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New Years

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New Years

Holiday Customs

Informant:

Melake Bililgne is a 23-year-old student here at Utah State University. Melake was born in Ethiopia and moved to America at the young age of two. He has spent most of his life in Logan, Utah. He is extremely close with his family and enjoys spending time with them during various holidays. During his free time, you will find Melake with his friends, partying, and getting to know new people. He values the relationships he has with his friends and family members. You can sense the significance they have within his everyday life by the way he speaks about his love for people and community.

Context:

I interviewed Melake in Old Main on the Utah State University campus. During the interview there were several people walking by either talking on their phone, rushing to class, or talking with friends. Because of this, you could tell that Melake felt more comfortable and less formal in the way he spoke and felt during the interview. Melake recently visited his home town in Ethiopia and enjoyed learning the significance of the many holiday customs he grew up practicing here in the states.

Text:

So we have like several holidays throughout the year. [brief pause] um but a lot of what we do to celebrate is like um. For right now I'll just talk about the holiday that my family and I just celebrated—New Years. New Years is a Fall holiday in Ethiopia...So, like, It's nothing like crazy special but you know you just like have family over uh or you like wear like Ethiopian garb which is typically like [brief pause] and it's kind of like this traditional like wear where you—it's very um patterned clothing. It's very like... if you look it up it's like very distinct and just doesn't look like most clothing, you know? And so typically people wear their like their traditional clothing and then you go to like a family members house, right? [long pause—I asked him if there was any distinction between male and female garb to coax the conversation]. Yeah, it's basically like the same thing in the sense of like the design and how it looks and like everything [voice raises]. But there are like dresses for like women and then there is like um like the button up shirt. There is like a button up version or even like a short sleeve v-neck type of

thing. And it usually has like cross patterns [mumbles] and like you know... religious patterns like crosses and things like that. A lot of the clothing patterns have religious meaning. And, yeah, you wear that and you typically go to like a family member's home [uncomfortable and quiet 10 second pause] [and...uh...what is it?] and it's just like a small gathering usually there is like a traditional thing that we do. It's like a coffee area, right? [I asked him what the coffee area consisted of for further clarification]. It's just like basically a lot of small dishes set out on the coffee area which is usually a small and short table. The table is like smaller than a coffee table and you sit on the floor to enjoy your coffee. And like within the area there is like this [uh...um...] grass that is usually found in Ethiopia. People put this grass in their house and it's literally like a living grass and they like... throw it in their house. It's just this very long grass and I don't know why we do that it's just kind of like to make the house like inviting and calm. To put this grass in our homes is just like a very old tradition. So like my mom only puts the grass in our home when we are celebrating New Year's, birthdays, and other cultural holidays. Yeah so you do that and then there is like the women that do like the coffee thing. So they technically like, [um...] use this incense that they um put near the coffee area. It's like very strong and creates a very unique aroma. It's very distinct. I have never really smelt it outside of an Ethiopian home. [10 second pause. I asked him what kinds of foods they eat during this celebration to continue the conversation]. So like food... The thing about Ethiopian food is that whenever you have a large amount of people at your home you are always gonna kinda cook the same thing. So like whether it's a holiday or not, you'll have essentially a lot of the same food... Having similar types of food throughout the year is basically because Ethiopian diets are often simple and revolve around a lot of the same types of spices, fruits, vegetables, meats, and grains. The thing that does change when we cook for large amounts of people is how we prepare

the food and present the food. Like on New Year's you'll like go get a lamb like you'll go get a lamb. [ugh...] Like in Ethiopia it's very easy. There are a lot of vendors on the streets that sell lambs and all sorts of meats. So for the holidays, the family will go out and get a lamb and then they [um...uh...] I think typically they have the meat cut somewhere else like they get it [uh...] sheered and everything for the most part somewhere else. When you are celebrating New Year's at your home it is typically just sheered and everything else is still on it. [nods his head in reassurance]. And, yeah, so they have that and um beef. Yeah so typically with the lamb there is a certain like way to cook it. With the beef, they sometimes do similar things except it's typically [uh...well...] you eat it raw. [nods his head in reassurance]. You don't always eat beef raw but during the holidays or other special events it is common to eat it raw. We'll just have this rack [gestures with his hands] with beef like just hanging somewhere in the house typically by the kitchen and then it's being like cut and people like cut it and put it on their plates. Ethiopian cultures believe that eating raw beef is strengthening and empowering. Not only in a metaphorical sense but like Ethiopians straight up believe that by eating raw beef it will give you power. I think it's gross so I've never really eaten beef raw like that but then there is this other dish that is like [uh...] the same where like you're eating it raw but it's like mixed in with all different types of spices and butter and like all this stuff. And that is like way good it's like insane. Like it's way good. Food is typically on the spicier side. It doesn't matter if you're a baby or if you don't like spice, everyone just eats what is made. It's like you develop a tolerance for spice. Basically, a lot of what we do, regardless of the time of year, is revolved around church. Like every holiday and everything you do has a religious aspect to it. So for like New Years we'll go to church and then later gather for a party. The party side of New Years is like well we have music like blasting all day [shows significance with widened eyes]. There is like

certain music you play while everyone is eating like gospel music and then once everyone is done the music becomes more upbeat to encourage dancing. Once the dancing starts people start to drink this like [uh...um...] it's like a special wine. It's like a honey and bark fermented wine. It's very distinct, sweet, and way good. You drink it out of a special cup that kind of looks like a science beaker.

Texture:

When interviewing Melake I could sense a feeling of pride. Usually, Melake is very humorous and lives life with little significance. During our interview I could tell that his demeanor had shifted, displaying reverence, pride, and passion. Despite the environment of the hallway in which we decided to do our interview, Melake paid attention to the details that are encompassed within his family's New Year's holiday traditions.

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