CHAPTER 4

Antagonists make peace by sharing a tobacco pipe over the grave of the deceased. (PHOTO: Eileen Marie Knauft)

Getting Along with Kin and Killers

TO FOLLOW THE PLAY, you have to know the characters. If the play is in sports, you need to know what team the players are on, what sport they are playing, and what the rules are. For Eileen and me, lives in Yibihilu seemed halfway between a dramatic play and an intense sport. The sport analogy may be stretching things, because the "game" was to manage one's relationship to others in the community, not to defeat a rival team. Indeed, when men and boys in the village played soccer (which government officers had introduced), they preferred the game to end in a tie rather than having one team win and the other lose. But in daily life, people *were* organized into groups. And we had to know the groups and their rules of relationship to know what was going on. Suddenly, a dispute would break out. All at once, one group would be swinging clubs against another, which retaliated in like fashion—while a third group stood as peacekeepers in the middle, trying to break things up. It all happened spontaneously, and we couldn't tell why people divided as they did. The same was true more generally—groups of people would casually depart to forage in the forest, give and receive gifts of food at feasts, or present costume decorations to initiates. Why did some people act together as a group as opposed to others? And why had some people been killed within the community while most others remained friends?

In societies like that of the Gebusi, principles of cooperation and division stem from patterns of kinship and marriage. Anthropologists have long emphasized the importance of kinship, especially in non-Western cultures. In fact, if there is one topic that is specific to anthropology but largely unconsidered by the other social sciences, it is the social organization of kin and relatives. On the surface, kinship is a simple concept. Each of us has a family and relatives, and it seems natural to think that we know about relations between kin. We know about parenthood and about our brothers and sisters; we know what marriage is, who our cousins are, and so on. But things are less obvious when we consider other cultures—or even when we consider our own more closely.

In Gebusi society and many other societies, if you ask someone what group he or she belongs to, the person will tell you the name of his or her clan. A clan is a permanent social group whose members pass

down membership through descent from one generation to the next. Members of a clan generally believe that they should not marry one another and that they derive from a common ancestor. We say "believe" because all members of a clan may not, in fact, be able to actually trace links through a male or female line to an ancestor whom they think they have in common. Among the Gebusi, clan membership is passed down through the male line—a bit like the way last names in most Western societies have historically been passed down. So we can call the Gebusi descent groups "patriclans." By contrast, however, most people in countries like the United States do not belong to clans—or even to any descent group at all. They typically belong to "families" but not to larger, permanent named groups defined through descent and possessing special rights and duties. But among Gebusi, all members of a named patriclan call one another "brother," "sister," "father," "father's sister," "grandparent," and so on—even though most of them are what Americans and other Westerners would call "cousins," "uncles," "aunts," and "grand-aunts and -uncles."

Sometimes, the extended ties of descent groups can be quite strong. Take an example relating to marriage. When Saliam's first husband died, she was expected to marry the deceased man's patriclan "brother," Daguwa, who was a widower at the time. This "marriage by levirate" had the effect of keeping Saliam—and her daughter from this previous marriage—within a close branch of her dead husband's patriclan. This was true even through Daguwa was not the true brother but rather what we would call a cousin of Saliam's first husband. In fact, the two men couldn't trace an actual clan relation to each other through their relatives, but both considered themselves to be members of the upper branch of the Yugul clan, *Yugul tabul bwi.* We can graphically show the family relationship that emerged between Saliam and her two husbands, in turn, by the standard symbols that anthropologists use to show kinship: a triangle for a man, a circle for a woman, an equal sign for marriage, a slash to indicate someone who has died, a vertical line for descent, a horizontal line for siblingship, and a slash across a horizontal line to indicate that descent or clanship cannot be demonstrated by actual kinship (see figures 4.1 and 4.2).

If we want to be yet more complete, we can add in Daguwa's first marriage and the children of the two marriages. Because this involves persons who died from homicide, we can indicate these persons with an "X" rather than a slash. Likewise, we can indicate the order of each person's marriages with numerals in boxes (see figure 4.3).

