Ministry of Science and Higher Education

Social Anthropology (Anth 1012)

A Freshman Common Course

Department of Anthropology

Hawassa University, 2013 E.C.

UNIT TWO:

SUB-FIELDS OF ANTHROPOLOGY: *Four Mirrors for Understanding Humanity*

INTRODUCTION

- Due to its Broad interest on humanity, anthropology intersects the multiple approaches to the study of humankind;
  - biological, social, cultural, historical, linguistic, cognitive, material, technological, affective, and aesthetic.
- This inter-disciplinarity is integrated and formalized in anthropology within its four major subfields that compose the discipline:

- ***Socio-cultural Anthropology, Linguistic Anthropology, Archaeology and Physical***

Socio-Cultural Anthropology

- is also often called ***social anthropology*** or ***cultural anthropology*** -the broader sub-fields of anth.
- It deals with human ***society*** and ***culture***.
  - In simple terms, while ***society*** is a group of people (*with patterns of relationships and power relationships within a specified territory*), who have similar ways of life, ***culture*** is a way of life of a group of people (*by-products of those relationships*).
- It study the social, cultural, material and non-material life of contemporary human societies.
  - It studies the ***social*** (*human relations*),

Socio-Cultural Anthropology

- By taking **culture** as unit of analysis, it study living people in all parts of the world:
  - Culture, economic lives, kinship, sex and marriage, socialization, social control, political organization, class, ethnicity, gender, religion & culture change are few of its themes.
- Its major intention is understanding the ***existing social & cultural diversity*** across the globe.
- To study and interpret cultural diversity, it engage in two types of study: **Ethnography** & **Ethnology**.

Socio-Cultural Anthropology

- **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 & present in the form of a book, article, or film.
- **Ethnology**: is the comparative study of contemporary cultures/societies, wherever they may be found.
  - It attempt to identify & explain cultural differences & similarities and build theory to enhance our understanding of how social & cultural systems work.

Socio-Cultural Anthropology

Ethnography	Ethnology
Requires field work to collect data	Uses data collected by a series of researchers
Often descriptive	Usually comparative
Focus on single culture /specific community	Generalizes across cultures

Linguistic Anthropology

- It try to understand mankind from its linguistic aspects -*one of humanity's most distinctive characteristics.*
- Study human language as ***a cultural resource*** and ***speaking as a cultural practice*** in its social & cultural context, across space and time.

- Language is basically a system of information transmission and reception & it hand down ***cultural traits from one generation to another***.

- It focuses on several key issues including:
  - *the origin of language; the r/n b/n language, culture & human thought patterns; the ways language constructs identity & ideology; linguistic*

Linguistic Anthropology

- **Structural Linguistics**: studies the structure of linguistic patterns to understand the structure & set of rules of given language.

- **Historical Linguistics:-** deals with the emergence of language & focuses on the comparison and classifications of languages to discern the historical links b/n them.

- **Ethnolinguistics:** examines the ***r/nship between language & culture*** and explore *how language affect human thinking process* & influence the *modes of perception of reality* & experience of the world.

- **Socio-linguistics**: investigates ***linguistic***

Archaeology

- It study the way's of lives of past people through the interpretation of material remains.
- It focused on the study of **historic and pre-historic cultures,** through excavating & analyzing the material/physical remains they left behind.
- To get information about earlier culture, archeologists excavate & analyze different types of material/physical remains; primarily - ***Artefacts, Features & Eco-facts.***
- **Artefacts**: are material remains made and used by the past peoples such as tools,

Archaeology

- **Features:** are artifacts made or modified by people, but they cannot be readily moved from site. e.g., *house foundations, ancient buildings, obelisk, and steles*.
- **Ecofacts**: are organic and environmental remains that were not made by human; but were used by them such as soil, animal bones, and plant remains.

**helps to understand the past environment and how people used natural resources in the past.*

- The analysis of such material/physical remains helps reveal *how people lived in the distant past and the way the past societies interacted*

Archaeology

- It has two prominent subfields:
  - **Prehistoric Archaeology**:- study human prehistoric cultures, dated b/n 6,000 years ago to 2.5 million years ago.
  - **Historical Archaeology**:- study the cultures of people who used writing & about whom historical documents have been written.
- **Ethiopia**: as per archaeological findings in north, south, east & western part of the country, Ethiopia is among those countries which have old civilization.
  - *It is believed that archeological studies and findings in the future will help to better understand the country's past and to reflect on*

Physical/Biological Anthropology

- Study humankind from a biological perspective –humanity as a biological being/species.
- It concerned with the interactions between ***human biology***, ***environment*** and ***behavior*** (culture).
- Essentially, physical anthropology is concerned with two broad areas of investigation:
  - **human evolution**:-it try's to comprehend the biological evolution of the human species.
  - **human variation**:- it examines how and why the physical traits of human populations vary throughout the world.

