

# Unit Three: Human Diversity, Culture Areas and Contact in Ethiopia

## Chapter Introduction:

- In this unit, we believe you will get a better understanding of what makes humanity different from other animal species within the animal kingdom and how did diverse groups of people emerge across the globe through time.
- The unit is structured in such a way that you will be able to recognize/ find out the sources of human variation emanating from environmental, evolutionary and cultural factors.
- As a result, in this unit, you will be introduced to themes such as humanity, human diversity or variation, race, racial forms, culture areas and aspects of contact (interaction, connection) in the context of Ethiopia.

### 3.1. Human Beings & Being Human: What it is to be human?

□ **Reflect your views on the following questions:**

- What do you understand by the term humanity, diversity, and human diversity/variation?
- What makes human beings different from other animals?
- Origin and evolution of human beings?
- As you learnt in the first two units of this module, anthropology is a broader discipline covering a vast spatio-temporal dimension in the study of man/humanity.
- **Since anthropology studies humanity in its entirety, it is often called a mirror of humanity.**
- As Kluckhohn correctly pointed out: **"Anthropology holds up a great mirror to man and lets him look at himself in his infinite variety."**

- In this case, anthropology helps human beings to look into themselves by searching for answers to questions that challenge us.

**□ Some of the questions central to humanity and anthropology are:**

- What are the commonalities among humans worldwide? (That is what does every human culture do?)
- What are the variations among humans worldwide (That is, what things do only some cultures do?)
- Why do these commonalties and variations exist in the first place? (In other worlds why aren't all human cultures the same?)
- How does humanity change through time? (Is it still evolving, and if so, how?)
- Where has Humanity been, and what can that show us about where humanity is going? (That is, what can we learn about ourselves today, from the past?)

- In order to address these questions, we should rely on key anthropological concepts of comparative approach (cultural relativism) and evolution.
- The comparative approach, which is also known as cultural relativism, entails those cultures shouldn't be compared one another for the sake of saying one is better than the other.
- Instead, **cultures should be compared in order to understand how and why they differ and share commonalties each other.**
- The comparative approach or cultural relativism encourages us not to make moral judgments about different kinds of humanity, and it examines cultures on their own and from the perspective of their unique history and origin.

- **Evolution** is another key concept in anthropology which, together with the comparative approach (cultural relativism) allows us to address the aforementioned fundamental questions regarding our distant origin, current stage of growth, forms of adaptation, and predict future direction of development.
- By studying evolution, the change of species through time, anthropologists tend to treat humanity as one of the biological species in the animal kingdom.

- In this respect, human biology and culture have evolved over millions of years and they will continue to evolve together.
- **Human biology affects human culture; and similarly, human culture affects human biology.**
- One example of this is that the brain size of humans has become larger over millions of years of evolution, and this is considered biological change.
- Whereas, the change in human brain has brought cultural changes in terms of increased intelligence, language and even the emergence of writing.
- This is why anthropologists **use the term bio cultural to describe the dual nature of human evolution: both biological and cultural dimensions.**
- **Human beings are described as a bio cultural animal.** In what follows we will see the meaning of bio cultural evolution with practical examples.

# The bio cultural animal?

- Humanity evolves both as a result of biological factors and cultural factors.
- For this reason, anthropologists call it **bio cultural evolution**.
- Although humans survive by using both their biology and cultural information, **all other animals survive mainly through their biology and by relying on instinct rather than such cultural information.**
- **Consider the following cultural behaviors and their possible involvement with biological evolution of our species:**
  - The earliest use of stone tools corresponds/agrees/ with increased consumption of animal protein. **More animal protein in turn changes the hominid diet and potentially its anatomy/structure.**

- The use of clothing (itself a cultural artifact or object) allows human bodies to survive in environments they wouldn't normally survive in. For example, the human body is naturally best-suited for equatorial environments, not the Arctic, but the invention of heavy coats and other such clothing enables that body to survive Arctic temperatures.
- As a result, Paleo-anthropologists(scientific) are concerned with understanding how cultural, non-cultural, and bio-cultural evolutionary factors shaped humanity through time.
- If this is the case, let us first see the meaning of humanity from the anthropological perspective.



