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SISTERS IN TRANSITION: MOVING FROM THE *BUNA* COFFEE RITUAL TO RELIEF SOCIETY

As others have pointed out elsewhere in this volume, the Church is transitioning from a regional, western United States religion to a global institution. In terms of missionary work, we are reaching populations and cultures that were unapproachable just a decade ago. While this is one of the primary blessings of the Restoration, it also brings with it a challenge, namely the manner by which native traditions and rituals, with their attendant social value, are approached in a gospel setting. Jennifer Platt addresses this tension by exploring the relationship between the Ethiopian *buna* ritual, a rite that incorporates the drinking of coffee while empowering native women, and Latter-day Saint converts who no longer drink coffee. In so doing, she also looks at the relationship between Latter-day Saint women and ritual and suggests that the Church may be well equipped via the Relief Society to deal with these and other challenges. —DB

INDIVIDUALS CAN DISTINGUISH RITUAL FROM other forms of human behavior by the sense of sacredness and holiness that they ascribe to or derive from the ritualized act. If participants do not feel a sense of holiness, the behavior may become merely a routine action, lacking any significance.¹ The collision of ritualized behaviors becomes challenging when one set of rituals and its attendant significance are confronted with a new set of rituals that discounts some or all of the significance of

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the original rites. New converts often experience this challenge as traditional ritual behavior clashes with newly introduced Latter-day Saint ritual practices.

Yet this tension does not necessarily have to result in complete loss for either ritual tradition. It is possible that new converts may retain elements of the traditional ritual system by concentrating on the sacral nature of ritual. This allows them to remain a part of their native community while combining all that is good from their traditions to their new faith.² Latter-day Saints can enhance their own ritual system by learning of the ritual practices of other cultures. Thus new converts and more experienced members grow together in meeting challenges associated with living ritually rather than routinely. This chapter explores these possibilities by examining the role of *buna*, an all-female Ethiopian coffee ceremony, both in the larger Ethiopian community and among the much narrower community of LDS Ethiopian women who have been introduced to the Relief Society.

Buna, a coffee ceremony practiced upwards of three times a day among women living in Ethiopia and of Ethiopian heritage, is a striking example of a female ritualized gathering. Though the ceremony is explored in travel literature and restaurant critiques and even referenced in explorations of the origins and history of coffee, the literature on the significance of this event to female identity and solidarity is limited.³ Yet those who have studied the ritual see that buna creates a space for women to associate with and support one another. Ethiopian women agree on the delineated process of preparation of buna and gathering for the ritual. They also agree on what behavior is inappropriate and unacceptable in the ritual space.⁴ Thus the ritual plays a powerful role in the socialization and development of Ethiopian females of all ages.

Buna's significance within the community and role in defining womanhood may create a difficult hurdle to clear when Ethiopian female converts embrace Latter-day Saint doctrine and the Word of Wisdom. The Latter-day Saint Church has only been in Ethiopia since 1991 (with the first official meeting in Addis Ababa in August 1992 and the creation of the Addis Ababa Branch in 1994). According to the Church's

official news website,⁵ there are currently 1,450 members in Ethiopia with four congregations and one Family History Center. Approximately 700 members attend Church meetings consistently; adult females make up only 100 of that number. Returned missionaries who have served in Ethiopia affirm that a vast majority of those they teach and baptize are males. They cite low female literacy rates,⁶ lack of English speakers, strict observance of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, and—pertinent to this study—addiction to coffee and the tradition of the buna gathering as major obstacles to female interest in the Church.⁷

Of course, the new convert commits to living the Word of Wisdom and thus from imbibing coffee. For Ethiopian female converts, overcoming this addiction is even more of a challenge because of the positive role coffee consumption, via the buna ritual, plays in female identity and community. For many, it is simply too big of an obstacle to overcome, yet others view buna as a “preparatory” ritual providing a framework by which the convert may understand the purposes and impact of Relief Society.⁸

Buna as a Ritual

Drinking coffee is a worldwide phenomenon, and in countries such as Ethiopia, Sudan, and Turkey coffee plays a vital social role as well, particularly in establishing female gender roles. For instance, in areas of Turkey, one of the criteria for marriage is a woman’s ability to prepare quality coffee. In Sudan, coffee drinking is associated with women and witchcraft, fortune-telling, and calling upon Zar spirits.⁹ In other locations, coffee drinking is associated with hospitality, transforming the stranger into an honored guest.

All of these purposes can be found in varying degrees in Ethiopian coffee drinking, though they look down on the use of coffee in fortune-telling and spirit invocations. Ethiopian legend purports that coffee was discovered by a goatherder and his goats¹⁰ in the northern region of Kaffa around the fourth century AD.¹¹ It is more likely that coffee beans were used as stimulants by caravaners, but Ethiopia’s claim as the birthplace of coffee appears legitimate, at least in the case of *Coffea arabica*. Coffee is still an important economic contributor to Ethiopia, being a chief export

and source of labor.¹² It is unknown when the buna ceremony began, but the consumption of coffee is so intertwined in the ritual gathering that the Amharic term *buna* is used for both the red bean itself and the ritual event of women gathering together and sharing their lives with one another while drinking coffee.¹³ The length of the ceremony is dictated by the time needed for preparation, typically about one hour. The ceremony varies according to the preference of the women who gather. Often the women find ways to extend the ceremony by bringing their children and handwork with them to the ceremony so they can continue their daily work. For women living in rural regions of Ethiopia, they gather at least once a day, typically at midday. Sometimes they will gather more frequently or will host a spontaneous ceremony when they receive visitors. Even in the city of Addis Ababa, women tend to gather daily, though not as consistently as women living in the countryside. For women of Ethiopian heritage living in the United States, gathering is limited to once a week, usually on Sunday after they have worshipped together.

Buna Preparation

Reviewing the process of preparing the coffee provides a context and understanding for the importance women place on the social practice. Though men drink coffee, women are the sole preparers of the buna and cherish the time and space, as the event is primarily for women. There is a clear and delineated process for preparation of buna.¹⁴ First, items such as a tray with coffee cups and all of the items needed for making coffee are gathered and brought to the space in which the ceremony will take place. Often, there will be twelve cups on the tray, regardless of the number of women gathering for buna. It is likely that religious symbolism is at play since Ethiopian women are devoutly religious. The two major religions in Ethiopia are Orthodox Christianity and Islam. The number twelve plays a significant role in both of these religious traditions.¹⁵ With that said, when the participants are asked directly if there is any religious symbolism in the number, they tend to demur. Instead, they note that it is a historically significant feature providing continuity through the generations; absence of twelve cups lessens the value of the ritual.¹⁶



An Ethiopian woman sorts coffee beans in preparation of a buna ceremony. (All photos by either the author or women living in a rural village in Ethiopia.)

