Social Exchange Practices in Tourist-Local Interactions along the Bishoftu- Modjo-Hawassa Tourist Corridor, Central Ethiopia

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Abstract

Empirical research findings done on the theme of tourism uncovered the presence of enormous research gap in relation to social exchange practices between tourists and locals. This article describes tourist-community interactional experiences around natural tourist attraction sites along the Bishoftu-Modjo-Hawassa Tourist Corridor, Central Ethiopia by using relevant sociological theories and methods. Methodologically, the paper followed an interpretative research philosophy and qualitative research design. Critical reviews of relevant models, theories and empirical literature were used to substantiate primary data generated through the fieldwork. The tenets of social exchange theory were central in the analysis of social exchange practices between locals and tourists in the attraction sites. The findings from the fieldwork showed that the interaction of tourists and host locals often transforms into social exchange relations that fall within the principles of rewards and costs in human behaviour. It follows that tourist-local contacts nurture human intercultural exchanges through the circulation of cultural traits, technologies, economic assets and lifestyles. In the study sites, three dimensions of social exchange were more noticeable: social, cultural, and material-technological. The end processes of social exchange relations were production of social capital and integration manifested through marriage, skill/technological transfers, and economic transactions. Nonetheless, on the courses of such processes, two issues demand serious attention: (i) ways to increase the involvement of ordinary local residents in social exchange practices as their participation were marginal during the study; (ii) structures and social networks that support social exchanges practices were less operational at institutional levels.

Keyterms: Sociology of tourism, social exchange practices, Bishoftu-Modjo-Hawassa tourist corridor, central Ethiopia

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1. Introduction

This section introduces readers with thematic research domains in the sub-field of the sociology of tourism, which is hardly known in Ethiopia. It also highlights the contexts in which the article is embedded, major objectives and methods of the research.

1.1. Backdrop

Interfacing between sociology and tourism, lie four main thematic sub-domains of inquiry: (i) socio-economic and demographic profiles of tourists, (ii) interrelationships between tourists and host community, (iii) institutions and structures that operate in tourism, and (iv) the impacts created through the practice of tourism (Cohen 1984). In other words, sociologists of tourism have drawn their attentions to investigating themes such as "destinations and attractions, impacts of tourism, tourist behaviours and typologies, host-guest relations, structures and sustainability" of tourism products and services in a globalised world (Platenkamp 2007:8).

Nonetheless, early in its history, sociology of tourism has been viewed as "a trivial pursuit and thus not worthy of serious academic effort." There had been controversies among "mainstream sociologists" in the elaboration of Wang (2000), and "how to treat tourism as a legitimate area of [sociological] study" as similarly noted by Dann and Parinello (2009:9). Indeed, reviews of existing knowledge attested poor connections between tourism and sociological explorations elsewhere in the world.

Regardless of the persisting controversies over themes of sociology of tourism, the practices of paying visits to various attractions constituted among the age-old human phenomena. Above all, Meethan (2001:1) confessed the contemporary relevance of growing touristic activities as follows:

> *Tourism provides both a lens onto and energy for relationships with everyday life. It invites us to engage in exchanges of life with others and to remind us thereby of its most precious and vulnerable aspect. Tourism owns a transformative power. It, by dividing the environment as home and away, elevates the social space into a different platform.*

The sub-discipline of the sociology of tourism was not a cherished area of research to attract the interest of sociologists for a long time (Greenblat and Gagnon 1983). As a witness of fact, Dann and Parinello (2009) agreed on the dominance of theoretical sociology over sub-disciplines like Sociology of Tourism. Such indolence to apply sociological theories and methods to the study of tourism was due to factors that characterise the sociological enterprise and its uneven relationships with other disciplines in the social science disciplines.

Similar to the global trend, the subject and research of sociology of tourism constituted a neglected sub-field and represented a marginalised sphere of inquiry in Ethiopia. Some commentators focused on the tourism potential of the country, which extends to include cultural, historical, religious, archaeological and natural tourism resources (Kauffmann 2008; Ministry of Culture and Tourism— MoCT 2010; Mulugeta 2012; Murray and Biniyam 2013) than social exchange practices. For example, Mulugeta (2010) shaded a light on the minimal tapping of tourism resources in the overall economic development of the country and its regions, where themes on exchange were neglected. Other writers, such as Hanna (2007), Ayalew (2009), Misge (2004) and Yemane (2011) attempted to explore tourism in different localities yet none of their research had highlighted the imperativeness of social exchange practices that goes among tourists and locals. The growing gaps in knowledge pertaining to poor exchange relations and practices through the agency of tourism in central Ethiopia pave the way for posing questions such as:

  i. do tourists engage in social exchange relations with locals or do they just come and go without any shared meanings?
 ii. if they do engage in exchange practices, what do they share with and acquire from residents in the attraction sites?
iii. do those practices of exchange create consequences that affect the lives of the host community members in the attraction areas?

Consequently, the line of argument taken in addressing these research questions defines tourism as a social phenomenon explicable through sociological perspectives and methods. As a result, the empirical experiences of five local spots, on the Bishoftu-Modjo-Hawassa tourist

corridor, were purposively opted to illustrate the empirical practices connected to tourist-local social exchange relations and, thereby nascent but emergent sub-cultures.

1.2. Objective and Rationale of This Article

The overarching objective of this article is to portray exchange relations that occur between tourists and locals on the Bishoftu-Modjo-Hawassa tourist corridor, Central Ethiopia. Investigations on such a theme would give a focus to the exchange practices prevailing between tourists and the locals. In recent decades, dynamics in tourism have shown progressive trends both at domestic and international levels, where Ethiopia is also trying to fetch out substantial benefits. The periods of development in Ethiopia [growth and transformation plans in both cycles] have also set further dynamics in tourism development and financial resources accrued from the sector and being injected to the local economy.

2. Theoretical Context and Empirical Reviews

Social exchange theory explains the processes of negotiated exchanges among people in the wider societal structures. The theory assumes that human relationships proliferate through a subjective cost-benefit analysis and undertake the comparison of possible options (Yutyunyong 2009:5). Authors (e.g., Lin 2004:143) characterised social exchange as "… a series of interactions between two (or more) actors in which a transaction of resources takes place. By this definition, exchange has two …components: it requires a relationship between the actors, and it leads to resource transaction." The resources of exchange involve material and non-material assets. With a stronger tone, Molm (1997: 11) considered social exchange to originate from the principles of economic exchanges where the exchange processes emphasised certain forms of benefits. The principles of exchange covering the transactions of valuable resources are applicable to numerous contexts in human social life and the society; it included the exchange relations that emerge between tourists and local residents.

Renowned authors on the themes of social exchange (e.g., Blau 1964:4) signified social exchange as the emergent properties of interpersonal relations and situations in touristic social interaction. It represented relations

underlying individuals, groups or associations. The forms of the relations that tie groups or individuals together involve cooperation or sometimes competitions that result in conflicts. Through these processes, actors reciprocate cultural assets, economic resources, technological innovations, social values and thoughts.

