

TO BE A GOOD ETHIOPIAN WOMAN: BUNA AND FORTUNES

THE CULTURAL PRACTICES OF ETHIOPIA ARE EMBEDDED WITHIN MANY TRADITIONAL RITUALS. ONE SUCH IS THE COFFEE CEREMONY (BUNA) WHICH INCLUDES A SPECIFIC ROUTINE FOR PREPARATION AND PARTICIPATION. THE WAY A WOMAN ENGAGES IN THIS CONTEXT HAS MUCH TO DO WITH HER IDENTITY AS A GOOD ETHIOPIAN WOMAN.

METHOD:

Utilizing photo elicitation (Margolis & Rowe, 2004) and focus groups (Tobin & Hsueh, 2007), I conducted a study among Ethiopian women living in Arizona to explore the research question: In what ways does participation in the traditional cultural ritual of the coffee ceremony contribute to the identity of Ethiopian women?

Preliminary data was gathered among 36 participants living in Ethiopia all of whom were asked to capture their daily routine with photographs. Nine focus groups (including a total of 27 women) were formed in Arizona through a snowball recruiting method to explore the typicality of the photographs as well as what they liked or didn't like in the photos.



RESULTS:

Findings show that the ceremony is an important venue for female identity and socialization of female children. Participants continue to utilize this practice as an important time for socialization, remembering "home", and problem solving. To be a "good Ethiopian woman" one must care deeply for the other women in her cultural community, participate in the ceremony, host other women in the ceremony, and NOT participate in superstitious practices or other practices that would be viewed as inappropriate by the social group.



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THEORY:

This study is anchored in a sociocultural, historical perspective which enables the examination of individuals in their context and in relation to others through shared practices and activities (Rogoff, 1995, 2003). Within this theoretical perspective, discussing important aspects of mediating acts and tools of culture may act as a bridge between the individual or group and the actions they make, though these tools of culture are best considered as a process which gives insight into action. Acknowledging that "mediation always involves constraint as well as empowerment" (Wertsch, del Rio, & Alvarez, 1995, p. 24) allows for the application of a lens which draws upon the meaning made by the "dialogical self" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, Cain, 1998, p. 171) in utilizing non-traditional tools with the intent of building understanding of how these behaviors are accepted or rejected.



DISCUSSION:

This paper focuses on the findings of the superstitious practice of the Zar Spirit and fortune telling within the ritual of the coffee ceremony. These practices were salient features of inappropriate behaviors that would isolate a woman from her community or social group, assuming the entire group did not accept the practice. The practices become cultural tools that may create caste systems or cultural boundaries.

There is a dearth of research on buna (coffee), therefore this research is an important contribution towards the understanding of Ethiopian refugees and immigrants while examining their use of cultural artifacts in a new home.

