Cultural Diversity, Opportunities, and Management: 
Ethiopia in Perspective

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1. Introduction
“Cultural diversity” has been a topic of contention since early times such as since Plato (See Parekh 2000). I do not review here the history of idea extending the time span to so long era, but focus just on contemporary debates on its opportunities and challenges. There are generally two contending arguments, both in academics and politics, on cultural diversity: one against and another in favor.

In this paper, I will explore challenges, opportunities, and management of cultural diversity. The paper is developed based on review of existing literature. Following this introductory section, the next section highlights problems of cultural diversity as antagonists of cultural diversity argue. The third one provides for direct or indirect contribution of diversity for economic growth and the importance of commoditizing cultural diversity for itself. The fourth section deals with options in diversity management, and the fifth section gives Ethiopia’s policy and practice in the discourse of culture and development, and finally a concluding remark under section six.

It would be perplexing to proceed further without making a note on what cultural diversity is in the first place. Cultural diversity exists in so exquisite detail that in fact even no culture of an ethnic or cultural group may be internally the same. Instead of cultural diversities of a single ethnic or cultural group as primary focus, here, I want to draw attention to the meaning of cultural diversity at the multiple group level. In this sense, first I am speaking of diversity as structured along ethnic and/or cultural groups, and then myriad details of cultural traits structured within each ethnic or cultural group.

2. Challenges
Those who argue against espouse that cultural diversity is something which is a source of social disharmony, conflict, and then an impediment to economic growth (see Putnam
They characterize culturally diverse society is mutually suspicious (Putnam 2007), less charitable, less altruistic, less cooperative to infrastructure (Salter 2007:146), and dominated by “ethnic nepotism”, as Smock (1969:23) coins the term. In strongest terms, Putnam (2007:149) in particular says: “[W]e hunker down. We act like turtles. The effect of diversity is worse than had been imagined. And it’s not just that we don’t trust people who are not like us. In diverse communities, we don’t trust people who do look like us.” Recommendation of anti-cultural diversity proponents is, at best, to abolish cultural diversity in a given jurisdiction, and at worst, to minimize it.

3. Opportunities

Regarding opportunities of cultural diversity, UNESCO Convention on Diversity Article 1 notes: “cultural diversity is important for humans as biodiversity is for nature”. I have not seen this quotation interpreted elsewhere, but it may mean that as biodiversity increases, it increases the ecosystem productivity. This means, each species, no matter how small, have an important role to play to enrich the ecosystem and therefore for a better survival the ecosystem itself, and then for the human beings. Rich ecosystem also gives direct benefits to the humans, for example, medicinal discoveries could be possible because of rich biodiversity. Likewise, cultural diversity may enrich social and economic productivity, more than otherwise limited or no cultural diversity.

3.1. Direct contribution: cultural diversity as an economic sector

Culture can be presented as an economic sector, and in different ways. As OECD (2005:139) states, “Culture is the basis of the new economy, and is giving rise to many creative activities that produce high value-added.” Cultural diversity can be considered as one of a fertile ground for cultural tourism, and it can also generate income and contribute to national economy through what is called “creative industries”. In this paper, let me illustrate only the case of the importance of culture for tourism industry.

Cultural diversity contributes to tourism industry through its correspondingly diverse tangible and intangible cultural heritages. The following can be some of the services and
“goods” culture can present itself for development of tourism, both in rural and urban areas. I will explain first rural tourism and then urban.

The rural tourism concept has many interpretations (Page and Getz 1997; Sharpley et al 1997). Bramwell and Lane (1994) propose some, but not all, “goods” and services that can be considered as constituting rural tourism: interest in rural farm activities, nature, sport, arts, and heritage. In 1996, Pedford expands rural tourism goods and services into living history such as rural customs and folklore, local and family traditions, values, beliefs, and common heritage. Turnock (1999) further broadens the view of rural tourism to embrace all aspects of leisure in the countryside. In fact the range of goods and services cannot be exhaustive since new innovations can emerge once rural tourism is in place. Whatever the range of goods and services may be, researchers suggest that, actually, many tourists seek rural destinations which offer pleasant experiences related to the natural environment, historic heritage, and cultural patterns (Butler and Hall 1998; World Tourism Organization 1994).