Though kinship diagrams take a bit of getting used to, they are important ways for anthropologists to keep track of social relations among people in small-scale communities. And they can alert us to things we might otherwise miss. For instance, figure 4.3 reminds us that the marriage between Saliam and Daguwa was actually the second one for each of them. It also shows that Saliam had a surviving daughter from her first marriage, that Daguwa's first wife and son were killed and that Saliam and Daguwa's own marriage did not produce any children. Finally, it shows that, despite Daguwa's violence, the clanship between Daguwa and Saliam's first husband helped him maintain his claim to her.

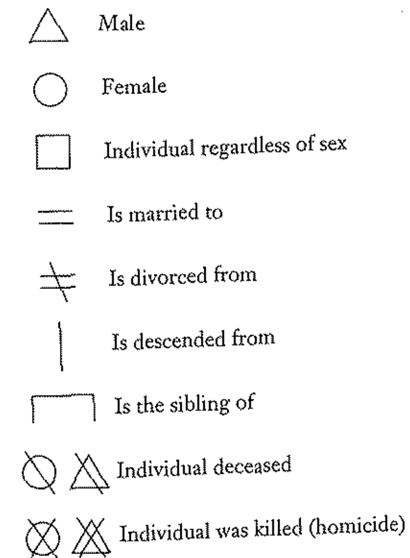

Figure 4.1
Key to kinship terms

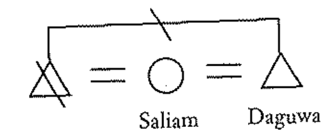

Figure 4.2
Marriage by levirate

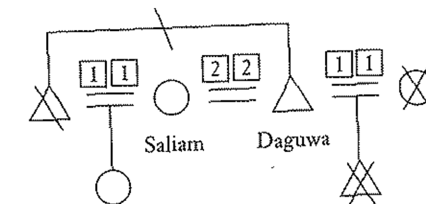

Figure 4.3
Families from leviratic marriage

What about the power of "sisterhood" between women as opposed to the bond of "brotherhood" between men? Because the Gebusi trace descent through the male line, broadening "brotherhood" and "sisterhood" works only as long as the links between generations go through fathers; generational ties don't turn the Gebusi into members of the same clan if they are traced through mothers (see figure 4.4). For many of us born and raised in Western countries, the people we consider "cousins" can be related to us on either our mother's or our father's side. But for the Gebusi, a first cousin on the father's side is either a "brother" or a "sister," whereas a first cousin on the mother's side is almost never a member of one's clan at all.