Dual lines of argument dominate social exchange theories: individualistic models and collectivist exchange principles. The individualistic model focuses on the micro-individual level and explains that individuals seek to maximise their own private pursuits and calculations. In this context, benefits and rewards follow mutual reciprocations. The works of Homans (1961) and Blau (1964) gave much insight to the individualistic exchange orientations. The collectivist approach put emphasis on generalised exchange covering at least three actors. According to this approach, exchange adopted shared values in which actors discharge their obligations to the group or to the society. Self interest declines and societal concern grows in the collectivist exchange model (Abercrombie *et al.* 1994:156–157).

In a way of forwarding the central tenets of social exchange principles, Zafirovski (2005:3) discusses the following:

> *Exchange theory examines the processes of establishing and sustaining reciprocity in social relations or the mutual gratifications between individuals. The basic assumption of exchange theory is that individuals establish and continue social relations on the basis of their expectations that such relations will be mutually advantageous. The initial impetus for social interaction is provided by the exchange of benefits, intrinsic and extrinsic, independently of normative obligations.*

Under numerous circumstances, social exchange theories consider actors to hold self-interest. Commonly, actors seek to increase outcomes that are positively valued and decrease negatively valued ones. Social exchange occurs as what humans consider valuable are mostly obtained from other actors in a society or group through the processes of social interaction. Inevitably, the social exchange among actors leads to interdependencies. However, the interconnections among actors exhibit dual forms: one producing social integration and the other leading to social differentiation,

involving unequal dependencies (Blau 1964: 89; Molm 2003: 13 and Cook and Rice 2002: 699).

Having embedded social exchange in human social life, Molm (1997:12) further purported over the essential elements of social exchange as follows:

> *Social exchange is based on a fundamental characteristic of social life. Much of what we need and value in life (e.g., goods, services, companionship, approval, status, and information) … be obtained from others. People depend on one another for such valued resources, and they provide them to one another through the process of exchange. Social exchange theory takes as its particular focus this aspect of social life — the benefits that people obtain from, and contribute to, social interaction, and the patterns of dependence that govern those exchanges.*

Exchange theory, also stretched to take into account the analysis of exchange networks out of its dyadic focuses. Exchange relations establish network of structures among actors. Commonly, three forms of connections evolved in the exchange network structures: negative, positive and null connections. Actors tend to exhibit negative connections when the frequency of exchange in one is negatively correlated with the magnitude exchange in the other relation. Thus, negative connections of network structures involve competition. In contrast, in positively connected network structures, the relations of actors enhance exchange with other actors. Positively connected exchange relations present more of cooperation. The null connection indicates lack of networks ties among exchange actors (Cook and Rice 2002:705).

In Molm's (1997: 13) view, social exchange theory addresses four key issues: 1) actors who exchange, 2) the exchanged resources, 3) the structure of exchange, and 4) the process of exchange. Actors denote individuals or groups that behave in certain ways to gain outcomes positively valued and decrease outcomes that are negatively valued in the courses of exchange practices. Resources cover a range of elements transacted. Structure of exchange involves the exchange relations that develop within the structures of mutual reciprocation. The exchange processes entail activities like the recurring and interdependent interactional relations among actors over a period of time.

In this regard, tourists on visit and locals represent the actors. The process involves the actions of actors such as the residents, service providers, government structures, local guides and institutions under various contexts. The element of relationship designates the contacts (physical, telephone, internet and through the traditional media) between tourists and the community at tourist sites. The exchange resources were the cultural and natural tourism assets [tangible and intangible] available in various modalities.

The tourists also travel with valued rewards and resources, such as knowledge, experiences, technology, and cash money that would be reciprocated with communities around attractions. The host communities have also got resources to exchange with tourists in turn. The cultural resources, rituals, hospitality and a range of other social supports are among the packages of assets that communities offer to the tourist. These processes of exchange gradually transform into higher forms of structures and institutions that influence the operation and patterns of tourism itself.

Most premises of exchange theory noted in the previous sub-sections hold practical relevance on a range of human behaviours involving interaction. The phenomena of tourist-community interaction represented among the core domains ensures its applicability. Following the prevailing assumptions of exchange, Jack and Phipps (2005:6) demonstrated the inherent connections between touristic activities and exchange as follows:

> Tourism provides a …significant occasion for intercultural communication, and for a potential mixing of different social groupings. In this mix we find relations that are inflected by power relations in highly nuanced ways, as resistance, as domination and as subtle shifts between people as they meet and exchange.

Connecting exchange theory and its principles to touristic phenomena, Shaw and Williams (2004: 184) also remarked that, "the processes of socio-cultural exchanges considered the local situations and the processes of change negotiated in different ways by local communities. These processes of negotiation are stimulated by the reactions of local communities toward tourism and tourists." This allegation further stipulates that the actions of the community towards tourism developments in their locality consider at large the costs and benefits across economic, social and environmental

implications. As a result, a growing concern has been offered to social-exchange theory to explore the community's reactions towards tourism in the context of their localities.

In line with the underlying assumptions of the theory, the actors, tourists on the one side and local residents, particularly service, were motivated for interaction in calculation of maximising their respective rewards, which flows in the form of financial benefits and eliminating consequent penalising behaviours.

Moreover, the mode (Figure 1) demonstrated the emerging framework that guides tourist-community social exchange practices on the tourist corridor in Central Ethiopia. The model is constructed based on the theoretical and empirical reviews of relevant materials as presented in the preceding parts.
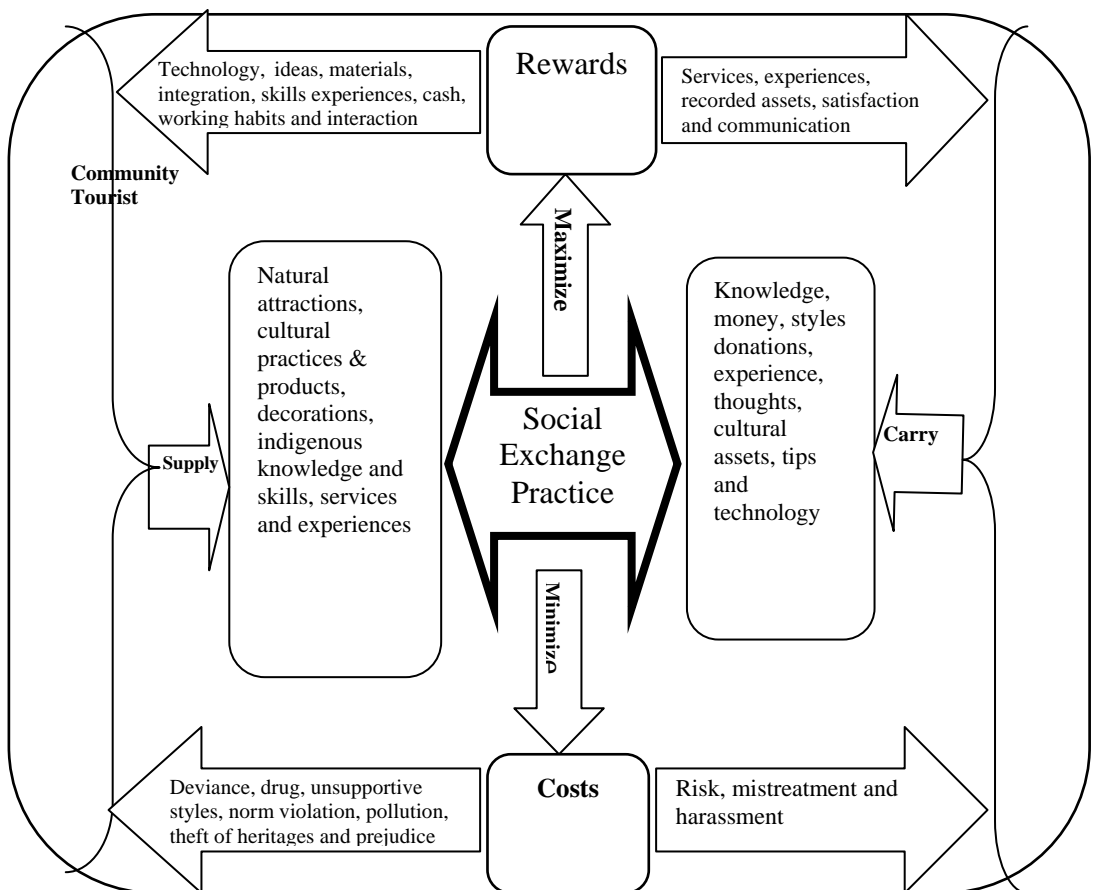

