Gender, Culture and Power (SoAN: 2071)

CHAPTER ONE

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1. What is Gender?

1.1 The Discourse of Gender

Gender is a socio-cultural variable that refers to the comparative relation or differential roles, responsibilities and activities of female and male. Gender is a key dimension of personal life, social relations and culture. It is an arena in which we face difficult practical issues about justice, identity and even survival. According to Connell (2009), gender is a topic on which there is a great deal of prejudice, myth and outright falsehood. Many people believe that women and men are psychologically opposites that men are more intelligent than women, men are naturally violent, or that gender patterns never change. Connell maintains that all these things are factually wrong given that research and theory in the human sciences provide vital tools for dispelling prejudices and understanding the real issues.

Gender issues are about men quite as much as they are about women. There is now extensive research and public debate on masculinities, fatherhood, men's movements, boys' education, men's health and men's involvement in achieving gender equality. In the 1970s, a number of feminist theorists proposed a sharp distinction between "sex" and "gender". Sex is the biological fact, the difference between the male and the female human animal. Gender is the social fact, the difference between masculine and feminine roles, or men's and women's personalities. In short, the conventional definition of gender refers to the cultural difference of women from men, based on the biological division between male and female. Dichotomy and difference are the substance of the idea. Connell and many other contemporary feminist scholars have objections to such a definition for the following reasons.

I.   Human life does not simply divide into two realms, nor does human character divide into two types. Our images of gender are often dichotomous, but the reality is not

II. A definition in terms of difference means that where we cannot see difference, we cannot see gender. With such a definition we could not recognize the gendered character of lesbian or homosexual desire (based on gender similarity). Intra-sex relations can also be gendered.

III. A definition based on dichotomy excludes the differences among women, and among men, from the concept of gender. For instance, there are women who display the behavior of men, and men who are womanish.

Currently, social science research has made the move in defining gender from a focus on difference to a focus on relations. Thus *gender is the structure of social relations that centers on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes.* In other words, gender concerns the way human society deals with human bodies and their continuity, and the many consequences of that dealing in our personal lives and our collective fate. Gender relations are always constituted through everyday life practice.

People are born female or male, but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. They are taught what the appropriate behavior and attitudes, roles and activities are for them, and how they should relate to other people. This learned behavior is what makes up gender identity, and determines gender roles. Gender is a dynamic concept. Gender roles for women and men vary greatly from one culture to another and from one social group to another within the same culture. Sex unlike gender distinguishes males from females exclusively by biological characters.

According to UN reports, the role of women in agricultural production or other income generating activities is often ignored denying them access to resources, credit and training. Also, it can be argued that women work long hours than men, but earn less and their works and opinions are undervalued. On the other hand, women face obstacles to holding position of authority and may be exposed to threats of violence. The UN (2000) thus, presents the following statistical data on women's subordinate position to men. In this regard, women perform 67% of the world's working hours, earn 10% of the world's income, constitute 2/3 of the world's illiterates and own less than 1% of the world's property. Due to women's subordinate position to men, planners and policy makers often ignore women and view the

world from the male perspectives although it is not purposely to oppress women. The gender question is therefore, the ability of any actor especially in development matters to consider and address issues from the perspective and interests of both men and women.

1.2 Why Gender Equity?

It is true that involving women at all levels of development thinking, planning and implementation will make a world of difference not merely to women but to the capacity of society to envisage and carry out planned social change, which will permit humankind to live in harmony. To bring women to centre stage however, will require profound changes in ways that societies conceive of relations between the genders and the dismantling of centuries' old structures of thought and practice. Such changes will take a long time to bring about because women are a tremendous social resource which no society can afford any longer to undervalue or under use. Women will no longer accept being treated as workhorses for development strategies planned by others, they require to be treated as partners in development practice and planning. In other words, women should be actors in development projects that are not male-biased or androcentric.

The failure of many development plans and their implementing instruments has been blamed on a planning process, which neither involves people in the decision-making process nor in the identification of their own needs. At a minimum, consultation of local people about projects or programmes is now argued to be a precondition for successful planning outcomes, particularly when innovation is concerned. Greater involvement of the wider society in decision-making through democratic processes is also argued to be central. Nevertheless, consultation and involvement are not unproblematic; social heterogeneity raises complex questions of how consensus is to be achieved. All too often, in fact, consultation is confined to those who are wealthier, more articulate and educated. And these in many developing countries will be male; when asked, they may give their views as to women's needs. But more commonly it is assumed that women's needs are identical to those of men.

Women in many cultures are socialized in such a way as to lack any sense of having rights or needs except in relation to others; women typically want things for others-their children or their family, but not for them. Utmost, this is a product of cultures. Powerlessness not only prevents women from getting their demands placed on the agenda, but also makes articulating such demands unimaginable. Gender inequality has become embedded and institutionalized

in the political and bureaucratic authority of the state. This has led to property, income, public representation, and state benefits being directed into the hands of husbands or fathers as household heads, women being seen as reproducers and mothers. As a result, any attempt to bring about a redistribution of benefits to women meets with resistance from men, and those women who have a stake in existing male privilege.

