

Eating christmas in the kalahari | essay



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Eating Christmas in the Kalahari

Abstract

Richard Borshay Lee was a social anthropologist that had lived with and studied the southern Tswana tribe. In “Eating Christmas in the Kalahari” Richard Borshay Lee introduces us to some very useful techniques in social science. What he decided to do was take part in an ox Christmas festivity. Mr. Lee felt he had to give a gift because the tribal community thought he was a miser, this was due to the fact the Mr. Lee had been there for quite some time and never shared his food. Being Christmas and both sides believing in this spiritual holiday, he felt obligated to share. Ultimately, his beliefs does not coincide with the !Kung people and we witness the power of socializing agents.

Even though Mr. Lee had lived with and was engaged in every part of the !Kung people’s lives, he was still an outsider and alien to the society. It seems after Mr. Lee decided to attend the ox Christmas festival, he felt it would be a nice gesture to buy an ox to eat at the celebration. Among the !Kungs, the slaughtering of an ox is a custom. After choosing the ox to bring to the festival, the Bushmen started complaining and calling the ox old and skinny. To Mr. Lee, the ox looked big, fat and perfect for the Christmas celebration and the reaction of the !Kung Bushmen people leave him very insulted. His feelings and how he perceived the Bushmen’s reaction was likely founded on his own culture, where people are supposed to appreciate other people’s generosity no matter the outcome. But to the Bushmen, giving an ox was no more than what they usually do every day, and was nothing special. After

consulting with cultural experts, Mr. Lee discovers the native's viewpoint. In the ! kung's culture, things such as gifts and generosity are appreciated. However, it is not easily shown and always behind closed doors. Their cultural belief is that it will cause more harm to praise any individual even for a job well done. They believe by boosting someone's ego it will eventually swell his pride to the point where he may kill someone. The ! Kung's survival is based on their awareness of the environment around them and how people act and think in the society. This I think would be a good thing as long as people were not taken for granted.

Why did the ! kung people's insult bother Mr. Lee so extensively? I feel the anthropologist thought he had gone through so much to choose, and buy the ox for the ! Kungs just to be ridiculed for his efforts. Lee finally received the message of what the ! Kungs were trying to put out, and this was the concept that there is some motive behind every gift and somehow, someday the gift will be repaid. However, I must disagree with this concept and disagree with the ! Kungs.

This is supported by the fact, every day I see many charitable acts, and the people that are giving, have no intention of receiving praise or anything in return. There are many cultural rules about gift giving in our society. Gifts in our society are given in celebrations and special occasions. Usually in our society, the amount spent on the gift is based on the rareness or the size of the event taking place. Mr. Lee's views brought on by his own cultural beliefs, left him feeling inadequate and insulted. But to the ! Kungs, it was an everyday occurrence and reaction.

To understand the ! kungs is to understand and accept people of different cultures. This is dually noted in the above paragraphs. The ! Kungs who live in the Kalahari were raised quite differently than someone who grew up in the society we live in today. In accepting gifts in our country, we always say thank you and how much we appreciate it. This praise gives us a feeling of arrogance knowing that the receiver really likes our gift. In different cultures there are different guidelines. The people of the ! kung tribe think badly of individuals that show arrogance. To eliminate these characteristics in the children, they were raised to mock and make fun of others while doing things such as hunting and viable activities. And by telling Mr. Lee that his ox was skinny and old, they were ultimately doing him a tremendous favor according to their cultural beliefs. As in contrast to our beliefs that characteristics such as bullying and mocking is very wrong. However sometimes in our society we see arrogance as a negative quality but it is not always discouraged in the same manner.

Agents of Socialization was a strong influence in the article that Mr. Lee wrote. The feeling of being insulted only came from his own inadequacies and the way he was taught in his society. His status while being among the tribe was less than in his own society and also contributed to his feelings. His cultural values were very different than that of the ! Kung people, and in time he came to understand and accept their attitudes learned as a social group. He realized that even though it was a celebration known to people of his culture, it could also sustain a part of the ! Kung tribe. This is a documentation of another instance of how different societies of people

distinguish themselves from one another with certain customs and differences, and how they conduct themselves socially.

References

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