Figure 1. A Model for Tourist-community Social Exchange Practices on the Tourist Corridor

SOURCE: Researcher's own construction

3. Methodology and Portrait of the Study Route

This sub-section presents the vivid descriptions of selected tourist attraction sites purposively included under the study and also offers concise description of the data collection processes and designs.

3.1. Description of the Bishoftu-Modjo-Hawassa Tourist Corridor

The study route (Figure 2) covers the natural and cultural attractions in the Lake Regions, Hot Springs, and a National Park along the Bishoftu-Modjo-Hawassa tourist corridor. The route falls in the administrative boundaries of Oromia National Regional State and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples National Regional State (SNNPR). While Lake Babogaya, Lake Langano and ASLNP are sites in Oromia, Wondo-Genet and Hawassa belong to SNNPR. Huge natural and cultural tourism attractions are available in the two national regional administrative states surrounding the aforementioned tourist sites.
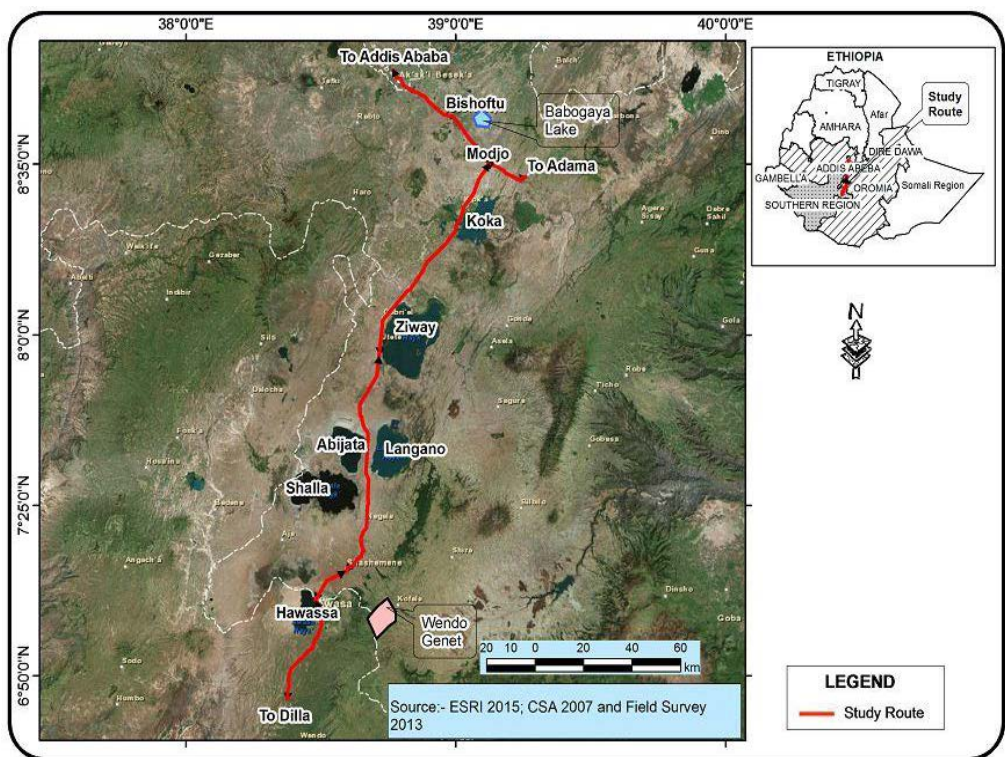

Figure2. The tourist sites in the Central Rift Valley area

Each of the specific sites included in the study presents unique natural and cultural features to domestic and international visitors. For example, Lake Babogaya offers a beautiful natural scenic tourism with boating services to tourists. The yearly veneration of cultural ceremonies of the Oromo society, such as *Irreecha* have amplified the growth of festival tourism to the natural attractions in Bishoftu. Similarly, the attractions in the Central Rift Valley areas, around Langano and Abijata-Shalla Lakes National Park, provide natural scenic services to domestic and international travellers. Tourism attractions at Wondo-Genet provide medical values on top of its natural and cultural elements. Lake Hawassa has been a hub where tourists interact with nature and mosaics of cultures in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region of Ethiopia.

3.2. Research Paradigm, Design and Methods

This sub-section focuses on the brief discussions made on research paradigms, designs and specific methods of data generation tools.

3.2.1. *Paradigm*

This investigation falls under interpretative research paradigm, which represents one of the famous research philosophies in social sciences. Interpretive philosophy invites for the interpretation and apprehension of human social phenomena. According to Nuryatano (2003: 32), interpretative paradigm "involves understanding human behaviour through lived experiences." As a research paradigm, interpretivism defines reality in relation to the contexts of the phenomena under investigation while its epistemological stance also took subjective understanding (Scotland 2012), which shares much with the constructivist school of thought.

3.2.2. *Research Design and Methods*

The paper entirely relied on a qualitative research approach and strategy, involving in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and observation. These methods were employed in exploring tourist-community exchange practices in the selected tourist sites. The selection of the participants of the study proceeded through purposive sampling based on their experiences, prior knowledge and level of expertise in relation to tourism.

The in-depth interviews were held with the representatives of tour agents, tour guides' associations at local level, community representatives, and

private and public higher education institutions. The interviews also covered hotel owners, managers, representatives of micro-enterprises, and relevant security [police] officers in the respective cities. Key informant interviews were made with the respective Offices and Bureaus of Culture and Tourism in the National Regional States of Oromia and Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples Regions. The total numbers of in-depth interviews were 30 while the key-informants were 20 officials.

Focus group discussions were also conducted with service providers organised in the research sites. Six focused group discussions were conducted in each research site. On average seven individuals took part in each of the focus group discussions. The data gathered through focus group discussions generated primary facts and accounts that built and explained the arguments in the findings and helped verify points that emerged through in-depth interviews and key informant interviews.