Participants feel that it is important for a woman to sit on a stool or can, close to the ground, with the stove accessible while preparing the coffee. Though sitting near the ground is not necessary for the actual preparation, the participants of this study all indicated this position was

an important aspect of the preparation, perhaps reflecting the humility of the host.¹⁷ The hostesses' demonstration of humility in the preparation of buna pays tribute to her guests while affirming her as one that sustains tradition. With the exception of grinding the coffee beans, buna is prepared in the communal room in front of the guests so as to include all members of the buna circle during the ritual. However, even coffee will be ground in front of the guests if the preparer is not concerned with the noise. These practices highlight the need for solidarity and unity among the women, allowing buna sisters¹⁸ to be together throughout the process rather than having one woman isolated from the others.

In many cases, incense is burned during the preparation process to add to the fragrance of the coffee and is often referred to as "smoke." Of the women that were interviewed for this study, all agreed that the absence of incense negates the validity of a proper ceremony.¹⁹ Though further inquired, the women did not attribute specific meaning to the smoke other than enjoying the fragrance. However, scent is recognized as a means of creating ritual space, often denoting a transformation of space into a liminal zone.²⁰

There are three rounds of boiling and drinking coffee in the Ethiopian coffee ceremony. These rounds are often attributed to the desire to prolong the time women have to talk together. The first round is called *Abol* in Amharic and is translated as "first" or "first order" because it represents the first boiling. Each woman in the coffee ceremony drinks a cup from this first dark, rich, and concentrated coffee. Women can talk or sit in silence according to their moods or needs.

The second round is called *Hulettengana*, "second time." In this round, water is added to the previous pot; the residue of the coffee is boiled again, and each individual is given a cup of this as well. Because the second round is made from the grounds of the first boiling, the coffee itself is not as strong as the first.

A snack is served with the coffee with the intent of extending the ritual time and the women's time together. Typically roasted barley (*kolo*) or popcorn is served, though the snack may vary according to the financial means of the hostess. What is served is not as important as having

something to eat with buna. Though a snack is presented to guests at the beginning of the ritual, it appears that it is while the women wait for the second (and third) round of coffee to boil that the snack is consumed.

The last and final round is called *Baraka* in Amharic, which the participants of the study designated as “the last one.” However, the root of the word, *brk*, is similar to other Semitic languages and means “blessing” or “to be in a blessed state,” suggesting that the entire rite had, at least at one time, a sacral nature.²¹ Among Muslim women, the sacred, liminal nature of buna is particularly strong as prayer plays a fundamental role in the proceedings.²²

Drinking all three rounds of coffee is viewed as good luck or perhaps a blessing when considering the lingual implications of the last round. Part of this may reflect the physiological effect of coffee drinking. Often women will talk about their addiction to coffee not as a negative but as a positive effect. Since it is possible to partake of buna more than once a day, women that drink that much coffee would certainly be affected by the physiological stimulation of the beverage. Further, coffee suppresses hunger,²³ a significant advantage in a drought-stricken country.

What is clear is that the ceremony emerges as a fundamental element in the socialization practices among Ethiopian women. Within the space and time of buna, these women relax, communicate, and socialize; they explore and share what it means to be good Ethiopian women. Though the conversations are not structured and the women often speak of the time as gossip, a careful analysis of the meaning the women make of this time supports the claim of a deeper meaning.²⁴ Like other liminal spaces, buna can act as a time out from social challenges, abuses, and limitations that otherwise dictate the women’s actions.²⁵ All phases of this practice (from the process of calling sisters to buna,²⁶ preparing the buna, drinking the coffee, and reminiscing with the other women) create a space where the women are able to leave the cares of their lives and support one another. Moreover, buna reinforces shared values and beliefs as they also pass strong generational practices to the rising generation. In other words, women are empowered and strengthened²⁷ through their time together in a ritual that holds historic meaning for them. In fact, one researcher

argues that the coffee ceremony may be the only context in which an Ethiopian woman can exert any power because she is fully responsible for the process and can make a significant contribution to the outcome.

A Time to Be Free

As suggested above, perhaps the most important part of buna is the opportunity to speak freely, to express emotions and deep feelings, and to work toward solutions to crises and tensions within the community. As some participants stated, buna was a “time to be free.”²⁸ While buna certainly frees one from the day-to-day work, it may also free them from cultural discrimination. Centuries of social practices have established a social standard of females being viewed and treated as second-class citizens despite political efforts in Ethiopia and other African countries to work toward equalizing gender roles in society.²⁹ In places like Ethiopia where men have most of the social power, women are often viewed as property to be traded. At marriage, a woman becomes the property of her husband. HIV research conducted in Africa, and specifically in Ethiopia, demonstrates the impact of this inequality. Research indicates that there are significant educational gender inequalities. Female education and literacy rates are much lower than those of males, and the rate of child labor for females is higher.³⁰ This discrimination affects both the quality of life and the actual life expectancy of Ethiopian females. Research has shown that social discrimination is a factor that contributes to females being at greater risk for HIV infection.³¹

This temporary respite from the demands of life becomes an important purpose of buna. Indeed, buna can be essential to a healthy sense of personal worth or a desire for self-improvement for an Ethiopian woman. Certainly it establishes that any given individual is not alone but part of a community in which the women support and listen to one another. As one Ethiopian woman said of the buna ceremony, “If I have a problem we don’t have those psychiatry or something to tell us, so that is the way to treat each other you know. If I have a problem, we just talk about it, and the other ladies tell you a solution.”³² Another Ethiopian woman described her feelings for the coffee ceremony and her ability to “trust

in” the ritual for a sense of community: “Like what would happen to us if we did not have that thing [the coffee ceremony] together? There’s all those kind of hardships in life, you know. Especially on the women. The life is so much stressful. So the women there really trust in that. They need that in that time.”³³

In addition to creating a respite from day-to-day stresses, buna promotes social change. Buna gatherings are often used to conduct formal meetings such as microfinance business meetings or life-skills training on topics such as hygiene. This practice is becoming more common, especially for women living in rural settings.



Generations of Ethiopian women enjoy the buna ceremony.

Socialization

Buna plays an important role in formation of Ethiopian female identity through group participation in a ritualized environment. Females are involved in the ceremony at all ages and throughout their lifespan. For Ethiopian women, the developmental process found in buna is one of

contextual immersion and observation rather than actual directed lessons, as many women report that they were never directly taught how to make the coffee. Instead they reveal that they picked it up through personal observation, followed by trial and error participation.

Often buna acts as a gateway to other female social responsibilities and roles. For instance, in addition to buna's use as a daily space for gathering, it also accompanies ceremonies associated with religious worship such as funerals, marriages, and so forth. For example, when a family member dies, not only does the family gather, but also the women that are close to the mourning female family members. These women will come and stay with their mourning buna sister for several weeks, consoling the survivors through the buna ceremony, but they will also prepare meals and take care of regular household tasks. Physically dwelling with the woman who has experienced the loss of a loved one is an important gesture offered by buna sisters. This may result in a young woman assuming the responsibilities of her mother, as her mother leaves to mourn with one of her buna sisters. Without saying a word, the significance of the buna sisterhood is impressed upon the young woman.

