



## Ebola, Culture and Politics: The Anthropology of an Emerging Disease (Case Studies on Contemporary Social Issues)

By Barry S. Hewlett, Bonnie L. Hewlett



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In this case study, readers will embark on an improbable journey through the heart of Africa to discover how indigenous people cope with the rapid-killing Ebola virus. The Hewletts are the first anthropologists ever invited by the World Health Organization to join a medical intervention team and assist in efforts to control an Ebola outbreak. Their account addresses political, structural, psychological, and cultural factors, along with conventional intervention protocols as problematic to achieving medical objectives. They find obvious historical and cultural answers to otherwise-puzzling questions about why village people often flee, refuse to cooperate, and sometimes physically attack members of intervention teams. Perhaps surprisingly, readers will discover how some cultural practices of local people are helpful and should be incorporated into control procedures. The authors shed new light on a continuing debate about the motivation for human behavior by showing how local responses to epidemics are rooted both in culture and in human nature. Well-supported recommendations emerge from a comparative analysis of Central African cases and pandemics worldwide to suggest how the United States and other countries might use anthropologists and the insights of anthropologists to mount more effective public health campaigns, with particular attention to avian flu and bioterrorism.



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- Sales Rank: #680172 in Books
- Brand: Hewlett, Barry S./ Hewlett, Bonnie L.
- Published on: 2007-11-27
- Released on: 2007-11-27
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x .44" w x 6.38" l, .63 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 192 pages

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### **Editorial Review**

#### **About the Author**

Barry Hewlett is Professor of Anthropology at Washington State University, Vancouver. He received a Ph.D. from the University of California--Santa Barbara in 1987 and has had appointments at Southern Oregon University, Tulane University, and Oregon State University. He has conducted research in central Africa since 1973 and is the author of *INTIMATE FATHERS: THE NATURE AND CONTEXT OF AKA PYGMY PATERNAL INFANT CARE*, *HUNTER-GATHERER CHILDHOODS* (edited with Michael Lamb), *FATHER, FATHER-CHILD RELATIONS: CULTURAL AND BIOSOCIAL CONTEXTS* (Edited), and "Human Behavior and Cultural Context in Disease Control," Special Issue of *TROPICAL MEDICINE AND INTERNATIONAL HEALTH* (edited with Joan Koss-Chiokino). Current research interests include biocultural contexts of infectious and parasitic diseases; the transmission, acquisition, and evolutionary nature of culture; hunter-gatherers; and child development.

Bonnie L. Hewlett worked as a registered nurse in neonatal intensive care before obtaining her Ph.D. degree in anthropology at Washington State University, Pullman. She has conducted research in Gabon, Republic of Congo, and Central African Republic. Her research interests include medical anthropology, adolescent development, hunter-gatherers, and evolutionary cultural anthropology. Recent publications include "Providing Care and Facing Death: Nurses and Ebola in Central Africa" in *JOURNAL OF TRANSCULTURAL NURSING*, "Vulnerable Lives: Death, Loss, and Grief among Aka and Ngandu Adolescents of the Central African Republic" in *HUNTER-GATHERER CHILDHOODS* (Barry Hewlett and Michael Lamb, editors), and "Love, Jealousy, and Anger among the Aka Foragers and Ngandu Farmers of the Central African Republic" in *LOVE AND INTIMACY ACROSS CULTURES* (William Jakowiak, editor). She is currently an adjunct professor of anthropology at Washington State University, Vancouver.

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