Moreover, field observations were used to triangulate the data collected through focused discussions, in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. The researcher assumed the role of both observer and participant where close observation was a major action with marginal participation. The activities of residents around tourist attraction sites constituted foci of observations. Hence, the physical settings of the attraction lakeshores, market centres, bazaars, hot springs, cultural centres, souvenir shops and entertainment centres were on the forefront for field observation activities.

Beyond the primary data sets generated through qualitative fieldwork techniques, as highlighted above, the researcher also reviewed existing documents. Archives and secondary sources were mainly consulted to complement and substantiate the primary data generated though fieldwork. Data generated from the fieldwork through qualitative methods and review of the documents were thematically organised into their sub-categories, analysed based on their contents and then interpreted. Thus, thematic content analysis was the main method used to carry out the analysis of the primary data. This is to mean the facts collected from the field were sorted out in terms of their contents under the research questions and then integrated together in manners it gives coherent meanings.

4. Fieldwork Results: Characterising Social Exchange Practices on the Route

Interaction opens the ground for social exchange in human interrelations. Hendry (2008:64) denoted that "an immediate exchange is less likely to represent a social relationship than delayed one, since the transaction will be completed on the spot and there is no need for further communication." The instrumentality of social interaction for social exchange is indisputable; but interaction and engagement in exchange had less mechanistic connections. Still, interaction paves the ground for exchange as tourists and locals inevitably depend on one another. A mere analysis of tourist-local contact demonstrated that tourists relied much on the community and conversely the community obtained varied resources from travelling tourists. In touristic practices, Molm (1997:1) elicited, "people depend on one another for much of what they value and need in social life, and they provide these benefits to each other through the process of social exchange …". The imaginative actions of the tourists that combine their personal biography, historical scene and socialisation present distinctive resources for the local community members to leverage their communications with tourists.

Tourist-community interaction was, thus, considered as vibrant modality of social exchange occurring among actors of diverse experiences. It is based on the principles of giving and taking [win-win] through exchange relations. The contacts have ranged from intermittent interaction to highly intimate ties extending between tourists and local communities, building enduring patterns. The rising pattern of interaction becomes imperative in social exchange than onetime transactions or contact alone.

Correspondingly, in-depth exploration carried out in the field exhibited the practical prevalence of social exchange relations between tourists and locals. Above and beyond, the presences of differences in their lifestyles were driving factors to accelerate interaction and then social exchange. A key informant at Hawassa stated that 'tourists and the communities are from different environments, backgrounds, economic classes, and outlooks. The differences in life styles of the two sides instigate social exchange relations with the aim to maximise valuable resources from each other.'

This statement considered tourists to possess resources and assets valuable in the exchange relations including knowledge, experience, ideas and other tangible technologicalmaterials and products. Due to the differences in personal, geographic and historical contexts between the tourists and the local community, the exchange of cultural attributes and traits, the exchange of linguistic vocabularies, costume, cultural materials and products of technology constituted the commonly prevailing practices of social exchange between the tourists and the community.

According to Jack and Phipps (2005: 144), the actions of taking photographs and buying of souvenirs, giving materials, either on a sustainable manner or ephemeral basis, help to symbolically extend present experiences into fragments that continued beyond the tourist time, instilling fresh memories of the past, after getting back to their usual environment. Analogously, the owner of Babogaya resort interviewed at Bishoftu presented on the role of photos taken by the tourists, and its exchange values out of the context of local cultures. He said:

> *Our community mostly misperceived the actions of tourists while taking photos. I personally argue on the other way round. Our natural resources were exchanged with the mere presence of tourists even without the community's consciousness. Whether the tourists sale the photos, use it for advertisement, or use it for personal documentation in their respective offices, home or even for other purposes, that did not count much in my view. I rather judge it in terms of disseminating our local tourism resources in Europe and the rest part of the world through those tourists. The practice contributed towards building the image of the country among individuals who did not come and visited the sites.*

In certain regards, tourists themselves possessed unwelcoming outlooks towards sharing their exchange resources. According to the key informant contacted at Wondo-Genet Hot Spring area, the tourists were 'much eager to acquire, learn, take and explore the cultural and natural assets of the community than to share their respective experiences and cultural assets.' The key informant further posited that '...tourists lacked the willingness to share part of their experiences on cultural, social, economic or environmental issues and aspects.' Generally, tourists engage in cautious exchange as compared to the open door perspectives of the community.

Tourists shared more of their experiences on stories and events or practices that caught their attentions while the community displayed all its assets. One of the tour guides [at Mosaic Land] contacted at Hawassa stated: '... it is usually after repeated interrogations that tourists react selectively to our inquiries. On the contrary, community explanations were detailed on every question posed by the tourist.' The Zonal level key informant contacted at Shashamane maintained that '... few foreign tourists showed the willingness to share their knowledge and experience. However, the existing institutional settings failed to capture the tourists' knowledge and skills that could have been extorted and disseminated among the local community.'

The explanatory powers of social exchange theory forwarded by Homans (1974) and Blau (1964) to the analysis of human social behaviour, particularly at the moments of exchange were evidently recognised on the route. Exchange principles expounded the social processes involving interpersonal interaction between the tourists and the community, norm formation peculiar to settings (through bylaws, setting ethical standards), role and status differentiation between the interacting sides, establishment of communication networks, displaying the economic powers and mediating structures, and influence conformity formations to the frameworks of exchanges.

4.1. Resources of Social Exchange in Tourist-community Contacts

Exchange theories share sets of analytical concepts such as actors, resources, structures and processes. Actors refer to participants in social exchange including individual persons (tourists and the community segments in the context at hand), groups (micro-enterprise, local guides or hotel associations) and structural positions (decision-makers through hierarchies). The social exchange resources cover not only the tangible goods and services rendered to tourists but also socially-valued approvals, recognitions, respects or considering status in the tourist community interactional frameworks (Molm 2003: 2).

i. Gifts and Economic Assets as Resources of Exchange in the Tourist-community Contacts
According to Woosnam (2007:75), gifts were "viewed as the relationship between community and tourists as ones in which resources are exchanged,"

and the tourists as actors who receive the services in return to the context. In essence, these relationships proved and merely indicated the presence of exchange in its economic modality.

Diverse groups exchange economic assets during the tourist-community interaction, where gifts represent crucial ones. Franklin (2003: 101) characterised gifts that tourists and the community reciprocate as: "...abounds with commodities, or things that have an exchange value and these…range from tourism services (guiding for example) culture (for instance rituals performed for a fee) and nature (payment to visit or see natural objects, habitats, and species."

Material exchange and gifts formed a category of valued resources between tourists and the community. Tourists donate books, clothes, and products of technology to the community members during their trip and interaction. The community members also present in turn cultural gifts like clothes and handicrafts to the tourists. Under the dimensions of material or economic exchange, tourists were more interested in items of symbolic significance that indicate the religious, historical and cultural assets of the community.

ii. Ideas and Lifestyles

In sociological literature, social exchange does not limit the parties involved only to the give and take of material cultural or technological assets. It often extends to cover a wider range of views, ideas and lifestyles as essential assets and resources of exchange among humans. The key informant interviews in SNPPR disclosed the presence of more intangible exchanges, such as exchanges of stories, plays, myths, songs, dances and ideas, as compared to the material cultural products on the study route.