In addition to interests in rural “organic” villages, cultural tourism is also an important phenomenon in urban areas. Cities are now creating “niches” or “ethnic quarters” in order to develop their tourism industry (Syrett and Sepulveda 2011). By doing this, they offer tourists unique and diverse cultural experiences. Cultural events and festivals in ethnic quarters have become successful drivers for tourism in the cities; increasing visitation and raising visitor expenditure (Fainstein and Powers 2007, Collins and Kunz 2007). Constructed cultural villages (such as Chinatowns) and “organic” clustering of diverse cultural or ethnic groups (such as Harlem in New York City) provide tourism benefits to the cities and provide a competitive advantage to tourist destinations (Hoffman 2003, Rath 2007).

Whether rural or urban, cultural tourism provides different services and goods to tourists, and the more cultural diversity, the more and better cultural tourism services and “goods” can be offered. For example, cultural diversity provides increased choices for cuisines and dining options, for residents and visitors alike (Dandy and Pepua 2013). Cultural
diversity contributes to tourism economics through diverse forms of hospitality and the food industry. Exposure of tourists to culturally diverse foods and cuisines is perhaps one of the ever-lasting experiences for tourists, since food is the first point of contact and exposure for tourists traveling to different cultures.

In addition to the contributions through intangible culture, cultural diversity also contributes through material culture. Rich cultural diversity also refers to rich material culture, which can be included under the rubric of handicraft industries. So, a greater diversity of handcraft local industries provides tourists with local products with cultural flavors. As Haldrup and Larsen (2006:276) say, “…. ‘nonhumans’ such as objects and technologies enable human agency and are crucial in making leisure and tourism geographies happen-able and perform-able.”

3.2. Indirect contribution: cultural diversity as a vehicle to promote economic growth

In addition to direct contribution as an economic sector, cultural diversity also fuels economic growth in many indirect ways. This includes by invoking positive competition and growth in entrepreneurship, cultural diversity as an opportunity to sharing positive values and technology, and through cultural diversity and sustainable development agenda.

We need to ask a question on what is the most prominent factor in bringing about development. One may answer: it is a government’s smart policy and execution (including finance, well trained manpower, etc) that is the determinant variable to bring about what is called development. But, is there another factor which may supplement or even take a leading role to facilitate economic development? An answer to this question leads to the role of culture in facilitating or hindering the progress of economic growth.

In the fields of socio-cultural anthropology and development studies, the debate on the importance of cultural values towards economic growth has emerged since 1980s. Even earlier, anthropology had introduced “the culture of poverty” (Lewis 1969) in 1960s; though this theory was attacked and silenced on behalf of the political economy, later in
1980s and until today, it made a comeback. In today’s state of knowledge, the role of cultural values in the economic growth is relevant. Let me explain this by taking some scenarios and in the line of my argument for cultural diversity.

Cultural values in different cultures may be favorable or unfavorable for change, hence determine the attitude for development. For example, let us take the culture of work and occupational preference. Among other things, culture dictates to the nature of work or occupation that one must be engaged in. In some cultures, a certain kind of work is highly reputable while is highly despised in others. Thus, who does what is not only the function of local ecological adaptation or the level of society to exploit natural environment in a relative advancement. Brown (1963:18) loosens the primary influence of environment such that “Nowhere does the natural environment completely determine the ways of men but everywhere it limits and influences the human condition”. Camber (1986:14) discusses the “economic specialization” along ethnic lines in multiethnic settings by taking the case of Singapore. In Singapore, there are different ethnic groups. Among these are Malay and Chinese. Between these two ethnic groups, there is a difference in world view. Chinese view that hard work and success should be always pursued while the Malay view that work is not an end by itself. Other aspects of life such as leisure, religion, cultural pursuits and etc are given important place in their daily lives. As a result, the two ethnic groups are channeled in separate occupational pattern. The Malay are concentrated in services, in fishing and agriculture while Chinese are concentrated on production, managerial and professional positions. My own research among the Kumpal (Desalegn 2016) also shows how the Kumpal of northwest Ethiopia perceive they are cursed and thus destined to stagnation and poverty.

