

Anthropology

Even without much economic development or physical coercion, people in out-of-the-way places develop their own ways of being or becoming modern. How and why does this occur? What new forms of inequality does it produce? Twenty years ago, the Gebusi of the lowland Papua New Guinea rainforest had virulent sorcery beliefs, an elaborate spiritual cosmology, and one of the highest homicide rates in the world. But by 1998, the Gebusi spirit world was largely defunct, vengeance was largely disavowed, and community members were willing subordinates in schools, markets, and Christian churches run by nationals from other parts of the country.

In this book, Bruce Knaft details Gebusi engagement with modern institutions and shows what their experience tells us about the process of becoming subaltern subjects in a contemporary frame of cultural and political reference. In the process, he reveals dynamics of "recessive agency" and analyzes their relation to new forms of exchange, spiritual expression, and public cultural performance. Powerfully written and ethnographically nuanced, *Exchanging the Past* combines trenchant theoretical analysis with a dramatic story of social and cultural change.

Bruce M. Knaft is Samuel C. Dobbs Professor of Anthropology at Emory University. He is the author of four previous books, most recently *Genealogies for the Present in Cultural Anthropology and From Primitive to Postcolonial in Melanesia and Anthropology*. His edited volume *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies* is currently in press.

Cover photo: Bruce M. Knaft

"This gracefully written book pulses with the energy of locally modern lives in contemporary Melanesia, and at every step its account rings true. It is quite simply the best discussion of what we might call post-village life that we have in the Melanesian literature."

Joel Robbins,
University of California, San Diego

"*Exchanging the Past* is an ethnographically rich and theoretically subtle discussion of what it means to be 'locally modern' in contemporary Papua New Guinea. Knaft illustrates, in prose both clear and compelling, how the cultural sentiments and social patterns of modernity can both transform and diversify the world."

Frederick Errington, Trinity College

"A remarkable story of cultural transformation, *Exchanging the Past* is a moving, smart, and accessible account of the social contradictions and personal compromises that multiply as the resources of an out-of-the-way place belie people's expectations of a wider world."

Robert Foster, University of Rochester

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Exchanging The Past

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