The first exposure to the rite may begin when the child (either male or female), as early as three or four, is sent to beckon participating women and invite them to their mother's ceremony: "Buna! Buna! Buna! It's time for buna!" Though the children do not directly participate in the drinking of the coffee, many women recognize the invitation as part of the process, stating that this was their first participation in the rite. Involvement in the actual preparation varies by individual. Some Ethiopian women suggested this happens when the girl is able to balance the cups on the tray and carry the weight of the *jebena* (the pot used to prepare the buna) and other utensils used in preparing buna. Only then will she prepare her first pot of buna.³⁴ This first pot is performed for the family, including both males and females; when the family finds the preparations appropriate, she is able to perform buna for others outside of the family circle. This suggests that buna also functions to establish familial pride and position with the culture.

Not only does this experience teach the girl the proper way to perform the ritual of buna, it is also one of the more significant ways in which the

young girls may demonstrate their love and respect for their mothers. By performing the more menial tasks of buna preparation, they allow their mothers to participate more in the social elements of buna—conversing and sharing time with her buna sisters. Yet this taking over of preparation has an additional purpose: not only does it allow the young woman to demonstrate the respect she has for her mother, it also allows the young woman to be around the conversing space, hearing what the women talk about.

This exposure to adult female conversations becomes informative to the developing female. As we have seen, one of the primary elements of buna is the open and frank conversations engendered by the ritual time and space, and for many of the participants, it is this element that is the most instructive. Participants in the study often described the conversations they heard between the older women as “fun talking”³⁵ and expressed that listening to the conversations not only introduced them to the concerns of the community, but also helped them learn about the lives of the older women. Specific topics discussed within the context of buna include family relationships and marriage, particularly the importance of marrying a man who shares cultural practices and country heritage; thus “fun talking” indirectly teaches the young woman the proper perspective of her community. This type of storytelling also establishes age-specific, hierarchical roles as the young women learn it is culturally inappropriate for them to speak openly to an adult woman (including her mother) about her personal life, feelings, and experiences such as her relationships. Though she may play a fundamental role in the ritual experience by being the preparer, she is not viewed as an equal in the group until she has reached the age of marriage. Not surprisingly, it may not be until the young girl gets older that she recognizes the value of buna because she has to do the work of the buna without participating in the social interaction. As one participant in the study put it: “I didn’t like making (buna) as a child. I like it more now. Before I don’t understand the meaning and the way I was being raised. But when I leave my country. You know. I knew now, I have a good culture and tradition. . . . At that time I didn’t realize it is a very good thing. But I miss it a lot when I came here. Now I come here [to the United States] and I want to do it. A lot

of memories come. Now I want to do it. It is part of who I am. It is an important part of who I am." Perhaps one of the most important events for an Ethiopian woman is when she is able to host her own buna, which means that she not only prepares the coffee but also participates directly in the "fun talking" and in so doing legitimizes her adult status. Thus buna can be understood as a type of rite of passage. Although the women in this study did not talk much about their first experience hosting a coffee ceremony, they did indicate that this was done when they had a place of their own or had married, the latter being the predominant situation. Moving out or living on one's own is not a typical practice of Ethiopians (male or female) primarily because of economic reasons; there simply are not enough resources to allow for individual movement. Rather, they live together as families and support one another until they marry. This is complicated further when one recognizes that some married women continue to live in the home of their family or husband's family after they have married. As a result, the newly married woman may either submit to her family's pattern for participating in the buna ritual or have the opportunity to host her own buna, separate from other female family members living in the home.

The role female servants play in buna adds another dimension to the meaning of the social gathering. The participation of a female servant depends on the female head of the house. One participant indicated that the maids in the home she grew up in were allowed only to prepare the coffee and then were dismissed to continue their household work, suggesting they were not seen as part of the sisterhood. Instead, these maids had their own ceremonies with other workers in the home or neighborhood. This particular example is intriguing in that buna exemplifies socioeconomic disparity while functioning at the same time as a legitimate manner by which solidarity is created and maintained. Though the servant is not a part of the household in which she works, as demonstrated by her nonparticipation within the buna's socialization, she creates a new social organization of similarly employed women in the neighborhood. Thus buna becomes, in classical style, a way to siphon off tensions that are created through social segregation.³⁶

Buna and the Word of Wisdom

In light of the integral role buna plays for female identity among Ethiopian women, it is not surprising to find that one of the challenges for these women is how to accommodate buna when they are confronted with a new, dominant culture, either by changing living locations, as is the case of emigrants who move elsewhere,³⁷ or by converting to a new religion. This is the case of some Ethiopian converts to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Because of the Word of Wisdom's injunction against coffee, an Ethiopian female convert can (and does!) feel the effects of being separated from the cultural ritual that has defined her womanhood up until then. This separation from her cultural norm causes her to reevaluate the role buna has played and will continue to play in her life, especially as she is now introduced to another culturally established sisterhood—the Relief Society.

Local LDS Ethiopian leadership is well aware of this challenge, and for female leadership in the Relief Society it is a challenge that they themselves experience directly. One young convert served as her branch's Relief Society president at the age of nineteen, one year after her baptism. She is the only member of the Church in her family, and though her father supported her decision, her mother struggled for fear that her daughter would lose her culture. The tug to be home and participate in Sunday buna has been difficult for the young leader.

Another Relief Society leader, the first district Relief Society president in Ethiopia, acknowledged the challenge that buna presents for female converts. According to many female Ethiopian converts, one of the consequences of their conversion is that they are no longer invited to participate in buna as they previously had been. This is, no doubt, a fear that converts and even investigating women may have. To be cut off from the primary social institution that defines one's place in that society is difficult to comprehend.

One convert, a twenty-one-year-old woman currently living in the United States, reports that she never cared for buna. Even when she prepared buna for her mother and other women and attended ceremonies, she never drank coffee. Having joined the Church at the age of fourteen

while living in Ethiopia, she was happy to abandon buna, as that relieved her of responsibilities associated with it. However, she describes the struggles her mother faced in abandoning coffee. The young woman recalls visits to their home in Ethiopia from missionaries, home teachers, or visiting teachers that seemed to always be focused on teaching the Word of Wisdom in an effort to encourage her mother to stop drinking coffee. Though she wanted to be fully committed to the gospel, her mother attributed her severe headaches to not drinking buna and tried to reconcile participation in the ritual as medicinal. According to the young woman, the family tried to support their mother in every way possible but were often disappointed when they had committed her to stop drinking only to come home to coffee ceremonies.³⁸

Yet for those women who have maintained their commitment to conversion, they have found that the Relief Society could fill the void created by abandoning buna. The branch Relief Society president recognized this following the passing away of her father. During the traditional mourning period, some of the Relief Society sisters who are near her age conformed with their long-held cultural traditions and entered the home of their young Relief Society president to mourn with her. They stayed in the home for several days, providing for the family and joining with other women who had come to comfort the young president's mother. Buna was served daily with the young women in attendance, but no one drank. Thus the women of the Relief Society did provide the love and nurturing that is associated with the ritual in such a context. As a result of these actions, the mother acknowledged that her daughter had not lost cultural continuity with her conversion.