Several studies about the positive role of emigration and cultural diversity in the US, UK and EU have also shown a positive correlation between cultural diversity through immigration and economic growth. Scholars argue that the “Great Divergence” in terms of economic disparity since industrial revolution was a result of encountering with diversity. Research by Ashraf and Galor (2011) suggests that encounters with diversity triggers innovation, competition, and diffusion. One of the arguments about the
responsible factors for the “Great Divergence” in economic development in the countries development since the 18th century is the result of the difference in accommodating diversity.

Researches often show that culturally diverse staff also correlates positively to economic success of (multinational) corporations (Nieuwenhuyson and Storer 2011; Syrett and Sepulveda 2011; Kitching, Smallbone and Athayde 2009) since diverse cultural groups come up with diverse and innovative ways of thinking in the work.

3.3. Cultural innovation
Culture and development have also a reciprocal relationship. Commoditization of culture as an economic sector, as is highlighted in the preceding two sections, is not merely for economic benefit only. The relationship between cultural diversity and development is not only the income we get from commoditization of culture, but also the other way round. Commoditization also encourages cultural innovation. It promotes entrepreneurship, providing innovative cultural commodities to consumers. Thus, an integration and mutual relationship exists between culture and tourism.

It is not only commoditization increases cultural innovation. Income that can be generated through cultural tourism can be used to make investment on cultural preservation and innovation. As resolution from the 4th Conference of the Council of Europe (Helsinki, 1996) stresses, "revenue from cultural tourism can contribute significant funds for the maintenance and preservation of cultural heritage". In this sense, if cultural heritage is able to stimulate tourism industry, tourism it in turn should assist detection, protection and promotion of their own cultural and historical resources.

3.4. Diversity as a human tendency
Which one is the human tendency: diversity or uniformity? It seems to me that humans have a less tendency to live a single model, a single culture, a single way of life. We, at almost every point of our life, seek to be immersed in cultural diversity. Even the very reason there is tourism is a human tendency to enjoy diversity. Without culture to make
the difference, every place would seem insipidly the same. Without a belief in new or different sensations and benefits that can be obtained through cultural tourism, what incentive would there be for any of us to make a visit to a place where there is nothing unique? A journey would hardly ever be so desirable unless for cultural diversity. And I think this can be one of the driving forces of human evolution into different cultures: this desire for distinctiveness, setting up a different way of life, and then splitting off. Human beings are creatures with capabilities (see Parekh 2000:126ff), diversity is inevitable.

3.5. Diversity for social harmony
Researches indicate that, instead of causing social disharmony, mistrust and conflict, cultural diversity contributes to otherwise: it promotes to mutual knowledge of groups and gives a breeding ground for tolerance and respect for that very diversity. By popularization of cultural diversity, we can create an aware society, guided by ethical norms, open, and resistant to cultural diversity. Cultural diversity has been found to enable greater tolerance - and to challenge cultural stereotypes among individuals. Crisp and Turner (2011) argue that in the right circumstances, the presence of cultural diversity conflicting with commonly held cultural stereotypes challenges these constructs and encourages these stereotypes to break down. They argue that a culturally diverse society provides the necessary conditions to produce greater tolerance and understanding of different cultures by providing exposure to different faiths, ethnicities and languages.

4. Management of diversity
Cultural diversity is necessarily neither the hurdle of economic growth nor a source of social disharmony, but can be otherwise a driving engine for both. They argue that the social and political problem of cultural diversity is not the result of the diversity as such, but how it is taken into a social and political system. Indeed, diversity can be seen as a rose, and the argument depends on how the scholars and politicians see the roses. Those against cultural diversity complain because they see thorns in the rose, while those who favor it endorse because they see rose in the thorns. If we do not want to know how to take care of the thorns, we wish not to use the rose. If we know how thorns are carefully dealt with, roses can be collected. Those who argue against diversity argue in that...
direction because either they have tried and failed how to handle the thorns or they have not tried at all because they fear the thrones. Benefits and challenges of cultural diversity depend on how it is managed.

