

# Christmas with the Kalahari

- The natives of /ai/ai learned of Christmas third hand, through early 19th century teachings from London missionaries
  - Anthropologist's name is Richard Lee and he is a social anthropologist working with !Kung Bushman
  - /ontah was the name given to Richard Lee. It means whitey, roughly.
  - Got what he thought to be a big black ox for Christmas and was made fun of because the ox looked so frail and old that it could never feed the entire village and leave everyone enough energy to dance in celebration
  - Prospect of a gloomy Christmas a result of Lee's oversight
- Despite the looming threat of an unhappy village, Lee was still insistent on seeing what would happen, not in an unethical way, of course
- He thinks the town is all in on a big joke to make him feel bad about the ox*

## The joke

It was actually a joke, but it sparked suspicion on what the meaning of the joke was, whether it be a worsening relationship with the bushman or just harmless pranks, with the former being more likely.

## The 'mean spirited joke' is really part of their custom

Humbles the people in their society, prevents people from becoming arrogant or from bragging about hunting skills

- They cannot accept someone coming back triumphant and believing that they are better than the rest of the group, so they belittle them and make jokes to keep them humble
  - When Lee asked a townspeople why he was never informed of this custom, they said "Because you never asked me." - a phrase that 'haunts every field ethnographer'
- In the end, gathering the black ox for Christmas is no different than what the Bushman do every day for one another, so there should not be an unnecessary fanfare for such a necessary task

**People resented Lee's presence at the water hole, but also dreaded him leaving because of the connections he brought. This made him the perfect target for the bushman's tactic of enforcing humility**