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ANTH100

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Summer 2021

“American Practices as Ritualistic”

After reading the “Nacirema” article, I agree with the thesis that American culture has many practices that are ritualistic. I consider them to be ritualistic firstly because many of the practices are passed down from generation to generation as true. There is never any questioning of our practices and the underlying philosophy behind the fascination of the human body. All areas of American culture are inundated with an individualist, hedonistic, and highly personal philosophy. Horace Miner, the author of the article, convinces me more of this by taking a cultural relativist approach to examining American culture. Although from American, he uses terminology to make us cringe at the medicine man writing in a language only understood by the herbal man and a weird language to describe brushing our teeth with hog hairs. What this does is separate us as readers from America from the bias we would otherwise understand our practices. We never really think of our simple practices as odd because we have been influenced by our society that it is normal and corect. Miner’s view is not biased by ethnocentrism because by in Ember and Ember’s Cultural Anthropology, he would be holding “a view of one’s cultural behaviors and attitudes as correct and those of other cultures as immoral or inferior” (Cultural Anthropology pg. 330). However it might not be appropriate to view all these practices as ritualistic because as an advanced society, the people of America trust authoritative figures through specific modes of inquiry. In the same way that other cultures hold that the best way to find truth may be through spiritual or religious frameworks, America holds that science is the objective way to frame reality and the way we should live in it. And if this is the case for America, Miner’s approach to writing as a cultural relativist reveals how we should study other cultures. Other cultures should be viewed inside of their standards and belief systems. When one does that, their assessment will not make other cultures seem odd, inferior, or incorrect in their behaviour.

Three areas of globalization are economics, politics, and culture. In economics, some examples of globalization are the removal of trade barriers. Creating an open market has allowed for the integration of other countries into the flourishing economy of advanced countries and has allowed those countries to gain more for less by establishing factories in other countries for less costs. Examples of globalization in politics has been the surging of issues such as terrorism and climate change that have called for coordinated efforts between countries. Formation of the UN, coming back historically from WW2 have led to the common goal of solving these international issues. And finally culture has become globalized through the means of the first two. Pop culture, spread through economic globalization, and international politics has led to ideologies of the west being dominant and reinterpreting the cultures of others. Technology has facilitated all of this in many ways. Communication has never been easier for people across the world, and the facility of communication has lowered costs meaning that there were investments in other areas. The investment in transportation has also allowed for higher rates of importing and exporting goods. And finally media through television and social media has allowed for political discussion, commentary and the spreading of culture across the globe. Some countries that have benefited from globalization, specifically economic globalization, have been those with lower costs to create goods and services. As stated earlier it has allowed for them to play into the flourishing economies. Some of these countries are Brazil and China. However some countries that suffer are those that lose all local production through globalization. Because of cheaper and mass production from big cooperation, the countries struggle to see any profit from globalization. These countries are mostly Sub-Saharan African countries.

The Bushman in the account reacted with skepticism. Most of them claimed that they would not believe the rumors unless he had told the Bushman the news himself. Moreover when they found out which he bought, their reaction was to ridicule him for the size and lack of meat or fat on the animal. They teased him in his face for the apparently horrible choice he had made. I believe that the intent of their reaction must be understood in context of their culture. For the Bushman, the cultural goal they wanted to accomplish was to humble Lee with a joke. It revealed that the culture used jokes and teasing as a tactic to keep people from thinking themselves greater than they are so that there would be a sense of equality amongst their group. What this case study reveals is that ethnography strengths lie in its ability to document and organize practices of a given culture. It’s weakness is placing these practices in the context they deserve. The practices when documented as an observer are not complete unless the anthropologist is in the culture directly. Had Lee integrated himself and interacted with them more closely he would have not been offended and had a more holistic understanding of the Bushman.

The main thesis of the article is that the paleo diets that are trying to restrict certain foods on the evidence of evolution may be faulty based on new understandings of evolutionary processes. The evidence he argues that supports this is that we have already adapted. He uses a study to show that the time it takes for humans to adapt is much faster than claimed by those who argue for paleo diets. This research backing this evidence reveals that the genes that allow for the digestion of milk may have started approximately 7000 years earlier than first understood. This would indicate that although only in a few people, humans adapted to their new source of food depending on the area they lived. Another study showed that the genes that fight against obesity have mutated in DNA as recently as in the last few hundred years. This would be connected to new starches from farming that were implemented into the diets of humans. This evidence leads the author to believe that “dietary diversity, not exclusion, is the key.”

 *(“Paleo Diet Only Makes Sense If You Don’t Understand Human Evolution”. 2015, June 23.TheConversation.http://www.alternet.org/personal-health/paleo-diet-only-makes-sense-if-you-dont-understand-human-evolution)*