

Thought Questions for

The Gebusi, Fourth Edition

Introduction: In Search of Surprise

- A. In what ways is being surprised a good or a necessary feature of being a social and cultural anthropologist?
- B. During what three time periods did the author study with the Gebusi? What general patterns of social change are described across these time periods?
- C. What does the author say about the appreciation of cultural diversity and the critical exposure of human inequality and domination? What does he assert about the relationship between these aspects of culture in anthropology? In thinking about your own culture, do you agree or disagree with his point of view, and why?

FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS:

- A. What are the theoretical and historical underpinnings of anthropology's "appreciation of cultural diversity" and its "critique of inequality"? Arguably, the former was paramount in anthropology's earlier history—and continues to distinguish anthropology from other social sciences—while the latter has become increasingly important since the 1960s. Why is this so?
- B. What ways can be found, analytically, theoretically, and ethnographically, to cross-cut, mediate, or "articulate" the strains of cultural appreciation and critical exposure that are characterized as discrete or complementary points of view in this chapter?
- C. How can the "surprise" of contemporary situations and familiar cultures be more effectively included and communicated in anthropology to keep the field both up to date and of value and interest to students?

Chapter 1: Friends in the Forest

- A. How did the author come in contact with the Gebusi? How were he and his wife treated at first? In what ways was it challenging for them to learn the Gebusi language?
- B. How were the lives of Gebusi shaped by the neighboring Bedamini people, on the one hand, and by the intervention of Australian colonial officers, on the other?
- C. What is *kogwayay*? What does this term reflect about Gebusi culture, and why is this significant?
- D. What important aspects of Gebusi culture and of Gebusi gender relations were downplayed or covered up by emphasis on *kogwayay*? What do these patterns reveal about culture in general?

FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS:

- A. What is the relationship between reciprocity and exchange among the Gebusi and between them and the author himself? Are these the same? Why or why not? Based on other ethnographies you have read, what similarities and differences are there both between patterns of social reciprocity in societies AND between members of these societies and the anthropologists who have studied them?
- B. What is the rhetorical or pedagogical status of anthropological accounts of personal “entry” into the field? What to these accounts reveal about the status of the ethnographer as an asserted “eye-witness” and about the received tropes of romantic encounter in ethnographic fieldwork? How could accounts of fieldwork “entry” be made analytically and theoretically salient for advanced students and academics as well as for beginning students?
- C. What notion and understanding of “culture” informs the author’s analysis? Critiques of the classic anthropological notion of “culture” (for instance, as propounded by Clifford Geertz and others) include objections that such attributions of “culture” are (a) too systemic or systematic, (b) too objectivist, (c) not fully shared among the members of the culture, and (d) too fixed or bounded in space and place by anthropological attribution. To what degree do these objections also pertain, or not, to the author’s implicit notion of Gebusi “culture”? In what ways would a different conceptualization of culture alter, improve—or compromise—the author’s account?

Chapter 2: Rhythms of Survival

- A. Describe the connection between sharing and the making of social relationships in Gebusi society. Give specific examples of Gebusi gift giving. In what ways were the resulting relationships similar to or different from those in your own society?
- B. What do Gebusi eat? How do they make their houses? Across the spectrum of human subsistence patterns, what type of subsistence and of residential organization do Gebusi exhibit most strongly?
- C. How would you describe the physical environment and health situation of the Gebusi? In what ways were conditions of environment and health experienced similarly or differently by Gebusi, on the one hand, and by the author, on the other?
- D. In what way are Gebusi “in-betweeners,” and what does this reveal about the use of concepts in social and cultural anthropology?

FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS:

- A. What are the benefits and difficulties of isolating and categorizing “subsistence” or “livelihood” as an anthropological category of analysis as opposed to a more ramified

analysis of social relations?

- B. What implications and comparative significance does the “mixed” nature of Gebusi subsistence—horticulture with some foraging, sedentism with some nomadism, and so on—have for the concepts and analysis of material cultural evolution and types of human society in a broader sense?
- C. From a demographic perspective, why do you think Gebusi were not more numerous? If you were a fieldworker, either at the time or retrospectively, how would you begin to empirically investigate which of the following was most important in explaining Gebusi’s low population density: (a) human predation (e.g., from the Bedamini), (b) disease risk factors (exposure to malaria in the deep forest), (c) protein insufficiency?
- D. What further information would you like to know about Gebusi subsistence regimes, and what significance would such information potentially have in comparative terms?