Consequently, at the tourist sites, the social exchange practices cover the acquisition of ideas, thoughts, outlooks, perspectives and life styles, in both sides. These elements played significant parts in laying the ground to change in the lives of the locals. Manager of Dreamland Hotel at Bishoftu stated that 'with the aim to improve hospitable receptions and caring services, ideas from tourists are demanded and examined thoroughly. The ideas of tourists were exchanged with the improvements in the quality of

standardised services in the hotel.' Similarly, the tourism expert in the Office of Culture and Tourism at Bishoftu expressed the presence of efforts to convert tourists' idea, perspective and reflections into practical improvements of the activities of the community on tourist sites.

Authors like Jack and Phipps (2005: 14) presented an array of exchange elements that characterise human's everyday life, which include tourist-community contact practices. They argue that:

> *Our everyday encounters are full of different kinds of exchange; not only commercial exchanges when we swap money for desired goods and services, but also exchange of love, friendship, and community. Exchange can be predictable; the stuff of habit such as the visit to the (super) market, but it can also be unexpected, fun, unusual and uncertain. Exchange does not, however, exists in a social vacuum.*

Following the arguments of Jack and Phipps (2005), the practices on the ground exhibited that tourists' ideas on service improvement, act of speech and distinctive appreciations and concerns on various tourism elements were exchanged with the communities'. In this regard, the cumulative experience and knowledge of the tourists were exchanged with the community members. In turn, tourists expect quality services and witness improvements through their satisfactions.

iii. Sharing Linguistic Terminologies and Meanings

The elements of social exchange practices between tourists and the locals incorporate the elements of language vocabularies. Such exchanges were straight forwardly mentioned by the informants, particularly the local guides. The local tour guides at Wondo-Genet and Bishofu expressed that 'tourists exert a lot to acquire and capture local terminologies [mostly Amharic and Afaan Oromo] including self-introduction, greetings, words associated with food stuffs, cultural products, and common natural resources.' Likewise, a key informant contacted at Hawassa expressed that:

> *Tourists attempt to imitate and acquire Amharic vocabularies and terminologies. The availability of tourist guide books [English-Amharic translations] motivates most tourists to develop acquaintance with key terms of these languages. In addition to the vocabularies, tourists also attempt to capture and rehearse the meanings and interpretations of the concepts.*

> *Some of them show effort to discern the meanings of Lake Hawassa, Wondo-Genet and other locally known cultural terminologies such as name of plants, name of birds and name of places.*

Local communities also got the opportunities to acquire some vocabularies from the tourists in turn. Local tour guides, members of micro enterprises operating around the lakes and tourist attraction settings, and those segments of the community employed in the hotel industry developed much better communicative skills through English and other foreign languages. In this regard, the local guides indicated to have benefited from their interaction with tourist in acquiring the language vocabularies of French, Germany, Italina and Spainish. The social exchange of linguistic mediums was more evident and most perceptible among the local guides. In Hawassa, the local tour guide at Fikir Hayiq shared his experience on how his interaction and exchange with tourists assisted him to improve communicative skills. In his words,

> *Whenever I guide tourists on the lake, my ambition was to create relaxation in their heart and mind. Some tourists become easily communicative when I tried to present to them eliciting words while other[s] remained resistant to communicate with me. However, at the end of each guiding session, all tourists spending some minutes or hours, and sometimes days, with me show excitements and congratulate me.*

In fact, per the claims of the local tour guide in Hawassa, such 'skills were acquired over years, particularly due to learning through longer experiences of guiding tourists.' This has proved that social interaction with tourists improved the social and communicative skills of the local tour guides and other community members.

iv. Cultural Assets: Tangible and Intangible Resources

In addition to the linguistic terminologies, the cultural assets of the community constituted essential resources of social exchange between tourists and locals. The handcraft products displayed at souvenir shops, the dancing and singing performances on cultural ceremonies, and the costume are among the core cultural resources of the community highly valued and appreciated by the tourists. Tourists often engaged in either purchasing or temporarily wearing the cultural cloths of the locals. The symbolic

meanings and interpretations of cultural element often create particular interest to tourists.

As part of the cultural products and displays, the roles exhibitions and bazaars play in facilitating the actions of social exchange were highly pronounced by members of the community. In tourist preferred hotels on the route, there were lots of exhibitory photos displaying knowledge, history and culturally-praised postages representing the lives of Oromo people. In this regard, the situations at Bishoftu, Babogaya and Kuriftu Resorts, for example, present particular opportunities of cultural advertisements to the tourists. However, tourists were not courageous to share cultural assets of their respective countries. Tourists were often resistant to share part of their cultural practices.

v. Technological Products and Skills

In terms of the volume and frequency of exchanging valuable resources between tourists and the locals, the processes of social exchanges related to technical and skill transfer occupied prominent stage next to cultural exchanges. Within the components of technology and skill transfer relationships, much of the technologies and the skills were supplied by the tourists to the local communities. Tourists rendered computer technologies, trainings on use of technologies, and skills for local guides. There were tourism sites in which, for example, tourists created websites for local tourism associations. The local community members confessed having acquired business skills [those locals operating in the areas of tourism product], planning skills [for members of local tour guide associations], guiding skills, and nature conservation strategies in more systemised ways.

4.2. Dimensions of Tourist-community Exchange on the Bishoftu-Modjo-Hawassa Tourist Corridor

Social, cultural and technological-material facets were the three core inter-related dimensions of exchange through which tourists and locals transact valuable resources. Jack and Phipps (2005: 160) also argued, *"Exchange was...a key practice of everyday tourist life. It took different forms... sometimes it materialized ...; sometimes it took the form of swapping food in youth hostels where the currency was a smile; sometimes it involved the telling of stories and the swapping of tips and information."*

Cognisant of the presence of such domains, the researcher provides overview of the above dimensions of tourism in detail as follows.

4.2.1. *Social Dimension of Exchange in Tourist-community Interaction*

The exchange of ideas, thoughts and perspectives was an aspect of the social realms that tourists and the local communities share to each other. Hendry (2008: 62) shared the experiences of Western society while elaborating that "... some of the ways in which social exchange...[can be] fostered are through dropping into drink cups of tea or coffee together, inviting people to dinner and parties, writing letters..., sending Christmas cards, making telephone calls, buying drinking and doing favours."

Jack and Phipps (2005: 107) argued that "practices led to stories, and stories led to practices. This is a kind of hermeneutic circle for intercultural tourist and community communication, in which practices and stories provide the conditional possibilities for each other." In connection with these, the determination of hard working spirits and time management practices were identified as the socially-desirable and valued resources exchanged between the tourists and the community members on the study route. Interviewed community members openly admitted their acquisitions of determinations to work hard and spent time on productive activities following the staged social exchange with the tourists. The overriding feeling that tourists shared on hard work, determinations and achievements circulated among the community members. The local tour guide interviewed at Wondo-Genet stated the following:

> *While spending time with tourists ...I had grasped much on how best to improve the work habit and mentality to respect any kinds of jobs available in my locality. The tendency of working hard towards attaining one's own envisaged end was a social quality acquired from tourists during the interaction and exchange practices. Tourists often comment on the abundantly available cultural, historical and natural tourism resources in Ethiopia. But lower efforts were exerted to transform these resources into practical value.*

Furthermore, there were tourists who also took initiatives to organise and provide short-term training courses at Bishoftu and Hawassa. According to

the view of the key informant interviewed at Bishoftu, 'a visitor arrived to Ethiopia from South Africa and spent few days on visit to the Lakes- in Bishoftu. At the end, the tourist himself decided to share his experiences on how to improve the existing work habits and economic utilisation of natural resources in the city.' The training was conducted for weeks and contributed much in the transfer of knowledge, experience on work habits and ethics among the youths. In addition, the social dimensions of tourist-community exchange included the work habits, service qualities and types, and techniques of tourist handling in the face of growing tourism dynamics. The fundamental exchange element here fell on the social facet of changing the work practices, knowledge and skill improvements between the South African experience and those of the Ethiopian youths in the contexts of Bishoftu.

