

Bruce M. Knauft, *Good Company and Violence: Sorcery and Social Action in a Lowland New Guinea Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. Pp. x, 474, photographs, tables, figures, appendices, notes, references. \$40.00.

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Longhouse communities in the upper Strickland area, a remote part of the Western Province of Papua New Guinea, were first discovered by Champion and Hides in the 1930s, yet it was not until 1963 that Nomad, an administrative outpost, was established by the Australian administration. Knauft's study is the latest in a number of most remark-

able works by contemporary anthropologists who have undertaken the arduous monolingual fieldwork necessary to understand the traditional life of these communities. The Gebusi, in the Rentoul and nearby valleys, number a few hundred people subsisting on a combination of sago, bananas, a few other crops, occasional domestic pigs, and the products of collecting and hunting.

Knauff draws his analysis around the “primary dialectic” of Gebusi: good company, that is the joviality, talk, and good humor of collective sociality, especially in all-night ritual feasts and spirit seances in the longhouse; and violence, the organized homicidal retaliation for deaths that have been attributed to sorcery. Adult men are the main accusers, killers, and victims, as well as the spirit mediums and investigators of deaths. Gebusi society is not only small and remote, with a high infant mortality and short life expectancy; it is also drastically declining from these homicides and from raids by the neighboring Bedamini, some of which are by contract to kill a sorcerer. Death frequently claims a second victim in the accused sorcerer. About one-third of adult deaths are by homicide, and most of these are connected with sorcery accusations and revenge. The inherent contradiction and main question that Knauff examines is the complex interrelation of sex and marriage (the culturally stated preference is for sister exchange, but in practice marriage is more often nonreciprocal), good company (which is best exemplified in coresidence of affines), suspicion of sorcery (which is most often by affines), and the violence that follows sorcery accusations.

The text provides detailed examples of ritual performances and feasts, narrative tales, seances, the role and behavior of spirit mediums, and many cases of sorcery accusation and homicide, with explication of the family and interpersonal relationships involved. Accusations of sorcery are made in divination inquests in which, according to Knauff, the person accused often tacitly admits the practice under strong public pressure. However, no evidence or observation of sorcery practice is given by Gebusi, and the accused persistently deny their guilt. The death of a community member becomes evidence of a lapse in sincerity of good relations among kinsmen and affines, with tragic consequences.

The meanings of Gebusi concepts and actions are examined and compared within and outside Melanesia to show Gebusi sorcery in comparative perspective. Sorcery types include leaf-wrapped parcels of excrement, presumably by a coresident and the most common type of sorcery for which revenge is taken, and assault and epidemic forms, thought to be by external enemies. The contrast with the New Guinea highlands large-scale exchange systems is particularly striking. In these New

Guinea societies, large and small, the most important ties of members of a solidary local patrilineal group are with the wife's brothers and non-agnatic kin. These ties are ambivalent and conflict-producing. In the highlands, exogamy and intergroup competition play out in large-scale prestige presentations, whereas Gebusi may have carried this ambivalence and its potential for conflict to a destructive extreme.

Rich as it is in material and analysis of its central problem, the book leaves some questions. There are many tables and statistical demonstrations of the relation of marriage, homicide, demography, types of sorcery cases, and the outcome of sorcery accusations. However, there is no list of tables and figures, and basic data concerning marriage patterns and choices must be tracked down in the index. Relations between the sexes, homosexuality, adultery, and the life of and choices of women are little discussed. The final chapter, "Conclusions of method and theory," seems tacked on as an afterthought and not sufficiently integrated into the body of the book. I hope that these ideas will find their way into future contributions and comparative discussions.

New Guinea ethnography continually amazes us with the capacities of the human imagination, and we are fortunate that it is in such good hands as Knauff's.