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Chapter 3

Describe key features of Dugawe's death, his funeral, and the investigation that resulted.

Reflect on how you would have or might have reacted to these events.

“...[T]he community was protecting itself from identifying too closely with so many young lives ending so quickly” (47).

The events surrounding death in Gebusi culture gives way to further revelations for anthropologist Bruce Knauft. Dugawe was a Gebusi man, with a wife and several unfortunate outcomes for his family and him. It is important to note that around the time of Dugawe's death, it was not uncommon for children to die naturally from myriad harsh conditions. Some major differences between Dugawe's departure and that of a child, is that Dugawe's was not preceded; whereas children, for example, didn't receive names until they have passed a certain point, theoretically to reduce the amount of attachment that one has to a baby who might not survive.

“Dugawe had died a writhing death after poisoning himself in anger against his wife,” (49).

Based on the author's firsthand account, with the Gebusi during the time of Dugawe's apparent suicide, the Gebusi had not had death by suicide in their culture in several Gebusi lifetimes, “no one could remember a man having killed himself,” (48). Therefore, it is conceivable that suicide would be a difficult concept for the Gebusi. The next key difference, or

relevant feature is related to Gebusi views on all deaths. For them, death is always related to some form of sorcery. To opine deeper and examine their belief that a sorcerer had possessed someone into taking their own life, it is also possible they feared more spiritual attacks.

“There is virtually no evidence that the Gebusi actually practice sorcery, though they believe firmly in its existence. Gebusi sorcery is a form of scapegoating,” (60).

The ensuing events regarding Dugawe’s death sent researchers into a “whirling cultural vortex,” where séances, burials, investigations, and other cultural practices were observable to the anthropologists on location (48). After Dugawe died there was unease between the settlements. The reason for this is that “Dugawe had been Silap’s extended ‘brother-in-law,’” so having married into another family (after his first family was killed), Dugawe was a bridge “across different family lines,” and between Gebusi settlements (48). When he died, women cried out loudly while the men proceeded with the business at hand, preparing for a séance, a funeral and the required spiritually based investigation.

“It seemed hideous that his corpse was allowed to decay and that our women friends wallowed in its stench,” (51).

Confusion seemed to take hold at the time between the Gebusi over Dugawe’s death, there was physical confrontation, and threats for instance someone shouts “‘*Si-nay!*’” [which means], “‘We’re going to cook and eat you,’” a statement that is meant to be taken literally (50). In some regards, everything about Dugawe’s life was outside the norm for the Gebusi, after all, “[h]e was also the only Gebusi known to have killed his wife or his child,” (61). He also served a jail sentence at a time when, “no other Gebusi had ever been incarcerated,” (53). It was Dugawe’s second wife, Siliam that “had gotten her husband jailed, and cheated on him,” a

possible reason for him taking his own life (54). Given the rapport with the Nomad officials it followed that a Nomad officer would investigate the events leading Dugawe's death as well.

“After a long conversation through several interpreters, the constable finally wrote a brief entry in his police book: ‘Reason of death: Suicide caused by his wife fooling around,’” (51).

Knauft points out the feminist perspective on behalf of Sialim, given the complexities of her life before and after Dugawe's death arguing that “Sialim could hardly be blamed. Her fighting with her husband... could have been a desperate attempt at self-defense,” (53). In Gebusi culture, at the time, widows often married the brother of the deceased presumably in an effort to keep a similar order. It is also part of the Gebusi culture to have a funeral and a séance, which seems to partially determine direction of the spiritual investigation. In Dugawe's case, “the séance was a songfest of ribald entertainment,” and the investigation did not take place immediately (52).

“...Dugawe's death shouldn't take place in the heat of the moment but should be undertaken more objectively and slowly—somewhat like a murder investigation in Western societies,” (54).

The Gebusi men eventually gather to follow leads and track the sorcery that took Dugawe's life. What sounds like a combination of tracking methods mixed with spiritual guidance, the members of the search team venture off for truth and ultimately reach a point where there are no more findings. This was probably settling for the anthropologists on-site since these spiritual investigations could have led to spiritual killings if the sorcery were tracked to a specific individual. “The investigation did validate that Dugawe had been killed by an assault sorcerer from a distant village,” a conclusion that offers some form of closure (56).

As for me, I believe it is remarkable the series of events surrounding Dugawe's death. Yet another great example of the surprises a human cultural researcher will find while doing fieldwork. I was surprised to learn how involved Knauft was with the Gebusi in the unfolding events after Dugawe's death. Knauft suggests "cultural anthropologists often court risk and uncertainty...and when to engage in the 'participant-observation' of fieldwork," concepts which could not ring truer than what is described in this chapter (58). In the same situation I am not certain what I would have done as a researcher, but I would try to keep myself and my crew insulated from danger. I would do everything I could to observe events and continue the research, sometimes this means participate small ways to good keep relationships. The idea of reciprocity or laughter discussed in other chapters is contrasted by this particular set of events.

"No wonder that coming together in collective good company was so important to Gebusi—or that it was such an accomplishment," (58). According to the text, the Gebusi have since reduced sorcery inquisitions. Overtime as a result of growing awareness and decisions of Gebusi, not the police presence or Christianity in the surrounding areas, it appears that generations are changing traditions though "[death] fuels their cycles of marriage, reciprocity, and replacement," (63). It is the spiritual scapegoating that would have likely cause the most discomfort for me; however, outsiders may have naturally been safer from accusation of wrongdoing in general. I think the approach to 'stay with the group' is ultimately the best one, that way one's actions are never unknown or called into question.