Chapter 3: Lives of Death

- A. Describe key features of Dugawe’s death, his funeral, and the investigation that resulted. Reflect on how you might have reacted to these events.
- B. Summarize key features of Gebusi sorcery beliefs and practices. Describe how beliefs and practices concerning sorcery affect Gebusi responses to death.
- C. In what ways did events concerning the death of Dugawe and the fate of Sialim reflect general features of Gebusi culture? In what ways were these events distinctive or even unique?
- D. What does the author say about the experience of fieldwork in relation to establishing ethnographic facts and making generalizations?

FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS:

- A. As a prospective ethnographer, what further questions would you ask about the life stories and events surrounding, and preceding, Dugawe’s suicide? How would you go about answering these?
- B. How big a role do you think Bruce’s own presence had in forestalling Gebusi violence against Sialim? More generally, what impact do you think his presence had—or didn’t have—in shaping the unfolding of events?
- C. With benefit of hindsight, do you think Bruce’s ethics of fieldwork practice were sound in his approach to “observing” and to some extent “participating” in Gebusi sorcery inquests? What changes if any would you have made? And what difference would these have made in the progress—or limitation—of the remainder of his fieldwork?
- D. Examine the account of another complex or interesting “ethnographic story” in another book. Based on the “chaos of discovery and interpretation” as described in this chapter, how would you rethink or reevaluate the ethnographic account you have chosen for consideration?

Chapter 4: Getting Along with Kin and Killers

- A. Describe Gebusi kin groups, the role of clans and lineages, and the composition of Gebusi settlements.
- B. What types of marriage are characteristic of Gebusi, and how do they relate to Gebusi patterns of kinship, exchange, and reciprocity? What structural tensions or fault lines result from marriages that are “romantic” in nature and not reciprocated? What connections are there between Gebusi sorcery accusations and their patterns of marriage and social organization?
- C. Describe the pattern and degree of violence and homicide among Gebusi as described in this chapter. How did the Gebusi rate of killing compare with that in other societies and cultures? Does an understanding of Gebusi violence suggest anything about the causes and conditions of violence elsewhere?
- D. For Gebusi and more generally, what is the value of social organization and kinship for understanding problems and tensions that societies face? How does the study of social organization help uncover the variable relationship between what people say or believe and what they actually do?
- E. According to the author, what place is there in anthropology for structural or statistical depictions of social behavior? What is the proper relationship between these depictions and the more nuanced and humanized description of specific events and people?

FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS:

- A. Do the various aspects of the author’s analysis of Gebusi social organization, and its relation to their violence, make sense to you? What “leaps of fact or inference” do you think the author makes? For instance, are the details of Bedamini-perpetrated violence adequately considered? Does the disjunction between “direct reciprocity in marriage” and the de facto acceptance of nonreciprocal marriage make sense to you? (See Knauft, *Good Company and Violence*, U California Press, 1985, for more details).
- B. How and why do you think Gebusi contrast to the patterns of social organization—and collective warfare—attributed to many tribal peoples, including those described for parts of the New Guinea Highlands?
- C. Do you think the study of social organization and kinship in relation to violence is also applicable to more complex society environments—contemporary towns and cities—or more so mostly in “tribal” societies such as Gebusi? In what ways could our understanding of social organization and kinship be *improved* to make it more germane to understanding contemporary conflict and violence patterns more generally?
- D. In what ways is the account of social conflict or violence in other anthropological or ethnographic accounts—including concerning more recent or widespread social problems—linked or linkable to patterns of social organization in relation to local or regional political economy? More generally, in what ways is the kind of analysis proposed in this chapter

useful, or not, for the study of other and potentially broader human conflicts and problems?