- **Humanity** is the most common term we to use refer to human beings. Humanity stands for the human species, a group of life forms with the following characteristics:
  - Bipedalism (walking on two legs);
  - Relatively small teeth for primates of our size;
  - Relatively large brains for primates of our size;
  - Using modern language to communicate ideas; and
  - Using complex sets of ideas called culture to survive.
- Standing on two legs and having particularly small teeth and large brains are all anatomical characteristics, and they're studied by anthropologists focusing on human biological evolution.
- Surviving by using a wide array of cultural information (including instructions for making a pottery or farming tools in Ethiopia) is the use of culture. It's studied by other anthropologists, and even more study the evolution of language.

- **Humanity** is a general term that doesn't specify whether you're talking about males, females, adults, or children; it simply means our species- *Homo sapiens sapiens*- at large.
- The term *humanity* can be applied to modern humans (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) as well as some of our most recent ancestors, placed more generally in *Homo sapiens*, without the subspecies (the second *sapiens*) suffix.
- Exactly when *Homo sapiens* evolved into *Homo sapiens sapiens* is a complex question based on when humans became *anatomically* modern and when they became *behaviorally* modern.

## 3.2 Origin of the Modern Human Species: Homo sapiens sapiens

### □ Reflect your views on the following questions:

- What do different world religions and cosmologies say about the origin of human beings?
- What about scientific (paleo-anthropological explanations) about the origin and evolution of human beings?

### 3.2 1. Cosmologies Vs. Evolutionally and Paleo-anthropological Explanations

- One of the major questions anthropologists' grapples (deal) with is the origins of humankind.
- The fossil record preserves evidence of past life on Earth, tracing or drawing a progression of simple one-celled organisms to increasingly diverse forms.

- How did these different forms of life emerge and new species arise?
- The biological explanations for this process are the focus of this section.
- Theories concerning the evolution of life date back to the ancient Greeks, but it was only during the 19th century that the first comprehensive theories of evolution were developed.
- They were made possible through discoveries in many different areas. The acceptance of evolutionary theory is based on research in many fields.
- Indeed, the value of evolutionary theory is its utility (usefulness) as a unifying explanation for a wide variety of phenomena.
- Before examining the scientific basis for our understanding of evolution, it is useful to consider other explanations of human origins.

## A. Cosmologies and Human Origins

- The most profound questions are the ones that perplex (puzzle, confuse) us the most.
- Where did we come from? Why are we here? What is our place in the universe?
- These questions have been shared by many people throughout history. Most cultures have developed explanations that provide answers to these fundamental questions.
- **Cosmologies are conceptual frameworks that present the universe (the *cosmos*) as an orderly system.**

- They often include answers to these basic questions about human origins and the place of human kind in the universe, usually considered the most sacred (holly) of all cosmological conceptions.
- Cosmologies (the scientific study of the origin and structure of the universe or cosmos) account for **the ways in which supernatural beings or forces formed human beings and the planet we live on.**
- These beliefs are transmitted from generation to generation through ritual, education, laws, art, and language.

- In Western cultural traditions, the ancient Greeks had various **mythological explanations (lacking factual basis or historical validity)** for human origins.
- The most important cosmological tradition affecting Western views of creation is recounted in the biblical Book of Genesis, which is found in Greek texts dating back to the 3rd century BC. This Judaic tradition describes how God created the cosmos(universe). **It begins with “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” and describes how creation took six days** during which light, heaven, Earth, vegetation, Sun, Moon, stars, birds, fish, animals, and humans originated.

## B. Evolutionary and paleo-anthropological perspectives on human origin

- **As opposed to cosmological explanations** that we discussed above, today anthropologists rely on scientific views of evolution in order to explain human origins. **Simply put, evolution refers to a process and gradual change in species over time.**
- In fact, evolution is used to describe the **cumulative effects** of three independent facts.
- Importantly, **these attributes of evolution can be observed in nature every day.** They are:
  - **Replication:** The fact that life forms have offspring;
  - **Variation:** The fact that each offspring is slightly different from its parents, and its siblings; and
  - **Selection:** The fact that not all offspring survive, and those that do tend to be the ones best suited to their environment.