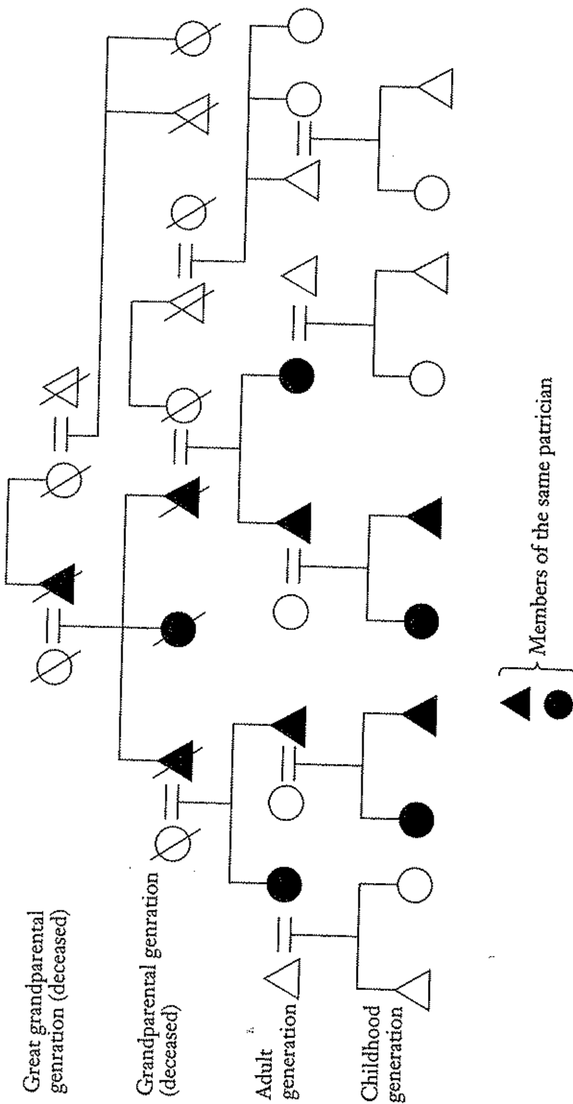

Figure 4.4
Gebusi clanship

In a further twist, Gebusi extend the terms for "mother," "child," and "mother's brother" selectively across generations. In particular, they call the daughter of a maternal uncle their own "mother" (*wi*), and they call the boy or girl born to a paternal aunt their own "child" (see figure 4.5). Strange as it may seem, this kinship system is found in several different parts of the world and is called Omaha kinship (after the Omaha Native Americans, who also refer to these relatives in this way). What this terminology reflects is that you cannot marry into a descent line that your father or father's sister married into, because this would mean you were

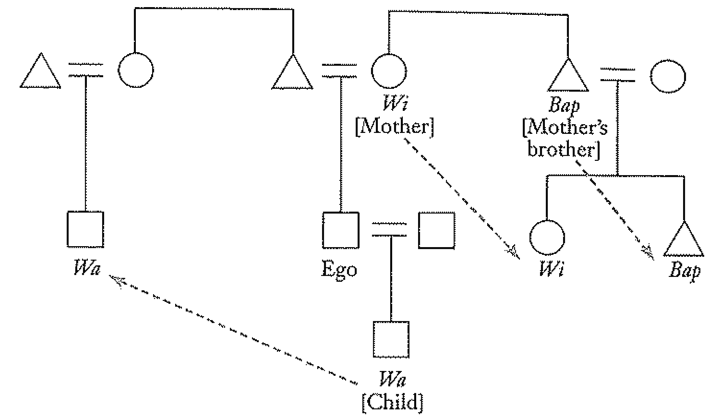

Figure 4.5
Gebusi Omaha kinship terms

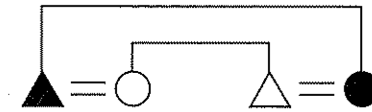

Figure 4.6
Gebusi sister-exchange marriage

marrying someone you called your "mother" or "child." Instead, your clan branch should wait another generation before remarrying someone in these descent lines. This has the net effect of extending a clan's network of marital alliances to a wider and more diverse range of other clans.

Does this all seem complicated? It certainly was for me. But because my advisor was really into kinship, I had to tackle it. Truth be told, kinship is just about the driest and most boring part of cultural anthropology, at least for most students. When I was in college, I felt about kinship the way I felt about calculus: I knew it must be important, but I really couldn't see the point—and I didn't seem to be very good at it. And Omaha kinship was the tip of the iceberg. There are hundreds of ways that cultures group relatives together, decide who is "really" related to whom, establish rules and patterns of intermarriage, structure alliances and divisions between groups of kin, and so on. To start figuring this out before I entered graduate school, I tried to read Claude Lévi-Strauss's classic *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. I thought I would go crazy! But then I started doing fieldwork. Learning kinship in the abstract is, well, abstract. But when your friends are dating, marrying, fighting, giving gifts to one another, and all the rest, you often can't figure out who is doing what to whom and why *except* through kinship. And then kinship becomes not just important but a fascinating human puzzle.

In addition to kinship, marriage among the Gebusi is also really important, as it is for most Westerners. But Gebusi practice "preferential sister-exchange." When a woman marries into a given clan, a "sister" of the husband should also marry a "brother" of the bride (see figure 4.6). As such, the marriage of a woman

into her husband's clan should be matched by a balancing marriage of a woman from this second clan into her own—so neither side "loses" a woman without gaining one back. It may sound like a strange way of getting married, as if women were pawns exchanged between groups of men. We may like to think that women and men should get married because they want to, not because they feel obligated. But among groups like the Gebusi, sister-exchange is more interesting and surprising than either of these alternatives.