Chapter 5: Spirits, Sex, and Celebration

- A. According to the author, what are some of the important reasons why sexual culture is a valid and significant topic of study for anthropologists? What does the author's experience reveal about the potential benefits—and risks—of investigating sexual beliefs and practices in another culture?
- B. Describe the shifting sexual practices of Gebusi males from early adolescence to middle age as described for 1980–82. What role do spiritual beliefs play in influencing Gebusi males' sexual orientations and practices?
- C. Do you think Gebusi men are in fact more strongly attracted sexually to other men, or to women? What evidence could you use to support your claim either way?
- D. Describe the attitude and orientation of Gebusi women concerning: (a) their own heterosexual relations with men, (b) men's sexual relations with each other, (c) men's ritual representation of female sexuality and of spirit women, and (d) the potential for sexual relations between Gebusi women themselves.
- E. In what ways are Gebusi sexually tolerant? In what ways are they restrictive or conservative? Do women enjoy the same degree of sexual toleration or restriction as men? Why or why not, and under what circumstances?
- F. What do Gebusi illustrate about the nature of human gender and sexuality generally?

FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS:

- A. In what ways does the sexual diversity of Gebusi reaffirm, or undercut, the notion of Gilbert Herdt and others that "Third Sex" and "Third Gender" categories are common if not typical across human societal and cultural variation? In what ways does nominating a sexual pattern as a "third" type—or even as "homosexual"—undermine the *multiplicity* of sexual orientations and behaviors?
- B. In their book, *Taboo*, Kulick and Willson explore the relevance of the sexual subject position of the anthropologist. If the author of *The Gebusi* had been gay, or bisexual, what difference would this have made, or not (a) in chapter 5, and (b) in the remainder of the book, concerning other topics
- C. In what ways could the author have extended or further pursued the investigation of Gebusi sexuality and gender; what further questions remain unasked or unanswered? And what theoretical formulation/s—queer theory, third-wave feminism, standpoint theory, postmodern sexuality, or other—would best inflect this investigation? As it is, the author's own theoretical assumptions in examining sexuality are largely implicit or unexpressed. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this—and what are the alternatives?

Chapter 6: Ultimate Splendor

- A. Summarize the basic sequence of Gebusi initiation activities—what comes first and what comes next. Describe the ways that Gebusi from different settlements are thereby brought together.
- B. The author states that Gebusi initiations combine (a) spirituality, (b) sexuality, (c) material gifts and exchanges, (d) kinship, (e) friendship, and (f) gender. Identify a key example of each of these features in the Gebusi initiation, and describe its connection to the other features.
- C. What do you think the experience would be like to be initiated as a young Gebusi man? Which parts of this process do you think would be most enjoyable, and which most difficult?
- D. What prevented the climactic celebrations of the Gebusi initiation as described from going forward smoothly? How did Gebusi react to this problem—and what did their reaction reveal about Gebusi culture?
- E. What special role did women play at the final conclusion of the initiation festivities—and what was significant about their concluding roles? In what way did this “final act” of the initiation change your view of the entire event—or not?

FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS:

- A. What aspects of ritual exchange, social relations, and cosmological and/or gendered/sexual experience would you like to know more about concerning Gebusi ritual initiation? How would you be able to investigate these? Do you agree with the author’s conclusion about the relative role and significance of young men and young women in the initiation? What more could have been investigated in this regard?
- B. Since 1981, many accounts of ritual transition in contemporary or altered context have been published, including for Africa and other world areas, that include more modern social, political, economic, and cultural influences. In what ways could these have been used to broaden or expand the author’s account of Gebusi initiation even in 1981?
- C. Compare this chapter with Edward Schieffelin’s book, *The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers*. What are the strengths and limitations, respectively, of each account—and what makes them so?

Chapter 7: Time for Change: Yuway’s Sacred Decision

- A. Describe how changes in anthropology—and changes in the author’s own circumstances and disposition—affected his expectations and initial experiences among the Gebusi in 1998.
- B. What general features, according to the author, are associated with being or becoming “modern”? Which specific new activities and institutions were associated with becoming modern for the people of Gasumi Corners in 1998?
- C. How did Gebusi notions and experiences of time change between 1980 and 1998? What examples

does the author provide to illustrate these changes? Why are changes in Gebusi notions of time significant?

