Unit Three:
HUMAN CULTURE AND
IES THAT CONNECT SOCIET

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Session 3:

TOPICS

- **Conceptualizing Culture:**
  - Characteristic Features of Culture
  - Aspects/Elements of Culture
  - Cultural Unity and Variations
  - Evaluating Cultural Differences
  - Culture Change
- **Ties That Connect Society:**
  - MARRIAGE:
  - FAMILY
  - KINSHIP
  - DESCENT

Reflect your views on the following questions

- **How do you define *culture*?**
- **What are the *characteristic* features of *culture*?**
- **Do you think *culture* differentiates *human* beings from other *animals*?**

Conceptualizing Culture: *What is it?*

1. Edward B. Tylor (1871), defined **culture** as *"**a complex whole** which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits **acquired by man as a member of society**."*
2. B. Malinowski has defined **culture** *"**as cumulative creation of man.**"*
3. Clyde Kluckhohn (1951), depict **culture** as a *"**community's design for living**"*. As per to kluckhohn-
   - It consists ***patterned way's of thinking, feeling & reacting***;
   - It ***acquired*** & ***transmitted*** mainly by ***symbols***

Cntd…

- We may define **culture** as the ***common way of life*** shared by a group of people.
  - It's ***patterns of behavior*** that ***characterize*** a particular group in a given society.
- Therefore, **culture** entails ***moral, intellectual*** and ***spiritual*** advancement in accordance with the ***norms*** and ***values*** based on accumulated heritage.
  - It is a ***collective heritage*** learned by individuals and passed from one generation to another.
- In general, **Culture** refers to the ***acquired***, the ***cognitive*** and ***symbolic*** aspects of human existence.

Characteristic Features of Culture

2. Culture Is Shared:

- For a ***thing***, ***idea***, ***belief***, ***practice*** or ***behavior pattern*** to *qualify* as being "**cultural**" it must have a ***shared meaning*** among *a group of people* in a society.
  - Clifford Geertz (1983), regarded Culture as a ***system of meanings*** that was ***largely shared*** by a population.
- Without ***shared culture***, members of a society may *not be able to communicate* and *cooperate* with each other; and may end up with confusion and disorder.
  - Shared culture is fundamental for the functioning of a social system;

Characteristic Features of Culture

3. Culture Is Symbolic:

- Symbolic thought is unique and crucial to humans and to cultural learning.
- Symbols are **central** components of culture:
  - **Symbols** can be ***anything*** to which ***people attach meanings*** and by which they ***use to communicate*** with each other;
  - There need be **no** obvious, natural, or necessary connection between a ***symbol*** and ***what it symbolizes***.
  - Culture can be regarded as an ***ordered systems of symbols*** that **guide *social action/behavior***.
- Many symbols are powerful and often trigger

Characteristic Features of Culture

4. Culture Is All-Encompassing:

- Culture is the ***sum total of human creation*** -comprising ***intellectual, technical, artistic, physical,*** and ***moral values***.
  - It encompass not only the ***whole tangible lifestyles*** of people, but also the ***prevailing values*** and ***beliefs***, which ***dictate*** their ***everyday lives***;
- Thus, culture is a ***complex pattern of living*** that **directs** human ***social life***.
  - each new generation ***not only learn culture***, but ***eventually add*** with the dynamics of the social & the physical world

Characteristic Features of Culture

5. Culture Is Integrated:

- Cultures are ***not haphazard collections*** of ***customs*** and ***beliefs***.
- It is an ***integrated whole***, the parts of which, to some degree, are ***functionally interconnected*** with one another:
  - a culture is a **system**, ***change in one aspect*** will likely ***generate changes in other aspects***;
  - a ***single cultural trait*** may lose its meaning outside its integrated context.
- A Good example is organic analogy between a culture and a living organism such as the

Characteristic Features of Culture

6. Culture Can Be Adaptive & Maladaptive:

- **Culture is adaptive**:- it serve as ***coping mechanism*** against ***environmental stresses*** and help humans to ***adapt*** practically to ***any ecological condition.***
  - ***Culture*** *is an integral whole, encompassing ideas, crafts & beliefs…a vast apparatus, partly material, partly non-material & spiritual;* ***by which man is able to cope with the concrete specific problems that face him*** (Bronislaw Malinowski, 1944).
  - Cultures contain information about ***how to survive*** in the world and it's unique to human.