First, the Gebusi ideal of marital balance is taken loosely and can be extended. Because Gebusi have complicated ways of extending "siblingship" beyond even the patriclan, they can sometimes find creative ways to "define" a woman as a kind of "sister." Second, the bride-to-be has a degree of veto power in marriage. If a woman really objects to marrying a given man, her wishes may hold sway. As Eileen discovered, this was also true in the distant past. Some of the oldest Gebusi women told her they had bluntly refused a proposed marriage and hence had thwarted a sister-exchange. Their ability to resist depended on several things. One was how strong-minded and forceful they were. Another was their age at the time. Before government contact, Gebusi women were sometimes "married" when they were as young as ten or twelve years old. I put "married" in quotes because the young woman didn't have sex with her husband until she was older. But she could be physically transferred to the husband's settlement and live with him and his relatives until she reached puberty and the marriage could be consummated. When a woman was given in marriage at a young age, it was harder for her to resist the union. But others might resist on her behalf. If they were alive, a girl's close "mothers," especially her true mother, would vehemently object to marrying off a young daughter. As a result, the marriage of not-yet-adolescent girls in sister-exchange doesn't appear to have been common among the Gebusi.

Alternatively, a teenage girl and a young man could become romantically attracted even though there was little chance that a "sister" of the young man would marry a "brother" of the young woman. Such "unreciprocated" marriages almost always drew vehement objections from the young woman's fathers and brothers. But the young couple could prevail if the woman was strong-willed or ran away with her new husband. Though the parents or brothers of the woman could object mightily, and though they could beat her if they found her, many of these romantic unions persisted and were ultimately accepted as marriages.

Marriage between certain kinds of Gebusi relatives was considered impossible and was completely prohibited. All human cultures put a taboo on some kinds of marriages, such as that between a woman and her own true son. But other rules concerning who can or cannot marry vary widely from one society to another. In some cultures, a person is restricted to finding a partner in one-half, one-quarter, or even only one-eighth of the available descent groups. Western societies tend toward the other extreme: the only marriages that are completely prohibited are usually those within the nuclear family and sometimes between very close cousins. This leaves almost the whole rest of society as an open field in which you can find a marriage partner.

The Gebusi stay somewhere between these extremes. They generally prohibit marriage within the clan, which averages eighteen persons in size. In anthropological terms, this means that Gebusi clans are "exogamous"—their members have to marry outside the clan. For any individual, one or two additional clans may be considered a "brother" clan, based on vague ancestral ties. Marriage between such "brother clans" is frowned upon but not completely prohibited. Other restrictions are less widespread. A Gebusi shouldn't marry the child of a paternal aunt or a maternal uncle. (After all, these persons are "mothers" and "children" to each other!) But more distant relatives on the mother's side are permissible marriage partners. Gebusi like to repeat marriages between clan branches after skipping a generation—so finding a partner from the clan of the father's mother is particularly desirable. Beyond this, however, the field of marriage is largely open; anyone who is not closely related is an eligible spouse. In a village like Yibihilu, an unmarried young person finds that about two-thirds of the appropriately aged persons of the opposite sex are marriageable. Most Gebusi find their marriage partners within their village or among those who live in smaller hamlets within an hour's walk of the main settlement. As such, we can say that Gebusi communities are largely endogamous.

On some occasions, a Gebusi woman actively wants to complete a sister-exchange. If a young woman likes her own brother and his new wife—not to mention the new wife's brother, her own potential spouse—then she looks forward to completing the matrimonial exchange. The two couples will typically live together as a joint family, and such family units tend to be strong and cooperative, both structurally and emotionally.

Ultimately, then, the notion that Gebusi sister-exchange is "preferential" means just that: sister-exchange is preferred "if possible." But if not, that's life. In actuality, just over half of all first Gebusi marriages (52 percent) were sister-exchanges. Most of the remainder were what we liked to call "romantic unions" that did not follow the rules of sister-exchange. Despite the pronouncements of Gebusi men that "we exchange women" (*ulia sesam degra*), women and men who wanted to marry without exchange often found a way to do so. Various features of Gebusi social organization helped them out. Within each Gebusi patriclan are smaller subgroups whose members *can* trace an actual linkage to one another via male descent. In anthropological terms, these small groups are "lineages." More specifically, because Gebusi lineages are traced through the male line, we call them "patrilineages."

