

HOSPITALITY IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF COFFEE AND SANITATION IN URBAN ETHIOPIA

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Over the last seven years, the Ethiopian coffee ceremony—traditionally performed in the home—has moved into the public sphere, foregrounding coffee as Ethiopia’s symbol of hospitality. In 2016 the municipal government of Addis Ababa, rolled out a latrine development intervention popularly known as the Mobile Public Toilet (MPT) Project. By positioning the Ethiopian coffee ceremony next to pay-per-use public toilets as an instrument to achieve a breadth of developmental goals, the MPT Project operationalizes this crucible of Ethiopian hospitality in a novel way. In short, the Ethiopian coffee ceremony is critical to the intervention’s designed space and form as well as its aim at social reincorporation.

My research interests are situated at this intersection of anthropology of development and anthropology of design. I am interested in examining how practices of hospitality—understood anthropologically as a technique for the negotiation of relationships between strangers—act as a scheme for social engineering within the context of a developmental state. While hospitality has been a useful analytical concept for the study of immigration, where one country or community acts as host to another, hospitality as a strategy for social change within the nation-state remains overlooked. I address this gap by asking: how is hospitality being used as an instrument for socially engineered development in Ethiopia? How do people or collective entities, such as cooperatives, communities, municipal governments, institutions, and the state, fill the roles of hosts, guests and strangers in the context of public goods provision? As individuals and collective entities negotiate their roles of hospitality while serving basic needs, how are social relationships remade in the context of inequalities?

By providing a solution to the historic lack of public sanitation infrastructure



in Addis Ababa, the MPT Project also attempts to eliminate poverty by creating job opportunities for unemployed groups—namely women, young men, the disabled, and the diseased. The municipal government recruits and organizes marginalized individuals into cooperatives that are responsible for managing the pay-per-use toilets, educating the community about behaviors deemed healthy and performing the traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony. Hospitality emerges as the main means of income-generation for the managing cooperatives as well as a mechanism to integrate women and their traditionally domestic labor into the formal economy.

Since the 1990s, the Ethiopian coffee ceremony has been incorporated into women’s health interventions with the primary goal of reintegrating marginalized individuals into broader society. The coffee ceremony’s convivial and relaxed atmosphere is thought to be an ideal platform to broach intimate topics of women’s reproductive health, HIV/AIDS,

and violence against women. The MPT Project draws upon the intimacies of the coffee ceremony in a standard, if contested, way to address the long histories of stigma and shame associated with the intimacies of women’s bodily waste. Due to their social and biological vulnerabilities, Ethiopia’s developmental state identifies women not only as the MPT Project’s ideal delegated hosts, but also as its target customers.

My research on the MPT Project conducted in 2016 and 2017 has generated exciting new questions about how to study urban development and how hospitality is being reproduced and organized in new formats. I remain indebted to the invaluable support from UF’s Department of Anthropology and Center for African Studies during these research periods and am excited to begin my dissertation research in spring 2019 supported by a Fulbright Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad award.

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