Physical/Biological Anthropology

- Thus, it can be defined as *the study of human biological evolution and contemporary physical variations*.
  - It **study, analyze** and **describe** human populations to understand the mechanism and processes of **human evolution**, **biological variations**, and **bio-cultural adaptations**.
  - It examine the influence of ***culture*** and ***environment*** –on human evolution & biological variations.
- In general, it is concerned with understanding how ***bio-cultural evolutionary*** factors shaped humanity through time.

Physical/Biological Anthropology

- Along the two areas of investigation, ***diverse areas of specialization*** **-**were developed–.
  - E.g., –***Paleoanthropology*** (evolution of early humans), ***Population Genetics***, ***Human Ecology***, ***Human Growth*** and ***Development, Anthropometry***, ***Human Demography, Forensic Anthropology, Primatology*** *etc.*

- In addition, it has diverse application areas (problem solving) -in ***health sector***, ***industry***, ***physical fitness analysis***, providing evidences in ***criminal cases***, providing evidences in ***identity/paternity dispute cases***, etc.

Human Variation (Physical/Biological)

- Obviously, not all human beings look the same -People come in many colors and shapes with wide-ranging ***physical/biological differences***.

Questions for Discussions:

- ***Why do people worldwide have differences in their phenotypic attributes?***
- ***What are the sources of human physical/ biological variations?***
- ***What do such differences mean for humanity as a species?***

Human Variation (Physical/Biological)

- Biological anthropology studies human variations within & among d/t populations in time and space.
  - examines how & why humans physical traits vary.

- In dealing with human variation, ***Human Ecology and Adaptation*** become its central concerns:
  - **Human ecology** is about relationships between people and their environment (general ecosystem).
  - **Adaptation** refers to changes, modifications or variations that increase the chances of survival, reproductive success and general wellbeing in an environment.

Human Variation (Physical/Biological)

- Studies of ***human ecological adaptation,*** in this regard, shades light on how ***different physical characteristics*** help people adapt to their environment.
  - Among others, ***Skin color***—*one of the most visible human characteristics* -is a good example of adaptation to a particular environment.
  - while ***natural selection*** (overtime) favored people with ***Darker skins*** in **tropical** regions -Africa (*w/h received extensive & more intensive sunlight*), ***Lighter skins***, are an adaptation (favored) to more **cloudier** regions -Europe.
  - This in a way, implicates the influence of environmental factors on the human body & human physical variation.

Human Variation (Physical/Biological)

- Besides, humans adapts mainly through **cultural** means including complex behavior such as making tools and technological inventions.
  - **Cultural evolution** is vastly ***more efficient means*** of ***adaptation*** than **biological evolution**.
  - It is a non-biological responses of people to environmental stress. It ***facilitates human biological adaptation.***
  - More rapid - potentially to all mankind in less than one generation -*inventions/discoveries occurs at high frequency*.
- Thus, the observing ***physical/biological variations*** among the modern human population is accounted to ***bio-cultural evolutionary factors*** and ***process*** that shaped humanity through time

Human Race/s and the History of Racial Typing

- Humans have undoubtedly been classifying their neighbors (or each other) in various ways -including in ***racial*** typologies, for a very long time.

Questions for Discussions:

- ***How can we understand 'race' from biological (genetic) and societal point of view?***
- ***Does the use of 'race' as a system of human classification has scientific validity?***
- ***The idea held by some people/groups about the presence of superior (master) and inferior racial groups has any***

Racial Typing: A Short Historical Overview

- The history of racial typing –*people* cl*assifying each other into d/t* —***'racial groups'***, goes back to ancient Egypt:
  - there find records (1350 BC) of ancient Egyptian's ***classifying*** people by ***skin color***.
- Because ***skin color*** was so noticeable, many ***racial classifications*** were prominently based on that factor.
- During the age of discovery (16thc), European, encountering other people –develop ***racial classification*** of their own -based on ***skin color***:
  - they also labeled these unknown people as '***Savages***' for they didn't share ***European's culture, values & religion***.

Racial Typing: A Short Historical Overview

- The **Scientific Community**, in its part were also engaged in ***human racial typing/classifications***.

