Ministry of Science and Higher Education

Social Anthropology (Anth 1012)

A Freshman Common Course

Department of Anthropology

Hawassa University, 2013 E.C.

Course Introduction

- The course will acquaint you with the basic essence of anthropology and its approach to culture, society and humanity, in general.
- It covers a wide array of ***questions*** about humanity and the human condition –
- It come up with a no. of fascinating themes, key for a comprehensive understanding of humanity:
  - Among others, *human origin, cultural & biological diversity, culture & ties that connect society, race, ethnicity, identity & multiculturalism, power relations and inequality, local systems of governance, indigenous knowledge systems and practices*.

Module Learning Competencies

- Up on the successful completion of the course, students will be able to:
  - Understand the nature of anthropology and its broad scope in making sense of humanity in a global perspective;
  - Understand the cultural/biological diversity of humanity and unity in diversity across the world & in Ethiopia;
  - Analyze the problems of ethnocentrism against the backdrop of cultural relativism;
  - Realize the socially constructed nature of identities and social categories –such as gender, race, and ethnicity;
  - Explore the various peoples and cultures of Ethiopia;
  - Develop broader views & skills to deal with people from a wide variety of socio-economic & cultural backgrounds etc.

UNIT ONE: INTRODUCING ANTHROPOLOGY AND ITS SUBJECT MATTER

- **What is Anthropology – *a Mirror for Humanity?***
- ***Q. What do you know about anthropology?***
- ***Q. How do you define Anthropology?***

What is Anthropology?

- The term- '**Anthropology**' is;
  - compound of two Greek words, '***Anthropos***' and '***Logos***', -meaning, '*Mankind*' and '*Study/Knowledge*' respectively.
- **Etymological Definition**:-
  - Anthropology is the study/knowledge of mankind.
- Man has two important characteristics: ***biological*** & ***cultural*** –w/h are inseparable elements, influencing each other.
  - anthropology study mankind, both in its cultural and biological aspects of existence.

- In more specific terms, '***Anthropology***' is a science, which;
- Examines why & how people are both similar and different at the same time.
- It examines the characteristics that human beings share as members of one species and the diverse ways that people live in different environments;
- Investigates the strategies for living adapted (*learned & shared*) by people as member of a social group -situated in d/t environment.
- Analyze the products of human societies: both material & non-material creations.

- Anthropology can also be stated as a comparative study of cultural and social life.
- It tries to achieve an understanding of culture, society and humanity through detailed studies of community life, supplemented by comparison.
- Anthropology is the study of people —their origins, their development, and contemporary variations, wherever and whenever they have been found.
- To sum, it is a broad scientific discipline dedicated to the comparative study of humans as a group, from its origin to its present stage of development.

A Short Historical Background of Anthropology

- Anthropology has its roots in the works and ideas of the great ancient and medieval Greek, Roman, and Hebrew philosophers & social thinkers - *who were interested in the nature, origin and destiny of man.*
- Generally speaking, anthropology as an academic discipline was born, during the 19th c, out of the intellectual atmosphere of ***Enlightenment***;
- **E**. is the 18th c social & philosophical movement that emphasized human progress and the poser of reason, and based on the Darwinian theory of Evolution.
- By the late 1870s, anthropology was beginning to emerge as a profession.

- During its formative years (1870s & 1880s), anthropology became a profession primarily in museums.
- Anthropologists of the early 1900s emphasized the study of social and cultural differences among groups.
- here the social and cultural features of many non-western societies were studied in detail and documented -*this approach is called* ***ethnography***.
- By the mid-1900, however, anthropologists attempted to discover ***universal*** human patterns and the common bio-psychological traits that bind all human beings -*this approach is called* ***ethnology***.
- ***Ethnology*** aims at the comparative understanding and analysis of different ethnic groups across time and space.

Scope & Subject Matter of Anthropology

- The breadth and depth of anth is very vast & broad:
- It has ***humanity*** as its object of research –*that it tries to grasp through its most diverse manifestations.*
- It touches every aspect of human condition -if there is r/n b/n '**Man & Man**' and '**Man & Environment**'.
- It concerned with both the ***biological*** and the ***cultural*** aspects of humanity.
  - It seeks to understand human beings as whole organisms who adapt to their environments through a complex interaction of biology and culture.
- Anthropology is the broad study of human kind around the world & throughout time.

- Anthropology is a philosophy with the people in.
- It raises d/t philosophical questions, which it try's to respond to by exploring human lives under d/t conditions.
- In this regard, it is interested in d/t questions & issues about humanity such as;

✓ **Origin** -*From where did we (human species) come from?*

✓ **Development** -*How did humankind arrive at the present stage of biological, intellectual, and cultural development?*

✓ **Way's of Life** –*What are the social and cultural lives of a given group? Why variation in way's of life is existed?*

- Anth studies humanity with its *all aspects of existence*, and *in its all means of differences* (diversities) and similarities (commonalities).
- To conclude, as an academic discipline, anthropology provides **two kinds of insights**;
  - **Things to Think About**: it produce & provide knowledge about actual way's of life, culture, society & diversity in the world via conducting empirical studies.
  - **Things to Think With**: it offers methods & theoretical perspectives, enabling practitioners to explore, compare and understand the varied aspect of the human condition.