### 3.3 The Kinds of Humanity: human physical variation

#### ☐ Reflect your views on the following questions

- Why isn't everyone the same?
- Why do people worldwide have differences in their phenotypic attributes?
- People come in many colors and shapes; people of the Mediterranean, for example, are obviously darker-skinned than those of Scandinavia, and natives of the Arctic are shorter and stockier than the tall, lean Samburu of East Africa.

- Why is this?
- How did these variations come about, and what do they mean for humanity as a species?
- The answer comes from the study of human biology by physical anthropologists.
- In this section we will see how human populations have adapted to their varying environments by the same evolutionary process that shapes all living things from the perspective of race.

### 3.3.1. Racial types- anthropological perspectives

- Like all living things with sensory input, humans have to classify their perceptions into some kind of order: These things go with these others but don't belong in this group.
- Some people have darker skin, so they're in the "darker skin" category. And the list goes on.
- Obviously, not all human beings look the same, so humans have spent some time putting people of different colors, body shapes, and so on into different categories sometimes called races.
- Unfortunately, this tendency has had some very bad consequences for millions of human beings over the centuries.

- Biologically speaking, a **race** is a group of organisms of the same species that share similar physical (and genetic) attributes and specific geographic regions.
- In short, they're subdivisions of a single species- meaning they can mate and have offspring that are healthy enough to have their own offspring-exhibiting some characteristics reflecting their geographical origins.
- This definition is pretty slippery, though, because finding good examples of distinctly different races is difficult.

- The most visible non-human animal races are those of dogs. Wherever you go, all dogs are in the same **species-*Canis familiaris***- but they have obvious physical differences. Strictly speaking, they're of different races - and even this isn't so strict, because these differences come from humans selectively breeding these animals for certain characteristics, not from their originally inhabiting very different environments.
- Once, all dogs (most likely first domesticated about 20,000 years ago) were wolf-like, and their modern diversity is more a result of human selective breeding than geographical adaptation.

- Just like any other living thing, human beings adapt to their environments through an evolutionary process.
- Throughout this unit we will see the ways in which our species adapts mainly through cultural means; that is, we survive our environments not because we've adapted to them biologically, but with artifacts and complex behavior.
- In this respect, it should be noted that human bodies (human beings) have adapted to certain conditions over time.

- **Adaptation** is can be understood as a process (behavioral and/or biological) that increases the likelihood of survival for an organism.
- An adaptation can be a mutation/change, transformation/ that confers/discuss/ an advantage.
- For example, a frog that has better-camouflaged skin (a way of hiding something by painting it or covering it with something) than its siblings **have a lower chance of being snapped up by a fish, and therefore a stronger chance to survive and have offspring that will carry the gene for better-adapted camouflage.**
- **In humans, adaptations include complex behavior, such as making tools. These behaviors aren't passed on genetically but rather culturally.**

- Some of these bodily adaptations are pretty easily visible, and some are only visible when you look very closely at the genes.
- Skin color—one of the most visible human characteristics — is a good example of adaptation to a particular environment.
- The darkest skin appears in populations originating in tropical zones, such as Africa and Asia.
- The lightest skin is traditionally found in northern Europe because over time, natural selection favored darker skins in areas that received extensive and more intensive sunlight, because individuals with lighter skin in these areas were more prone to skin cancers.
- Darker skin, then, is an adaptation to the geographical conditions of Africa.



- What's the adaptive value of lighter skin?
- It has to do with vitamin D, of all things.
- Vitamin D is a nutrient that helps human bones form properly.
- Without enough vitamin D, deformities like the disease *rickets*, which normally includes bowed (deformed) legs and a misshapen pelvis, will occur.