> *The exchange of experiences on time usage related to tourism activities, tourism resource usage and the need to change work ethics were crucial elements on the training. Moreover, the locals also shared to acquire the habits and motivations of learning to pay visits to the tourist attraction areas; first domestically and then extend to neighbouring countries. The mounting influx of tourists to the sites along the study route stimulated the habits to engage in recurrent visits in the community. The local tour guides, who obtained training courses and orientations under various sessions, showed the enthusiasm of visiting cultures and practices distinct from their normal environments, after receiving the training. The local tour guides also influenced other local community members to engage in touristic activities.*

In Hawassa and, to a lesser extent in, Bishoftu, local guides and institutions contacted for in--depth interviews showed strong interest in travelling to experience cultures and nature in their country and abroad. Remarkable developments have been heralded at Wondo-Genet through the operation of heritage clubs. Hence, experiences and encounters with the tourists visiting their localities have partly motivated members of the local communities to pay similar visits to other parts of the country and even aboard. This in turn would implicate that visiting others' culture and environment would carry over a peculiar social value that generates social status, happiness, and caring for tourism resources in essence.

The exchange of messages including greetings and communications were accelerated through internet technologies. What categorised them under the social component was the fact that the locals communicate tourists during holidays to extend greetings and express their wishes on social events. The contents of the interaction were mainly social ranging from asking information on wellbeing to creating mutual understanding. The local guide who mostly spent days on delivery of boating services at Hawassa reflected the following: "... I usually communicate with the tourists, with whom I had created better interaction while visiting Ethiopia, upon their return to their country. Some of them have continued to give me a call and send me gifts during holidays in turn." Turner (2006: 305) also emphasised that "globalization is reconstituting interaction in complex and uneven ways…interaction in time and space concerns… the new information technologies that people deploy in their day-to-day lives." The role of global technologies is eminent in facilitating the exchange practices between tourists and locals.

Social exchange domains undertaken with tourists showed variations between domestic and international travellers. The views of the community interviewees indicated that relatively strong influences and quite meaningful exchanges occurred with international arrivals as compared to domestic tourists. Exchange of ideas, thoughts, work habits or linguistic vocabularies were noted among the international tourists. Hendry (2008: 62) states that "whether made in material form or not, exchange is an important means of communication which expresses the social relationships at various levels." Hendry's argument was practically noticed and practiced on the study route.

4.2.2. Cultural Dimension of Exchange in Tourist-community Interaction

Much of what tourists and the locals exchange on the study route falls under the cultural systems, exceeding the social and purely technological elements. Tourists mostly bring into context material or technologically-valued resources while the locals supply in turn cultural resources and assets.

Tourists paid much attention to observing the life styles of the locals. The local tour guides reflected that tourists aspired to experience the cultural life of the community encompassing cultural events, ceremonies, costumes and

other symbolic systems while interacting with the locals. One of the local guides at Hawassa narrated: "I noticed tourists who appreciated the cultural events. For example, tourists feel happier to see the steps in the processes of preparing coffee ceremony even beyond drinking it." The same mood applies to the preparation of cultural foods (e.g., processing of *Enset [Ensete ventricosum])*, and rituals on conflict resolutions.

Above and beyond, tourists have shown inclinations of fading away with complex modern life styles in their country of origin and want to relax with the customary living styles in their destinations. As a result, tourists are interested in directly observing and experiencing details of cultural events and ceremonies. At Bishoftu, for example, *Irreecha* ceremony was venerated by the local communities. Tourists also take part in the ceremony and observe its various phases including blessing, speeches and cultural dances. The flow and exchange of intangible cultural assets between the local communities and the tourists tend to be more intense on such events.

The symbolic significances of traditional houses that serve foods and music, displaying the cultural representations of the respective ethnic groups on the route, were highly appreciated among the local tour guides, government key informants and the heads of micro-associations. At Bishoftu, there were few of such traditional houses where tourists and the locals interact and initiate cultural exchange. At Wondo-Genet, Langano and Abijata-Shalla tourist attraction sites, relatively established traditional houses were limited in number. More number of traditional houses was available at Hawassa. The representative of Oasis Micro Association interviewed at Hawassa reported that during the night time, particularly on the weekends, tourists attend the cultural dances and songs performed by youth. In the specific dimension of the cultural exchange, tourists acquire considerable experiences and also attempt to partly exhibit their distinctive styles to the contexts in the tourist sites or in association with the events.

A more pronounceable cultural exchange occurred at settings where the handicrafts and artefacts are sold. At Bishoftu the exchange of cultural materials were less frequently practiced as compared to situations at Hawassa. The practices of displaying the cultural handicrafts and cultural clothes were confined to small regions in the interior of the city. The

number of souvenir shops on the study route and respective tourist attraction sites were quite limited. At Wondo-Genet, Abijata-Shalla and Langano areas, the cultural artefacts were mostly handled by women and youth groups organised in micro-associations residing in the villages. Key informant at Arsi Negele pinpointed that despite the absence of well established souvenir shops in the area, youth organised in Small and Micro Associations make and sell handicrafts to tourists. Handicrafts mostly symbolise wild animals in the park areas and in the community. The values of purchasing the cultural products like the handicrafts or cultural clothes were not associated with timely satisfaction alone among the tourists. Rather, the symbolic meanings and cultural values conveyed in each item were resources of exchange between the locals and the tourists. The symbolic connotation of the artefacts creates strong exchange affiliation with the community even after tourists' departures in their home environment.

The international tourists audio-record cultural events and take them away to their native countries and cultures. These recorded cultural events, ceremonies and materials play important role in disseminating cultures of the communities in the tourist destinations to the people in the respective countries of the tourists. Thus, cultural practices and assets of the communities on the study route were basically exchanged with the communities outside of Ethiopia— mostly Europe, North America and Asia. In this regard, the manager of Asham Africa Hotel interviewed at Bishoftu asserted:

> Foreign researchers and tourists prefer to deeply explore and understand local situations. Whatever the case, the research results would finally come into view in the form of book or paper that convey and communicate realities about the tourism resources in Ethiopia, hospitality of the people, diversities or other issues. Then, it contributed significantly towards building the image of Ethiopia and also disseminating the cultural assets for those individuals who planned to visit the country.

Therefore, tourists who arrived to Ethiopia for the purposes of research owned distinctive values in terms of materialising the social exchange through research results that are widely shared among the scientific community, organisations and governments, exterior to Ethiopia. The social

and cultural exchange values of research results carried out by tourists were the sources of knowledge and skill transacted between the local community and the external world even in the contexts of limited physical contacts. This has got its own value in the re-construction of the image of the tourist sites in Central Ethiopia.

