



*James Barnett Lecture Series on
Religious Cultures*

Presents

Don Seeman

Emory University

November 1, 2016

11:00-12:20 pm

Laurel Hall, Rm 305

Coffee and the Moral Order: Ethiopian Jews and Pentecostals against Culture

The importance of coffee (*buna*) to traditional Ethiopian (including Ethiopian Jewish) culture is well-known. Its drinking, surrounded by ritual and sociality, is considered a true mark of “being Ethiopian.” But the refusal of *buna* by some Ethiopian Jews and Pentecostals living in Israel marks a protest against the very notion of culture as a decisive way for thinking about the possibilities of being human. In different ways, some members of these religious communities seek to ground a notion of moral and personal freedom on the critique of culture as a guiding force. This paper explores the implications this dynamic for Ethiopian-Israelis, but also for anthropology as a whole. How does moving away from a cultural frame towards a moral experience frame change the way we tell stories, the kinds of theories we develop and the kind of ethnography we do? This is a call for a different kind of anthropology, in which claims about freedom and moral experience are taken seriously by social science.

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