- Humans naturally produce Vitamin D through the skin when they're exposed to sunlight, but cloudier parts of the world — like northern Europe — are exposed to much less sunlight than regions in the tropics, where the species began.
- As early human populations were expanding into northern Europe around 40,000 years ago, those individuals with darker skin were less able to manufacture Vitamin D and probably experienced a much lower birthrate than those populations with lighter skin.
- Lighter skin, then, is an adaptation to the geographical conditions of Europe because over time, the prehistoric colonists of Europe who happened to be born with lighter skin (simply by chance) had more offspring, who themselves carried the genes for lighter skin.

- Biological adaptations aren't instantaneous/immediate.
- They take place over the span of generations, so an African moving to Europe won't evolve lighter skin, nor will a European travelling to Africa evolve darker skin (except for some tanning).

- Another example of biological adaptation in human beings is the difference of stature between arctic (such as Inuit) and East African (such as Maasai) people.
- In biology, *Bergmann's rule* indicates that in colder regions, warm-blooded animals will have stockier bodies than their counterparts from warmer regions, because stockier bodies are more efficient at retaining body heat.
- In the cold polar regions, the Inuit have a short and stocky build; the Maasai of East Africa have taller and more slender bodies that don't have to retain so much heat — they actually have to dump excess heat in their hot environment, which is facilitated by their body shape. Body stature in these cases is an adaptation to the geographical conditions of hot African and the cold Arctic.

- The rapid physiological changes that occur in one's lifetime — like a mountaineer's adjustment to lower oxygen levels at high altitude — **are referred to as *habituation or acclimatization*.**
- **These *aren't passed on genetically*** to the next generation (because changes acquired during life can't be encoded in the genes,) and they're reversible (as when the mountaineer returns to lower elevations.)

### 3.3.2. What Anthropologists can say for sure about Human Races?

- So, do human races exist? Very strictly speaking, yes. *Homo sapiens sapiens* does feature geographically based differences within the species. **However, you must consider two very important points:**
  - ❑ **First**, these genetic differences don't mean a lot, biologically. Because all healthy humans can mate and have healthy offspring, we're all in *Homo sapiens sapiens*, biologically speaking.
- Don't let anyone tell you different. Not only is it inaccurate to say "the female species" when talking about significant sex differences between males and females, but **it's also inaccurate to say "the African race" or the "European race" when speaking of deep differences in these peoples.**

- A look at the genes shows no significant species-level differences — only very minor visible ones such as skin color, shape of nose, or hair texture.
- **Biologically speaking, though, these differences aren't important.** For most physical anthropologists (who've spent the most time closely examining human biology), **race is nearly meaningless when applied to humanity.**
- Rather than talk about races, physical anthropologists **more commonly talk today of ancestry**, a more general term that recognizes the reality of some geographically specific human adaptations but doesn't turn them into loaded, black-and-white races (pun intended.) **Ancestry may be important, for example, when considering someone's genetic health because different human populations have developed slightly different genetic characteristics over time.**

- ❑ **Second** — and most important — is that cultural behavior isn't genetically linked to those geographical differences. This disconnect is one of anthropology's most important discoveries and lessons for humanity.
- **People from Scandinavia aren't reserved** — or whatever other behavioral trait you may apply to them — because it's in their genes to be so. It's not.
  - **Most of human behavior isn't biologically determined or filtered in through the natural environment — most of it is culturally learned.** An infant from Japan can be raised in the Kalahari of Southern Africa and won't automatically remove his shoes when going into a home unless his culture specifically teaches him to do so.
  - **Like any human can acquire any language, any infant can acquire any culture; it's culture that really drives behavior, not the genes.** The ancient belief that human races have innate behavioral traits — industrious Asians or hot-blooded Mediterranean's — is simply wrong.



- One of the main reasons the race concept really doesn't apply to humans is that defining human races is almost impossible: **For example:**
  - ✓ To what race do you assign a person born from a Native American and a native African marriage?
  - ✓ Do you create a new race in this case?
  - ✓ Although some of these designations/descriptions/ do exist, to come up with a race for every possible combination of ancestries **would be an infinite job**. Plus, it would just be another exercise in drawing lines where they don't really exist. **And what's "black" or "white"? Is a Greek person black or white? Of course, they're in between.** Assigning people to a race based on skin color becomes an exercise in holding up paint chips to the skin.

