THE GEBUSI
Lives Transformed in a Rainforest World
THIRD EDITION

Bruce Knauft
Emory University

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To the memory of Yuway (c. 1961–2009)
May his decent spirit and good nature endure among the Gebusi
About the Author

Bruce Knauft is Samuel C. Dobbs Professor of Anthropology and director of the States at Regional Risk Project at Emory University in Atlanta. He has published numerous journal articles and two large ethnographies concerning the Gebusi of Papua New Guinea: *Good Company and Violence* (University of California Press, 1985) and *Exchanging the Past* (The University of Chicago Press, 2002). Dr. Knauft has also published extensively about contemporary analytic and theoretical issues in cultural anthropology and in relation to modern development, including his books *Genealogies for the Present in Cultural Anthropology* (Routledge Press, 1996), and *Critically Modern* (edited, University of Indiana Press, 2002). He is an accomplished scholar of Melanesia, as reflected in his books *From Primitive to Post-colonial in Melanesia and Anthropology* (University of Michigan Press, 1998) and *South Coast New Guinea Cultures* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

During the past decade, Professor Knauft has become active in engaged or practical anthropology, including project activities that he has directed in West Africa, East Africa, the northern Andes, Inner Asia, and the Himalayas (see http://sarr.emory.edu). He has taught a broad range of undergraduates and also graduate students who have conducted fieldwork in diverse world areas and who are now professional anthropologists in their own right. He regularly teaches freshman seminars and introductory courses in cultural anthropology at Emory. The present book was written with an undergraduate and educated general audience in mind. Professor Knauft has continued his association with the Gebusi people of Papua New Guinea since his first fieldwork among them in 1980–82.

Professor Knauft’s CV, selected papers and publications, photos, and flash video presentations, including concerning the Gebusi, are available on his university website (google “Bruce Knauft”).
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Preface

BACKGROUND

Anthropology is little without powerful portrayals of peoples and their cultures across the world. For beginning students as well as advanced professionals, the wonder of learning about different ways of life can be both thrilling and provocative. We are pushed to stretch 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 variety and human experience. These typically take the form of short ethnographies—summary book-length descriptions of the people and culture considered. The present book follows in this same vein but is distinctive—at least so I hope—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; I have already published more than 1,500 pages of scholarly description and analysis concerning the Gebusi and related peoples in Melanesia, as well as books concerning general theory and analysis in cultural anthropology (see About the Author). In the present thin volume, by contrast, I have taken the liberty to write more lyrically and personally, that is, for a larger and more general audience. This book is based on substantial scholarship, but it portrays and humanizes Gebusi and my experience among them, in ways that are hopefully engaging and evocative.

Second, as a teacher of both beginning undergraduates and graduate students, I have enjoyed writing this book to dovetail with topics and issues covered in introductory 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 third edition.

Who are the Gebusi? When I first lived among them, they were a small ethnic group of some 450 horticultural foragers living in longhouses in the deep recesses of the interior rainforest of Papua New Guinea, just north of Australia in the South Pacific. At that time, Gebusi society was rife with amazing and seemingly long-standing practices of sorcery and ritual, body art and divination, feasting and camaraderie, violence, and alternative sex practices. When I studied with the Gebusi again sixteen years later, in 1998, they had largely transformed. They were now a Christian people of about 615 who frequented the local market, attended government development meetings, played in the regional sports league,
and attended the local church. Their children went to government school five

days a week. 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 previ-

ous beliefs and practices. In 2008, and more recently, Gebusi, now numbering

more than 900 people, have weathered an economic recession and near-collapse

of the local cash economy. In the bargain, they have rediscovered and resuscitated

many aspects of their previous culture. Now, the linchpin of their Province’s

regional political economy—the large Ok Tedi copper and gold mine, 100 miles

to their northwest—is slated for downsizing or closure.

In all, 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, and then to the resurgence of many of their previ-

ous practices. As such, their development illustrates a range of key issues in the

understanding of social development, globalization, inequity and marginalization,

and also of cultural change and vitality over time.

THE GEBUSI, 3E

In this third edition of The Gebusi, I have gently drawn out comparative and

general themes. In the process, I have attempted to carefully and selectively revise

all the book’s chapters without compromising their liveliness and occasional drama. 

General points, concepts, and themes are then separately summarized and listed

in Broader Connections segments that are formatted separately at each chapter’s

end. These can be drawn upon by instructors for presentations in introductory

anthropology courses as well by students for purposes of review and linkage to

issues otherwise presented in the course. In the book’s Table of Contents, the

Broader Connections topics for each chapter are listed in italics beneath each 

main chapter title. In all, I have tried to enrich the evocative accounts and expe-

riences related in The Gebusi by delineating their connection to themes and con-

cepts taught in beginning anthropology courses. On the other hand, more

advanced students can benefit from new Advanced Student Study Questions that

link the main text of each chapter to deeper theoretical, analytic, and conceptual

issues in anthropology.

In association with the above changes, Chapters 7 and 8 from the second edi-

tion are now combined into a new Chapter 7 and former Chapters 9 through 12

are now revised, respectively, as Chapters 8 through 11. The former “Conclusions”

are now substantially expanded and reconfigured as a new Chapter 12, “2012

and Beyond,” that brings the Gebusi up to date and considers larger issues of

political economy, globalization, and engaged anthropology. These changes have

allowed me to expand broader contemporary implications at the end of the work.