Characteristic Features of Culture

- **Culture** can also be **mala-adaptive-** when certain ***cultural creations*** (adaptive behaviors) that offers short-term benefit may ***harm the environment*** and ***threaten people's long-term survival*** or ***wellbeing***.
  - For instance, ***technological*** achievements like ***industrialization*** enable us to make a living and address our different material needs;
  - But the ***by-product*** of such a "beneficial" technology often ***create new problems***.
  - For eg:- Chemical emission increases air

Characteristic Features of Culture

7. **Culture Is Dynamic:**

- There is ***no culture*** that remain completely ***static*** year after year.

- Culture is ***changing constantly*** as new ideas and new techniques are added as time passes, modifying or changing the old ways.
  - In cultural process, each new generation are not only learns culture from old generations, but eventually **adds *new cultural entities*** *–responding to new challenges and problems*.

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- **Reflect your views on the following activity:**

Q-*Write down any item/activity that shows your culture. Then differentiate which one is* ***material*** *and* ***non-material culture****.*

Aspects/Elements of Culture

- The ***two basic aspects***/elements of **culture** are ***material*** and ***non-material*** culture.
- **Material culture** -consists of the ***physical products*** of human society (ranging from tools to clothing styles), which has been made and used by man.
- **Nonmaterial culture-** refers to the ***intangible products*** of human society that represent the *patterned ways of thinking and acting within a society*.
  - It consists of the ***language*** people speak, the ***beliefs*** they hold, ***values*** and ***virtues*** they cherish, ***habits*** they follow, ***rituals*** and

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- The ***most basic aspects*** of **non-material** culture includes –***Values***, ***Beliefs*** and ***Norms***.
- **Values** are the ***standards*** by which members of a society define *what is good or bad, holy or unholy, desirable or undesirable*.
  - As broad principles, ***values*** influence the behavior of members of a society -serving as ***general guide lines of behavior***.

- **Beliefs** -are *cultural conventions* that concern ***true*** *or* ***false*** *assumptions, specific descriptions of the nature of the universe and humanity's place in it*

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- **Norms:** are ***shared rules or guidelines*** that define ***how people "ought" to behave*** under certain circumstances.
  - they are connected society's values, beliefs & ideologies.
- Depending on the *degree of importance* to a *culture,* **norms** are classified as -**Mores** and **Folkways.**
  - **Folkways:** are norms guiding *ordinary usage* and *convention of everyday life* –they are agreed notions of proper conduct (***etiquette***) & have ***little moral significance***.
  - **Mores** refers to norms that are believed to be ***essential to core values &*** have ***great***

Cultural Unity and Variations

- In studying human diversity in time and space, anthropologists distinguish among the ***universal***, the ***generalized***, and the ***particular*** cultural traits:

1. **Universality:** are cultural traits that span across all cultures.
   - Example: among *Social universals* is –organizing life –***in groups*** & in some kind of ***family*** & depends on ***social interactions*** & shared ***norms*** (e.g., incest taboo) etc.
2. **Generality:** are cultural traits that occur in many societies (widespread), but not in all cultures.
   - many societies can share same beliefs and

Reflect your views on the following questions

Group Discussion:

Q: You observed many events/activities since you joined Hawassa University.

- Would you please jot down ***specific cultural differences*** you observed between *university life and home*?
- Explain the differences you noticed to the rest of group members. Which event/activity do you like and which one you don't? And, Why?

Evaluating Cultural Differences

A. ETHNOCENTRISM:

- refers to the tendency to see ***one's own group culture as superior*** and to ***apply one's own cultural values*** in judging the behavior, beliefs & practices of other cultures.
  - It involves a belief that once own group's ways are correct, normal, & better way's for thinking, feeling & behaving.
  - Alien cultural traits are often viewed as being not just d/t but ***inferior, less sensible***, and even "***unnatural***".
  - Our own group is the centre or axis of everything, and we scale and rate all others with reference to it.

