Homework 3

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David Counts, writer of “Too Many Bananas, Not Enough Pineapples, and No Watermelon at All,” was shown to have had a mildly difficult time with his years in the world of reciprocity. He and his family did, however, learn three valuable lessons in their time within Kaliai village. The following paper will cover the three lessons, what caused the lessons to be learned in the first place, what levels of society seem to properly fit these lessons, and how one person of the western civilization experiences similar dealings. That’s not all actually, there will also be a mild analysis of the article known as “Eating Christmas in the Kalahari” by Richard Borshay Lee.

The three lessons are divided into three different tales, each explaining how David and his family learned it. Firstly there was “No Watermelon at All,” in which the writer is living in a government provided “rest house.” A woman comes by with a watermelon balanced on her head, apparently attempting to sell the fruit to the writer. The kids within the home are ecstatic for the idea of watermelon as a sweet treat so Mr. Counts purchases it for two shillings, a smile on his face during the deal. The woman leaves for a short while before coming back with the village’s leader, Kolia. The leader explains to them that they should not pay for any food in this village ever, nor should they sell any, and demands that the deal be undone. The woman takes her watermelon and leaves Mr. Counts with his shillings. This is the first lesson. “In a society where food shared or gifted as part of social life, you may not buy it with money” (Counts p. 1). Unfortunately, that was the last watermelon of the season and they would not have any more for quite some time. The next lesson was provided in the story of “Too Many Bananas,” which is a fairly straightforward continuation straight from the last tale. The family gifts visitors with tobacco and gum while the visitors offer them other goods, but eventually the Mr. Counts’ family receives too many of one good. Bananas. By the time it becomes a problem, they’ve already acquired four stalks of bananas, some already over-ripening. The next visitor is a woman named Rogi, who came bearing the gift of bananas for the kids. Mr. Counts refuses the bananas and explains why, causing the woman to leave in shame. Kolia comes in shortly after and essentially lectures them about sending people away without taking their gifts. The family reasons that they’ve got too much but Kolia simply tells them, “When your guests are hungry, feed them bananas!” This brings up the second lesson. “Never refuse a gift and never fail to return a gift. If you cannot use it, you can always give it away to someone else – there is no such thing as too much – there are never too many bananas” (Counts p.2). The last tale, “Not Enough Pineapples,” conveys the third and final lesson for Mr. Counts’ family. It starts with an explanation that although the family had many friends and acquaintances in the village, there were still those they barely interacted with or wanted to interact with. Sara, an elderly woman, was one of the people they did not want to interact with. The reasoning behind such a harsh desire was that Sara was quite greedy from what they’d seen, constantly asking for gifts on her visits and suggesting that when they leave again that she receive their furnishings. Eventually, the writer has enough and asks the woman if she could bring something to the table next time she visits, like a story to tell or a pineapple to eat. The next time she visits, to the author’s delight, she brings a pineapple as a gift. The next afternoon, however, a friend of theirs drops by and talks about how they were waiting for the pineapple to be just right before giving it to them. This brings about the last lesson. “Where reciprocity is the rule and gifts are the idiom, you cannot demand a gift, just as you cannot refuse a request” (Counts p. 3).

Despite the society presented in the story, things are different in one of modern western origins. However, this doesn’t mean that the lessons and principles would vanish in it, they would simply be relocated to a more specific pair of groups within that society. Namely, the neighborhood and family levels are known for displaying these values. For families, gift giving is constant, especially on the holidays. For neighbors, if someone has a cookout or a new member to the town moves in, foods of all sorts are brought to commemorate the event. It’s common courtesy to bring gifts during these kinds of events, whether it be food or something a little more material. There is someone is named “Josh Noodt.” He lives in a small town and is currently attending college. On occasion he spends some quality time with his grandmother in the Bronx, who cooks him food and talks about her day with him. One could say this is similar to the article’s first lesson of reciprocity, in which no money is expected of either parties. These are simply gifts. The gifts of each other’s company and the gift of food to pass the time. If one of them refused the other’s presence, they would feel saddened certainly, but no amount of shame would befall them.

Thus ends the examinations of “Too Many Bananas, Not Enough Pineapples, and No Watermelon at All.” The family learned three valuable lessons when staying in a village that supports the system of reciprocity. It was also delved into which faculties of western culture this system would fall under. Lastly, it was shown how the three lessons would be involved in one’s own life.

As the detailing and discussion of the previous article ends, the beginning of the analysis of “Eating Christmas in the Kalahari” arrives. The published work begins with the author attempting to reward his hosts with a massive black ox for Christmas dinner. The Bushmen responded with nothing but insults and joking jabs, calling the ox old and sick, hardly fit for a meal. During the year of having to deal with the author’s pushy demeanor, they believed him to be too high and mighty. Too full of himself, especially if he thought he was gracing everyone with a feast. However, it was not because he was an outsider. Certainly not. It was because they believed in insulting anyone with even a meager amount of success in order to prevent them getting a massive ego. They believed a big ego meant they were above their fellow men and if seen as insects, that man may kill them. This would go against their egalitarian thought process. A claim was made during this explanation to the Mr. Lee. “There are no totally generous acts” (Lee p.4). The writer thought he was being generous but in actuality he wanted to show off a bit and gain the acceptance of others. This is an example of food reciprocity, hoping to gain something for food.

In the end, both “Too Many Bananas, Not Enough Pineapples, and No Watermelon at All” and “Eating Christmas in the Kalahari” were observed and analyzed thoroughly enough. The three lessons learned in the first article are valuable as well as the one learned in the latter, both covering reciprocity in a foreign area. Regardless, things seem to have worked out for both authors in the end at least.

Work Cited

Counts, D. (n.d.). Too Many Bananas, Not Enough Pineapples, and No Watermelon at all. Three 0bject Lessons in Living with Reciprocity. Retrieved July 16, 2016, from <http://anthropology.uwaterloo.ca/WNB/TooManyBananas.html>

Lee, R. B. (1969). *Eating Christmas in the Kalahari*. New York: American Museum of Natural History.