

The Gebusi

*Lives Transformed
in a Rainforest World*

FOURTH EDITION

BRUCE KNAUFT

Emory University



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To the Gebusi

Past, Present, Future

About the Author

Bruce Knauft is Samuel C. Dobbs Professor at Emory University in Atlanta. He has published numerous journal articles and two substantial monographs about the Gebusi of Papua New Guinea: *Good Company and Violence* (U California Press, 1985) and *Exchanging the Past* (U Chicago Press, 2002). Dr. Knauft is a widely known scholar of Melanesia, including his books *From Primitive to Post-colonial in Melanesia and Anthropology* (U Michigan Press, 1998) and *South Coast New Guinea Cultures* (Cambridge U Press, 1993). He has also written extensively about contemporary directions in cultural anthropology, including his books *Genealogies for the Present in Cultural Anthropology* (Routledge, 1996), and *Critically Modern* (edited, Indiana U Press, 2002).

During the past decade, Professor Knauft has directed projects that relate to applied and engaged anthropology in West Africa, East Africa, Inner Asia, South Asia, and the Himalayas. He has mentored students who have conducted fieldwork in diverse world areas and who have become established professionals in their own right. He enjoys teaching undergraduates and regularly teaches Introduction to Cultural Anthropology. The present book was written especially with undergraduates and a larger general audience in mind. Professor Knauft has remained keenly interested in the Gebusi people of Papua New Guinea since his first fieldwork among them in the 1980s, and he anticipates returning to work with them yet again.

Professor Knauft's CV, selected papers, photos, online teaching modules, videos of him with Gebusi, and music links are available on his website at www.bruceknauft.com.

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Preface

BACKGROUND

Anthropology is little without powerful portrayals of diverse peoples and their cultures; for beginning students as well as advanced professionals, learning about different ways of life can be both thrilling and provocative. We are challenged to push our envelope of understanding—and to reconsider our own beliefs and practices. Over the years, a number of short books have exposed students to the richness of cultural diversity as lived experience. These typically take the form of short ethnographies—book-length descriptions of the people and culture considered. The present book follows this pattern but attempts to be distinctive in two connected ways. First, I have written this book without the formality and jargon of technical scholarship. This is not to dismiss scholarly writing. But having published some 1,500 pages of academic description and theoretical analysis concerning the Gebusi and related peoples in Melanesia (see “About the Author”), I can take the liberty here to write more concisely, personally, and lyrically for a larger and more general audience. While *The Gebusi* is based on what I think is detailed and rigorous scholarship, it tries to portray Gebusi and my experience with them in evocative and engaging ways.

Second, as a teacher of undergraduates, I have enjoyed writing this book to dovetail with topics and issues covered in cultural anthropology courses and textbooks. This aspect of *The Gebusi* was important to me from the start but has evolved further in the book’s present edition.

FOR INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS

This Fourth Edition of *The Gebusi* has been completely revised and redesigned in a highly readable format. No major details from previous editions have been omitted, but tightening and further clarifying the book's contents have made way for significantly updated material based on new fieldwork with Gebusi in 2013.

Update sections now follow chapters 2–10 in Parts One and Two, bringing the chapter stories fully up to date. Major new material from fieldwork in 2013 as well as 2008 is brought together and discussed in Part Three. The Update sections allow the book to be read as a story of cultural change topic by topic and chapter by chapter, while the book retains its overall structure of sequential change portrayed over three different periods of time.

Revised and updated “Broader Connections” bullet points at the end of each chapter link the chapter content to anthropological concepts, which appear in boldface. All of these sections include updated material based on fieldwork in 2013. For ease of reference, each chapter's Broader Connections themes are listed under the chapter title in the book's Table of Contents. And an alphabetized index of the highlighted Broader Connections terms, with their page references, is included on my website, per below.

A striking 8-page insert of color photos of Gebusi, in addition to black and white photos in every chapter, showcase people and topics. Together with the book's cover, a rich array of 61 photos link directly to portrayals of Gebusi in the text.

A List of Persons, which indicates what has happened over time to many individuals mentioned in the book, is included prior to the index.

Online Features

- Eight video modules that were made in large part during on-site fieldwork with Gebusi in 2013 illustrate updated topics and link them to larger issues in anthropology. These segments are available for the following topics at www.bruceknauft.com → *Gebusi* → *Gebusi video modules online*:
 - Entering the field
 - Studying Culture
 - Language
 - Subsistence Livelihood
 - Social Organization and Kinship
 - Gender

- Sexuality
- Development and Underdevelopment

Additional Gebusi online modules may become available in due course; check the above website for updates.

