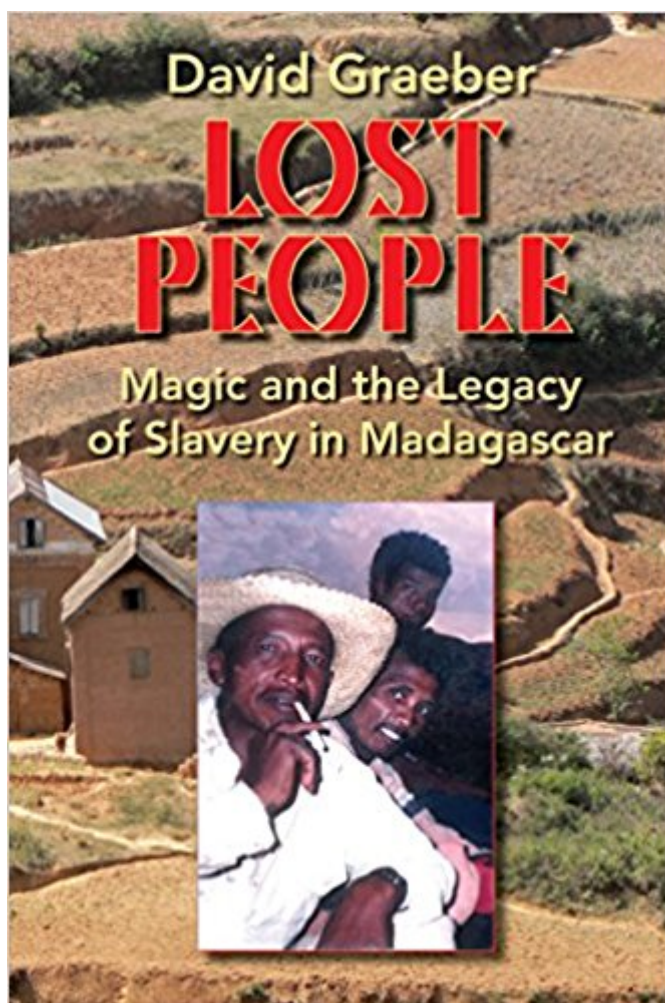


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Lost People: Magic And The Legacy Of Slavery In Madagascar



Synopsis

Betafo, a rural community in central Madagascar, is divided between the descendants of nobles and descendants of slaves. Anthropologist David Graeber arrived for fieldwork at the height of tensions attributed to a disastrous communal ordeal two years earlier. As Graeber uncovers the layers of historical, social, and cultural knowledge required to understand this event, he elaborates a new view of power, inequality, and the political role of narrative. Combining theoretical subtlety, a compelling narrative line, and vividly drawn characters, *Lost People* is a singular contribution to the anthropology of politics and the literature on ethnographic writing.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"This compelling ethnography matches Bakhtinian dialogism with Dostoevskian detail.... Graeber... is a masterful narrator, allowing contradictions in people's accounts to be what they areâ•different takes on given circumstancesâ•as he brokers more speculative hypotheses and historical understandings about the nature of society. A humanistic sense of flow results, as Graeber talks with and about people while shedding light on the paradoxically 'perverse, extreme scientism' of postmodernist quests for 'real knowledge.'... Recommended." â•A. F. Roberts, University of California, Los Angeles, Choice, September 2008"[T]his book will be useful for those readers seeking a detailed analysis of the workings of everyday politics in a small community, a politics that involves creating stories that combine the everyday with the eternal, giving mortal characters the possibility for eternal influence over their descendants." â•American Ethnologist

This compelling ethnography matches Bakhtinian dialogism with Dostoevskian detail. The book is 'full of characters:

both in the sense of eccentrics and oddballs, and... of protagonists of stories... about the edges between politics and history,' where assumptions are negotiated and 'new things can emerge.'

Madagascar's blend of African and Pacific cultures and histories is highly unusual, and innovative tactics are needed to capture and convey its singularities. Dark Dostoevskian portrayals prove apposite to understanding people who do 'not see anything particularly shameful about fear' in both religious and political realms. Highly articulated social stratification meant that aristocrats and slaves cohabited precolonial places and periods. With French conquest and subsequent abolition, these categories shifted rather than disappeared as elites managed their newfound sharecroppers.

Graeber (Goldsmiths, Univ. of London) is a masterful narrator, allowing contradictions in people's accounts to be what they areâ•different takes on given circumstancesâ•as he brokers more speculative hypotheses and historical understandings about the nature of society. A humanistic sense of flow results, as Graeber talks with and about people while shedding light on the paradoxically 'perverse, extreme scientism' of postmodernist quests for 'real knowledge.'

Summing Up: Recommended. Upper-division undergraduates and above. A. F. Roberts, University of California, Los Angeles, Choice, September 2008

"What makes *Lost People* an extraordinary book is its freedom of thought. It is important not because of its position in the next round of anthropological debates but because of the graceful eclecticism of the author's perceptual and creative range. One hopes that ethnography built on such foundations will be treasured by anthropology today and tomorrow." â•Yancey Orr, University of Arizona, CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY, Vol. 50.6 Dec. 2009

"The political intrigue makes for a compelling narrative. Committed to showing the power of stories, Graeber is very capable of telling a story of his own.... a brilliant study in the classic anthropological tradition...." â•Michael Lambek

"This rich book... provides us with an innovative account of the political nature of the apparently unpolitical." â•Eva Keller, University of Zürich, AFRICAN STUDIES REVIEW, Volume 52, Number 1, April 2009

"[O]ffers fascinating comparative material with other places where the wound of past injustices continues to fester and destroy.... [A] brilliant weaving together of history and the anthropology of participant observation.... The style is limpid, funny, and a delight." â•Maurice Bloch

"Graeber leads us in an engaging manner through a succession of rich narratives obtained through taped interviews, superbly analysed ethnographic encounters, and sharp arguments based on a thorough knowledge of the ethnographical record and historical archives, including state records.... In trying to present an ethnography that is both honest and not written and structured exclusively for 'the market', Graeber does well to treat the ordinary (and extraordinary) people of Befato as 'historical characters' and as historians in their own right." â•African Studies Quarterly, Fall 2009

"[O]ffers fascinating comparative material with other places where the wound of past injustices continues to fester and destroy. . . . [A] brilliant weaving together of history and the anthropology of participant observation. . . . The style is limpid, funny, and a delight." --Maurice Bloch "The political intrigue makes for a compelling narrative. Committed to showing the power of stories, Graeber is very capable of telling a story of his own. . . . a brilliant study in the classic anthropological tradition. . . ." --Michael Lambek

I love this book. The description of political action in primitive rural Madagascar matches closely political life in the U.S., as in: "The formal political sphere has become a sphere where nothing is supposed to happen...elders deliver speeches with practically nothing in the way of propositional content, full of proverbial wisdom, sentiments which no sane person could possibly disagree with. Nothing is openly debated, nothing decided." As well as being a work of considerable scholarship, this book is funny on almost every page as it is packed with an array of fascinating characters, whom Graeber clearly likes and I do too. I only got this book while I was in line to get a library copy of his book Debt, and I'm glad I did. Graeber is a natural writer, and the more I got into it, the more I wanted to get into it. The characters are quirky and it helps to like quirky to like this book, but also I'm learning a great deal about the mechanisms of politics everywhere.

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