D. What factors help account for the fact that Gebusi so willingly accepted modernizing influences between 1982 and 1998? How much of this acceptance was based in factors of culture or belief rather than in actual economic improvement?

E. By what means had Gebusi become Christian by 1998? What was the respective role of (a) white missionaries, (b) Papua New Guineans from other parts of the country, (c) cultural beliefs and orientations to modernity, (d) the prospect or lure of material rewards, and (e) the decisions and actions of Gebusi themselves?

F. Why did Yuway choose to become a member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA)? What does his choice reveal about local perceptions of different Christian churches, and about the extent of Gebusi religious freedom?

G. What has been the relationship between Christianity and sorcery violence among Gebusi over time? In what ways is the impact of Christianity upon Gebusi sorcery evident in (a) the life story of Doliay—the man who beheaded a Gebusi as a sorcerer in 1988, and (b) the death and funeral of Uwano in 1998?

H. The author suggests that Christianity among Gebusi in 1998 was linked with politics, government, and desires to be or become modern. What evidence is used to support this claim?

I. What does the author assess as the cost and the benefit of Christianity among Gebusi relative to their traditional spiritual beliefs and practices? What is your own opinion, and why?

FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS:

- A. What literary or rhetorical tropes of “reentry” does the author use to frame this chapter? What kinds of romanticism (or critical objectivism) are deployed, and to what effect?
- B. Authors such as Reinhart Koselleck (for instance, in his book *Futures Past*) have suggested that modernity is underpinned by new senses of ever-unfolding progressiveness in time or temporality. In what ways is the Gebusi’s emergent sense of time as described in this chapter consistent with this view?
- C. What underpins the author’s understanding of being “modern” or engaging with “modernity”? How could his assumptions be made more explicit—or improved upon? (See Knauff, *Critically Modern*, U Chicago Press, 2002).
- D. What is significant about Gebusi conversion, and Yuway’s individual conversion, in the wider context of the spread of world religions and of fundamentalist Christianity in particular? Do these changes among Gebusi confirm or disconfirm Joel Robbins’ suggestion that evangelical Christianity is hard to combine or mix with other beliefs and practices; that is, it is predicated on stark and dramatic opposition between its own creed and other systems of belief or understanding?
- E. Does it change your understanding or interpretation of this chapter to know that Yuway gave

up Seventh Day Adventism between 1998 and 2008? How so?

Chapter 8: Pennies and Peanuts, Rugby and Radios

- A. How successful were Gebusi women in selling goods at the Nomad market in 1998? Describe the cultural as well as the economic features of the Nomad market—and how these help explain the continuing participation of women.
- B. Describe Nelep’s achievements and challenges in life, and reflect on her status in Gebusi society.
- C. How was the author able, as a man, to obtain information in direct conversation with Gebusi women? Describe the opportunities or constraints that you think you would face, given your gender and disposition, in engaging in the lives of Gebusi men and women.
- D. How did Nomad schoolchildren envisage their future lives in 1998, and what were the differences between boys and girls in this regard? Why is this significant?
- E. What difficulties had arisen at the Nomad Station by 1998 due to increasing or inflated expectations of future success? What differences are there between young men and women in this regard, and how do these differences appear to affect gender relations?

FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS:

- A. Many ethnographic studies from Africa and elsewhere highlight the significant role that women play in market activity in major towns and urban centers. Why and how do you think this is the case—and does this undercut or confirm assertions that globalization tends to benefit men, on the whole, more than it does women?
- B. In what ways is Gebusi women’s market activity in fact “irrational” or not? What kinds of cultural assertions, and conceptual definitions, would you make to adjudicate—or to reframe—this question?
- C. Gebusi schooling evokes the “diploma disease” in many developing countries, in which those who graduate are often unemployed—and overeducated for the jobs they can get and find meaningful. Do you think this is also true for Gebusi, or not, given that they have little market economy to begin with? What larger issues—theoretically, and comparatively concerning cultural context—are at stake in addressing this question?
- D. What is similar to and different from the challenges faced by Gebusi youth in places like Nomad and Gasumi Corners in the late 1990s relative to what they and others would face as migrants to large cities?