- A narrated photo presentation summarizes Gebusi and their changes through 2008 [68 minutes]. This can be used in one longer class or divided into two or three segments (corresponding to the parts of the book) for use in shorter class periods. See *www.bruceknauft.com* → *Gebusi* → *Gebusi narrated flash presentation*.
- A large photo gallery of fieldwork with Gebusi has been organized and categorized by chapter of the book. These photos and captions with additional information are available at *www.bruceknauft.com* → *Gebusi* → *Photo gallery of Gebusi, chapter-by-chapter*.
- Gebusi music clips—including traditional singing and contemporary string band music—are available at *www.bruceknauft.com* → *Gebusi* → *Gebusi popular music, church music, and preaching (2008)*.
- Probing more deeply, chapter-by-chapter Thought questions are available at *www.bruceknauft.com* → *Gebusi* → *Thought questions*.
- Updated Notes and References are available at *www.bruceknauft.com* → *Gebusi* → *Notes for The Gebusi 4/E* and *References for The Gebusi 4/E*.
- A list of the bolded anthropological terms that appear in the “Broader Connections” sections of the book’s text is indexed with each entry’s book page referenced at *www.bruceknauft.com* → *Gebusi* → *Broader Connections highlighted terms Index for The Gebusi 4/E*.
- Instructor’s resource materials are obtainable online via a password from Waveland Press. They include thirty objective quiz questions concerning *The Gebusi 4/E*, and objective ten-question quizzes for each of the author’s eight Gebusi video teaching modules.

In all, this Fourth Edition of *The Gebusi* is a significantly revised, enhanced, reformatted, and updated book, and is enriched by a host of exciting new teaching aids and online resources for instructors and students.

THE GEBUSI

Who are the Gebusi? When I first lived among them, they were a small ethnic group or “tribe” of some 450 forager-horticulturalists living in longhouses in the deep interior rainforest of Papua New Guinea, which is

located just north of Australia in the South Pacific. At that time, Gebusi life was rife with dramatic practices of ritual and body art, sorcery and divination, feasting and camaraderie, violence, and alternative sex practices. When I studied with the Gebusi again in the late 1990s, they had largely transformed. They were then a Christian people of about 615 who frequented the local market, attended government development meetings, played in the regional sports league, attended the local church, and whose children attended the local government school. In the mix, they had become engaged with other ethnic groups in a regional process of nation-building, and they had given up many of their previous beliefs and practices. In 2008 and yet more recently in 2013, Gebusi, now approximately 1,000 people, have weathered a collapse of the local cash economy. Government and its services have been withdrawn, and the airstrip has been closed. In the bargain, Gebusi have rediscovered and rejuvenated much of their previous culture. Now, however, ExxonMobil, the world's largest energy company, is contemplating building a multibillion-dollar pipeline for liquefied natural gas that may cross part of Gebusi territory.

In all, our knowledge of the Gebusi spans a great arc of social and cultural transformation—from remote isolation to active engagement with national and global lifestyles, to resurgence of many previous cultural practices in a new key, and now to the possibility that one of the most expensive energy projects in the world will intrude on their lives. In the process, Gebusi vividly illustrate important features of social change, marginalization, globalization, and inequity—as well as topical issues of subsistence, kinship and marriage, politics, religion, gender and sexuality, ethnicity and nationalism, expressive and public culture, and applied or engaged anthropology. Amid and across these issues and topics run indigenous Gebusi orientations and their cultural elaboration over time.

Most importantly, I think, Gebusi are amazing people—funny, funky, high spirited, and at turns both relaxed and intense. I hope you will agree that they are as wonderful as they are different from a Western perspective. I am privileged to be able to work with Gebusi, many of whom have become deep friends for many years. And I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to convey vital aspects of their lives as well as parts of my own when working among them.

Personal names used in the text are in most cases actual names, used with permission, and in a few cases pseudonyms, including when a depiction is potentially unflattering or embarrassing in a modern context and the person is still alive. Quotations taken from my Gebusi fieldnotes have been lightly edited from the original to make them clearer or more compact.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is hard to express the personal and professional debt that I feel toward my Gebusi friends and acquaintances. Deepest thanks go to Sayu, Didiga, Mus, Halawa, Keda, Mosomiay, Kilasui, Yamdaw, Uwok, and Abi. I gratefully acknowledge help from officials and staff formerly at Nomad, officials at Kiunga, and clergy of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Papua New Guinea's Western Province. Especially in remote regions, field research is difficult if not impossible without financial assistance from funding agencies. I gratefully acknowledge support for my work among Gebusi from the US National Science Foundation, the US National Institutes of Mental Health, the US Department of Education, the Rackham Graduate School at the University of Michigan, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, and Emory University.

Thanks go to numerous persons who have read and commented on various drafts and editions of this book, especially, at present, wonderful editors Tom Curtin and Jeni Ogilvie at Waveland. I am grateful to Elena Lesley for help with proofreading and to Kate Bennett for conceptualizing the photo layouts with me, as well as detailed editing of the book's previous edition. Stuart Kirsch, Laurence Goldman, and a range of other colleagues have alternatively given me general insights and specific clarifications that have informed my work, though they bear no responsibility for the book's shortcomings.

Photo credits are listed on the book's copyright page. I give heartfelt thanks to Eileen Knauff for permission to print a range of her photos of Gebusi from 1980–82, at which time taking quality photographs and maintaining film were difficult and challenging in a tropical rainforest environment. To Latham Wood goes credit and thanks for the cover photo that graces this book as well as several other of its photos. I was most fortunate that Latham was able to take time from his other obligations to go with me to the field in 2013, during which time he was a wonderful presence and much appreciated by Gebusi.

I owe a special debt to my 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 the spirit embodied by my friend Yuway (c. 1961–2009), to Sayu Silap and Didiga Imba, and to the past, present, and future of all the Gebusi.