Similarly, the district Relief Society president, while acknowledging that ostracism is a challenge for female converts, suggests that the Relief Society program, and its emphasis on communal sisterhood, is uniquely adapted to provide meaning to the new convert, saying:

Buna is everywhere; I still see it but don't drink it. Instead, I live the values of the culture in a different way through Relief Society. I love helping my sisters and the women who are not members

of the Church to see this. Our culture is about hospitality and showing love for each other. This is how we are. In our culture, if a friend will pass by your door, she will stop and knock it. It doesn't matter if she's busy. She will get in your house and say "hi." There's no need for an appointment. You may view this as a bad culture, perhaps a foreigner will see it that way. To me it is beautiful because it shows a priority. The Church is helping Ethiopia in many ways. One is that Relief Society gives us an organization to live our culture. We are already living in a relief society. Joining the Church gives it a better way, in an organized way that gives us instruction. Relief Society is helping each other in a better way and relates to our culture of helping.

For this individual, she kept the "spirit" of buna, the female camaraderie, by replacing a gathering of coffee with gathering for food. In other words, she still gathers with female family and friends, but for a meal rather than coffee.

Of course, it is important to realize that these two individual accounts are not necessarily indicative of the general response, but they do suggest that the Relief Society organization can meet the needs that the cultural ritual of buna had previously filled. One Ethiopian sister declared that her experience with the local Relief Society eased her assimilation in US culture. Though she describes herself as being quite shy, she feels that her transition to a new life in America over the past three years has been aided by new friendships and almost daily contact with Relief Society sisters in her neighborhood. They have taught her to drive, grocery shop, and adjust to life in a new country. Her desire for buna has been replaced with associations centered on child rearing and homemaking, all shared with her Latter-day Saint female neighbors. When showed a photo of a large group of Ethiopian women in a coffee ceremony and asked what was happening in the photo, she quickly responded, "This is their super Saturday."³⁹

The irony is that these sisters' appreciation of the Relief Society came as a result of their earlier participation in buna. In other words, because the Ethiopian converts engaged in a completely female event from their



A group of Ethiopian women gather in a buna ceremony for a microfinance meeting.

childhood, they were prepared to fully appreciate all that the completely female Relief Society could offer. And this may have implications for the Relief Society worldwide.

In October 2008, Julie B. Beck, then Relief Society general president, described her feelings of isolation and loneliness as her parents made plans to move away from her:

My parents, who had been my neighbors, announced that they would be moving to another part of the world. I had relied on my mother's nurturing, wise, and encouraging example. Now she was going to be gone for a long time. This was before e-mail, fax machines, cell phones, and Web cameras, and mail delivery was notoriously slow. One day before she left, I sat weeping with her and asked, "Who will be my mother?" Mother thought carefully, and with the Spirit and power of revelation which comes to women of this kind, she said to me, "If I never come back, if you never see

me again, if I'm never able to teach you another thing, you tie yourself to Relief Society. Relief Society will be your mother."⁴⁰

Though Sister Beck's comments indicate the role that Relief Society can have in female community, informal studies suggest that for many women the communal needs that Relief Society can potentially fulfill are not realized.⁴¹ One informant, when asked about her transition from her branch in Ethiopia to her ward in Utah, expressed that she wished her visiting teachers and other Relief Society sisters would learn to be "good Ethiopian women" by truly investing the time necessary to get to know her. This sister expressed that she longed for the sisterhood to show sincere interest in her life by regularly sharing feelings, time, and space, rather than just teaching a nice lesson and asking how she is doing. These were all important needs to this woman that she felt were missing in her transition to a new home and country.

Another challenge confronting the Relief Society is the transition of young women into adulthood, generally, and into the Relief Society community, specifically.⁴² For many, this transition is difficult and isolating. Due to the nature of the young women's program, relationships with older females are limited to a few individuals that are called to serve in the auxiliary. Thus the female solidarity one would hope to create for developing females rarely manifests itself during youth. This, coupled with the lack of a ritual foundation for young women in general (as opposed to the young men of the Church who have a religious ritual foundation in their priesthood responsibilities including home teaching with an adult mentor and a secular ritual foundation in the scouting program) can lead to some young women disengaging from the religious community.⁴³

The buna ritual, on the other hand, provides the time and space for direct and indirect interaction between differing female age-groups that can lead to full integration of young women and children into the adult community.⁴⁴ Moreover, it demonstrates the role of ritual in creating opportunities for females of all ages to comfortably socialize together and young females to eventually transition into adult roles and responsibilities.

This latter point should not be simply dismissed. Ritual is a social act that figures prominently in the creation of communities. Within buna, the ritual behavior in which the young woman engages is the mechanism by which she learns proper gender roles, both within the private setting of the home and within the larger community of women. In this, the Relief Society can be utilized as well. Since its foundation, the Relief Society has been instrumental in preparing women for LDS ritual behavior, particularly those rituals associated with the temple.⁴⁵ Yet other less formal rituals also play a role in the Relief Society. Communal gatherings are often a crucial element of Relief Society practice, though the regular nature of such gatherings varies according to the individual congregations and the perceived needs of such. Yet as powerful as these large group meetings are, they do not necessarily provide the same benefits as in-house gatherings, such as buna. This type of gathering is best reflected in visiting teaching.

The duties of a visiting teacher are outlined in *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, which emphasizes both the counseling nature of this communal act as well as the sacral element of these visits (both of which ritualize the overall event):

Visiting teachers sincerely come to know and love each sister, help her strengthen her faith, and give service. They seek personal inspiration to know how to respond to the spiritual and temporal needs of each sister they are assigned to visit.

Taking into account each sister's individual needs and circumstances, visiting teachers have regular contact (monthly if possible) with those they are assigned. When a personal visit is not possible, visiting teachers may use phone calls, letters, e-mail, or other means to watch over and strengthen sisters.

When appropriate, visiting teachers share a gospel message. These messages may be from the monthly visiting teaching message printed in the *Ensign* or *Liahona* magazine and the scriptures.

Visiting teachers give compassionate service during times of illness, death, and other special circumstances. They assist the

Relief Society president in coordinating short-term and long-term assistance when invited.⁴⁶

Certainly, one can see how the purposes of *buna* in terms of social and personal interaction coincide with intents of visiting teaching. Yet there is one significant difference. Traditionally, visiting teaching has involved only three individuals, two guests and a hostess, which does not quite reflect the communal nature of *buna*. With that said, Sister Beck suggested that smaller Relief Society meetings can be flexible and include more participants to meet and focus on specific individuals' needs.⁴⁷ If this latest instruction is combined with a greater understanding as to the purposes of visiting teaching, then one can see how the visits to sisters within their homes can provide the same needs of the *buna*.

As for the young women, currently young women are not involved in visiting teaching and do not engage in it until they enter the Relief Society at eighteen years of age. Much like *buna's* role for Ethiopian adolescents, it is possible that earlier inclusion in the Relief Society program could serve to teach young females how to relate to and integrate with the older women. Besides the spiritual benefits of seeking revelation to meet the needs of other sisters and preparing and presenting a monthly message, the young women would also be privy to the "fun talking" and counsel the older women engage in, similar to the experience of young women in *buna*, thereby providing the ritual foundation for a successful transition into social womanhood.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Often, faithful women embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ and abandon family and cultural traditions innate to their country and community because they appear to be false. As a result, some of the uniquely beautiful practices of the culture are lost, when in fact these rituals parallel the teachings of the gospel. *Buna* appears to be one such ritual that has functioned as an ancient organization of women for many generations.

In the case of Ethiopian women, the Relief Society in Ethiopia could be a natural and thriving circle of sisters precisely because Ethiopian women

have gathered in such a way for centuries, especially if they are shown the true significance of buna and its relationship to their new sisterhood of Relief Society. Currently, the number of LDS women in Ethiopia is slim compared to the men that are joining the Church. Challenges such as literacy, gospel instruction primarily in English, and fear of abandoning their buna ritual are major obstacles. Recognizing gospel truths associated with the ritual enables the new sister to perceive that her loss of buna is merely a move to another stage of community. In other words, the Relief Society can help the convert realize that buna is preparatory to the principles of the restored gospel.

At the same time, Relief Society in general could benefit by studying more closely the role of buna and ritual in the lives of its practitioners. The world in which girls, young women, and Relief Society sisters live attacks core attributes of femininity and nurturing. The women of Ethiopia embrace these values and qualities and embody them in their behavior publically and highlight them in their private buna circles. In particular, buna's unique structure, which involves all ages of Ethiopian females, can be a model for designing Relief Society programs that do the same. These new programs could recognize the value of ritual in creating time and space in such integration.

Buna teaches the value of looking beyond activities as routine to the deeper ritual structure, which in turn reveals the underlying meaning and purpose of such events. Emulating this type of introspection can lead to fulfilling the purposes of the Relief Society in extraordinary and profound ways. This has the potential to transform female members' participation in the Relief Society and the effectiveness of the organization overall,⁴⁹ which in turn may act as a model for future contact between the LDS Church and native ritual traditions.

Notes

1. For the purpose of this paper, rituals will be explored through the theoretical underpinnings of Barbara Fiese, who focuses on a ritual as a symbolic event that has three fundamental parts: preparation for the event, participation in the event, and reminiscence of the event. Fiese distinguishes between routines and rituals based upon the meaning an individual ascribes to the act. Fiese's

work is primarily focused on the family mealtime which is a similar context to the coffee (buna) ceremony that will be examined in this paper. See Barbara H. Fiese, *Family Routines and Rituals* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2006); Barbara H. Fiese, Kimberly P. Foley, and Mary Spagnola, "Routines and Rituals in Family Mealtimes: Contexts for Child Well-Being and Family Identity," *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development* (Spring 2006): 67–89; Barbara H. Fiese and Michael W. Pratt, "Metaphors and Meanings of Family Stories: Integrating Life Course and Systems Perspectives on Narrative," in *Family Stories and the Life Course Across Time and Generations*, ed. Michael W. Pratt and Barbara H. Fiese (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 401–18. Barbara H. Fiese and others, "A Review of 50 Years of Research on Naturally Occurring Family Routines and Rituals: Cause for Celebration?," *Journal of Family Psychology* 16, no. 4 (2002): 381–90.

2. President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke about how converts can build upon past traditions: "Let me say that we appreciate the truth in all churches and the good which they do. We say to the people, in effect, you bring with you all the good that you have, and then let us see if we can add to it. That is the spirit of this work. That is the essence of our missionary service." Meeting, Nairobi, Kenya, February 17, 1998, in *Ensign*, August 1998, 72.
3. With the exception of four other scholars that have addressed the social implications of the gathering for buna, this work is one of the first to examine buna as an important context for female gathering. David Palmer and his work on the buna ceremony assisting exiles and migrants in the United Kingdom. Palmer addresses the practice as a framework for addressing mental health and well-being issues, arguing that understanding cultural underpinnings assists practitioners in meeting client needs. His narrative studies focus on the role of the ritual in stabilizing exiles in a new land. See David Palmer, "Every Morning Before You Open the Door You Have to Watch for that Brown Envelope': Complexities and Challenges of Undertaking Oral History with Ethiopian Forced Migrants in London, UK," *Oral History Review* 37, no. 1 (2010): 35–53.

David Palmer, "The Ethiopian Buna (Coffee) Ceremony: Exploring the Impact of Exile and the Construction of Identity through Narratives with Ethiopian Forced Migrants in the United Kingdom," *Folklore* 121, no. 3 (2010): 321–33.

Along the lines of buna acting as a context for resettlement, Melissa Edelstein explores the coffee ceremony as a reminder of "home" for Ethiopian Jews who have migrated to Israel. Yet this study is more focused on the religious identity of the Ethiopian Jew and the contested validity of their claim of being Jews. Edelstein's study is focused on religious identity and not on gendered identity. Further, Edelstein explores religious practices conducted within the buna ceremony. This includes a superstitious practice of Zar

Spirits, something that my participants indicated was unacceptable to them. See Monika D. Edelstein, "Lost Tribes and Coffee Ceremonies: Zar Spirit Possession and the Ethno-Religious Identity of Ethiopian Jews in Israel," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 15, no. 2 (2002): 153–70.

An interesting study was conducted by Thera Mjaaland on the gendered practices of Ethiopian women. Mjaaland primarily focuses on the limited agency that women exert in Ethiopia and argues that what appears to be the most important "choice" an Ethiopian woman makes is to be a good, traditional Ethiopian woman. That includes tending the house and household duties, having children, and being a good wife and mother. Mjaaland claims that few women have challenged this choice but some women have successfully navigated alternate choices for their lives. See Thera Mjaaland, "Beyond the Coffee Ceremony: Women's Agency in Western Tigray, Northern Ethiopia," in *Betwixt and Between: Sosialantropologistudentenes Årbok 2004*, ed. Kjersti Lillebø and others (Oslo, Norway: Årboksredaksjonen, University of Oslo, 2004), 71.

Janet Yedes, Robbin Clamons, and Amal Osman explore buna among Oromo (another Ethiopian region) Muslim women in America as a sacred ritual and context for communication and maintenance of their national identity. These authors contend that buna is an important context for passing on cultural practices intergenerationally. See Janet Yedes, Robbin Clamons, and Amal Osman, "Buna Oromo Women Gathering for Coffee," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 33, no. 6 (2004): 675–703.

4. This study used research garnered from numerous interviews spread across eight focus groups, including non-LDS Ethiopian women, both immigrant and native, as well as LDS Ethiopian women, both immigrant and native. For more on the specific individual data, the reader is invited to contact the author at jennifer_platt@byu.edu.
5. "Facts and Statistics: Ethiopia," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 28, 2012, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-statistics/country/ethiopia>.
6. USAID 2006 report indicates that 34% of Ethiopian women are literate. See USAID Country Health Statistical Report (Ethiopia) May 2009. Research indicates that for every 95 males enrolled in grades 1–4, 70 females are enrolled. By grades 5–8, the ratio diminishes to only 23 females enrolled in school. See Nazmul Chaudhury, Luc Christiaensen, and Mohammad Niaz Asadullah, "Schools, Household, Risk, and Gender: Determinants of Child Schooling in Ethiopia," *The Centre for the Study of African Economies Working Paper Series* (Oxford: Berkeley Electronic Press, 2006); and Amina Mama, "Restore, Reform but Do Not Transform: The Gender Politics of Higher Education in Africa," *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* 1, no. 1 (2003): 101–25.

7. The author interviewed five missionaries that served in Ethiopia as recently as May 2012. These numbers are estimated by the missionaries and illustrate observations in the gender gap of adult membership in the Church in Ethiopia. Females make up a small number of the membership, with children under the age of eighteen and men being the largest populations. Additionally, Church membership statistics indicate that there are considerably more male members of the Church in Africa as a continent. The average age of members is in their mid twenties. See Tim B. Heaton, "Vital Statistics," in *Latter-day Saint Social Life: Social Research on the LDS Church and Its Members* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 105–32.
8. The motives for this examination stem from Sister Julie B. Beck, former general Relief Society president's call to the women of the Church to learn the history of their society. Relief Society is young in Ethiopia with few female members. Male membership far exceeds female membership among the new converts in Ethiopia. This is according to the author's personal correspondence with and observations of Church leadership in Ethiopia.
9. See Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zār Cult in Northern Sudan* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). Some Christian traditions in both Sudan and Ethiopia believe that when Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden, Eve attempted to hide some of her children. As a result of Eve's efforts, God cursed the hidden children and left them to live as Zār Spirits on the earth. Some women use coffee ceremonies to call upon these spirits. See also Monika D. Edelstein, "Lost Tribes and Coffee Ceremonies: Zār Spirit Possession and the Ethno-Religious Identity of Ethiopian Jews in Israel," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 15, no. 2 (2002): 153–70; and Salma Ahmed Nageeb, *New Spaces and Old Frontiers: Women, Social Space, and Islamization in Sudan* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004).
10. The story claims that there once was a goat herder in the northern region of Ethiopia who had very well-trained goats. They always returned to their keeper when they were off grazing and he never had to worry about their well-being. One day he had a wayward goat that returned noticeably changed. The goat was energized in a distinct way and behaved very differently from the other goats. Curious about the marked change in his goat, the goat herder explored where the goat had wandered and discovered a unique red berry, something he had never seen before. Upon tasting it, he too was quickly energized. He sensed that this energy would be useful to others and began harvesting the beans. In this way, the coffee bean was discovered. See Mark Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How It Transformed Our World* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
11. Many believe that the term *coffee* derives from the name of this Ethiopian province.

12. According to Ethiopian country reports, agriculture accounts for 83.9 percent of the country's exports and 80 percent of the labor force. Coffee is the chief cash crop. See *The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia: Selected Issues*, IMF Country Report No. 08/259 (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2008), 5, 26.
13. Janet Yedes, Robbin Clamons, and Amal Osman, "Buna: Oromo Women Gathering for Coffee," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 33 (2004): 675. David Palmer, "'Every Morning Before You Open the Door You Have to Watch for that Brown Envelope': Complexities and Challenges of Undertaking Oral History with Ethiopian Forced Migrants in London, U.K.," *The Oral History Review* 37, no. 1 (2010): 35–53. David Palmer, "The Ethiopian Buna (Coffee) Ceremony: Exploring the Impact of Exile and the Construction of Identity through Narratives with Ethiopian Forced Migrants in the United Kingdom," *Folklore* 121, no 3 (December 2010): 321–33. Both Palmer and Yedes and others exert that buna is a unique space for empowering women.
14. The author argues that understanding the delineated process contributes in a significant way to the beauty and power of the ritual. Rituals require procedural acts. Absence or exclusion of such acts lessens the ritual and distracts from the meaning individuals make of the ritual. Women in this study agreed that there are specific tools that are necessary in order to accurately portray the ritual. These tools are the *jebena* (baked clay coffeepot), incense, grass (for decoration), coffee cups, and the sequence of preparation. Additionally, how women behave and participate are important contributors to the ritual. Each of these components will be touched on in this paper, some in greater detail than others.
15. For an overview of the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia, see Sergew Hable Sellassie and Tadesse Tamerat, *The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: EOTC, 1970).
16. This is often found in elements of this ritual. When asked for the significance of a particular item, no reason is given, just that it is the tradition. Yet when it is missing, the entire buna may be suspect. For instance, one informant recounted the following exchange with a fellow immigrant invited to partake of the informant's buna:

Like my friend comes and one time, she's in Texas, she came for vacation here. Unfortunately I didn't make coffee like this with the *jebena* [the traditional coffeepot] like this. She hold the cup in her hand and she was waiting, waiting. (She'd come from back east, . . . Texas.) She was waiting, she was going to make coffee with *jebena* tomorrow. The next day no *jebena*. She says "You don't really have *jebena*? What's wrong with this house? You don't make coffee?"