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- Ethnocentrism has ***more negative*** & some *positive effects*.
- The **negative** effect of our ***ethnocentric view*** includes:
  - It results in ***prejudices*** and prevent us from understanding & appreciating others culture;
  - It prevent open communication and result in misunderstanding/mistrust, and in extreme cases might ***cause violence***.
- The **positive** aspect of ethnocentrism has to do with the protection that it can provide for a culture.
  - It acts as a conservative force in preserving traditions of one's own culture

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B. CULTURAL RELATIVISM (CR):

- CR states that cultures differ, so that a cultural trait, act, or idea has ***no meaning*** but ***its meaning only within its cultural setting***.
  - It's understanding other people's beliefs or practices in its own context without making value judgments.
- Every society has its ***own culture***, which is more or less ***unique***, ***adaptive*** & ***responsive*** to the d/t needs of its members and to the group relationships.
  - A culture must be studied/understood in terms of its own meanings & values.

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- CR involves an attitude of respect for cultural differences rather than condemning other people's culture as uncivilized or backward.

- It is not logically possible to underestimate or overestimate others culture by one’s own standards.
- Below are few examples of respect for cultural difference:
  - ✓ Appreciating cultural diversity;
  - ✓ Accepting and respecting other cultures;
  - ✓ Trying to understand every culture and its elements in terms of its own context and logic;

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C. HUMAN RIGHTS:

- **Human rights** -based on justice and morality beyond and superior to particular countries, cultures, and religions.
- It's idea ***challenges cultural relativism*** by invoking a realm of justice & morality beyond and superior to the laws/customs of particular countries, cultures or religions.
- A doctrine of ***universal human rights***, which emphasizes the ***rights of the individual*** over those of the community, would condemn abuse of such rights.
  - *Human rights include the right to speak freely, to hold religious beliefs without*

Questions for Discussions

- **What do you understand about '*ethnocentrism*' and '*cultural relativism*'?**
- **Debating ethnocentrism vs cultural relativism-**
  - ***In context of multicultural/ethnic/linguistic societies like Ethiopia, which approach do you think is productive? And, why? (please share your ideas with your classmates).***
- **What do you think about cultural relativism and human rights?**

Culture Change

- Culture change can occur as a result of the following mechanisms:

i. **Diffusion**
ii. **Acculturation**
iii. **Invention**
iv. **Globalization**

Cntd.....

I. Cultural Diffusion:

- Is the process by which cultural elements are borrowed from another society and incorporated into the culture of the recipient group.
- It's the spread of cultural traits from one area to the other via ***direct, forced*** or ***indirect*** contacts:
  - Diffusion is ***direct*** when two cultures trade with, intermarry among, or wage war on one another.
  - It is ***forced*** when one culture subjugates another and imposes its customs on the dominated group.

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II. Acculturation:

- Is the exchange of cultural features that results when groups have continuous firsthand contact.
- The cultures of either or both groups may be changed or blended by this contact.
- This usually happens in situations of trade or colonialism.

III. Independent Invention:

- Refers to any new thing, idea or behavior pattern that emerges from within a society.
- Some **inventions** are ***very purposeful*** (*an adaptive response*) while others are

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iv. Globalization:

- The broad-scale changes and transformations that have resulted from the ***impacts of industrialization*** and the emergence of an ***inter connected global economy***, with the spread of capital, labor (migration) and technology across national borders.
- The mass media help propel a globally, spreading ***culture of consumption***.

- **Reading Assignment**

❖ In your course module, go to ***Page 63*** (*section 3.8*) and make a reading on ***'Culture Areas and Culture Contact'*** **and** familiarize yourself with the **main culture areas identified in the context of Ethiopia in r/n to subsistence –'Plough Culture Area', 'Enset Culture Area', and 'Pastoral Culture Area'.**

Ties That Connect: *Marriage, Family and Kinship*

- In this part students are expected to get a good understanding of social organization!

Marriage

- Almost all known, societies recognize marriage; though the ***norms*** that arrange for an institutionalized marriage vary along cultures.
- Marriage, like all other things cultural, is governed by ***rules***; & as the rules vary across society, so does the ***ritual*** by which society recognizes and celebrates the marriage.
- Despite this, anthropologists attempt to formulate a **universal** definition of marriage.