- From the mid-18th c to early 20th c, in particular, d/t scholars including naturalists began to ***classify humans*** into d/t ***racial types/varieties***, using d/t methods & criteria.
  - the question of whether '***human races' were separate species or just varieties of a single species*** become crucial.
- The typology provided by **Carolus Linnaeus** (1707-1778), was worth mentioning, in this regard. *–it was influential & the first to put humans in a classification along with the primates*.
- On the basis of ***geography, skin color, humor,***

Racial Typing: A Short Historical Overview

- In the later years, (esp. mid-19th c), in attempt to categorize humans, scientists were *quantifying and measuring human bodies*, focusing primarily on ***cranial morphology***.
- However, such rigorous measurements (e.g., *craniometry*) & classification schemes – strengthen ***scientific 'racism'***.
  - they led to many arguments about which peoples were ***superior*** to the others (***racial superiority*** vs ***inferiority***).
- The root problem of such ***racial typing*** was – ***Biological determinism***: *the idea that physical traits were somehow linked to behavior.*

Racial Typing: A Short Historical Overview

- Especially of the 18th & 19th c, scientific typologies were ***ethnocentric*** *-often* ***relied upon subjective descriptions*** *of non-Europeans in contrast with a European ideal*.

  - the typologies incorporated the ***cultural values***, ***morals***, and ***stereotypes*** of their time into their explanations;
  - they were **rigid**, linking behavioral traits including ***intellect to physical characteristics*** *–strengthen popular notions of* ***racism***.

Racial Typing and Racism

- **Racism**: is an ideology/a set of ***beliefs*** about the ***superiority*** of one particular (colour/social/ethnic group) over others; **rooted** *in the assumption that behavior/intellect is linked with hereditary characteristics.*
- In extreme cases, it is used to ***justify inequality***.

- This was practically observed in the promotion of the idea of ***Social Darwinism*** and the practices of ***Eugenics***.
- **Social Darwinism** – opt for application of Darwin‘s principles of ***biological evolution to societies***.
  - the idea that as ***societies/nations evolved & competed***, the ***morally superior societies would***

Racial Typing and Racism

- **Eugenics**– as a social philosophy, advocates ***improvement*** of ***human species*** through ***social intervention*** (*selective breeding*)–:

  - during the 19th & early 20th c, along supremacist racial ideologies, people including scientists advocated for ***state regulation of marriages, family size***, & whether to ***allow an individual*** to ***reproduce***;
  - during the **II WW,** the Nazis took it to a terrible extreme;
  - using ***eugenics*** as the basis for its acts, the Nazi party killed millions of Jewish people, Gypsies and others it considered inferior in an attempt to create a **Master Race**.

Racial Typing and Racism

- The **problems** with the concept of a ***master race*** — aside the obvious **moral** issues— is that ***biological variation is necessary for the health of a population***.
  - If everyone is the same, everyone is susceptible to the same potential disaster –makes the idea of a ***master race suicidal.***
  - For this reason, many biologists measure the overall health of a species by its very genetic diversity.
- After all, **Racism** is a ***learned behavior*** that can be ***avoided*** by ***unlearning*** *–by learning and being aware of the claims made about* ***race***.
- **Yes**, *physical/biological attributes* including

Race

- Though the **modern man** exhibit *geographically based differences* within the species, a **biological** conception of '***human races***' ***makes no sense***, factually or conceptually.
- In fact, starting from the early 20th century, the "**scientific**" notions of **race** -was begin to diverge.

- **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***.

- **Dramatic *genetic discontinuities* (*species level differences)*** are ***not found among modern human population***.
  - many of the ***physical attributes*** associated with **race** are due to ***bio-cultural adaptation*** to climate & environment.
- Thus, people are fundamentally the same biologically and it would be difficult to argue otherwise:
  - as members from what are considered to be ***different human races can mate & produce offspring*** and the ***offspring*** are ***fertile*** themselves.
- More importantly, ***human behavior isn't biologically determined*** –for the most part, it's

- Instead of ***race***, biological anthropologists prefer to speak about '***ancestry***', a more general term that *recognizes the reality of some geographically specific human adaptations* but *doesn't turn them into separate species*.
- Indeed, anthropologists (e.g., Ashley Montagu,1942, & R.C. Lewontin, 1972) concluded that ***Human racial classification is of no social value*** and is ***destructive of social relations*** –And, it's ***not the correct way*** to examine human variation.
  - there find ***no identifiable, objective phenomena*** **nor do a uniform set of coherent beliefs** about **race**;
  - As a biological classification, '**race**' fails –it doesn't predict genetic similarities or differences;