The exchange of the cultural assets, events, ceremonies and products thorough distinct modalities remained the most magnificent dimension of exchange practices happening between tourists and the locals. Its pervasive influence persisted in creating mutual understanding between tourists visiting the study areas and community members around the attractions. The mutual understating initiated through local exchange could be mapped even at larger national levels.

4.2.3. *Material-technological Dimensions of Exchange in Tourist-community Interaction*

The exchange of material gifts and exchange other than the cultural products were categorised under the component of material-technological component. Dann and Cohen (1991: 162) uncovered that "exchange between hosts and guests, based on principles of hospitality and characteristic of the gift, now becomes largely replaced by economic exchange and the profit motive, often masquerading behind a phony front of friendliness or even servility."

As compared to the exchange relations relying on socially- and culturally-valuable assets, the exchange of technological or material products were uncommon and less prominent on the route. The donation of books discussed in the previous sections were approached within the general framework of gift. According to Mauss (1966:10), gift involves:

> *...to give something is to give a part of oneself...led to a better understanding of ... and total presentation... It follows clearly ... that in this system of ideas, one gives away what is in reality a part of one's nature and substance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone's spiritual essence. To keep this thing is dangerous, not only because it is illicit to do so, but also because it comes morally, physically and spiritually from a person. Whatever it is, food,*

> *possessions, women, children or ritual, it retains a magical and religious hold over the recipient.*

Technological transfer, share of experiences, skills and knowledge to the local communities were enormously manifested through the act of donating books published on contemporary societal themes and various subjects. Technological and knowledge transfer through books to the communities in the tourist settings were a predominantly prevailing practice. At Bishoftu, nearly 20,000 books were donated to the public library that provides service in the city. The Tourism Council in Bishoftu spearheaded to communicate with various tourists and other networks to pull together those books. The key informant contacted at Bishoftu Office of Culture and Tourism underlined that such technological and skill transfers were among the conspicuous indications of the Tourism Council in the city. Obviously, the younger generations are benefiting from the knowledge and skills transferred through the books.

Parallel initiatives and practices prevailed at Abijata-Shalla, Langano and Wondo-Genet areas, but were less systematised. The Head of the Abijata-Shalla Lakes National Park denoted the following: "I know currently, two of our employees are regularly receiving books from tourists who once visited the park from abroad— England." An in-depth interview held with an elderly informant at Arsi Negele also uncovered the donation of teaching materials and aid tools to the school-aged children in the community by the tourists. Computers, Camera and children play materials were commonly mentioned among the major items given by the tourists. This signified the transfer of technology to the local communities that also fortified exchange relations between the tourists' culture and the community's style of living. Hence, the local community members on the route were exchanging their cultural and natural resources with technologies, ideologies, skills or books of tourists.

Along the exchange of skill component, tourists contributed much in launching a website [advertising the association] for the Eco-tourism Tour Guide Association at Wondo-Genet. The tourists who hold regular contacts with the Eco-tourism Association through Wondo-Genet Forestry College involved much in sharing their skills, lessons and experiences through

trainings. The website developed with the help of tourists publicised the local natural and cultural tourism resources to the global community. Consequently, the transfer and exchange of such technological skills were advantageous in dual folds: (i) promotion and advocacy of the attraction site; and (ii) transfer of knowledge on the application of website.

In alignment, Appaduri (1996: 5) also alleged as follows: "It has now become something of a truism that we are functioning in a world fundamentally characterized by objects in motion. These objects include ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques." Thus, the global cultural flows included the techno-escapes that communities around the tourist attraction areas exchanged with the tourists. The technological skills were regarded among the highly valued elements of exchange by the community that flowed from the globally travelling tourists to the local communities on the study route.

Monetary gifts to the locals from the tourists, although less commonly observed on the route, were also mentioned as part of the global financial flows and exchanged with the local communities around the tourist attraction areas. It was only under rare circumstances [tips, orphans] that tourists directly provided paper money to the community. However, gifts in the form of tips were quite common ranging from cents to dollars. In this case, the qualities of services rendered to the tourist were considered among resources of transactions. The quality of the services matters a lot on the exchange relations to gratify tourist expectations. Whether it was through direct gifts, in the form of tips or in exchange to the services given by the communities, cash money was among the highly valued resources by the community members. It contributed much to the mutual understanding between the tourists and the locals.

At Wondo-Genet, a particular development on material exchange was practiced between the tourists and the community members. The following excerpt from the interview held with the representative of the Wondo-Genet Eco-tourism Tour Guide Association showed that:

> *Tourists visiting Wondo-Genet donated various official and helpful guiding materials to the members of the tour guide associations including uniform clothes, stationeries and office furniture. The gifts of these materials*

> *enhanced the operational capacities and service qualities of the Eco-tourism local guide association.*

The gift of materials and products of technology to the local guides at Wondo-Genet contributed much to improvements of the quality of the tourism services rendered to them in turn. The material gifts were exchanged with the increasing quality of services. Hence, the tripartite dimensions involving the social, cultural and material exchanges fortified one another and also promote the exchange relations between tourists and the locals.

In alignment with the foregoing portrayals, Yutyunyong (2009:6) stated that community members tend to participate in exchange relations to gain economic benefits without incurring costs. As a whole**,** the assumptions of social exchange apply to the diverse scenarios of tourist-community interactional and exchange practices and phenomena on the route.

4.3. Social Exchange Practices that Boost the Social Capital of Actors

Social exchange practices initiated and created between the tourists and the community members had chances of leading to culminate in the creation of better social capital and stronger networks among them. Sociologists understood social capital as "resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions (Lin 2004:29). Bourdieu (1985:51) conceptualised social capital to involve the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possessions of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintances or recognition." Ashely (2000: 15) further discussed social capital as referring to "… the social resources upon which people draw in pursuit of their livelihoods, such as relationships of trust, social norms, networks, and membership of groups." Among others, social capital emphasised considering social exchange and connections as an instrumental resource of interactive networks.

Consequently, the ultimate consequence of tourist-community exchange relations and social capital are exemplified via the ever growing people-to-people relation. So far, these social bonds, manifested through various modalities, existed on the study route but found on their early formations. Comprehensively putting, the presence of fragmented interaction and

exchange relation that did not develop into a holistic character of the community was acknowledged even by the government officials in the offices of Culture and Tourism. Relatively, signs of stronger social bondage were noted in the domain of marital ties, scholarships, persisting and committed material or financial support, and enhanced mutual understandings.

a. Bonds Created through Creation of Scholarship Opportunities

Social bondages predominantly prevailing on the study route were much associated with the creation of scholarship opportunities. The scholarship opportunities were happening through dual mechanisms: (a) provision of financial supports to the selected community members to cover their financial expenses to attend schools, colleges and universities in Ethiopia; and (b) opportunities of scholarships given to move abroad and attend short and higher trainings. The key informant contacted at Sidama Zone Culture and Tourism Office in Hawassa denoted that a man from the locality has gone to England as a result of his interaction with tourists for attending higher level education; such kind of opportunities were common, but less institutionalised. In support of defects in the scholarship programs, the key informant at Arsi Negele showed his discontent that scholarship opportunities concentrated among a given segment of the community; the guides, agents or services providers benefited much than the wider community around the attraction areas. On occasional cases, there were also students who were sent to Sweden for further education through a similar framework.