Gender roles for women and men vary greatly from one culture to another and from one social group to another within the same culture. In general, due to women's subordinate position to men, development planners and policy makers often ignore women and view the world from the male perspectives although it is not purposely to oppress women. The gender question then arises in implying the ability of any actor especially in development matters to consider and address issues from the perspective and interest of both men and women.

Gender sensitivity is therefore an attempt to consider women's equality with men, understanding the roles of men and women, listening to women's voices, valuing women's work as equal as that of men, and equally respecting the rights of both sexes. The issue of gender is crucial in development because development is the betterment of life for individuals-both men and women. It is also factual that men and women are the prime agents of development; hence they should be recognized, addressed and mobilized. The bottom line is that the fruits of development must be shared equitably by both men and women.

According to gender and development theorists, understanding gender differentiation is crucial to the design and implementation of development policies and strategies. Our interventions will be meaningful and effective in addressing the needs of society if we are aware of all the complex ways in which society slots people into different categories and roles. The basic aspects of gender differentiation include the following:

I.   *In relation to work*: both women and men have roles in the spheres of production of goods and services and public life. However, ensuring basic needs at family and household level fall almost entirely on women's shoulders but this reproductive work is undervalued; its lack of value is expressed by the failure to recognize that it is *real* work. The productive work of women is also seen as an extension of their reproductive work and likewise undervalued. In public sphere, with a few exceptions, it is men who hold the high status positions, and have decision-making power.

II. *In relation to sharing the world's resource*: women perform 2/3 of the world's work but they earn 1/10 of the world's income and 1/100 of the world's property. Access to resources and benefits and control over them is allocated according to gender hence; women have less access to land, credit, education etc.

III. *In relation to human rights*: gender is about inequality and about power relations between men and women. Half of the world's population is subordinate to the other half in thousands different ways because of the sex they are born with. Women are denied equal rights with men to education, land, mobility, employment opportunities. Also, they are denied the rights to manage, control and care for the health of their own bodies and their reproductive function.

IV. *In relation to culture and religion*: women face the same discrimination as they do in other spheres, and both religion and culture are sources of gender oppression and inequality while religions may teach equality between people, in practice women usually have a subordinate role and may be excluded altogether from the religious hierarchy.

On the road to social equality, gender is the last barrier, because it involves transformation of attitudes and practice in all societies, for all people: it touches all of us, all the way to our most intimate relationships. That is why gender equality is important to ensure the wellbeing of both men and women in a given society.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness measures must often be available to compensate for historical and social disadvantages. Women and men must not be prevented from operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality. Gender equity is an important component of sustainable development. It is when the community, women and men equally participate in the design and delivery of projects aimed at creating and sustaining household livelihood security that we come closer to achieving our goal of sustainable development. There are many fundamental reasons for working to achieve the equality of women and men in any given society.

1. Ethical reason: Discrimination on the grounds of sex is considered an infringement of universal human rights, like any other sort of discrimination, for instance, on grounds of ethnic or religious affiliation and is seen as something that should be overcome.

2. Economic reason: Women and men are the main actors of development and each constitutes half of the population. If development has to succeed, the untapped potential of all men and women must be fully utilized in the process. Women's participation in economic activities is a precondition for sustainable development.

3. Political reason: Gender discriminations weaken a country's governance and the effectiveness of its development policies. Unequal rights and poor socio-economic status relative to men also limit women's ability to participate in political process as active citizens. Consequently, women would be unable to influence decisions in their communities and at the national level. Gender equality thus emanates from gender equity. In practice, men and women must share power equally, should have equal access to education, health, administrative and managerial positions, equal pay for work of equal value and so forth. Gender inequality undermines the effectiveness of development policies in fundamental ways.

1.3 Patriarchy versus Categories of Work

Patriarchy is the social organization of the family, the community, and the state in such a way that male power is reinforced and perpetuated. The first pillar of patriarchy is the sexual division of labour that assigns men and women to different occupations and thus to different levels of prestige and reward. The second is male control of women's sexuality, which both seriously constrain women's space and physical mobility and shapes conceptions of what women should be. These two pillars of patriarchy function in a mutually supportive manner, one seeming to justify the other. While social class, technological levels of development and religious and cultural norms significantly influence the particular ways in which the division of labour and control of female sexuality manifest themselves, the two pillars in fact constitute the basis for women's subordination in most societies.

Like institutions, households play a fundamental role in shaping gender relations from early in life and in transferring these through generations. People make many of life's basic decisions within their households-about saving, raising children, engaging in work and leisure, investing in the future and so forth. How tasks and productive resources are allocated among sons and daughters, how much autonomy they are given, whether expectations differ among them-all these create, or reinforce gender disparities. However, families do not make decisions in a vacuum. They make them in the context of communities and in ways that

reflect the influence of incentives established by the larger institutional environment. In elaborating on the main categories of work, it is important to provide highlights on gender division of labour. Although many writers explain the term in various ways, gender division of labor can be described as the different roles, responsibilities and activities ascribed to women and men according to what is considered appropriate in a given society; the difference between men's and women's work. The gender division of labour is determined by culture. Due to the subordination of women and the way those relations work, women remain in the domestic sphere.