Management of ethnic and cultural diversity is a broad topic, underpinning a wide range of theoretical and practical issues. Ideologically, the issues range from adoption of federalism giving autonomy to and promotion of local cultures to that of centralization and homogenization of diversity. And in practice, it requires a very profound planning and execution of policies and commitment to their implementation. Policies and strategies in turn depend on the nature of diversity, such as its type (ethnic, cultural religious), historical background (diversity may have harbored hostile or favorable memories form history), and geography (the nature of diversity depends on the type of ecology). There are studies focusing on different mechanisms of managing cultural diversity and marshalling it for both economic and social benefits (see for example, Ronen 2001).

5. The Ethiopian policy and practice
It has been more than two and half decades since Ethiopia started to cherish diversity. It had adopted a highly “radical” and “pioneering” policy often called “ethnic federalism” in order provide for all ethnic groups right to develop their own culture and language. It is radical because compared to the pre-1991 centralist policies, post-1991 policy was highly liberal, such as it supports unconditional self-determination including secession. It is also pioneering because it is ahead of many African countries’ policies on diversity (Turton 2006:1). It is not just to cherish diversity for its own sake.

Moreover, the Ethiopian policy also integrates mechanisms for using cultural diversity to benefit economic growth. The latest national plan (Growth and Transformation Plan II), for example, identified five main focus areas in relation to culture and tourism: natural and cultural heritage conservation and development; culture and tourism products marketing; service excellence; improve culture and tourism research and information systems; and enhance cooperation and collaboration with development partners.
However appealing this may be, the practice is not enticing. In practice, the development endeavors do not seem to be structured in order to develop cultural diversity and tourism. Studies on the policy and practice of promoting diversity in Ethiopia show contradictions and inconsistencies at local level (see for example Epple and Thubauville 2012, Desalegn 2014) where while promoting cultures, the practice inhibits by putting a priority to modernization and economic development. Every cultural practice is supposed to be marshaled along the line of development. It does not seem to be committed to the survival of cultures that do not have development potential.

Moreover, rural cultural practices are heavily being influenced by globalization. For example, there is a rapid erosion of values in festivals and rituals. A simple example is traditional drinks being replaced by beer. Entering into villages, a tourist does not obviously want to experience drinking beer, but something local.

The same is true with urban centers. Urbanization in Ethiopia is expanding, but major cultural flavors being dropped. In Addis Ababa, for example, there is an extensive urban renewal program. However, the old cultural systems, historic buildings, old neighborhoods are being swiped away, only to make a monotonous agglomeration of buildings with no any “Ethiopian” flavor. A tourist, who travels in Addis Ababa from one end to another, would find nothing different not only within the city itself and the city compared to other cities in the west, this assertion becoming truer and truer in the future, as current trend show. Unfortunately, there is even a policy gap in this regard. For example, there is also no heritage impact assessment integrated into the urban renewal program. The Construction law (Proclamation No. 624/2009) too does not make any mention of this matter.
6. Conclusion

Cultural diversity offers important opportunities for development: economic or social. It is an economic sector by itself since by promoting commoditization and tourism, culture can be important source of income, jobs, and foreign exchange. It is also a source of cultural innovation and social harmony. Indeed, diversity, rather than uniformity, seems to be a human tendency.

Even if they have myriad opportunities, as noted by Trigg (2014), cultural diversity is often taken control by racism and discrimination, which challenges social cohesion in many societies including Ethiopia. As is the case in Ethiopia at least to some extent, currently, according to Trigg (2014), higher rates of discrimination and racism are felt by Middle Eastern and/or Islamic populations.

So, making use of opportunities from cultural diversity requires tackling its enemies by a proper management mechanism. The short term impacts of cultural diversity to local, national, and regional development and economic growth are dependent on how the diversity is managed (Goldin, Cameron, and Balarajan 2010). In my opinion, scholars who argue cultural diversity has a negative impact, instead of explaining cultural diversity, they explain it away. They explain not the importance of cultural diversity as such, but the problem of cultural diversity unless properly managed. When properly managed, cultural diversity is an opportunity.
References