Chapter 9: Mysterious Romance, Marital Choice

- A. What does the story of Wayabay reveal about (a) new ways of finding a bride in Gasumi Corners, (b) changes in Gebusi sexual orientations and practices, and (c) the challenges of communication across cultures?
- B. What does the story of Gami illustrate about (a) changing patterns of Gebusi sister-exchange, (b) the ability of Gebusi women to make their own marital choices, and (c) the dilemma faced by outsiders such as anthropologists when they try to help local people?
- C. Based on the stories of Wayabay and Gami, what guidelines do you think would reduce the chances that well-intentioned attempts by outsiders to help local people will fail or be counterproductive?
- D. Describe changes in marital choices and in marital risks as experienced by young people in Gasumi Corners. In your own opinion, among Gebusi and in your own culture, is there any potential benefit to trying to reduce rather than maximize the number of people from whom one might choose a partner?

FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS:

- A. What is the *relationship* between Wayabay's case and that of Gami? Are they complementary, or part of the same pattern? Given their histories, would you guess Wayabay's concluding marriage to Gami would be compatible and "companionate," or not? In what ways do the accounts and insights of works on modern ideals of companionate marriage, for instance, as analyzed by Jennifer Hirsch, Holly Wardlow, and others in their recent books and articles, influence your answers to this question?
- B. What difference—analytically and in terms of ethnographic terms of understanding—does it make if Wayabay, Didiga, and Sayu did not "know" about Gebusi male–male sexuality? Does it seem that they were concerned about this—or was it merely the preoccupation of the author himself with Gebusi male–male sexuality that makes this issue relevant?
- C. In hindsight, how could the author have handled his interaction with Wayabay differently—and what difference would this have made, or potentially have made, in our understanding of Gebusi changes?
- D. What avenues of understanding did the author open up—and which ones were foreclosed—in the way the author tried to intervene in Magi's case? What further issues and questions would you have raised in investigating the development of courtship, marital choice, and marriage among Gebusi in 1998—and what significance would these have had?

Chapter 10: Sayu's Dance and After

- A. What were the major stages and transitions in Sayu's life as recounted by the author? How would you characterize the changes and challenges in Sayu's life up to 1998? What was the author's history with Sayu—and his relationship with him in 1998?

- B. In what ways did ritual life as performed in Gebusi villages change between 1982 and 1998? Use Sayu's dance and the author's departure feast as examples.
- C. Summarize the basic events and activities of the Nomad Independence Day celebrations in 1998. Describe how traditions and traditional dancing were presented—and their relationship to contemporary or modern forms of entertainment or display at Nomad.
- D. What did the Nomad Independence Day celebrations reveal and reflect about (a) changes in Gebusi culture, (b) Gebusi's relations with their ethnic neighbors, (c) Gebusi in relation to their government and the country of Papua New Guinea, and (d) the general relationship between culture, ritual, and social change?

FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS:

- A. Of what larger significance is the disjunction in tone and emphasis between Sayu's traditional dance and the activities surrounding Independence Day at Nomad? In what ways is this disjunction objectively "ethnographic," and to what degree is it an authorial or rhetorical artifact of the way the chapter is written? What are the stakes and issues concerning the status of "public culture" in addressing or answering this question?
- B. Of the many different features of Independence Day festivities at Nomad, which did you find most poignant, and why? Do you think it was successful for the author to consider them all as a polysemic tableau of the complexity of contemporary cultural life of Gebusi in and around Nomad? What specifics does this frame of understanding cover up or elide in Gebusi public culture and ceremonial life—and what does it reveal?
- C. What analytic and theoretical dimension of "public culture" would you have used to complement, reframe, or augment the author's description of Gebusi Independence Day festivities?
- D. Along with the book's final section, "Farewell," the final celebrations surrounding Bruce's departure in this chapter form a kind of "end narrative" that complements the "entry narrative" at the beginning of the book. In what ways are these narrative constructions similar or different, and what do they reveal about the intended "message" or the account as it "travels" from its outset to its end?