The Gebusi don't keep track of their ancestors for more than a generation or two. As a result, Gebusi patrilineages usually include only three or four adults; they are an extended family that typically comprises an adult male, his adult siblings, plus his own children and those of his brothers. Given their small size, a patrilineage at any given time may include only one young unmarried woman—or maybe none at all. Yet it is within the patrilineage rather than the larger clan that a young man's claim to use his "sister" for exchange in marriage remains strong. In essence, then, Gebusi patrilineages represent very tight and very small atoms of kinship defined through male descent. Overwhelmingly, their members live together in the same settlement. Members of the larger patriclan, by contrast, do not necessarily live together; most patriclans are spread out over several settlements.

If Gebusi patrilineages are small, and if members of the larger clan often do not live with one another, then who else do people live with? Typically, they live

with other close kin who are related to them by marriage or with close relatives traced through their mothers. For instance, more than 80 percent of men who have a living mother's brother live in the same settlement as this man. Seventy percent of men who have a true brother-in-law reside in the same village as him. From a woman's point of view, this is good: it means that residing with her husband does not generally distance her from her own brother. And when she gets older, she is apt to live in the same village as both her son and her brother. In the mix, she usually resides as well with a range of close female kin on whom she can rely and with whom she can perform collective tasks.

Taken as a whole, Gebusi villages bubble with kinship relations that are variously traced through mothers, fathers, classificatory brother- and sisterhood, and intermarriage. The fifty-two residents of Yibihilu identified with thirteen different clans. The men of the village belonged to seven different clans and eleven different patrilineages. As many as a third of them were totally unrelated to one another. As such, Gebusi villages are multiclan settlements, rather than clusters of people around the men of a single patriclan. This helps explain why Gebusi place such a high value on collective good company and why they are so proud of their ability to cohere their settlement across diverse ties of kinship and friendship. Social ties are made stronger and more enjoyable by the emphasis on being together, talking congenially, and joking and cheering in collective camaraderie.

Having reviewed Gebusi social organization, we can now put the pieces together. In particular, we can ask what portrait emerges from Gebusi patterns of kinship and residence that combine very small lineages, sister-exchange marriage, and village residence based on diverse ties of kinship, marriage, and friendship. As we have seen, only about half of first Gebusi marriages are balanced through sister-exchange. And this creates a problem, because the Gebusi lack any effective way to recompense an extended family or patrilineage that loses a sister or daughter in marriage. In some parts of Melanesia, Africa, and Asia, a woman's marriage can be "paid for" by valuable gifts given by the groom and his kin group to the bride's relatives. These payments are sometimes called "bride-price." Many anthropologists prefer the term "bride-wealth," however, because the transaction is not a human purchase per se but the opening round of wealth exchanges that may last for years between the closest kin of the groom and the bride.

Among the Gebusi, however, bride-wealth or bride-price is rudimentary at best. A groom might give a few small gifts to the mother or brothers of his bride, but these presents typically are small and are not considered an exchange for the woman herself. Instead of material compensation, the Gebusi have practiced a direct or person-for-person form of reciprocity. The ideal, of course, is sister-exchange marriage. But when there is no return marriage, there is also no payment to mollify the bride's kin for the loss of her services. So what happens? Although this causes resentment, the Gebusi tend to sweep it under their cultural rug. Most in-laws claim that they accept marital imbalance and get along well. Indeed, in-laws co-reside just as often when the marriage that links them is unreciprocated as when it is balanced through sister-exchange. Given their strong cultural emphasis on good company, it is not easy for Gebusi to admit or address tensions between in-laws.

Here is where issues of kinship, residence, and social etiquette link to Gebusi politics and disputes. And at least to me, this is where the discussion gets really interesting. It's one thing to know about the kinship and residential makeup of a society. But it's more significant to use this knowledge to understand important and otherwise hard-to-explain trends. For the Gebusi, these have included a very high rate of violence and killing associated with sorcery accusations. Why has the Gebusi rate of killing been so high, and who stands the greatest chance of being killed?