A continuous allocation of specific tasks and the regular performance of a given task by one gender will translate into capability, qualification and specialization of skills for that gender. The gender division of labour in the home, social norms and prejudice, and unequal resource distributions prevent women and men from taking equal advantage of economic opportunities or from coping equally with risk or economic shocks. Failure to recognize these gender-differentiated constraints when designing policies can compromise the effectiveness of those policies both from equity and efficiency perspectives.

The main categories of work can be divided into two: productive labour and reproductive labour. Productive tasks are performed outside the home or in the public sphere to produce goods and services. Productive work includes among others agricultural activities, work performed at big industries including the flower industry, medical services at hospitals, business transactions and so on. Both men and women undertake productive work although women are often relegated to reproductive labour because of gender discrimination. In the light of this, reproductive labour is performed at home or in the domestic or private sphere. Nevertheless, reproductive labour is usually overlooked and is not equally valued as productive labour. This is because it is performed by women who are customarily marginalized. However, the truth is that reproductive labour is equally important in contributing to the household economy or to the growth of a country's economy as productive labour does.

Reproductive labour can further be divided into biological, social and labour reproduction. Biological reproduction refers to childbearing, and child rearing tasks while social reproduction implies activities that are intended to the socialization of children through maintaining moral values and norms. Labour reproduction on the other hand, refers to

household chores performed by women for instance milking cows, baking Injera, washing clothes, fetching water, cleaning rooms and kraals etc. Women are the key actors in the domestic sphere or reproductive activities, but these remain little recognized or rewarded. Rather, reproductive activities are always undervalued and the actors are marginalized.

1.4 Gender needs – Practical and Strategic

Women's subordination to men is a universal truth almost everywhere although the degree of male dominance over women quite differs in the developed and developing worlds. Feminists maintain the view that the state is an instrument to control women in the social, political and economic spheres. However, feminists do not have similar interpretations of how the system of government control is maintained. In this regard, radical feminists argue the importance of patriarchy in reinforcing women's subordination, which they define as the system of sexual hierarchy in which men possess superior power and economic privilege. On the other hand, radical feminists see the capitalist state as the root of women's oppression. Capitalism is particularly responsible for women's double oppression in productive and reproductive work (Please see the distinctions between productive and reproductive work in previous discussions).

Gender differential persists at all levels, as reflected by social indicators. For instance, there exist wide gender gaps in education, health status and opportunities. In Ethiopia until recently, many more boys become literate than girls and twice as many boys as girls are brought to health centers for treatment. The gap between men and women in terms of opportunity for participation, access to and control over resources, and gender division of labour is widening rapidly. Practically, women's unequal access to resources is the product of their exclusions from the arenas of political and economic power, their inequality within the family and the society, and their lack of control over their lives. In both cases women's actual location in the social structure has important implications for the degree of manoeuvre women have.

Practical gender needs are the needs women identify in their socially accepted roles in society. Practical gender needs do not challenge the gender division of labour or women's subordinate position in society, although rising out of them. Practical gender needs are responses to immediate perceived necessity, identified within a specific context. They are practical in nature and often are concerned with inadequacies in living conditions such as

water provision, health care, employment, food supply, a steady source of income, readily availability and safe contraception, access to education, training, and credit facilities and so on. In other words, practical gender needs are those that are formulated from concrete conditions of women's experience. Practical gender needs are determined by the concrete living and working situation of men and women aimed to improve the satisfaction of basic needs. The realization of practical gender needs does not however, lead to a reduction in gender-specific discrimination. This demands structural changes that improve the position of women in relation to men.

Initiated by the Derg military regime in the late 1980s, some actions were taken in Ethiopia substantively over the decade to address practical gender needs. The most salient features of such measures include activities to reduce women's workload with grinding mills, fuel efficient stoves, conveniently locating water pipes; improving family health through primary health centers, child spacing and family planning advices and services. In addition, the programs include expanding primary schools and facilitating girls' access to education, improving housing and credit services and providing skills training to run informal businesses.

Strategic gender needs come into focus when women's position in society is questioned. In other words, strategic gender needs are those needs that are formulated from the analysis of women's subordination to men. A theoretical analysis of the processes of women's subordination gives rise to strategic moral and ethical objectives, which are in the interests of all women. Such objectives constitute a vision of the future in which inequalities between men and women are no longer found. This implies that inequalities are neither genetically determined nor sacrosanct and impossible to change. Although in the abstract, the concept of strategic interests may seem reasonably straightforward, there is considerable uncertainty and debate about what actual strategic interests are.

Many argue that what constitutes the bedrock of inequality between men and women is culture combined with class and ethnic difference. Despite the differences in views, feminists maintain that women should and can unite around a number of issues arising from their subordination to find ways of transforming the situation. Strategic gender needs vary according to particular contexts. They relate to gender division of labour, male control of women's labour, women's restricted access to valued social and economic resources and

political power. Furthermore, strategic gender needs can be linked with such issues as legal rights, domestic violence, equal wages and women's control over their bodies or male control of sexuality. Meeting strategic gender needs helps women achieve greater equality. It also changes existing roles challenging women's subordinate position.

Given that the identification of common strategic interests is full of difficulties, and involves a conscious effort of understanding and commitment to change, women's activists emphasize the need for consciousness raising and collective empowerment. Once specific categories of women collectively come to understand better the mechanisms and processes of subordination, they are able to identify appropriate strategies for change, which may include forming alliance with a very broad range of other women. Strategies must involve both changing a variety of practices and the way we think about gender and gender relations. Merely changing activities – for example, changing the sexual division of labour, promoted by some as a strategic gender interest brings little change for women if what women do is still undervalued.

As many scholars argue, meeting strategic gender needs include: the abolition of the sexual division of labour, the alleviation of the burden of domestic labour and child care, the removal of nationalized forms of discrimination such as rights to own land or property, or access to credit, the establishment of political equality, freedom of choice over child bearing, and the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control over women. In reality, practical and strategic gender needs cannot often be clearly separated. Solving practical gender problems for instance, boosting the income of women by introducing them to improved cropping methods can simultaneously help strengthen their self-confidence, increase their mobility and economic autonomy. As a result, this can help change the relations between women and men-a strategic gender need.

Addressing strategic gender needs requires long-term planning and changes in the attitudes of men. In Ethiopia for instance, certain measures have been taken over the last thirty years or so by the Derg military regime and the EPRDF ruled government. Some of the measures taken include the following;

➢ Improving educational opportunities using gender-neutral text books and female teachers as role models

- ➢ Improving access to productive assets, including the right to legally own and use common property and the right to access to financial resources

- ➢ Allowing women to take part in decision-making in local communities, in elections and through women's groups.

- ➢ Providing equal opportunities for employment through access to jobs traditionally performed by men and equal pay for comparative jobs

1.5 Gender Analysis and Mainstreaming

Gender analysis is a broad concept referring to an organized approach for considering gender issues in the entire process of program or organizational development. The purpose of gender analysis is to ensure that development projects and programs fully incorporate the roles, needs and participations of women and men. Gender analysis requires spearing data by sex known as gender disaggregated data and understanding how labour, roles, needs and participations are divided and valued according to sex. Gender analysis is practiced at all stages of development project. The rational for gender analysis includes the need to:

I.   Show where men and women; and boys and girls are in the development process within the community

II.   Assess the impacts that men and women are making on the projects because they have impacts whether they are considered or not

III.   Understanding the power relations between men and women in the community and know how to balance them for achievement of fairness, justice and equity.

Gender theorists describe the concept of gender mainstreaming in various ways. Some of the definitions include the following. First, gender mainstreaming is a comprehensive organizational process. According to the UN, it is the process of assessing the implication for women and men of any planned action including legislation, policies, and programs in all areas and at all levels. Second, it is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design and implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women can benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. Third, gender mainstreaming

means better relationships, equal opportunities and choices that create space and allow women and men, girls and boys to contribute to and benefit equitably from programs. Effective information flow is a prerequisite for mainstreaming gender equality.

Fourth, gender mainstreaming implies the concept of integrating gender concerns into every aspect of organization's priorities and procedures. Mainstreaming gender is a technical and political process, which requires shift in organizational cultures, and ways of thinking, as well as in the goals, structure and resource allocation of development institutions. Mainstreaming gender requires the integration of equality concerns in the analysis and formulation of development policies, programs and projects with the objectives of ensuring positive impact on women and men. It is concerned with the inclusion of interests, needs and experiences of women and men in the development programs. Gender mainstreaming requires gender analysis in sectoral programs at different levels, including the formulation, implementation and monitoring of outputs. This requires capacity. In Ethiopia for instance, lack of genuine commitment of the government and lack of capacity are the main causes for the invisibility of gender issues in different sectors' programs and planning.

Gender mainstreaming can also be explained as an attempt to

- ❖ examine each and every policy program and project from gender perspectives

- ❖ restructuring of all sectoral plans and programs from gender context

- ❖ having clear directives to all concerned that all required budget must come from within the sectoral budgets

- ❖ reforms in all laws and regulations which discriminate against women and

- ❖ ensuring constant flows of resources to eliminate underlying causes of gender gaps

On the other hand, many argue that gender mainstreaming is about forging a conceptual and practical links between development and gender equality. Thus it requires a mix of skills that include:

- ❖ analytical capacity

- ❖ baseline understanding of socio-economic and gender issues

- ❖ advocacy and communications skills

- ❖ networking ability

- ❖ skills to facilitate the decision making process and

- ❖ negotiation skills

This can be implemented through setting new agendas as formulation of gender policies, establishing task forces responsible for gender issues, appointing gender focal persons etc. Gender mainstreaming has institutional dimension. This can be explained first, when gender equality is accepted in theory, second, when it becomes policy, and third, when it is fully integrated into structures and practices. As a result, gender mainstreaming is recognized as an institutional responsibility of all staff. However, there is a need to go beyond gender policies – it is transforming gender relations and changing practices where women's participation goes beyond equal number.

1.6 Gender Cultures and Sexual Behaviour

Until recently, most of the fieldwork in anthropology was carried out by male anthropologists who paid little attention to the women's worlds' of the societies they studied. Such studies did not bring out the inner secrets of the women's worlds such as their beliefs and practices related to sexuality, pregnancy, childbirth and menstruation. In recent years however, a large number of ethnographies have been done by female anthropologists to correct this imbalance. One of this new wave of researches is to highlight the role of nurture, or social and cultural influences, on the definitions of gender in human societies.

In all societies, the division of the social world into male and female categories means that boys and girls are socialized in different ways. They are educated to have different expectations of life, and to develop emotionally and intellectually in particular ways, and are subject in their daily lives to different norms of dress and behaviour. Whatever the contribution of biology to human behaviour, it is clear that culture also contributes a set of guidelines – both explicit and implicit, which are acquired from infancy onwards, and which tell the individual how to perceive, think, feel and act as either a male or a female member of that society.

One can describe these two sets of guidelines, within a particular society, as the *gender cultures* of that society. In some parts of the world, especially in less industrialized countries,

these gender cultures may be so different from one another that one could even describe men and women in that society as living like "two nations under one flag". In New Guinea for instance, men's and women's worlds are so polarized that they actually live in separate houses, in different parts of the village. They practice sexual relations infrequently in atmosphere of tension and danger. In some of these societies, where homosexuality is institutionalized, this adds further to the polarization of the two sexes.

In Naples, Italy healthy men are expected to have many premarital and extramarital affairs as proof of their masculinity, while women are barred from either. Men are expected to actively defend their own and their family's honour, while women's honour lies in preserving their purity and chastity. Gender roles are by no means fixed, and they can often change and develop, especially under the influence of urbanization and industrialization. In industrial societies, when machines replace human labour and when women can assign child care to others, strict division of labour by sex begins to disappear.

Although gender cultures lay down norms of sexual behaviour for each of the sexes, there are many variations cross-culturally in what those norms are. For example, ethnographic studies indicate that there is much variation between societies in the degree of heterosexual activity permitted before marriage, outside marriage, and even within marriage itself. Extramarital sex occurs in many societies, and that in an estimated 69% of the world's societies men commonly have extramarital sex, and in about 57% women commonly do. Patterns of sexual behaviour are major causes in the transmission of several diseases. Where promiscuity and extramarital sex is common within a society, there is a greater likelihood of the spread of sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhoea, syphilis, and so on.

The recent epidemic of the acquired immune-deficiency syndrome (AIDS) has led to an increased emphasis by health education authorities on the importance of limiting promiscuous sexual behaviour, among both heterosexual and homosexuals. Membership of a particular gender culture does not always coincide with sexual behaviour. For example, there are wide variations world-wide in whether societies are tolerant of some forms of sexual behaviour – such as homosexuality, which transgresses the usual norms of a gender culture. In some societies homosexuality is completely forbidden, but in others it is accepted. In most developing countries, homosexual behaviour does not weaken the rigid conceptual divisions

between men and women because whatever their sexual practices, their *biological sex* is much more important than their *behaviour* as a determinant of gender. In the developed world however, behaviour is more important in defining one's gender. Sexuality and fertility are hardly separated from each other conceptually where the desire for fertility and childbearing is high. This implies that the biological sex of individuals is more important in defining their gender, whatever their sexual behaviour. Where the desire for many children is less, and where contraception is more easily available, sex becomes gradually divorced from fertility and sexual practices that do not lead to pregnancy – such as homosexuality are more tolerated. Gender in these modern societies is therefore defined less by biological criteria, and more by social and sexual behaviour.

CHAPTER TWO

2. What is Culture? Anthropological Perspectives

There are different ways of explaining the concept of culture and hence there is no conventional way of defining it. In anthropological sense, culture could be defined as the integrated system of learned behavior patterns, which are characteristics of members of a society, and are not the products of biological inheritance. Culture is non-instinctive rather it is a result of social invention and is transmitted and maintained solely through communication and learning. Tylor (1871) and Spiro (1987) explained that culture is the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, religion, notions of time, roles, material objects and possession and so on acquired by groups of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.

The concept of culture is central to anthropology. The capacity for making culture differentiates mankind from nonhumans. The term *culture* is not used with consistent meanings. It is used with various meanings in commonsense. It makes the backbone of sociology and Socio-cultural anthropology and other related disciplines such as cultural geography and social psychology. As a scientific term, culture refers to all the features of a society's ways of life: e.g. production, modes of dress, routine living habits, food preferences, the architecture of houses and public building, the layout of fields and farms; and systems of education, government, law, etc. Here it may be useful to make few points regarding the difference between "culture" and "society". For beginning students it may be often difficult to differentiate between culture and society. They may wonder how they can distinguish between the two, as the socio-cultural anthropological approach to the concept of culture is often broad and all-inclusive. It is also emphasized that culture includes all things beyond nature and biology. This may imply that culture includes society itself.

Society generally refers to the social world with all its structures, institutions, organizations, etc around us, and specifically to *a group of people* who live within some type of bounded territory and who share a common way of life. Whereas, culture is the common way of life shared by a group of people (Stockard, 1997). Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917) a pioneering British anthropologist defined culture as "that complex whole, which includes knowledge,

belief, art, law, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Howard and Dunaif- Hattis, 1992:361).

The phrase "acquired by man as a member of society" in his definition is very important. It is not any habit or capability of man as a biological being, but man as a member of a social group. The definition focuses on beliefs and behavior that people acquire not through biological heredity, but by growing up in a particular society and social group where they are exposed to a specific cultural tradition. It is through the socialization process that a person acquires a cultural knowledge. In anthropology, this process is called *enculturation*. *Enculturation* is specifically defined as the process by which an individual learns the rules and values of one's culture (Howard and Dunaif- Hattis, 1992).

2.1 Major Features of Culture

Cultural anthropologists characterize culture in the following ways.

2.1.1 Culture is all- encompassing

Culture encompasses all aspects that affect people in their everyday lives. Culture comprises countless material and non-material aspects of human lives. Thus, when we talk about a particular culture, we are referring to all of its manmade objects, ideas, activities whether traditional, things of the past, or those created lately. Culture is the sum total of human creation: intellectual, technical, artistic, physical, and moral. It is the complex pattern of living that directs human social life (Kottak, 2002; Scupin and DeCorse, 1995).

2.1.2 Culture is general and specific

Generally, all human societies of the world have culture. It distinguishes them from other nonhuman beings. In particular, there are as specific cultures as there are diverse peoples in the world. Humanity shares a capacity for culture (general), but people live in diverse cultures where they are encultured.

2.1.3 Culture is socially learned

Culture is a natural outgrowth of the social interactions that constitute human groups whether in societies or organizations. Whenever and wherever people come together over time, culture develops. The essence of culture is that it is learned, shared, interrelated, and

adaptive. Culture is learned through social interactions. And the learned behavior is communicated in the group through forms of socialization such as observation, instruction, reward, punishment and experience. Three different ways of learning should be noted here:

Individual situation learning: this means an individual animal or person learns something by itself/himself as specific situations lead him.

Social situational learning: this involves learning from other members of a group, through imitation. Even animals can learn this way.

Cultural learning: this is uniquely human. It is possible only through the utilization of intelligence and the ability to communicate through attaching meanings to words, objects or things. This is called symbolic communication. People learn culture directly and through observation and social interaction.

2.1.4 Culture is symbolic

Symbolic thought is unique and crucial to humans and to culture. Symbolic thought is the human ability to give a thing or event an arbitrary meaning and grasp and appreciate that meaning. Symbols are the central components of culture. Symbols refer to anything to which people attach meaning and which they use to communicate with others. More specifically, symbols are words, objects, gestures, sounds or images that represent something else rather than themselves. It is the human ability to give a thing or event an arbitrary meaning and grasp and appreciate that meaning. There is no obvious natural or necessary connection between a symbol and what it symbolizes. Culture thus, works in the symbolic domain emphasizing meaning, rather than the technical/practical rational side of human behavior.

2.1.5 Culture seizes nature

Culture imposes itself on nature. It suppresses the natural, biological instincts in us and expresses it in particular ways. For example, we as biological beings feel the desire for food; but what type of food to eat, how many times per day to eat, with whom to eat, how much to eat, how fast or slow to eat, etc, are all determined by the cultural values and norms of a particular group of people. Or, we feel the desire to urinate, but one cannot do that anytime and anywhere unless one is an animal, a child or a mentally sick person. The nature- nurture debate is, however, a very heated one in the social sciences, and we need to underscore the

fact of the dialectical relationship between the two. Nature in terms of the natural environment, the evolutionary growth and development in biological dimensions, genetic make-up of people, etc. is said to have its own important effects in determining the creation, expression and continuity of human culture.

2.1.6 Culture is shared

It is a possession of individuals as members of a social group. Culture is shared in the sense that people learn by observing, listening, talking and interacting with other people. Culturally distinct ways of thinking, behaving, feeling, and responding become habitual very early in life through sharing. Behavior and ways of thinking or interacting must be shared within a group of people in order to be considered part of culture. Some cultural patterns are shared by nearly all people in some culture; and shared culture gives people common experiences. However, we should note that not all things shared among a group of people are cultural. There are many biological and psychological characteristics that are shared among a group of people.

2.1.7 Culture is patterned

Cultures are not haphazard collection of customs and beliefs, but are integrated and patterned systems. The parts are interrelated. Culture is an integrated whole, that is the parts of culture are interrelated to one another. No one single cultural trait has its meaning outside of its integrated context.

2.1.8 People use culture creatively

There is difference between ideal culture and real culture. What culture-rules say and what people do may be different. Cultural rules tell us what to do and how to do it, but we don't always do what the rules dictate. We use culture creatively.

2.1.9 Culture is adaptive and maladaptive

People adapt themselves to the environment using culture. The ability to adapt to any ecological condition unlike other animals makes human beings unique. This ability is attributed to human's capacity for creating and using culture. Culture has also maladaptive dimensions. That is, the very cultural creations and achievements of peoples may turn out to threaten their survival. For instance, when we see the contemporary problems of the

19

environment and the negative side effects of rapid growth of science and technology, we see that culture is also maladaptive.

2.1.10 Culture is stable and yet it changes

Culture is stable and yet changing. Culture is stable when we consider what people maintain as distinct values and practices and handover to generations. However, when culture comes into contact with other cultures, it can change. That is cultural diffusion, the spread of cultural traits from one area to the other. Culture changes not only because of direct or indirect contacts between cultures, but also through innovation and adaptation to new circumstances. Thus, the forces of culture change are not only external, but also internal. In understanding the concept of culture, anthropologists tend to define key terms such as *Cultural Determinism*, *Ethnocentrism* and *Cultural Relativism*. They are the most sensitive and controversial issues in sociology and socio-cultural anthropology.

2.2 Ethnocentrism versus Cultural Relativism

2.2.1 Ethnocentrism

All of us often judge the behavior of other people in other groups by the standards of our own culture. Because of ethnocentrism, we often operate on the premise that our own society's ways are the correct, normal, better ways, for acting, thinking, feeling and behaving. We scale and rate all other cultures with reference to our own culture. Ethnocentrism makes us minimize our indebtedness to other people (Zanden, 1990:74). Anthropologists attempt to avoid ethnocentrism. It is not logically possible and proper to underestimate or overestimate or judge other cultures on the basis of one's cultural standards. Ethnocentrism can therefore, be understood as an attitude of considering one's cultural ways of life as the best and the center of all other cultures. It is the tendency to apply one's own cultural values in judging the behavior and beliefs of people raised in other cultures. It is a cultural universal. People everywhere think that familiar explanations, opinions, and customs are true, correct, proper and moral. They regard different behaviors as strange or savage.

2.2.2 Cultural Relativism

We cannot grasp the behavior of other people if we interpret what they say and do in the light of our values, beliefs, and motives. Instead, we need to examine their behavior as insiders,

considering it within the framework of their values, beliefs and motives. This approach is called cultural relativism. It suspends judgment and views the behavior of people from the perspective of their own culture. Every society has its own culture, which is more or less unique. Every culture contains its own unique patterns of behavior, which may seem alien to people from other cultural backgrounds. We cannot understand the practices and beliefs separately from the wider culture of which they are part. A culture has to be studied in terms of its own meanings and values. Cultural relativism describes a situation where there is an attitude of respect for cultural differences rather than condemning other people's culture as uncivilized or backward.

Respect for cultural differences involves: appreciating cultural diversity, accepting and respecting other cultures, understanding every culture and its elements in terms of its context and logic, and accepting that each body of custom has inherent dignity and meaning as the way of life of the group it serves. Besides, respect for cultural differences encompasses concepts of recognizing what is immoral, ethical, or acceptable in one culture may not be the case in another culture. Cultural relativism may be regarded as the opposite of ethnocentrism. Anthropologists aim to provide accurate accounts of cultural phenomena. They do not have to approve customs such as infanticide, cannibalism or torture. Anthropologists respect human diversity. Although they are sensitive to objectivity, they respect international standards of justice and morality (Scupin and DeCorse, 1995; Kottak, 2002).

To sum up, ethnocentrism and cultural relativism involve difficult choices, dilemmas and contradictions regarding cultural exchanges and relationships between and within societies. The dilemmas and contradictions become clear when we see that the traditional anthropological position maintains every cultural beliefs and practices, including for example "harmful traditional practices" in Ethiopia. This implies that such cultural practices should not be judged and undermined by an outsider. On the other hand, the dilemma is taken to the theory of cultural relativism, which posits that there are no universal cultural or moral standard by which actions and beliefs have to be judged. Yet still, even cultural anthropologists accept the idea that there are some cultural standards that are universally found and expressed for example, in the world's major religions. In general, anthropologists contend that cultural diversity has to be respected and yet international standards of justice and human rights have to be taken into account.

2.3 Culture's Influence on Peoples' Behavior

As a human attribute, culture is public and individual both in the world and in people's minds. Anthropologists are interested not only in public and collective behavior, but also in how individuals think, feel and act. The individual and culture are linked because human social life is a process in which individuals internalize the meanings of public (i.e. cultural) message. Individuals influence culture (either alone or in groups) by converting their private understandings into public expressions. The issues of culture and the individual are studied in psychological anthropology. This field is interested in the ethnographic and cross-cultural study of differences and similarities in human psychology (Kottak, 1994). Individual personality, lifestyles, basic attitudes and characters are all reflections of the cultural background of the individuals. The processes of enculturation and socialization have powerful influences in the behavioral pattern and character development of individuals.

Health behavior is just an aspect of the overall social behavior of individuals, and the individuals' behaviors are reflections of their societal and cultural backgrounds. In other words, cultures play influential roles in shaping and determining the way people act, live, think, and view the world. Obesity, as a health problem, for example, is associated with peoples' nutritional behavior (Howard and Dunaif-Hattis, 1992). Other social behaviors such as smoking, alcoholism, *chat* chewing, etc, reflect peoples' social and cultural backgrounds. In short, the cultural values, norms, beliefs and practices of a group of people or any social group are related to the specific behavioral aspects of the individual person who is part of that culture. The person's living styles, life philosophy and attitudes are all important in determining his or her health behavior and conditions.

<div align="center">**CHAPTER THREE**</div>

3. Empowerment

3.1 The Status of Women in Ethiopia

There have been few studies concerning women in Ethiopia, but many observers commented on physical hardships that Ethiopian women experience through their lives. Such hardships involve caring loads of wood and water over long distances, grinding food items manually, working in the homestead, raising children and cooking. Girls are exposed to traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, which leaves them with severe and long complications of health, particularly during and after childbirth. During childhood girls are socialized to be obedient, submissive, shy, and virginal.

Moreover, girls from the age of five are assigned to carry on difficult household responsibilities in collecting fuel wood and water, looking after siblings and assisting with farm and animal husbandry tasks. Activities either productive or reproductive are often beyond their physical capacity. This consequently results in affecting their schooling. Early marriage also complicates their chance for achieving personal freedom because marriage at early age implies the occurrence of pregnancy too early. In fact, this does not only make worse maternal death, but also risks proper child growth.

In Ethiopia, women have traditionally suffered from socio-cultural and economic discrimination and have fewer opportunities compared to men for personal growth, education and employment. As in other traditional society, a woman's worth is measured in terms of her role as a mother and wife. Educating girls has also been seen as part of the effort to help women become good wives rather than empowering them. The current status of Ethiopian women is exacerbated by the overall poor economic situation of the country combined with the prevailing historical, cultural and religious impediments. Arguably, poverty, economic insecurity, poor social service provisions, vulnerability to disease and so on that affect the lower class population in Ethiopia place a heavier burden particularly on women. This is because women in Ethiopia have limited access to education, job opportunities and even worse their productive or reproductive labour is overlooked.

3.2 Empowerment and Power

The language of empowerment has gained prominence over the last two decades. Feminist groups speak of the need for women's empowerment and the UN and World Bank also emphasize the need for the empowerment of women. Empowerment was originally a demand made by activist feminist groups. In an obvious sense, empowerment is about people taking control over their own lives: gaining the ability to do things, to set their own agendas, to change events in a way previously lacking. This may include affecting the way other people act and consciously or unconsciously forcing changes in their behaviour. But, for feminists empowerment is more than this: it involves the radical alteration of the processes and structures which reproduce women's subordinate position. In other words, strategies for empowerment cannot be taken out of the historical context that created lack of power in the first place, nor can they be viewed in isolation from present processes.

Many scholars define empowerment as a multi-faceted concept. According to Kabeer (2005), empowerment is the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability. Empowerment can be explained by the way individuals consider their sense of self-worth. This depends on how other people see them as well. According to Mosedale (2005: 85), women's empowerment refers to "the process by which women redefine and extend what is possible for them to be and do in situations where they have been restricted, compared to men, from being and doing".

Feminist theoreticians and activists, while accepting and even emphasizing diversity, nevertheless maintain that women share a common experience of oppression and subordination, whatever the differences in the forms that these take. Central to this theory is the argument that this subordination is founded on the regulation and control of female sexuality and procreation, and sexual division of labour that allocates women a heavy burden of responsibilities while denying them control of valuable social resources. Not all women agree upon the nature of the structures and processes which reproduce women's subordination, nor is there consensus that the ideological representation of the social place and activities of women and men as determined by biology rather than society is a critical element.

Women's subordination by men will continue unless the structures of male dominance are changed. And as long as laws, institutions and practices are organized from a male

perspective, with male life experience as the typical, any changes made can only be superficial. Also, until gross inequalities between nations and within peoples' of the same country are eliminated, interdependence structured in equality between women and men is an illusion. Women become empowered through collective reflection and decision-making. The parameters of empowerment include: building a positive self-image and self-confidence; developing the ability to think critically; building up group cohesion and fostering decision-making and action. In other words, empowerment includes both individual change and collective action. What is meant is enabling women collectively to take control of their own lives to set their own agendas, to organize to help each other and make demands on the state for support and push for changes in societal attitudes.

With the collective empowerment of women the direction and processes of development would also be shifted to respond to women's needs and their vision. The collective empowerment of women, of course, would bring with it individual empowerment of women. This understanding of women's empowerment is a good deal more radical than the more common approach – that of economic empowerment or getting women in the cash economy generally through self-employment or income generation. The concept of empowerment also implies some degree of conflict.

Empowerment is not only about women acquiring something, but also about those holding power relinquishing it. Arguably, the relations between men and women are characterized both by conflict and co-operation. Just as women must organize together to gain, the sense of self-worth and understanding of the wide context of their lives that empower and make long-term co-operation possible, so must men undergo a process of reflection and transformation, which makes it possible for them to recognize the ways in which their power is a double-edged sword.

In understanding the nexus between empowerment and power, we need to look at the notion of choice that is fundamentally important. In this sense, Kabeer (2005) argues that empowerment occurs when there are alternatives to choose. Women, according to Kabeer (2005), are often affected by the absence of meaningful choices because of inequalities in gender relations. This implies that strategic life choices that allow women to challenge patriarchal relations are more important than other forms of choices. In gender studies, empowerment and power can be conceptualized through understanding the concept of

Agency, which refers to the ability of people to make their life choices. Agency can be positive or negative. Positive agency (*power to*) implies the capacity of people to define and act on their own life choices in the face of resistance from other people while negative agency (*power over*) indicates the capacity of people to override others' agency either through violence or authority.

Kabeer (2005) further notes that peoples' strategic life choices can be constrained by institutional, cultural, or ideological practices. In her attempt to show that the process of empowerment starts from within, Kabeer (2005) emphasizes the concept of *power within* as central because it denotes peoples' self-esteem and self-reliance. In addition, the author makes a reference to collective action as *power with,* which can be explained in situations where people attempt to make their voices heard through forming associations such as women's association or other forms of institutions. Kabeer (2005) underscores that these forms of power are central to the process of empowerment.