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- **Defining Marriage:**

- ***"It is a socially approved union between a man and a woman that regulates the sexual and economic rights and obligations between them."***

- But, this definition ***lack universal quality*** -there are societies, where *husband & wife live separately, do not have economic cooperation & the spouses are permitted to have extra-marital sexual relations.*

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- One interesting case is the *Nayar of* Southern India.
- Although teenage Nayar girls took a ritual husband in a public ceremony, the husband took no responsibility for the women after the ceremony, and frequently he never saw her again.

- Thus, the Nayar do not have marriage according to our definition in that there is ***no economic, cooperation, regulation of sexual activity, cohabitation, or expectation of permanency***.

Rules of Marriage

- Societies have rules that state whom one can and cannot marry.
- It's conventionally prescribed by social groups to clearly states: *whom one can & can not marry and when & where one should marry*... and so on. (It's obligatory).
- Rules which prescribe ***whom one can not marry*** are directly related to ***Incest Taboo*** –w/h is a *universal cultural practice;* except limited exceptions.
- ***Incest taboo's*** forbids *sexual relations* b/n certain categories of close relatives/social units & so does ***marriage***.
- Almost universally forbidden categories includes

Mate Selection: *Whom Should You Marry?*

- In addition to the rules in the form of ***incest taboo*** –there are certain other ***strict rules and regulations***:

a) Exogamy: a rule that require selection of spouse from outside once own kin groups or community.

- It may take many forms –it can be ***linage exogamy, clan exogamy*** or ***village exogamy***.
- It creates links b/n d/t groups –establishing *fictitious relationships* & it has ***adaptive value***.

b) Endogamy: a rule that allow marriage within a group & forbid individuals to marry outside the group.

Example: *religious groups –Catholics and*

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c) Preferential Cousin Marriage:

- In certain society indviduals can choose certain categories or relatives as marriage partners.
- A common form of preferred marriage is called ***preferential cousin marriage -c***an be distinguished between **two *different types of first cousins***:

❖ **Cross Cousins**: are children of siblings of the opposite sex- that is one's mother's brothers' children and one's father's sisters' children.

➢ It's the most common form of preferential

Cntd…

- **Parallel Cousins**: is when marriage takes place between children of siblings of the *same sex,* namely the children of one's mother's sister and one's father brother.
  - It can serve to prevent the fragmentation of family property.

d) The Levirate and Sororate:

- rules of marriage that require a person to marry the husband or wife of a deceased kin.

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- **The levirate:** is the custom whereby a widow is expected to marry the brother (or some close male relative) of her deceased husband.
- Any children from the woman's new husband are considered to belong legally to the deceased brother rather than to the actual genitor.
- The ***two side benefit*** of **Levirate** are:
- ✓ *social security* for the widow and her children,
- ✓ preserve the rights of her husband's family to her sexuality, future children &

Cntd…

- **The sororate**: comes into play when a wife dies.
- It is the practice of a widower marrying the sister (or some close female relative) of his deceased wife.

  E.g., Shertukpen Indian's.

- Radcliff Brown (1952), referred the two forms of marriage (*Levirate & Sororate*) as '***the equivalence of siblings***' in w/h one same-sex sibling can be substituted for another.

Forms of Marriage

- the forms of marriage varies across cultures & societies & largely depends on the ***number of spouse involved in the marriage***.
- Cultural anthropologists have identified ***three major types*** of **marriage** based on the ***number of spouses***:

- ***Monogamy*****:** it's a form of marriage in which an individual has a single spouse at any given time.
- ***Polygyny*****:** a form of marriage in which an individual has ***multiple wives*** at any time.
- ***Polyandry:*** a form of marriage in which a

Economic Consideration of Marriage

- One aspect of marriage contract is the rights of the spouses to each other's economic goods and services.
- The transfer of rights is usually accompanied by the transfer of some type of economic consideration.
- These transfers taking place either before or after the marriage can be divided into ***three categories***:

1. **Bride Price:** when payments are made by the groom and his family to the family of the bride (*dominant in Africa*).
2. **Bride Service:** when the groom works for

