humans have individual personalities. Society validates that individualism by giving infants unique names.
- To understand themselves as a species, humans have to also understand themselves as individuals within networks of other individuals.
- Brubaker (2004), inculcate that identity more generally is not real, either, in the sense that it is not a ‘thing’ that people can be said to have or to be. Instead, we should talk about ongoing and open ended processes of identification. By this logic, identity does not impel people to do anything; it is, rather, people who engage in identification.

5.1.1. Ethnicity: *What's in a name?*

Introduction

- 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 programs and in casual conversations.

- There has been a parallel development in the social sciences with a growing interest in such studies.

- During the 1980s and early 1990s, we have witnessed an explosion in the growth of scholarly publications on ethnicity, ethnic phenomenon and nationalism across different disciplines, within social sciences.

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- An important reason for the current academic interest in ethnicity and nationalism is the fact that such **phenomena have become so visible in many societies that it has become impossible to ignore them.**

- In the early twentieth century, many social theorists held that ethnicity and nationalism would decrease in importance and eventually vanish as a result of modernization, industrialization and individualism. This never came about.

- On the contrary, ethnicity and nationalism have grown in political importance in the world, particularly since the ***Second World War***.

5.1.2 Ethnicity: Short Historical Overview

- 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.

- According to John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (1996), the term “ethnicity” is relatively new, first appearing in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1953.

5.1.3. The term itself –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.

Ethnicity in the ancient Greek:

- The word is derived from the Greek term ‘*ethnos’* (which in turn, derived from the Latin word ‘*ethnikos’*), which literally means “*a group of people bound together by the same manners, customs or other distinctive features*” (Vanderwerf et al., 2009).

- 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).

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- 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).

Ethnicity in modern sense:

- 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).
- Due to the close link between the term "race" and Nazi

The North American tradition :

- It adopted ‘ethnic’ as a substitute used and applied at different times and spaces 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).

The European tradition:

- It regularly opted to use ‘ethnic group’ as a synonym for ***nationhood,*** defined historically by descent or territory (Vanderwerf et al., 2009:5).

- 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’.

Ethnicity: Popular Discourse…

- 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'.

Post-Colonial Period and Ethnicity:

- Furthermore, the collapse of the colonial world in the 1950s and 1960s has brought even more confusion on questions of '*race*', '*culture*' and '*ethnicity*'.
- The homelands of former European colonizers have become populated with new, post-colonial immigrants, who are visibly different.
- Following the consolidation of North American popular and legislative discourse these groups have also become defined as '***ethnic***', thus, simultaneously preserving old definitions of *historical ethnicity by descent or territory* (i.e., Welsh, Flamans, Walloons, etc.) while adding the new definition of ethnicity as an ***immigrant minority*** (i.e., Pakistani, West Indian, Sri Lankan, etc.).

5.2. Conceptualizing Ethnicity –*What's it?*

Max Weber:

- 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.

- In other words, ethnic groups are those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities or physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration.

- It does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists, but whether it is *believed* to exist.

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- Perhaps the most significant part of Weber's argument is that: "*ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere.*

- *On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized that inspires the belief in common ethnicity*" (1978: 389).

- Weber seems to be suggesting that the belief in common ancestry is likely to be a consequence of collective political action rather than its cause; people come to see themselves as belonging together – coming from a common background – as a consequence of acting together.

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- As Weber (1968) emphasized, it is the effectiveness of social action and, above all, a political aspect of group action that ‘inspires belief in common ethnicity’ and transforms group membership into a political community.

- For Max Weber, an ethnic group is based, on the belief in common descent shared by its members because of similarities or physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization & migration.

- And “it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists”, but believed to exist.

Frederik Barth (1969)-Norwegian anthropologist:

- Barth 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).

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- The cultural contents of ethnic dichotomies would seem analytically to be of two orders:

(i) overt signals or signs – the diacritical features that people look for and exhibit to show identity, often such features as dress, language, house-form, or general style of life, and

(ii) **basic value orientations**: the standards of morality and excellence by which performance is judged. Since belonging to an ethnic category implies being a certain kind of person, having that basic identity, it also implies a claim to be judged, and to judge oneself, by those standards that are relevant to that identity.

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- Barth defined and explained ethnicity from the ***outside in***: 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.

- The difference is created, developed and maintained only through interaction with others (i.e., Frenchness is created and becomes culturally and politically meaningful only through the encounter with Englishness, Germaness, Danishness, etc.).

- Hence, the focus in the study of ethnic difference has shifted from the study of its contents (i.e., the structure of the language, the form of the particular costumes, and nature of eating habits) to the study of cultural boundaries and social interaction.

Clifford Geertz-1973:

- Reflecting, on the one hand, the practical ethnographic concern with the everyday lives of real people, i.e., their ‘actually existing’ social relationships (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952:190), and on the other, the pursuit of *verstehen* (‘understanding’), advocated by Weber and Simmel,

  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).

Ethnicity summarized:

- Ethnicity is a matter of cultural differentiation - although, to reiterate the main theme of social identity (Jenkins 2004), 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:

- 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, predominantly consists. This includes;

1. *A common proper name, to identify and express the "essence" of the community;*

2. *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;*

3. *Shared historical memories, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events, and their commemoration;*

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3. One or more elements of common culture, which need not be specified but normally, include religion, customs, and language;

4. 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

5. 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:

- Typically, 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.

- An individual can choose to associate with a group especially if other choices are available (i.e., the person is of mixed ethnic or racial heritage). Affiliation can be influenced by racial, natal, symbolic, and cultural factors (Cheung, 1993).

- Racial factors involve the use of physiognomic and physical characteristics, natal factors refer to "homeland" (ancestral home) or origin s 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.).

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- On the individual level, ethnicity is ***a social psychological process***, which gives an individual a sense of belonging and identity.

- 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.

External and internal aspects of ethnic identity:

External aspects:

- Refer to observable behavior, 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.

Internal aspects:

- Refer to images, ideas, attitudes, and feelings. These, of course, are interconnected with the external behavior.

- 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.

Home Reading Assignment:

5.4. Race –The Social Construction of Racial Identity

5.5 Theories of Ethnicity:

Introduction:

- The academic debate and argument that surround ethnicity takes its place alongside a range of theoretical controversies about the capacity of humans to intervene in their own lives, to determine or to be determined.

- In general:
  - ***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.

The Primordial Model of Ethnicity:

- Primordialism is an "objectivist or essentialist theory" which argues, that "*ultimately there is some real, tangible, foundation for ethnic identification*."

- The anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (1973: 255-310), who systematized the primordial model articulated ethnicity as a natural phenomenon with its foundations in primordial ties deriving mainly from kinship, locality and culture (Geertz 1963).

- Primordialist theories view human society as ***a conglomeration of distinct social groups***. At birth a person "becomes" a member of a particular group.

- 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.

Instrumentalist (Situational) Theory of Ethnicity:

- 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 (Eidheim, 1971, Cohen, 1974a, and Esman, 1994).

- Banks (1996) explained the instrumentalist understandings of ethnicity as *an instrument of group mobilization for political and economic ends* (Banks, 1996: 40). By this, ethnicity is something that can be changed, constructed or even manipulated to gain specific political and/or economic ends.

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- Proponents of this perspective (e.g., Abner Cohen, Paul Brass and Ted Gurr) 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, *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*.

5.5.3. 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*).

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- 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).

- This provoked that ethnicity is dynamic that changes through time and space; and ethnic identities are constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed.