

## Cultural Diversity in Tourism: The Ethiopian Context

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### INTRODUCTION

There are plenty of evidences that indicate human beings were and still are natural and cultural beings. Thus, they share a common human identity but in a culturally mediated manner. They are both similar and different, their similarities and differences do not passively coexist but interpenetrate with each other (Parekh, 2006).

As natural beings, human beings have several unique and worthwhile capacities; such as, the ability to think, reason out, use language, form visions of good life, have moral relations with one another, be self-critical and achieve increasingly high level of excellence.

Similarly as cultural beings they created a system of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of them understand, regulate and structure their individual and collective lives.

They embodied their culture in proverbs, maxims, myths, rituals, symbols, collective memories, jokes, body languages, modes of non-linguistic communication, customs, traditions, institutions and manner of greeting (Dorson, 1981). They also articulate culture

in the rules and norms that govern such basic activities and social relations as how, where, when, and with whom one eats, associates himself/herself and makes love, how one mourns and disposes of the dead, and treats one's parents, children, wife, neighbors and strangers (Pareh, 2006).

Juxtaposition of the aforesaid manifestations of natural and cultural beings reproduces most of the desirable qualities of a homogenous society with cultural diversity. These include a sense of community, solidarity, common loyalties and a broad moral and political consensus. This in turn serves as potential tourist destination as it gives an ample chance to visit unfamiliar culturally diverse societies.

In view of the above, this mini-research tries to explore what cultural diversity is meant in general especially in the Ethiopian context and critically assesses its significance as Ethiopian potential tourist destination.

#### 1.1. CULTURAL DIVERSITY

According to Parekh (2006), cultural diversity is the presence of a variety of cultures and cultural perspectives within a society.

This indicates that cultural diversity is a societal phenomenon which creates a favorable atmosphere in which

different cultures can engage in a mutually beneficial dialogue. Different artistic, literary, musical, moral and other traditions interrogate, challenge and probe each other. They also borrow and experiment with each other's ideas, and often throw up wholly new ideas and sensibilities that none of them could have generated on their own.

UNESCO illustrated that cultural diversity is a driving force of development, not only with respect to economic growth, but also as a means of leading a more fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life.

Weinstock (1994, 1998) on his part states that cultural diversity is an important constituent and condition of human freedom. He further indicates that unless human beings are able to step out of their culture, they remain imprisoned within it and tend to absolutize it, imaging it to be the only natural or self-evident way to understand and organize human life. And they cannot step out of their culture unless they have access to others.

He further elaborated that human beings have mini- Archimedean standpoints in the form of other cultures that enable them to view their own images from the outside.

In doing so, they are capable to tease out its strengths and weaknesses and deepen their consciousness. Likewise, they are able to see the contingency of their culture and relate to it freely rather than as a fate or predicament.

Thus, cultural diversity fosters vital preconditions of human freedom as self-knowledge, self-transcendence and self-criticism. Apparently, cultural diversity embodies different cultures which correct and complement each other to new forms of human fulfillment. This in turn creates a culturally homogenous and strong society.

Furthermore, cultural diversity encourages a healthy competition between different systems of ideas and ways of life and both prevent the dominance of any one of them and facilitate the emergence of new truths.

Cultural diversity also represent different talents, skills, forms of imagination, ways of looking at things, forms of social organization, and different sense of humor. Similarly, it represents psychological and moral energies, all of which constitute a most valuable resource which can be fruitfully harnessed in such different areas of life as sports, businesses, management, creative arts, industry and most of all tourism.

## **1.2. CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE ETHIOPIAN CONTEXT**

Ethiopia, a country with thirteen months of sunshine as a brand, offers a remarkable range of physical beauty in her land, cultural diversity in her nations and nationalities and warm-hearted hospitality of her people to be enjoyed by tourists fortunate enough to choose this land which is witnessed by studies of various

scholars of assorted disciplines as a cradle of human race and a country of ancient civilization that can alluringly attract tourists as their travel destination.

The richness and diversity of the Ethiopian culture is a manifestation of the socio-cultural differences of the over eighty-two ethnic groups that inhabit the land for ages. Each of them manifests their own respective values, ideals, arts, rituals, songs, stories, literature, moral and spiritual wisdom.

This indicates the presence of religious as well as cultural diversities in Ethiopia – a time honored multi-ethnic nation.

The formation of nine regional states, with respect to cultural diversity that ensures political unity, appeared on the national agenda as a politically and ideologically significant issue.

This in turn manifests that the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia welcomes and cherishes its cultural diversity. Moreover, it reveals that Ethiopia makes cultural diversity central to its self-understanding and respects the cultural demands of its constituent communities.

As a culturally diverse nation, Ethiopia must find ways of coming to terms with cultural diversity and even profiting from it; that is, exploiting its untapped potential tourist destination.

## **1.3. SIGNIFICANCE OF ETHIOPIA'S CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

Taking into account the aforesaid illustration, Ethiopian's cultural diversity:

\* Provides ample chance to witness most significant and spectacular festivals intensified by drumming, dancing and singing,

\* Provides grand opportunity to experience traditional ways of life preserved in local customs, rich and varied handicrafts and other colorful products depicting or illustrative the native arts and lifestyles,

\* Enables to witness religious processions of archbishops and priests carrying ark of covenants accompanied by multitudes of followers and tourists,

\* Enables to gain insights to a glorious past at well as promising future set amid the natural beauty of this diverse country,

\* Enables to experience unique warm-hearted Ethiopian hospitality,

\* Provides great opportunity to experience the authentic unsophisticated but extraordinarily friendly attitude of many of the Ethiopian population,

\* Creates favorable atmosphere to exhibit a wide range of cuisines,

\* Provides grand opportunity to set-up annual and/or bi-annual nations' and nationalities' festivals on regular basis.,

\* Enables to watch, admire, and purchase handicrafts which constitute symbol of the people's cultural values and their love for nature,

\* Represents psychological and moral energies which constitute most valuable resources which can be fruitfully harnessed in tourism.

\* Serves as ideal model of tolerance and peaceful co-existence, and

\* Add richness and variety to the society and make it aesthetically pleasing to tourists.

Hence foreign investors and other interested individuals are advised to take the aforesaid significances of cultural diversity into consideration and invest in the Ethiopian tourism industry for sustainable and profitable returns.

### CONCLUSION

As a country with a time-honored multi-ethnic nation, cultural diversity is an asset that is indispensable for the development of tourism industry in Ethiopia.

Therefore, we (Ethiopians) should feel a sense of loyalty to our diverse culture. We also should gear towards exploiting the untapped tourist attraction potentials.

Apparently, it is worthwhile to note that cultural diversity is a driving force of development, not only with respect to economic growth, but also, as a means of

leading a more fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life.

In conclusion, juxtaposition of the nations and nationalities' cultures, life flowers in the garden, beautifully complement each other and add to the wealth of Ethiopia. By extension, Ethiopia proves to being a country having rich cultural diversity with untapped potential tourist destination.

Consequently, professionals engaged in cultural and tourism sectors and concerned stakeholders; such as higher learning institutions, should join their knowledge, skills and efforts to exploit and profit from cultural diversity.

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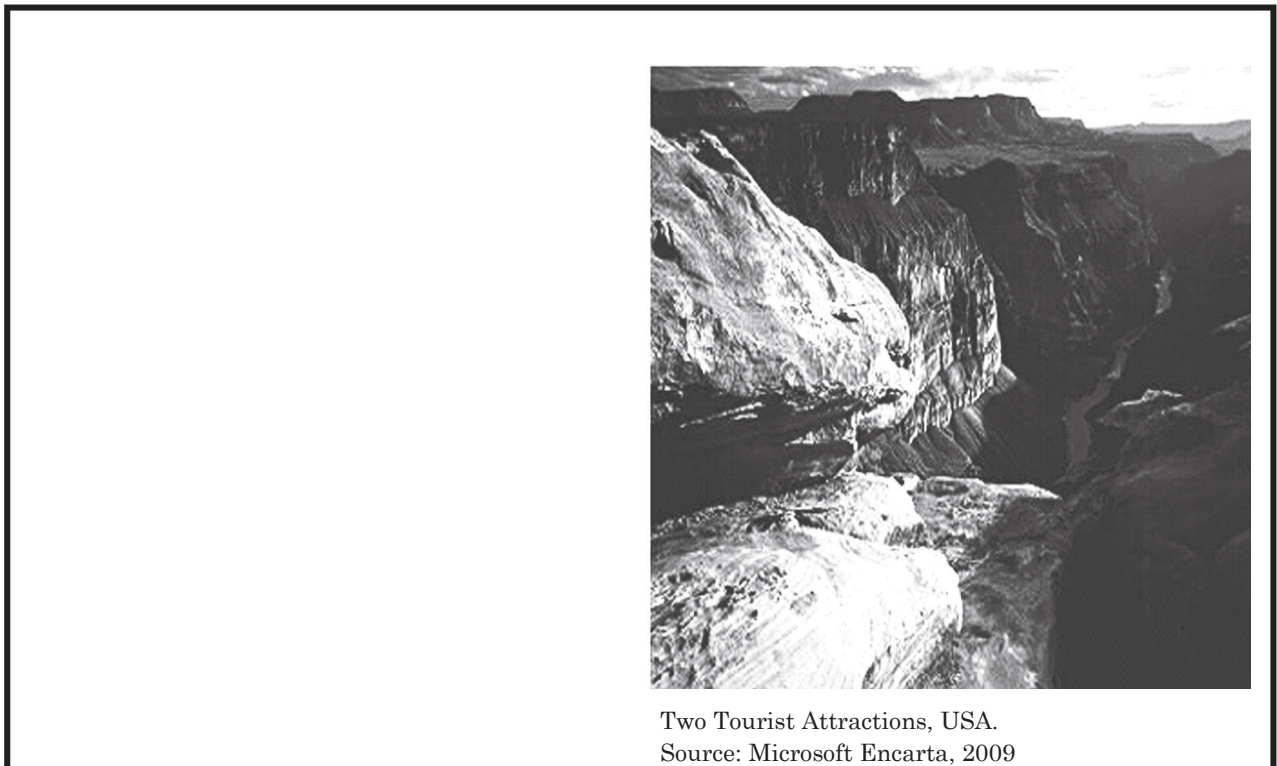
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