Chapter 11: Closer, Closer, Further Away

- A. How difficult was it for Bruce to return to the Gebusi in 2008, and why? What was the larger significance of this difficulty for the Nomad area and for the Gebusi? What was similar, and what different, about Bruce's reentry into Gebusi culture in 2013 in relation to 2008?
- B. What were the author's first reactions and impressions upon returning to the Gebusi in each case, and what did these reveal?
- C. List and give examples of the major features of change that the author describes for the Gebusi in

recent years, including (a) engagement with their physical environment, (b) population, (c) economic status, (d) government, (e) institutional religion, (f) dance and performance, (g) social etiquette, and (h) residence, community relations, and social integrity.

- D. Describe and draw implications from developments of the Gebusi's local Catholic Church as portrayed in 2008 and 2013.
- E. What significance did the 2013 visit by Garrick Hitchcock have, and how was this responded to by Bruce, and by the Gebusi?
- F. What are the prospects for further change among Gebusi, including from resource development by outsiders? What do these developments depend on, and how much influence do Gebusi themselves have in this process? What is the author's final conclusion concerning the end point of culture change among Gebusi? What does he assert as the meaning of his own continuing fieldwork among Gebusi?

FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS:

- A. Using the "reinvention of culture" literature, critically reexamine Gebusi changes since 2008.
- B. In this chapter, the author implies that economic downturn and restriction influenced the resurgence of Gebusi indigenous customs. Is this association generally true? What other stimuli or stresses may underlie cultural resurgence? Given that the author implies that culture is intrinsically creative and dynamic, does there "need" to be economic or other motivations (such as political oppression) to rejuvenate cultural expressions?
- C. What is at stake in attributing cultural change as a "reinvention" of culture as opposed to simply cultural change and development? Is the term "reinvention" anachronistic or subtly "primitivizing," or is it useful and worthwhile?
- D. How does Bruce as author reconcile or mediate the agency of Gebusi in responding to their current conditions against their very limited ability to influence the larger factors and forces that impact them?

Chapter 12: The Larger Future

- A. Summarize the key patterns and differences across time of Gebusi as described by the author for (a) 1980–82, (b) 1998, (c) 2008, (d) late 2011. Given this sequence of changes, what future does the author predict, or not predict, for Gebusi?
- B. Describe the political economy of the Ok Tedi mine and its continuing impact upon Gebusi. How does this compare with the potential impact of an ExxonMobil liquified natural gas project?
- C. What challenges face Bruce as he plans to return to the Gebusi again—and why are these significant?
- D. What does the author say about the reassertion or rejuvenation of customary practices? Can these ever be reenacted just as they were before? Conversely, can customs or practices be

abandoned and left behind with no impact at all on the present or the future?

- E. What key features of environmental change, and of colonialism and modernity more generally, have the Gebusi been fortunate to have avoided? How does their fortune in this respect impact the Gebusi's ability to develop their own livelihood and culture?
- F. What is the ultimate gift that the author finds the Gebusi have given him?
- G. Farewell: How does the author feel when he finally leaves the Gebusi, and why? If it were you, how would you feel, and why?

FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS:

- A. What does the political economy of the Western Province, and of Gebusi specifically, reveal about the nature of contemporary capitalism and of "global development"? How would an analysis of larger political economy earlier in the book reframe our understanding?
- B. The Gebusi aspire to greater outside contact and influence, but significant evidence suggests this could be detrimental to their environment as well as to their cultural integrity. If you were in a position of influence or intervention with respect to the Gebusi, what would you recommend—and how would you keep your actions from being unwittingly paternalistic or condescending?
- C. Why do you think that the author was apparently more successful in developing direct "engaged anthropology" projects in other world areas, and at higher levels of influence, than he appears to have done to date among Gebusi? What are the larger issues at stake?
- D. What is the significance of longitudinal fieldwork over several decades given that the period of field immersion typically gets shorter in subsequent stays? What different perspectives would be developed or pursued if a full, long-term restudy of the Gebusi were undertaken?
- E. What is the significance of "Farewell" as a conclusion to the book against the author's desire to continue revisiting Gebusi?