Unique Features of Anthropology

- Among others, anthropology has the following major distinguishing marks;
- **Broad Scope**: is the main distinguishing characteristic.
- Anthropology has a broad scope in ***time***, ***space*** and human characteristics- (biological & cultural ***dimensions***)
- It is interested ***in all human beings*** & ***In all things human***.
- Anthropology try's to comprehend the entire human experience.

- **Its Unique Approaches:** *holistic, relativistic & comparative*

❖ **Holistic Approach:** it tries to understand humankind in terms of the dynamic interrelationships of its all aspects of existence.

- Different aspects of culture and society exhibit patterned interrelationships.
- Indeed, anthropology considers culture, history, language and biology essential to a complete understanding of society.

❖ **Anthropology is Relativistic**:

- Anthropology tries to study and explain a certain belief, practice or institution of a group of people in its own context.
- It does not make value judgment.

- **Anthropology is Comparative**:
  - Anthropology studies certain aspects of the culture of a group by comparing it across societies and different times.
  - It helps the discipline to understand differences and similarities among human beings across time and place.
- **Emphasis on Insiders' View:**
  - Anthropological studies focus on *how the people themselves* ***perceive*** *&* ***understand their world****,* ***explains their action, or give meaning to their behaviour*** *or* ***cultural practices*** etc.
  - This is what anthropologists call **emic** perspective.
  - It helps to understand the ***logic*** and ***justification*** behind group behavior and cultural practices.

Its Method of Research:

- Anthropology is highly dependent on ***qualitative*** research to understand the meaning behind any human activity.
- It's study relies on ***first-hand data***, collected by conducting ***extended fieldwork*** & using d/t data collection techniques.
- The discipline emphasizes the importance of ***ethnographic fieldwork***, which is a thorough close-up study of a particular social and cultural environment.

Micro Focus: a focus more on the local than the macro social processes has been another exclusive approach in the discipline.

- Paying great attention to micro-social processes certainly helps us to better understand big changes in societies.

Misconceptions About Anthropology

- Due to lack of proper knowledge about its nature, scope & subject matter, d/t misconceptions are told about anthropology.
- The common misconception are related to the ***scope & areas*** of anthropological studies**.** To mention;
- ***Anthropology is Limited to the Study of "Primitive" Societies***:
  - **Yes & No:-** ***yes***, anthropology study so called "primitive" societies, (especially in the early 19th c);
  - **No**, it's not limited to the study of such societies; due to its holistic interest on humanity, it study modern, complex societies as well.

- ***Anthropology Study only Rural People and Rural Areas***:
  - **Yes & No:-** ***yes***, anthropology study rural people & rural areas, (especially in its formative years);
  - **No**, anthropology study not only rural people/areas; its interest expands to the study of urban people/areas.
  - As a matter of fact, ***Urban Anthropology*** is emerged, devoted to the study of urban people/life in complex, heterogeneous cities.

- ***Anthropology is Limited to the Study of Human Evolution*** *via the Analysis of Fossil Evidences:*
  - Of course, due to its interest on the origin of modern human, the discipline study human biological evolution.
  - But, ***this doesn't*** *mean that* ***anthropology is limited*** *to the study of human evolution*.
  - For this particular purpose, ***Paleoanthropology*** is emerged within anthropology to *study the biological evolution of modern human*.
  - Anthropology is a uniquely holistic & comparative science, studies the whole of the human condition: past, present, and biology, language and culture.
  - It attempts to comprehend the entire human experience.

The Relationship Between Anthropology and Other Disciplines

- How do anthropology relate to other disciplines and how it's different?
- **Similarity**:- due to its ***holistic interest*** on humanity, Anthropology share certain similarity with other social sciences such as *sociology, political sciences, economics, history*… -w/h study d/t aspects human society and peoples ways of lives.
- Anthropology greatly overlaps with such disciplines that study human society –in terms of ***thematic areas.***
- Anthropology thus, cuts across many disciplines, encompassing many of the subjects that other disciplines consider their special province: ***social life, political life, economic life, religion, art***, and so on.

- How do Anthropology differ from other disciplines -?

- By its ***broad scope, unique approach, perspective, unit of analysis*** and ***methods used***.
- By its ***Broad Scope***:- it study humankind in its entirety.
- By its ***Approach***:- it study culture & society holistically, comparatively and in a relativistic manner.
- By its ***Perspective:-*** it locates people's, individual and communal lived experiences…in terms of how these dimensions are interconnected & interrelated to one another -the perspective is fundamentally ***empirical***, ***naturalistic*** & ***ideographic*** than nomothetic.
- It's ***Method of research*** –undertake *extended fieldwork* …& develop intimate knowledge on the life and social world of communities. And, it use **culture** as an organizing concept.

Reading Assignment

- Make a reading on the '*Contributions of Anthropology*' and address the following questions:
  - Do you think anthropology can make a difference in the world?
  - What are the practical & potential contributions of anthropology in the context of the contemporary world, in general and in Ethiopia in particular?