At Wondo-Genet, the representative of the Eco-tourism local guide association uncovered that there were two local guides who have joined Catering and Tourism Training Institute (CTTI) at Addis Ababa to enhance their skills of guiding through a full scholarship coverage opportunity provided by the tourists who established contacts with the association previously. Correspondingly, community members benefited, although more indirectly, from the scholarship and financial supports extended to the receivers at Bishoftu, Hawassa and Langano.

b. Integration of Tourist-Community Cultures in a Constructive Sense

Social exchange bonds were manifested through the ever flourishing mutual understandings between tourists and the community segments. According to Theobald (2005:89), "the merit of social intercourse between tourists and the indigenous population as a means toward fostering better understanding and goodwill between nations has been extolled as a major social benefit obtained from tourism."

Relatively better understanding between the locals and the tourists prevailed at Hawassa and Wondo-Genet. The ever increasing number of tourists to the area coupled with their growing interaction resulted in good social exchanges. These days the community members around the attraction areas considered tourists as the key sources of their livelihood and survival. A local guide at Hawassa-from Habesha Coffee reflected the following: "...our survival entirely relied on the Lake and the tourists. In the absence of tourists, the Lake did not mean anything. Thus, we bother and care much for both." Since recent decades, tourists were affectionately welcomed by few community members. Thus, the interaction between the tourists and the community resulted in consolidating the mutual understandings between the two sides. The earlier trends of hate and suspicion have now become to be surrogated with charming receptions.

c. Marital Ties and Relations

A typical indication of the sustaining social bondages resulting from exchange relations between tourists and the community was marital ties and long-lasting friendships. Marital ties were commonly practiced between the tourists and the community members around the tourist attraction sites, particularly at Hawassa followed by Bishoftu areas. In these settings, young girls were married to foreign tourists. Although rare in happenings, local guides and men working in tourism firms have also been married to female foreigners. The representative of Meklit Micro Association accounted as follows:

> A tourist arrived to visit Hawassa from England last year [refereeing to 2012]. It happened that he communicated with a girl in the Lake area. Their interaction grew into friendship and he took here with him to his country. Just before three months this year [November, 2013], they celebrated their

> *marriage here at the Lake side. Local guides and the community around the area were invited to their wedding ceremony. After their honeymoon in Hawassa, the couple returned to England. I recently heard that they got even a child.*

Marital bondages arising from the interaction and exchange relations occurring between tourists and the community have become common phenomena. A key informant in the Bureau of Culture and Tourism in Hawassa attested, :Several girls were taken abroad through marriage. Those girls are economically supporting their families in Hawassa.". Likewise, at Bishoftu, Ethiopians married to tourists are currently involved in investments in the Lake areas, particularly Babogaya. Waiters got married to visitors who appeared as a guest to the hotels where they provided services in Bishoftu. The cases of marital ties and bondage were less common at Wondo-Genet, Langano and Abijata-Shalla tourist attraction areas. Instead, enduring friendship ties and interaction outweighed in these areas as a marker of the social bondage between tourists and locals.

d. Social Ties Created through Exchange of Ideas

Greetings and exchange of ideas through phones and other communication technologies remained among the common features of the prevalence of enduring social bondages between tourists and the community members. Exchange of messages, chatting and communications even after departure were quite commonly reported by the contacted informants and interviewees. There was a tendency that tourists once created interaction did not dissolve it. Rather continued to communicate through phone calls and internet communication, boosting interaction and exchange. Therefore, marital ties, scholarship opportunities, sustaining economic and material supports, and greetings demonstrated the key manifestations of enduring social bondages between tourists and the community on the study route.

5. Conclusions and Implications

The Ethiopian Growth and Transformation Plans (GTP-I and II), in the cross-cutting section focus on Culture and Tourism. The Plans denoted the instrumentality of inter-cultural dialogues to enhance mutual understanding and development among actors— that is, tourists and local residents, service

providers and other stakeholders (MoFED 2010: 75). Above all, it underscored the government's commitment to capitalise on tourism as among the strategies to promote interaction and exchange with tourists, investors, businessmen and researchers arriving to Ethiopia. Local level developments are partly accelerated with the interactions and resultant exchanges made with tourists.

This crystallises into the view that mutual understandings and benefits among actors (tourists and the community) remained crucial to address social, material and cultural developments. This has appeared to operate in tandem with the framework of social exchange theories, particularly the principles of rewards and costs. For travelling tourists and the host community members on the Bishfotu-Modjo-Hawassa route, the exchange of material, cultural, technological and socially-valuable resources constituted imperative elements in their social life, as stipulated both in the core principles of exchange and as also noted in the government's direction to promote multi-functional interactions and exchange with culture and nations of diverse countries.

The tourist-community interaction, and exchange relations as well as practices covered a range of issues despite the notable differences among the tourist sites. Social events and cultural assets, technological skills and material resources comprised the key resources of social exchange. Moreover, social capital and social bondage were considered as typical manifestations of the growing consequences of social exchange relations on the study route. Direct and generalised social exchanges designated the most commonly prevailing modality of social exchange relations occurring between tourists and the local community members.

Yet, lack of well articulated social structures and networks impeded the social exchange relations of tourists and locals on the route. Even in these prevailing operational network exchange relations, the actions of distortive and hidden network ties were often suspected than formally or legally defined structures. An effort to reverse those concealed networks of social exchange and development of healthy structures were suggested as part of the future scenarios and actions.

On the basis of the theoretical and empirical discussions and conclusions, the paper calls for concerted interventions on the following core issues:

i. The practices on the ground corroborate that the government line offices and major stakeholders had faltered to consider tourism as a key alternative-path to local or even regional level developments. The prevalence of fragmented or absence of institutionalised tourist-local interaction were offshoots of the negligence offered to the sector as a whole. This implication calls for strengthening the strategies to promote international and domestic tourism, and recognise tourism's place in local and community developments to harness higher levels of positive exchanges.

ii. Local communities are in the margins of the wider interactional and social exchange practices and benefits. A countervailing initiative, taken by responsible organs and stakeholders, should reconsider ways to educate, train and re-orient locals on the values of interaction and its imperativeness in local development. Expanding community-based ecotourism practices could be considered a good alternative to improve tourist-local interaction, exchange relations and maximise tourism's positive impacts at individual, household or community levels, which in turn accelerates local level development. These actions could farther be developed by complementing with periodic sharing of best practices among various destinations and communities in the country. As a result, planning for practical trainings, re-orientation and empowerment of the grassroots level community are not optional tradeoffs if tourism has to play its share among the strategies to bring substantial degree of change in the country.

iii. Research in the areas of contacts between tourists and host communities needs to be outcome-oriented, in which the outcomes promote tourist-community interrelationships and strengthen social-exchange practices and networks at various levels. In this context, higher education institutions and other key stakeholders in Central Rift Valley area need to develop research programs and projects that promote local development by promoting interaction and social exchange practices.

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