### 3.4 Human Races: the history of racial typing

- Like all animals, humans have undoubtedly been classifying their neighbors in various ways for a very long time.
- Some of the first records of humans classifying others as certain “types” come from ancient Egypt, where by 1350 BC you can see records of them classifying humans by skin color:
  - ✓ Egyptians were red-skinned, people south of Egypt were black-skinned, those living north of the Mediterranean Sea were white-skinned, and people to the east were yellow-skinned.

- By the 16th century, during the Age of Discovery, Europeans voyaging around the world were encountering many previously unknown peoples and developing racial classifications of their own.
- Because skin color was so noticeable, many racial classifications were based only on that factor.
- Additionally, these unknown people weren't Christian and didn't share European culture and values, so the Europeans labeled them Savages.
- In fact, they thought they could use racial type as an indicator of just how Savage a person was.
- The less European-looking, of course, the more Savage. Though most have ditched(abandoned) this concept today, many racial supremacists still believe that cultural behavior correlates with skin color, nose shape, hair texture, or what have you.

- Some naturalists in the 16th through 19th centuries proposed that savages were even a different *species* than white Europeans, saying that they shouldn't even be considered human.
- This classification made persecution and enslavement of different peoples purely because of how they looked much easier.
- Early attempts by Europeans to categorize people into racial schemes (arrangements) were extremely biased and hierarchical, associating morality and intelligence with skin color and other physical attributes.
- These schemes always placed Europeans at the top of the scale, and the successively darker-skinned peoples at the bottom.

- By the mid-1800s, naturalists began using a method of describing the shape of the head called the ***cephalic index***, a ratio measurement of the length and width of the head.
- ***Dolichocephalic*** peoples had long and narrow heads (like most northern Europeans), and ***brachycephalic*** peoples tended to have broad heads — like many southern Europeans.
- Not surprisingly, this classification scheme and others like it led to many arguments about which peoples were superior to the others.

- The root problem of all this flailing around at the identification of human types **was *biological determinism***, the idea that physical traits were somehow linked to behavior.
- Many thought traits like intellect, values, and morals were all products of one's race.
- Today, most people know better, although some people still wear sheets and call for “racial purity,” an impossible and destructive idea.

- A similar way that everyone — including early anthropologists — had this idea all wrong was in the application of Darwin’s principles of biological evolution to societies. This led to a concept known as *social Darwinism*, the idea that as societies and nations evolved and competed, the morally superior societies would prevail (overcome), as the less-moral, “savage” societies were weeded out (cleared out), and that this was all natural and good.
- Around this time debates about the superiority or inferiority of particular groups continued and some began to fear that civilized (meaning northern European Christian) society was slowly being destroyed by “unfit” peoples who, for one reason or another, were not being weeded out.

- With behavioral characteristics “linked” to genetic characteristics in the minds of many (including scientists), some in the 19th and early 20th centuries even advocated for state regulation of marriages, family size, and whether to allow an individual to reproduce.
- This practice became known as ***eugenics***, and the Nazis took it to a terrible extreme during World War II. In Germany, the Nazi party began to systematically kill those members of society that it considered inferior to the Northern-European Christian ideal they held.
- 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.



