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## Chapter 6

**Summarize the basic sequence of the Gebusi initiation activities---what comes first and what comes next. Describe how Gebusi from different settlements are brought together.**

Arguably, it is a good sign when anthropologists are surprised while conducting field work, it lends a certain level of excitement and support for the important work that they are doing. They are recording observations never formerly recorded before or they are witnesses to events other outsiders may never have been permitted to witness. In this sense, they should be open to the possibility that assumptions are proven false based on further evidence. For Bruce Knauft and his crew, having lived with the Gebusi for several months, going from learning about *male initiation*, to posing the question “Was it a *male* initiation—or not,” is a great example of how surprising things are in the field (107).

What takes the span of several months, “[b]y the end of March...the people of Yibihilu had worked and prepared for half a year,” in anticipation to host their settlement’s *male initiation* ceremony (94). Yibihilu is a Gebusi settlement, and, once in-a-generation cycle, a Gebusi settlement will host initiation ceremonies as a celebration into adulthood. The host settlement invites neighboring settlements, along with kinfolk, and friends to enjoy the festivities. Lavish meals, dances, séances, men’s only rituals, honoring, all-encompassing the events (100). Like all

Gebusi matters at this time, the ‘boy become big,’ initiation is spiritually grounded, “at each state, a lively séance was held,” anointing each event (95). The first step to any initiation ceremony is the kindling and food procurement.

From October to November kindling is gathered, December to February the sego is felled and harvested, by March, men are hunting for pigs and other game like cassowaries and other indigenous wildlife in preparation for the *sia* feast (96). The initiate's sponsor returns the young men with cooked sago, a sign they have accepted the invitation. The women from the host settlement process pith from sego to produce flour as it is a good source of starch, while the initiates are engaged in pre-initiation traditions. Prior to initiation male cohorts are “signified by bold stripe of yellow ocher painted on them from head to toe,” and they are given handmade celebration outfits made and delivered by kinfolk (97). A longhouse (a shelter for a large group) has been erected for the comfort of all the guests invited to join the fun and excitement (93). With all the coordination and grand gestures for neighboring settlements, the possible differences or disputes and “against all odds...Gebusi somehow came together to celebrate,” this major, once-in-a-lifetime cultural event (108).

“The initiates biggest trial was to wear the new wigs their sponsors now came to give them,” (97).

The time just before initiation occurs is perhaps the most challenging time for initiates. This is a *liminal period*—transition time—into manhood, when (one could extrapolate) the initiates-to-be carries the metaphorical weight of responsibility, an 80lb wig, made from tree bark, on their head throughout the day. The crowd of onlookers is jovial at the spectacle. Next is a more formal oath the public gets to see, followed by a men’s only trip to the watering hole, where further laws and codes are delivered. Besides the watering hole portion, Knauft claims

“Gebusi men simply had few initiation secrets,” and that even at the watering hole most of the guidance lacked a depth of mystery compared to other cultures’ initiation ceremonies elsewhere (99). In fact, from Knauff’s view “Gebusi male secrets were more a source of ribaldry,” like campfire horseplay described in previous chapters (99).

“It was initiation, not marriage, that involved cooking and distributing of the village pigs and publicly celebrated transition to virile adulthood,” (101).

It could be that “the Gebusi initiation was [sic] mild,” than other cultures based on some expectation of deep cultural tradition, spiritual awakenings, or some mysterious moment (100). As it turns out, the multi-settlement assembly was a great feat for Gebusi; and, unlike Gebusi marriages, this event truly celebrated it with a large gathering, feasting, séances, the taking of an oath, secret code, as well as co-ed dancing between the young women and men (105). Where the lines began to blur for Knauff at the end of the *male* initiation was when “two young women linked fingers and stood in a single line,” with male-initiates and dressed in similar outfits to the six young men (106). Knauff has already made the comparison of the *male* initiation as a sort of ‘male wedding,’ but the sudden involvement of women came at a surprise (101). It seems “in its final moments of ritual celebration, Gebusi culture transcended its own deepest gender division,” inviting women to join the transition into adulthood with the other young men (107). Social scientist, Émile Durkheim, is cited for suggesting that “religion reflects society,” a statement found to be true for the Gebusi (109). The final scene for the Gebusi celebration is described as “triumphantly asserting the richness and joy of their humanity,” a union of spirituality, community, and diversity (108).