

# Preface

## BACKGROUND

Anthropology is little without powerful portrayals of foreign peoples and cultures. For beginning students, the wonder of learning about different ways of life can be both 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 that are commonly used in anthropology courses. By nature, textbooks tend to be expansive in scope but less nuanced in portraying individual societies or cultures. By contrast, this is just what a short ethnography is designed to do. But even short ethnographies can be densely detailed. In part, this is because authors want to impart as much information as possible. And in part, it's because an anthropologist's scholarly reputation can suffer if his or her work is not packed with description.

In the present book, I consider myself fortunate to swim against this tide. First, I have already had the opportunity to lay a scholarly foundation by writing a number of academic books and articles about both the Gebusi and their culture area in Melanesia, which lies to the north and northeast of Australia in the Pacific Ocean. Second, I have accumulated many experiences and documented many stories among the Gebusi that have not yet been published. Finally, I am fortunate that the Gebusi are—as I hope you will agree—an amazing, intriguing, fascinating, difficult, and quite wonderful people. As such, I feel privileged to write a book designed to capture poignant and sometimes dramatic aspects of Gebusi lives as well as of my own experiences when I lived among them.

Over time, I have come to believe that Gebusi experiences and my own provide insight into issues addressed in undergraduate anthropology courses. In addition to 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, and perhaps most importantly, because my experiences with the Gebusi have spanned a large 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—their development illustrates key issues in the study of social and cultural change.

During my adult life, this book has grown up with me, both personally and professionally. Over the past several years, it has been a pleasure for me to write it. I hope you will find it at turns both informative and enjoyable—and in the best of all worlds, both of these at once.

## KEY FEATURES

This book contains a wide range of reference materials, instructional information, and links to Web-based photographs and text entries that have been specially designed for use by students and instructors.

### *Notes and References*

For those who wish to check or remind themselves about the identity of an individual mentioned in the book, an alphabetical List of Persons in the endmatter provides this information. Further information about topics and issues discussed in the book can be found in the Notes section that follows the main text. For easy reference, main topics are **boldfaced** in the Notes. Readers can skim these bold-face entries to find specific topics of interest and may also find information concerning a specific reference or passage in the main text by consulting the “Notes to pages X–Y” indicators at the top of each page of the Notes section. In addition to providing contextual information, the Notes contain wide-ranging citations concerning broader topics and issues in the comparative study of societies and cultures. These sources are compiled and listed in the References section at the end of the book. Taken together, the endnotes and their references can guide students and teachers who wish to use this book for developing paper topics or completing course assignments—as well as for conducting independent investigations or simply to satisfy the reader’s curiosity regarding practices or beliefs described in the main text.

For those who wish to pursue deeper investigation concerning the Gebusi specifically, principal publications concerning them are summarized toward the beginning of the notes and are listed with full citations in the References. These works contain detailed accounts of many aspects of Gebusi society and culture as well as comparative and theoretical assessments of their broader significance.

### *Topical Guide for Instructors*

For teachers, a Topical Guide for Instructors is included in the endmatter of this book. This provides a topical teaching outline of the book’s chapters plus a correspondence list between the chapters of this book and the chapters of five

commonly used anthropology textbooks. As the guide suggests, *The Gebusi* can be read in chapter-by-chapter conjunction with major textbooks. The book can also be read as a whole and then referred to by topic in conjunction with lectures or assignments that pertain to a specific chapter or section of a given textbook. The page edges of the Topical Guide for Instructors have been shaded to facilitate easy reference.

### *Web Site Image Library*

Of special note is the Web Site Image Library that has been configured for students and instructors who use this book. More than three hundred quality photographs of the Gebusi that my wife and I took are posted in thumbnail and in enlarged format in the book's Web pages, along with contextualizing descriptions and further ethnographic information. Organized by chapter for easy reference, the photos and descriptive information allow readers to undertake a visual journey into the lives and practices of the Gebusi. The photographs follow the development of individuals, events, and practices as they emerge within and between sections of the book. A categorical table of contents for the Gebusi Web pages can be found following this book's own table of contents. The corpus of Gebusi photos and descriptions is also indexed by both topic and name. As such, the student or instructor can easily locate images that pertain to a specific anthropological topic or to follow the moods and changes of a specific individual over time.

Together, the combination of photos and related textual information provides what we hope will be a new avenue for Web-based ethnographic instruction and student interest. The McGraw-Hill Web pages for *The Gebusi* are viewable with unrestricted access at <http://www.mhhe.com/knauft1>.

### *Sound Clips*

Selected sound clips of Gebusi music can be found under "Gebusi Research" on the author's home page (type "Bruce Knauft" in <<http://www.google.com>>).

## 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 Silap, Didiga Imbo, and Yuway Wapsiyak, and to Gwabi Gigi, who in 1998 lent me his new house to live in. I also acknowledge aid and support in both 1980–82 and 1998 from officials and staff at the Nomad Station and the Catholic Church; my fieldwork among Gebusi would have been much more arduous without their help. In 1998, I was aided in many ways by the local constables, teachers, pastors and the Acting Area Administrator, Sam Gaiworo.

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 in 1980–82 from the U.S. National Science Foundation, the U.S. National Institutes of Mental Health, and the Rackham Graduate School at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. In 1998, my fieldwork and its write-up were funded by a U.S. Department of Education Fulbright Faculty Research Grant, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, the U.S. National Science Foundation, and the University Research Committee of Emory University. Final revisions to the book manuscript were completed in 2003 during my initial months as an National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow at The School of American Research, Santa Fe, New Mexico—an organization that has provided me generous support and a wonderful working environment.

Numerous persons have read and commented on drafts of this book, and I owe them all great thanks. Of particular note are Joanna Davidson, Edward (Ted) Fischer, Carla Jones, Stuart Kirsch, Burt and Ruth Knauft, Eileen Marie Knauft, Donna Murdock, Ana Schaller de la Cova, Holly Wardlow, and Paige West. The anthropology editor at McGraw-Hill, Kevin Witt, has been wonderfully supportive during all phases of this project, and the comments of five reviewers whom he enlisted were a great help to me in revising the manuscript. Thanks are due Shannon Gattens for her work on the Gebusi Web pages. Thomas Briggs merits special recognition for his work as a superior copy editor. All shortcomings remain my own. Small portions of this book overlap in substance though not in exact wording with one of my previous works, *Exchanging the Past*, published by the University of Chicago Press in 2002.

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 wife and colleague of twenty-five years, Eileen Marie Knauft. Eileen has been my constant partner and spiritual companion, including during the six months of 1998 when I was in Papua New Guinea and she could not be physically with me. To this is added the substantive ethnographic information that she collected exclusively with Gebusi women during 1980–82. Some of this information has been published under her maiden name, Eileen Cantrell, as listed in the References at the end of this book. Virtually all the photographs of the Gebusi from 1980–82 were taken by Eileen—both those published in this book and those posted on the book's Web pages. As a complement to the photos of Gebusi that I myself took in 1998, hers constitute about one-half of the total images both in this book and on the Web site. Her permission to publish these remarkable early-period photographs of the Gebusi is gratefully acknowledged.

Without Eileen's help, insight, support, and continuing cooperation, this work could not have been completed.