

Saints, scholars and schizophrenics: mental illness in rural ireland



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The people of Ballybran parish are located in southwest Kerry, which is in Ireland. All there is in this small rural county town is a school, chapel, cemetery, three pubs, some good shops, the forge, a guest house, two graveyards and three churches that are in ruins. (Scheper-hughes, 19) It is a small rural village and doesn't have a lot of tourist attractions. The people of Ballybran are very long, lean, and finally sculptured meaning in shape. (Scheper-hughes, 19) They have very fair skin. Much of what these people eat is from the sea. They also eat packaged goods and canned goods from the local shops.

These people are farmers they mostly grow potatoes and cabbage. The average farm is between five and twenty acres. (Scheper-hughes, 20) These people are Irish catholic. The population of Ballybran is about 461. The men and women in Ballybran get married a lot later than the rest. It is about thirty-four for men and twenty-eight for women. So about one in every three adults is married. The people of Ballybran don't follow the seven to nine child rule once so prevalent in their parish. Most families only have about two or three and are using some form of birth control.

The men are mostly shepherds, fishermen, and dairy farmers. (Scheper-hughes, 19) The people in the town sell canned goods, cigarettes, sugar and tea. It is said that the introduction of Christianity by the village saint Brendan the navigator started the period of the parish. Brendan and his band of holy monks spent a summer in Ballybran on a mountain, which is now honored in his memory. They now call it Mount Brandon. It is said that when Brendan was praying on a mountain he got a divine commission to sail westward, where he would discover land.

In these peoples history it states that while Christopher Columbus was on his voyage across the Atlantic he paid a visit to Galway to read Brandon's manuscripts. Ireland got its name Saints and Scholars when the meetings between Pagan and Christianity were being held on Mount Brandon.

(Scheper-hughes, 25) In Ireland they have a huge problem with mental illness. In 1975 in the small town of Ballybran you can find almost five percent of the population out of 461 are in a hospital of getting treatment somehow.

Scheper- Hughes says that a mental breakdown is the most common among the people. Male patients are out numbering the females there are 2, 432 male patients and only 1, 414 female patients. The author suggests that the mental illness is most common among men. The rate of hospitalization are declining and increasing a lot. Up until age seventy the hospitalized increases and then it declines after a certain age. The patients both male and female usually stay between two or more years. The author talks about a certain mental illness called schizophrenia.

She explains that maybe this disease is caused by the person's cultural background. The people who had mental illness in Ballybran or maybe there were just the outcast were either institutionalized and people forgot about them or there were sent away to mountains all alone and isolated from the world. Although in some cases the people would be treated well by there family and were called saints. (Scheper-hughes, 84) The family life in Ballybran is supposed to be parents and children it is not the rule but the expectation that the community has for each other.

So the people who are either childless or not married tend to feel cheated and not happy because they won't have heirs to carry on their line. (Scheper-hughes, 98) Everyone in the family has different roles and some have more power than others. The father is the most powerful; the fathers pass on their names, land and also there belongs to the oldest son. They are usually favored as the best; most likely it will be the first-born son. Either they would work on village trades or be sent to emigrate to England or America. The daughters of the family would have to find a husband usually arranged marriages within the village.

The daughter usually got a dowry for herself at marriage but the father would sometimes keep it as long as he could so he could have power over the children for longer. For the people in the village who owned businesses they would pass them down through their family. (Scheper-hughes, 99) Most of the people in the town have a hard time trusting outsiders so they usually marry within their community. The marriages are usually limited to women in the six or ten households in the town land. (Scheper-hughes, 99) The people are catholic so in the catholic religion you cannot marry someone who you are blood related to.

People have such few choices of which to marry they will go as far as to deny their relations but the parish as it is on record. They keep the relationships low key in order to hide the number of marriages between cousins. Although it is against their religion it is not uncommon for them to marry a second cousin. (Scheper-hughes, 100) The priest in this rural town tends to let the rule slide of not letting cousins get married. Most of the time the women are brought into the town from other counties and other parishes.

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In some cases the men when they are in other countries will bring back wives, but the people in the town don't like it and never can trust them. The men don't do it very often because most times the women get bored and cannot get used to living such a rural life style. In marriages as long as the mother in law is still alive she will always be rude to the bride. This usually occurs with the in marring woman. She is made to feel like she is invading their family, and that are such a tight knit group its hard to fit in. (Scheper-hughes, 101) The view of sex is the same with any catholic group of people.