Post-Marital Residence

- **Patrilocal Residence:** the married couple lives with or near the relatives of the husband's father.
- **Matrilocal Residence**: the married couple lives with or near the relatives of the wife.
- **Avunculocal Residence**: the married couple lives with or near the husband's mother's brother.
- **Ambilocal/Bilocal Residence**: the married couple has a choice of living with relatives of the wife or relatives of the husband

- **Questions for Discussions**

- **Discuss the important functions of economic transactions involved in marital contract (e.g. *bride wealth payment*)?**
- **Identify the major types of marriage and a kind of residential place a married couple will take in your locality. And share it with your classmates.**

FAMILY

- Family is a primary social group, universally recognized to be a basis of all human society.
- It is the most permanent and most pervasive of all social institutions.
- It integrates its members in best possible manner, where ***affection, mutual trust*** and ***blood ties*** are the integrating bonds of a family.
- Cultural anthropologists have identified **two** fundamentally different ***types of family structure***:

1. **The Nuclear Family**: the family unit of husband, wife, and children live in separate households.

- it's related to ***monogamous*** forms of marriage &

2. The Extended Family: consists of two or more nuclear families, affiliated through an extension of the parent-child relationships (blood ties).

- This takes the form of a married couple living with one or more of their married children in a single household and under the authority of a family head.
- In such societies blood ties are more important than ties of marriage.
- Indeed, **Family** is a social group based on marriage & marriage contract, including ***recognition of the rights of & duties of parenthood, common residence, &***

Functions of Marriage and Family

- Family performs certain specific functions including:

1. **Biological Function**: sexual and reproductive function –so that a society perpetuate itself.
2. **Economic Function**: economic co-operation between men and women and ensure survival of individuals in a society.
3. **Social Function**: linking once kin group to another kin group.
4. **Educational Function**: the burden of enculturation and education of new born infants falls primarily upon the family –

Kinship

- Kinship system is an *extension of family structure* into broader networks of relationships between groups based up on ***shared descent***.
- It is not a social group, but is a ***structured system of relationships*** (a method of reckoning relationship).
- It's the relationship between persons, either by ***blood*** or ***marriage***:
- If the kin is related by **blood** –it forms ***Consanguineal kinship relation***, whereas if is related by **marriage**, it forms ***Affinal kinship relation***.

DESCENT

- Descent refers to the social recognition of the biological relationship that exists between the individuals.
- ***Rules of descent*** refers to a set of principles by which an individual traces his descent.
- It define *the kinship system of a group* and it provides the foundation for the formation of descent groups.
- Descent determine ***group membership*** as well as ***rights to property*** & ***inheritance***.

- Anthropologists identify **three** important ***rules of descent***:

- **Patrilineal Descent** – is when descent is traced solely through the male line.
- It affiliates an individual with a Consanguineous kin group through the male or ***agnatic line*** & the rules of descent is called ***patrilineal rules of descent***.
- A man's children all belong to the same descent group by birth, but it only the sons who continue the affiliation.
- **Matrilineal Descent** - it reckons descent through the mother line.
- It affiliates an individual with a *Consanguineous*

Cognatic Descent:

- In some society's individuals are free to show their genealogical links either through men or women.
- Some people of such society are therefore connected with the kin-group of father and others with the kin group of mothers.
- There ***is no fixed rule*** to trace the succession and inheritance; any combination of ***lineal link*** is possible in such societies.
- ***Lineal kin*** –kin who are related to each other directly through same descent.

- In addition, in some societies there is a **Double/Bilateral Rules of Descent** – where an individual descended to a *pair of* ***consanguinean kin groups***, affiliated through:
  - the **agnatic line** with his consanguinean kinsmen, who shared descent from a common male ancestor &
  - the **uterine line** with his consanguinean kinsmen who shared descent from a common female ancestor.
- As result, an individual belongs to two *consanguinean kin groups –patrilineal* and *matrilineal*.

Reading Assignment

1. Why and how do cultures change?

2. How do families and marriage differ in different societies?

3. What do you see as the main difference between nuclear and extended families?

4. What is the rules of descent used to reckon kinship in your locality/culture?