For purposes of teaching in class, my flash photo narration concerning the

Gebusi is now available on my academic website (68 minutes in total, in three

segments) at http://www.anthropology.emory.edu/FACULTY/ANTBK (or

google Bruce Knauft). Sound clips of Gebusi music past and present, PDFs of

my recent academic papers on the Gebusi, my academic curriculum vitae, and
narrated photo presentations of some of my experiences in other world areas are also available on my university website. Information about the States at Regional Risk project that I presently direct can be found at http://sarr.emory.edu.

For this third edition, a test bank of objective multiple-choice and true/false examination questions concerning the Gebusi is available for instructors online (see further below). Chapter-by-chapter Study Questions have been expanded and are now posted on “The Gebusi Information Center” McGraw-Hill website, and also on my university website, rather than printed in the book itself. A separate set of study questions especially For Advanced Students have been configured and posted for each chapter of the book’s third edition. These questions relate the revised chapters of The Gebusi to issues that students often address in intermediate and upper division courses, including both advanced topical matters and issues pertaining to the narrative and rhetorical structure of the book and the subject position/s of the author within it. The Advanced Student Study Questions can be productively used to frame or stimulate essay writing assignments concerning the book—in addition to the use of the “regular” study questions for this purpose in lower division courses and for use in shorter or more descriptive student assignments.

As in the second edition of the book, personal names 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. Increasingly, however, names are original and actual. Quotations taken from my Gebusi field notes have often been edited from the original to make them clearer or more succinct for a general audience.

KEY FEATURES

Broader Connections segments at the end of the chapters summarize the chapter’s main points and relate them to general themes and concepts in cultural anthropology. Students can use Broader Connections sections to review the chapter and link it to concepts and themes in their larger course and/or their textbook. Instructors can also use these sections to link The Gebusi to their presentations on a range of topics and concepts in introductory courses—and to quickly see the substantive changes between the second and third editions of the book.

A full-length photo narration of The Gebusi—in three segments—is publicly available on the author’s academic website.

An updated List of Persons printed in the book’s end matter provides an alphabetical listing of persons mentioned in the book, including their changed status over time.

A test bank of 30 Objective Examination Questions concerning The Gebusi, 3e, is available for instructors via the McGraw-Hill EZ Test Online website. Instructors can easily request and receive a login. This also allows instructors to access the entire library of questions from McGraw-Hill, including from other of their textbooks, and to combine these as desired with examination questions
concerning the Gebusi specifically. The Gebusi exam questions are also available for instructors at The Gebusi Information Center website for the third edition under Instructor Edition.

Newly formulated Study Questions for Advanced Students, for use in intermediate and upper-division courses, are available on the McGraw-Hill Gebusi Information Center website for the third edition of the book and also on the author’s academic website. Regular Study Questions for use in introductory classes and for shorter student assignments are also available at these websites.

Sound clips of Gebusi music past and present are available on the author’s academic website.

An Image Library of 350 color photographs of Gebusi, organized by chapter and cross-indexed by topic can be used for student interest, projects, or extra-credit assignments. Photos can be copied and used by instructors in their own classroom teaching and presentations. Photos are accessed by chapter under the “choose one” tab on the student edition section of the McGraw-Hill Gebusi Information Center website for the third edition of the book.

Notes keyed by book page number to Gebusi, 3e, link the text to further information and larger issues and topics, as well as references for further reading, that provide deeper understanding as well as material and guidance for student essays and research projects. Notes are available on the McGraw-Hill Gebusi Information Center website and also on the author's academic website. These sites also contain a full Reference List and Citations of scholarly sources.

The author’s recent academic papers on Gebusi and the author’s full Gebusi reference list are available on the author’s academic website.

The Gebusi Information Center website for the third edition can be found at www.mhhe.com/knauft3e.

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Especially in remote regions, field research is difficult if not impossible to complete without financial assistance from funding and granting agencies. I gratefully acknowledge funding for my Gebusi field research 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. Major support for my States at Regional Risk Project (SARR), described in Chapter 12, is gratefully acknowledged from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.
Thanks go to numerous persons who have read and commented on various drafts of this book, including anonymous reviewers, Stuart Kirsch, and the McGraw-Hill editors. Kathryn Bennett helped edit and proof the second edition manuscript, and I thank Eileen Knauf for her photos of Gebusi during 1980–82 and her information about women’s lives and experiences during that time. Small parts of The Gebusi overlap with my book 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 the memory of Yuway. Yuway befriended me when I first arrived and was learning the Gebusi language, and he was my stalwart friend since that time. He was one of the most decent, thoughtful, and pleasant people I have ever met. Born about 1961, Yuway died after a major illness, about 48 years of age, in June 2009. Amid the ailments and short life span that continue to afflict Gebusi, Yuway embraced the full potentials of the precolonial, colonial, and the modern post-colonial eras—all during a span of less than five decades. He did so with grace, good humor, and perseverance. May the memory of him remain bright, and may his children, his family, and his broader community prosper in their own rich ways.