17. As the last note made clear, this significance is subjective. In this case, the informant told the author that the sitting on the ground reflected humility. Whether or not this holds true for all is unknown.
18. *Sister* is a term used by the Ethiopia women, as discovered by the author in her research.
19. For the purpose of this study, women were asked to respond to how typical the nature of photographs taken in Ethiopia by Ethiopian women were of the coffee ceremony. All participants agreed that the absence of incense lessened the value of the ceremony. When asked why, their response was simply that it was an important feature of the ritual with no further explanation. What is interesting about this is that some ritual scholars are talking about ritual as empty acts that are nevertheless significant. See, for instance, Barbara H. Fiese, *Family Routines and Rituals* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); or Barbara H. Fiese, Kimberly P. Foley, and Mary Spagnola, "Routines and Rituals in Family Mealtimes: Contexts for Child Well-Being and Family Identity," *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development* 111 (2006): 67–89.
20. David Howes, "Olfaction and Transition: An Essay on the Ritual Uses of Smell," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 24, no. 3 (1987): 398–416, 401: "It is at the threshold of a room (bedroom, attic, cellar) that one notices odour most. . . . One might conclude that the sense of smell is the liminal sense par excellence, constitutive of and at the same time operative across all of the boundaries we draw between different realms and categories of experience." See also Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott, *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 140: "Why do odours tend to be emphasized during such rites of passage? The reason would seem to be that there is a widely perceived or intuited intrinsic connection between olfaction and transition. To begin with, it is in the nature of odours to alter and shift, making them an apt symbol for a person undergoing transition. Consider the situation of the initiate at a male puberty rite. The initiate is no longer a boy but not yet a man. He is 'betwixt and between' the conventional categories of social perception. In a similar way, smells are difficult to classify, and even more difficult to contain. Their 'out of placeness' thus corresponds to the ambiguous status of the subject of the rite of passage."
21. While the participants did not indicate this, it is hard to believe that they do not know the meaning of this root. This may reflect one of two things: (1) that the rite has become "commercialized" to the point that its original, sacral nature has been lost. This has been attested in shamanic practices of central Asia, that lost their sacred nature even as they became culturally recognized. And (2), because of the commercialization of the rite, the original community retains certain elements so as to keep its original meaning from outsiders.

22. For further discussion on the Muslim form of buna, see Yedes, Clamons, and Osman, "Buna: Oromo Women Gathering for Coffee," 675–703.
23. Some of the other buna research conducted affirms that coffee surpresses hunger. See for instance Thera Mjaaland, "Beyond the Coffee Ceremony: Women's Agency in Western Tigray, Northern Ethiopia," in *Betwixt and Between*, 71. Oral narratives of the women in the author's study claimed that coffee was used to replace meals and suppressed hunger.
24. Mjaaland, "Beyond the Coffee Ceremony," 155–56.
25. See Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 97, and *Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 16. Turner argues that a ritual's greatest power is not in what happens in the ritualized context but rather the experience of the individual while they are in a "liminal," or in-between, state. This is similar to the argument that Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Places* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), makes in his research on *thirdspace*. *Thirdspace* allows an individual to have an experience in a physical space (first space) while pressing towards a cognitive, developmental space of possibilities and growth. Like Turner, Soja emphasizes the exchange an individual has with a community and social group that has shared practices (second space) and the important role the ritualized gathering play in addressing social tensions or limitations. Working together at the social tensions or limitations within a community pushes for a *thirdspace* in which individuals can have an experience in the "in-between" spaces.
26. Typically young children, both male and female, call women to gather for buna. The call to buna is a child's earliest involvement in the ritual. Children normally do not drink the coffee but are allowed to watch and listen to the proceedings of buna gatherings. Young men stop coming to their mother's buna gatherings when they are middle adolescent and become more involved in male activities such as working with their fathers or playing sports. Nancy Chodorow argues that females are the primary socializers and that gender specific identities are acquired by "doing." Thus the role that both male and females play in the buna ceremony are an important part of their socialization and association with their mothers. See Nancy J. Chodorow, "Being and Doing: A Cross-Cultural Examination of the Socialization of Males and Females," in *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (London: Yale University Press, 1989), 23–44.

Therefore, gendered roles play an important function in identity formation. Acknowledging that there are particular behaviors and acts that are and are not acceptable in a given society for male or female children plays an important role in identity formation. For instance, in some communities in Ethiopia, a man will never set foot in the kitchen. A male child may do

- the work in assisting his mother in the kitchen (or preparing coffee) but the time will come that it would be viewed as socially inappropriate for him to enter the kitchen.
27. See Mjaaland, "Beyond the Coffee Ceremony."
 28. According to the author's research, *free* is a term that women both in Ethiopia and the United States used to describe the space. When the women were asked what they meant by the use of the word, they indicated it was an escape from their day-to-day duties. It is arguable that the women are escaping oppression and gender inequality. Though suggestion to the women that they are oppressed stirred questions as to the meaning of the word and denying that they experience oppression. The way individuals define their experience differs according to context, society, and experience as demonstrated by various studies of women who wear burkas. See, for instance, Lisa Wade, "Defining Women's Oppression: The Burka vs. the Bikini," *The Society Pages*, last modified February 22, 2012, <http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2012/02/22/questioning-definitions-of-freedom>.
 29. UNICEF provides official summaries that examine data relative to educational gender equality. These reports can be retrieved at www.unicef.org/publications/files/2004_OfficialSumm_ENG.pdf. An additional reading on gender inequality and the mistreatment of females in Ethiopia can be found at Omer Redi, "Ethiopia: Unique Community Leads on Gender Equality," *Inter Press Service News Agency*, last modified July 6, 2010, accessed January 2011, <http://www.ipsnews.net/africa/nota.asp?idnews=52060>.
 30. Academic literature exploring HIV and AIDS in third world countries attributes lower literacy rates in females to the way in which the women are socially perceived (as well as factors of poverty, degree of democracy, fertility rates and so forth). Research shows that Ethiopian women are viewed as having lower social status than men. As a result, young girls and women work or perform household duties instead of attending school. See Daniel Stockemer and Bernadette Lamontagne, "HIV/AIDS in Africa: Explaining the Differences in HIV Prevalence Rates," *Contemporary Politics* 13, no. 4 (2007): 365. Truus Abbink, "Ritual and Political Forms of Violent Practice Among the Suji of Southern Ethiopia," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 28 (1995): 271.
 31. See Stockemer and Lamontagne, "HIV/AIDS in Africa," 365; Truus Abbink, "Ritual and Political Forms of Violent Practice," 271, and their separate examinations of HIV/AIDS among Ethiopians. Abbink's work is particularly fascinating as he looks at ritual and political forms of violence practiced in Southern Ethiopia. In this case, rituals have been used to victimize people of different caste systems or those with illnesses such as HIV/AIDS.
 32. Many of the quotes stem from conversations gathered in the author's dissertation, Jennifer A. Brinkerhoff, "To Be a Good Ethiopian Woman: Participation

in the ‘Buna’ (Coffee) Ceremony and Identity” (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 2011), which was concerned with the daily routines of Ethiopian women living in both a countryside village in Ethiopia and the capital city of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Further data was gathered in the United States among first generation Ethiopian immigrants and refugees. The women were asked to respond to the typicality of the daily routine findings from Ethiopia. Results of the study indicated that the ritual context acts as an important space for women to develop their identity as a “good Ethiopian woman.” Therefore, references made to participants or specific women are pertaining to women who participated in this study.