You don't have see until your married and you only do when wanting to have children. The highest status in Ballybran is have is that of purity. The sins lie when a couple has sex just for pleasure and not for trying to get pregnant. The women are not supposed to have sex with there husbands if they are using a condom. (Scheper-hughes, 120) As in any religious person who is catholic they knew that having sex just for pleasure is a waste of sperm and a waste of a person's life. Also using birth control is not approved by the religion for it is stopping the cycle of life.

It is also making it easier for people to have sex just for pleasure. The separation of men and women are very prominent in the small town of Ballybran. In the house the women's place is in the kitchen, and the men's place is in the barn and the fields. Men mostly feel uncomfortable being in the kitchen and quickly eat so they can join their friends at the pubs. A division of the sexes is also big in the Sunday masses. Sitting during the mass is divided up in age, sex and marriage. Also during the mass only women are allowed to receive communion. The belief is in Ballybran that men bear more serious sin.

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Men are the ones who have bad thoughts such as sex, and masturbation. The men and woman don't spend very much time together not even the ones that are married. The author states that she never says a couple together in public walking or anything. Because the women don't spend much time with her husbands they have to force themselves and often feel awkward and uncomfortable. (Scheper-Hughes, 104) There are not many differences between the catholic religion now and how it was back in the 70's and 80's when Scheper-Hughes did her research on a small catholic rural town in Ireland.

Comparing the town of Ballybran to my hometown and my church in Carmel Valley, San Diego there are many differences on how people follow along with the religion and how much of the rules they actually follow. (Scheper-hughes, 122) In the town of Ballybran going to church everyone is not something you might do it is just required and no one thinks twice about it. Now days it a lot different people find other things to be more important and they figure if they go to church maybe one or twice a month they should be okay.

In the small town of Ballybran practicing catholicism is what they are, that is there life and the morals that they try to follow. In the present day people aren't putting much energy into catholicism, they don't spend time praying and going to church, people focus more on work and other things. The people in ballybran take the bible very literally and follow it exactly, they believe that men have more sin then woman, and men can't take communion. They believe that men have more serious sin so they don't get to take communion every Sunday like the women.

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Nowadays not everyone can take communion, but it's not separated between men and woman it's who has gotten their first holy communion. First Holy Communion is very important in the catholic religion for it is the first time that a child receives the sacrament of the Eucharist, or the body of Christ. Nowadays you can not take communion unless you have had the proper ceremony. (Crawly, 1) The view towards sex and birth control stand the same in the catholic religion today. Although most people have sex before they are married and use birth control.

In the town of Ballybran it was said that women used some form of birth control but that was after they had the desired amount of children. Still it states in the bible that birth control is wasting a woman's eggs and a Childs life. The highest status in the town of Ballybran is purity. (Scheper-hughes, 120) The same is for today but there are very few people that wait until marriage to have sex. In the bible sex isn't supposed to be used for pleasure but for the creation of children. The author talks about how having sex for pleasure even when a couple is married is still a huge sin. Condoms are also another no no in the religion.

They are not allowed because it is the same as birth control it is stopping a woman from getting pregnant and it is making it easier for men and women to just have sex to have sex. Another difference between the town of Ballybran and my hometown is the separation of men and women during mass. (Scheper-hughes, 120) It used to be that men and woman had to sit on opposite sides of the church but its very different at my church. Men and women sit together all the time with different families. In Ballybran it was divided up into different age groups like if you were married or a certain age. <https://assignbuster.com/saints-scholars-and-schizophrenics-mental-illness-in-rural-ireland/>

Not today we have every different kind of race and people at different age levels. It is a lot different now and I think a lot more laid back, the rules still matter but they don't matter as much to people. I believe that in Ballybran the people there take their relationship with god more seriously then most people do. I see people in church at home texting on their cell phone and playing games with their babies; it's such a different environment. These people take pride in their beliefs and go all the way with them. Nowadays religion is second or third best to everyone and things in life become more important.

People in the town of ballybran would get dressed up for church and put on there best clothes. At my church I see people coming into church with soccer uniforms on and in jeans. Its a different culture when everyone is dressed up and looking pretty. The reason these people in this town believe so strongly is because they don't have anything else, they don't have cars or cell phones or a TV to distract them from the world. The best part about the people is they live in the middle of nowhere and they seem so happy. The author of this book went in a documented these people's lives in the town of Ballybran.

It's just a historical account of the Irish people who live in this town and there day to day lives. It's a just picture in time of what they go through everyday to survive and keep their small town in business. After the author left and finished her research these people went on living there lives like nothing was ever any different. The author tells that there wasn't much of a cultural change since when she got there and when she left. The people of

the town of Ballybran still believe in what they believe in and will continue to until they cannot do so.