

Preface

BACKGROUND

Anthropology is little without powerful portrayals of peoples and cultures in diverse parts of the world. For beginning students, the wonder of learning about different ways of life can be thrilling and provocative. The range of human diversity both stretches our envelope of understanding and prods us to reconsider our own beliefs and practices. Over the years, a number of short books have filled this role in anthropology by exposing students to potent examples of cultural variety. Often, these works take the form of an ethnographic case study—a book-length description of a group of people who live in a foreign country or in underappreciated circumstances closer to home. For teaching purposes, these condensed ethnographies form useful complements and counterpoints to the textbooks commonly used in anthropology courses, which tend to be large in scope but less nuanced in portraying individuals and cultural contexts. By contrast, this is just what a short ethnography is designed to do. But even short ethnographies can be densely detailed. This occurs in part because authors want to impart as much information as possible—and because an anthropologist’s scholarly reputation can suffer if his or her work does not provide as many details as possible.

In the present book, I consider myself fortunate to be able to present a more personally shaped narrative. First, I have already had the opportunity to provide a scholarly foundation by writing a number of academic books and articles about the Gebusi and their broader culture area of Melanesia, which lies north and northeast of Australia in the Pacific Ocean. Second, I have accumulated many experiences and documented many Gebusi stories that have not been otherwise published. Finally, I am fortunate that the Gebusi are—as I hope you will agree—an amazing, intriguing, fascinating, difficult, and wonderful people. So I feel privileged to write a book designed to portray important and sometimes dramatic aspects of Gebusi lives as well as of my own experiences while living among them.

Over time, I have come to believe that Gebusi experiences and my own observations provide insight into issues addressed in undergraduate anthropology courses. Beyond general topics such as subsistence, kinship, economics, politics, religion, and art, these include the aims and methods of anthropological fieldwork, the personal challenges and moral dilemmas of conducting ethnography, and the ways in which local people become enmeshed with wider influences and

larger regions. Finally, because my experiences with the Gebusi have spanned a sizable arc of social and cultural transformation—from their remote isolation in the early 1980s to their active engagement with national and global lifestyles in the late 1990s to the resurgence of many traditional cultural practices in 2008—their development illustrates key issues in the study of social and cultural change.

This book has grown up with me, both personally and professionally. It was a pleasure for me to write it, and now it is a pleasure for me to revise and update it based on surprising new experiences with the Gebusi in the winter of 2008. I hope you will find the account enjoyable as well as informative, and in the best of worlds, both of these at once.

For this second edition, every chapter and the conclusion have been edited and updated. This includes the pruning of selected details, supplying broader context and comparative perspective, and linking the account as a whole through three rather than two periods of field experience: 1980–82, 1998, and 2008. Chapters 11 and 12 of the first edition are now condensed into Chapter 11. Chapter 12 in the present edition supplies information concerning the Gebusi in 2008. The “Farewell” at the end retains its original character but has been amended with artistic license to include features of my departure in 2008 as well as in 1998. The notes and references of the work are now available on Web pages as described below rather than being printed in the book itself. Study questions for each of the book’s chapters and its introduction and conclusion are now included at the end of the book.

Personal names used in the book are sometimes actual names and sometimes pseudonyms. Actual names are used for persons who have given their permission and for persons whose depiction in the text is nonproblematic and/or if they have been deceased for a number of years. This reflects the fact that the Gebusi generally are pleased to have their real identities represented to the larger world. Pseudonyms have been used in cases in which persons are still alive and the information could be perceived or interpreted as embarrassing, immoral, criminal, or otherwise unflattering.

Quotations in the main text that have been taken from field notes and from Gebusi have been edited to make them more direct and succinct. I have attempted to retain the spirit and meaning of original remarks. My occasional use of quoted paraphrase is designed to make the material more understandable to a broad audience.

KEY FEATURES

This book and its associated Web sites includes a name list, study questions, reference materials, a wide range of photographs, and music sound clips for use by students and instructors.

List of Persons

An alphabetical list of persons is supplied in the endmatter for those who wish to check or remind themselves of the identity of an individual named in the book.

Study Questions

Study questions for each of the book's sections are included at the back of the book. Students and instructors can consult these questions for thematic issues of interest and for purposes of studying or configuring course assignments.

Notes and References

The book's notes and references are now posted in updated format on the Web; to access them, google the author's name and look at my Web site under "Gebusi research." A second, official copy of these materials should also be available on the McGraw-Hill "Gebusi Information Center" Web site; click on "student edition" and choose "notes" or "references" under "Choose one . . ." Taken together, the endnotes and their references can guide students and teachers who wish to use this book for developing paper topics, completing course assignments, conducting independent investigations, or to satisfy the reader's curiosity regarding practices or beliefs described in the main text. Works cited in the endnotes are listed with citations in the references, which are Web-posted as described above.

Web Site Image Library

Approximately 350 photographs of the Gebusi are Web-posted in thumbnail and in enlarged format, along with captions and supplemental information. To access these, google the Gebusi Information Center, click on "student edition" and then choose one of the book's chapters. Photos of Gebusi and the author in 2008 are posted on the author's individual Web site and on the McGraw-Hill Web site for Chapter 12. Photos and descriptive information allow readers to take a visual journey through the lives and practices of Gebusi at different time periods. The corpus of Gebusi photos and descriptions is indexed by topic on the McGraw-Hill Web site.

Sound Clips

Selected sound clips of Gebusi music, including string band singing in 2008, can be found under "Gebusi Research" on the author's home page (google "Bruce Knauft").

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is hard to express the personal and professional debt that I feel toward my many Gebusi friends and acquaintances. Deepest thanks go to Sayu, Didiga, Yuway, Keda, Yamdaw, Abi, and Father Aloï. I gratefully acknowledge help in 1980–82, 1998, and 2008 from officials and staff at Nomad, Kiunga, and the Catholic Church in both of these locations.

As anthropologists are aware, field research, especially in remote locations, is difficult if not impossible to complete without financial assistance from funding and granting agencies. I gratefully acknowledge funding for my field research

among the Gebusi from the U.S. National Science Foundation, the U.S. National Institutes of Mental Health, the Rackham Graduate School at the University of Michigan, the U.S. Department of Education, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, and Emory University.

Thanks go to numerous persons who have read and commented on various drafts of this book. For this second edition, special thanks go to McGraw-Hill editorial consultant Phil Butcher and to five anonymous reviewers, who supplied valuable feedback on the chapters of the first edition. A special thanks goes to ICIS Program Associate Kathryn Bennett, who helped edit and proof the final manuscript. Small portions of this book overlap in substance with another of my books, *Exchanging the Past*, published by the University of Chicago Press in 2002.

I deeply thank Eileen Knauff for the ethnographic information she collected with Gebusi women during 1980–82 and for her photos of Gebusi during this same period, as credited in the book's text and Web pages. I owe a special debt to my undergraduate and graduate students at Emory University. They have given me the courage not simply to teach anthropology from the heart but to go back to the field and learn it all over again.

This book is dedicated to my Gebusi friends. I care about them deeply!