One of the most important facts here is that Gebusi sorcery accusations are especially likely between members of patrilineages that are linked by a marriage that has not been reciprocated. At this point, I should emphasize that the Gebusi themselves do not say this. As we have seen, Gebusi men have a profound ability to emphasize good company and to suppress or dissociate from their anger. Even during a spirit séance when a community member is accused of being a sorcerer, the clan and lineage relatives of the accused usually say nothing at all. They may even continue joking so as not to lose public face. Gebusi believe that sorcery accusations should be proved by tangible evidence. As described in Chapter 3, these clues take a variety of forms, including a "sign" by the corpse, a packet of "skin and blood" identified by a spirit medium, leavings from the victim that have been "burned" by the sorcerer, or divination food that has been undercooked by an accused sorcerer. To Gebusi, these findings represent tangible physical evidence—as real as fingerprints on a smoking gun. Why was the sorcerer accused or attacked? Because, Gebusi say, the objective evidence shows him or her to be guilty! This evidence typically is convincing to a wide range of people and tends to be supported rather than opposed by men from the many clans in the settlement.

Given this context, how can I suggest that unacknowledged tensions related to marriage and sister-exchange inform sorcery accusations between Gebusi patrilineages? Here, we must shift gears. Gebusi's own explanations are crucial, but they do not tell the whole story. Beyond what people think and say, it's important to focus on what they actually do. And especially in small-scale societies, these actions often link to their patterns of kinship and residence.

We all know that people often say one thing and do another. In American society, we may promise to marry someone "until death do us part." But about half of all marriages in the United States end in divorce. As an anthropologist, it is important—indeed, key—to consider the gap between ideals and actions. Among other things, such gaps are crucial if we are to understand patterns of violence or inequality that are minimized or downplayed by people's own perceptions and values. In making this move, however, we create more distance between our perspective and those of the people we are studying. To say that half of Americans who marry get divorced captures neither the joy of a good marriage nor the pain of a bad one. It is a statistical assessment, not an emotional or humanistic one; it pulls us back from understanding human lives.

Anthropologists have often debated which is better—a close-up portrait that is rich with people's experiences, or a more detached view that is systematic and

encompassing. Is a statistical depiction more scientific or more dehumanizing? My own opinion is that both views are needed—and that they need to be combined. Like a photographer with a zoom lens, the anthropologist should focus on the details of individual lives and experiences. But she or he should also draw back occasionally—as in the present chapter—and look more dispassionately at the larger picture, statistics and all.

For the Gebusi, Eileen and I tried to gain a societywide view by collecting census material, residence histories, and kinship information. By charting the genealogies of eighteen clans—as far back as Gebusi could remember—I documented the cause and circumstances of death for each deceased person. Then I double-checked each account with someone from a different clan, to make sure the information was accurate. This was a tedious task, as you might imagine. But the Gebusi were interested in the details, and I think they were proud to present them correctly. And when they didn't, they quickly realized that I would uncover their "embellishments" by obtaining a more accurate story from someone else.

To make a long process short, we can return to the question raised previously: How do we know that Gebusi related via unreciprocated marriage accuse one another of sorcery even though the Gebusi don't make this statement themselves—any more than Americans announce at weddings that the marriage is likely to fail? Within the community, statistics reveal that persons related by marriage are more than three times more likely to accuse one another of sorcery than would be expected by chance. In terms of father-in-law/son-in-law relations, the rate of sorcery accusations is a whopping fifteen times greater than would be expected by chance. In more than 70 percent of cases in which a relative via marriage is accused, the marriage that links the patrilineages of the accuser and the victim has not been reciprocated. Viewed broadly, this makes sense. Gebusi marriage is based on "person-for-person" exchange. So is Gebusi killing: the life of the sorcerer is taken "in exchange" for the death of the person who died of sickness. These aspects of positive and negative exchange link together. If there is no exchange for a woman in life, it increases the chances of violent revenge between the two patrilineages when a person in one of them dies from an illness.