33. Brinkerhoff, “To Be a Good Ethiopian Woman,” 146.
34. For the women in this study, the typical age to first prepare buna was ten years old.
35. This descriptive term is fascinating in illustrating children’s interest in adult conversation and the important influence these conversations can have in the informal and intent learning and developmental process of children. See Barbara Rogoff, *The Cultural Nature of Human Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 300; Barbara Rogoff, *Developing Destinies: A Mayan Midwife and Town* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 107, 252; and Elinor Ochs, “Socialization through Language and Interaction: A Theoretical Introduction,” *Issues in Applied Linguistics* 2 (1991): 143; and other developmental psychologists for further examination of the developmental implications of such conversations.
36. On the other hand, another woman in this study talked about coming home from her business as the owner of a travel agency to enjoy buna with her maids. Though the maids always prepared the buna, she would stay and join in drinking buna and talking with the women. Regardless of whom is invited, the role of buna remains the same: to create an environment that facilitates validation among the fellow buna sisters.
37. The need for the buna to provide meaning for the Ethiopian immigrant is apparent in the following humorous account concerning an informant’s mother who had just moved in with her:

Ethiopian Woman 1: She came. She live with her daughter’s apartment and she make coffee. She knocked everybody door and say, “Come and join me!” because she didn’t know what’s going on in United States.

(Laughter)

Ethiopian Woman 2: You know. We laugh because she didn’t know. She thought like Ethiopia! She didn’t know. She didn’t want to drink by herself so she had to invite someone with her to drink. So she started knocking the door.

Author: Even though she didn't know them? She's knocking the doors? Did they go?

Ethiopian Woman 1: The people call the police. They thought she's crazy!

Ethiopian Woman 2: Because she is a stranger! Or something.

Ethiopian Woman 1: The police come and say, "Why do you knock everybody's doors?" they say. For coffee. Because my country I don't want to drink myself. That's why it's, "Oh no, no. Don't do that next time."

38. Despite all of their efforts, the ultimate change for this woman came when she decided to embrace the teachings of the gospel and fully immerse herself in activity in the Church by living the Word of Wisdom. She currently serves in a Relief Society presidency in her branch in Ethiopia.
39. Presently she is serving in her ward as a member of the Relief Society meeting committee, the group that organizes super Saturdays. Interview conducted October 19, 2012, between the author and a thirty-eight-year-old Ethiopian immigrant who converted to Mormonism in 2008.
40. See Julie B. Beck, "Fulfilling the Purpose of Relief Society," *Ensign*, November 2008, 108–11, for further discussion.
41. Why this is the case is unclear, though a study by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg suggests that this may be a relatively recent phenomenon and in line with other sociological studies that have noted increased isolation among individuals in the Western world. Smith-Rosenberg points out that women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries often lived next to near kin and could rely on these women to fulfill household (and even farm) duties. Thus socialization among these women was common and prevalent, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1 (Autumn 1975): 1–29. With the introduction of mobility and the decline of the traditional rural/agricultural culture, such interaction has declined dramatically.
42. During her ministry as the general Relief Society president, Bonnie D. Parkin often focused on transitioning young women to Relief Society. See Bonnie D. Parkin, "Embracing Sisterhood: Helping Young Women Successfully Transition into Relief Society," <http://www.lds.org/pa/display/0,17884,5187-1,00.html>, for a conversation between the general Relief Society president and general Young Women president as well as a first presidency letter dated March 19, 2003, that offered suggestions for assisting in a young woman's transition to the Relief Society organization.
43. In a study focused on the behaviors of Latter-day Saint youth, researchers found that 30 percent of young women in their sample of 5,815 engaged in

- premarital sex between the ages of 15 and 18. This study was conducted in 2002 and contrasted to findings from 1990–99 in which 11 percent of a sample of 1,977 young women of the same age engaged in premarital sex. These researchers argue, “Peer pressure, public religious behavior, and mothers’ regulation accounted for 72% of the variance in premarital sexual activity among LDS young women. This means that nearly three-fourths of the sexual initiation of this sample of LDS young women is accounted for by these three variables.” Bruce A. Chadwick, Brent L. Top, and Richard J. McClelland, *Shield of Faith: The Power of Religion in the Lives of LDS Youth and Young Adults* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2010), 210. In the context of the argument of the necessity of ritualizing religious behavior within the young women’s program, it appears evident that the social solidarity found in rituals not only contributes to the development of young women but also safeguards them from participating in other ritual behaviors that she is not prepared for, such as sexual intercourse.
44. Bonnie D. Parkin, former general Relief Society president, talked about the importance of young women being mentored by older women in their transition to Relief Society. She suggests that all female auxiliary leaders work together in a unified approach to assisting females in making their transition to the Relief Society at the age of eighteen. By doing so, there is a sense of unity and focus on a singular purpose of assisting the woman in coming unto Christ. This unified purpose is transferred to the young women. See Parkin, “Embracing Sisterhood,” and First Presidency letter dated March 19, 2003.
 45. See Jill Mulvay Derr, “Strength In Our Union: The Making of Mormon Sisterhood,” in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Urbana: Illini Books, 1992), 158.
 46. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), 9.5.1.
 47. See Julie B. Beck, “Relief Society: A Sacred Work,” *Ensign*, November 2009, 112. “Under the direction of the bishop, the ward Relief Society presidency can use these meetings to address spiritual and temporal needs of individuals and families in the ward and to strengthen sisterhood and unity.

When sisters meet for Relief Society meetings during the week, they have the opportunity to learn and accomplish the charitable and practical responsibilities of the Relief Society. This is where they learn and practice skills that will help them increase their faith and personal righteousness, strengthen families and homes, and provide service to those in need. These meetings are meant to be instrumental in teaching the skills and responsibilities of womanhood and motherhood in the Lord’s plan. It is here that women learn and

apply principles of provident living and spiritual and temporal self-reliance, and they also increase in sisterhood and unity as they teach one another and serve together.

48. Elder David A. Bednar speaks frequently of assisting others in learning to “act for themselves.” In doing so, the power of true doctrine then begins to motivate behavior. See for example, David A. Bednar, “Watching with All Perseverance,” *Ensign*, May 2010, 40–43; and David A. Bednar, “Seek Learning by Faith,” *Ensign*, September 2007, 60–68. Not surprisingly, young men engage in home teaching early on, helping their transition from adolescence into the Melchizedek Priesthood program and manhood more generally.
49. President Boyd K. Packer promises the sisters of the Relief Society, “Your every need shall be fulfilled, now, and in the eternities; every neglect will be erased; every abuse will be corrected. All of this can come to you, and come quickly, when you devote yourself to Relief Society.” Boyd K. Packer, “The Circle of Sisters,” *Ensign*, November 1980, 109.