- The problems with the concept of a master race — aside (separately) from the obvious moral issues surrounding eugenics — is that biological variation is necessary for the health of a population.
- Basically, if all members of a population are the same, the population has no buffer against a particularly lethal or catastrophic disease or any other major change in the species' selective environment. If everyone is the same, everyone is susceptible to the same potential disaster.
- For this reason, many biologists measure the overall health of a species by its very genetic diversity. So even if a master race were possible, and one could (and would want to) manage to prevent any interbreeding, the end result would be a genetically uniform and genetically vulnerable population. **The idea of a master race is therefore suicidal.**

### 3.5 The Grand Illusion: Race, turns out, is arbitrary

#### ❑ Why do you think is race become an elusive (intangible, vague) concept?

- Over the years, various anthropologists have attempted to classify the human species into various races, such as Caucasian, Black African, Asian, and so on.
- The problem is that the physical traits used to identify which group an individual belonged in aren't binary opposites like black or white, period, with no middle ground. **They're *continuous* traits, meaning that a whole spectrum/range/ exists between, say, "black" and "white" skin designations.**

- Any attempt to classify human races raises a number of questions. Although Asians look pretty clearly different from Europeans in some respects, what do you do with people who look, well, partly Asian and partly European? And does “European” end in the Middle East, where some African traits are present? Where does Africa even begin, genetically speaking? Who’s going to draw up the lines between “black” and “white” (and what qualifies that person for the job, anyway)?

- One thorough 1972 study by Harvard anthropologist R.C. Lewontin concluded that **“Human racial classification is of no social value and is positively destructive of social and human relations.** Since such racial classification is now seen to be of virtually no genetic or taxonomic [classifying] significance either, no justification can be offered for its continuance.”
- Bottom line: For most professional anthropologists today, human **“race” is an antiquated (old fashioned, obsolete) concept.**
- **For biomedical reasons** (and sometimes forensic identification of bodies), the reality of genetic ancestry can be important, **but color-coded races, loaded with behavioral traits, are basically arbitrary.**

### 3.6. Why is Everyone Different? Human Cultural Diversity/Variation

- Why don't others do things the way we/you do?
- Although all humans are of the same species, they don't all act the same; human behavior varies tremendously(extremely) worldwide.
- If race doesn't control a person's characteristics, what does account for human behavioral variation?
- In short, the answer is culture. Cultures differ because people live in different conditions, be they ecological, economic, social, or what have you. For example, each culture is ultimately a unique adaptation to the social and environmental conditions in which it evolves.

- The culture of the Amazonian foragers (hunters) has certain characteristics, and they value certain things and act certain ways, because they have evolved in a particular ecological environment, one different from highland Scots, whose own culture is an adaptation to their unique environment. This difference is ultimately why human behavior isn't the same worldwide.
- Of course, human cultures have been evolving for thousands of years — and in the modern age, with mass communication and mass movement of peoples from one environment and culture to another, culture has changed very quickly.

### 3.7. Culture area and cultural contact in Ethiopia

- Put simply culture areas refers to a cluster of related cultures occupying a certain geographical region. In anthropology the concept of culture area has been used beginning from the 1920s where Alfred Kroeber and his contemporaries were interested in examining the concentration of cultural traits in a given geographic area.
- In the context of Ethiopia, we may come up with different culture areas in relation to subsistence (survival). These are plough culture (cultivate), *Enset* culture area, pastoral societies culture area.

## A. Plough culture area

- Plough culture area represents those parts of the country where agriculture is predominantly the means by which subsistence is eked out (to get with great difficulty).
- Most of highland and central parts of the country serves as the backbone of the economy is considered a plough culture. The area often called plough culture has been a subject of anthropological inquires over the past seven decades starting from the 1950s.
- Some of the ethnographers who studied the area that we call plough culture are Donald Levine, Allen Hobben, Fredrick Gamst and Jack Bauer.



## B. Enset culture area

- *Enset* culture area, on the other hand, covers a vast region in the southern part of country.
- *Enset* cultivating regions of the present day SNNPRS such as the Guraghe, Sidama and Gedeo areas constitute *enset* culture area.
- In this region, *enset* serves as a staple (main, principal) diet to the people who make use the plant in a wide variety of forms for a living.

## C. Pastoral culture area

- Pastoral culture area is found in the low land areas covering a large section of the Afar in the northwest, Somali in the southeast and Borena of southern of Ethiopia.
- As opposed to the above cases, inhabitants of the pastoral culture area rely (depend on) significantly on their herds and cattle for a living.
- Mobility of people and herds is a major characteristic feature of the people occupying the pastoral culture area.