Killings of the Gebusi were remarkably frequent. Of all adult deaths, almost one-third were homicides (129 of 394, or 32.7 percent). This rate of violence is even greater than that of the Yanomami, the so-called fierce people of the Amazon rainforest. Per person, this rate of killing equals the carnage of the bloodiest war in world history, World War II in Europe—including the Holocaust. Not all Gebusi killings were individual executions of sorcery suspects, but the majority were—61 percent. Another 21 percent were the result of Bedamini raids, in which large numbers of Gebusi could be killed simultaneously. (These raids were also linked to sorcery in that most of them were instigated by disgruntled Gebusi who contracted Bedamini to venture into Gebusi territory and attack one of their villages that was thought to be harboring sorcerers.) Only 5.5 percent of violent Gebusi deaths resulted from battles or fights between massed groups of Gebusi warriors.

Gebusi adults of both sexes and almost all age categories could be killed as sorcerers. In relative terms, however, the persons most likely to be accused and executed were senior adults—which for the Gebusi means anyone in their thirties or older. Although I don't have the numbers to prove it, I think there are several reasons for this. As they live longer, the Gebusi accumulate more disputes and resentments, including via nonreciprocal marriages. When someone dies of sickness, there is a greater chance that one of these past disputes may consciously or unconsciously inform an inquest that finds the other party guilty of sorcery. In addition, older persons can become increasingly concerned with and angry about their own growing list of friends and relatives who have died. They can also be thought to be angry enough over these deaths to themselves direct spiritual malevolence against others. By contrast, children are never accused of sorcery; in Gebusi belief, they are not old enough to know how to perform it.

Between the extremes of older persons and children, young men may sometimes be accused of sorcery and executed. In the more distant past (the 1950s and 1960s), late adolescent males were commonly targeted as sorcerers. But one category of adults has been almost completely immune from Gebusi sorcery accusation: young women. In their midteens and into their twenties, Gebusi women were virtually never accused or attacked as sorcerers. From a societywide standpoint, this is significant. Young women are crucial to a society's reproductive and demographic survival. As unconscionable as it is in moral and ethical terms, the killing of older persons has less impact on reproduction. Few Gebusi women seem to give birth beyond their early thirties. Men are even more "dispensable" in demographic terms because a relatively small number of men may impregnate a larger number of women to repopulate the society. Enormous numbers of European men were killed during World War I, but the population replenished itself quickly because so many young women were available for childbearing. In the case of the Gebusi, the relative immunity of young women from sorcery execution meant that the internal homicide rate, high as it was, did not preclude their collective survival. People lived in good company even as they killed those they suspected of breaking this rule, especially as they got older. A greater survival threat was posed by the Gebusi's neighbors, the Bedamini, who would indiscriminately kill Gebusi women and children as well as men during their fearsome raids.

What has happened to the Gebusi rate of violent death over time? As Australian colonial officers suppressed Bedamini raiding, from 1963 to 1975, the Gebusi who died of homicide declined from a whopping 39.0 percent of all adult deaths (97 killings out of 249 deaths) to 23.3 percent (24 killings out of 103 deaths). This decline continued during the first seven years of national independence: from 1975 until our departure in 1982, 19 percent of adults died from homicide (8 of 42 deaths). Despite this general improvement, those killings that did occur were targeted increasingly against women. Prior to pacification, the rate of homicide had been 26.4 percent higher for men than that for women. This balance then shifted: between 1975 and 1982, women were killed more than twice as often as men. Why? There are several reasons. First, the Gebusi became increasingly reluctant to kill people whose murder might come to the attention of police at the Nomad Station. Although officers seldom knew what went on in the villages, they might have

learned about a killing from angry relatives of the slain person. In practical fact, the killing of a woman—particularly if she was an elderly widow—was not as likely to generate an outpouring of anger as when violence was directed against an adult male. Old widows are sometimes perceived as a drain on the community because they have a declining ability to work, and their childbearing years are over. They may be seen as irritable, uncooperative, and apt to use spiritual power to compensate for their own physical decline. Reciprocally, if older widows do not have grown sons to support them, they can be relatively easy targets of sorcery accusation. And if they are killed in the forest, away from the main settlement, as was the case with Saliam's mother, chances are good that their deaths will not be reported to the authorities.

In some ways, Gebusi violence against sorcerers has gradually become more similar to that in Western history. From the late fifteenth through the late eighteenth centuries, some historians estimate that the Christian church killed approximately 300,000 women as witches. Fear of largely female witchcraft was found in significant parts of Europe and America during the 1600s and early 1700s, including in the famous witch trials at Salem in 1692. Among the Gebusi, however, sorcery is tied less to waves of community hysteria than to resentment over high rates of death due to sickness and to marital imbalances that simmer and fester between in-laws. These tensions ultimately find expression in sorcery inquests, divinations, and accusations.

How have the Gebusi themselves viewed their killing? This question has a certain poignancy because their violence has so frequently been directed against those who are supposed to be friendly acquaintances within the community. To a surprising degree, the Gebusi have rationalized these discrepancies away. For them, it is not murder to kill a sorcerer. Rather, it is a legitimate and proper way to dispense with someone who has him- or herself committed a terrible killing. In Gebusi belief, these persons must be eliminated to keep the death toll due to sickness from climbing even higher. It may be hard for us to appreciate the degree to which the Gebusi believe in their sorcery divinations and inquests. Outside the narrow context of sorcery inquests, most Gebusi were good-natured and friendly, not angry or violent. In contrast to males in some other parts of Melanesia, Gebusi men were self-effacing in public and more likely to minimize than to magnify their aggression. When the death of a close relative or spouse was followed by a verified sorcery accusation, however, even the most mild-mannered man could become a killer. When an ambush and a killing were finally arranged, the accuser was often aided by others who wanted to rid the community of someone considered to be a public menace.

In the aftermath of a sorcery execution, the killer and his supporters were rarely attacked. Instead, the community tended to close ranks behind them. In the same way that accusations needed to have "objective" confirmation and support from different clans in the village, so, too, the person who killed a publicly accused sorcerer could generally count on the support of the community to protect him. Faced with this reality, the relatives of the person who had been killed typically had little choice but to accept the death and either stay in the community or move on to another settlement. Even when they wanted revenge, the men of the sorcerer's

patrilineage were few in number—not numerous enough to prevail against the rest of the community.

Beyond our concern for the people who were themselves attacked or killed, why should we care about Gebusi sorcery and violence? One reason is that their accusations reveal the influence of culture in promoting stigmatization. Cultural beliefs can powerfully validate discrimination—as if discrimination was "objective" and "true." Scapegoating of innocent people can be abetted by structural tensions of social organization, kinship, and demography that may lay outside the daily awareness of the actors involved. Given this, a scientific understanding of social organization is particularly important to complement our awareness of people's stated motives and lived experiences. In American society, for example, tensions in family structure that result from class inequality, unemployment, racism, and gendered inequality clearly inform patterns of violence and domestic abuse.

By understanding how inequality works among peoples such as the Gebusi, we may see more clearly how larger patterns of discrimination operate in other societies. For instance, Western cultural values of equality concerning race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and religion are strongly assumed in discourses of human rights, freedom, and democracy. Amid this positive emphasis, however, it would be easy to overlook patterns of inequality and discrimination that persist in fact. As with the Gebusi, we may confuse how we would *like* society to function with how it actually operates. Just as we may believe in marriage despite a high rate of divorce, we may believe in sexual, racial, and cultural equality and yet find that women are not paid as much as men for doing similar work or that foreigners or racial or ethnic minorities are relegated disproportionately to low levels of income and status. In this regard, it is also easy to neglect patterns of kinship and social organization that are very important to ethnic or foreign-born minorities even though their networks of affiliation often remain outside legal recognition or mainstream cultural understanding. This is not to say that social inequities are necessarily due to willful malevolence. It is rather to underscore how culturally constructed beliefs—and their discrepancy from actual behavior—can be as strong in our own society as we may discover them to be in others. Cultural anthropology often looks to other cultures to rediscover our own beliefs and actions. Beyond their intrinsic value, features of social structure, kinship, and community organization help us understand much about the human condition at home as well as abroad.

Web site images of events and topics described in this chapter can be found at http://www.mhhe.com/knauft1.