

**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
STANDARD LEVEL
PAPER 1**

Monday 17 May 2004 (afternoon)

1 hour

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Read the passage carefully and then answer all the questions.

Texts in this examination paper have been edited: word additions or explanations are shown in square brackets []; substantive deletions of text are indicated by ellipses in square brackets [...]; minor changes are not indicated.

*Extract from Karen J Brison, “Constructing Identity Through Ceremonial Language in Rural Fiji”, **Ethnology** 40:309-327 (2001) (pp. 309-326).*

There is perhaps nothing that captures the essence of Fijian culture better than the *sevusevu*, the ceremonial presentation of kava, a mildly narcotic root central to ritual and social events in many Pacific societies. The *sevusevu* is a central component of all life-cycle rituals, social gatherings, healing ceremonies, and community meetings, both because it is so frequent and
 5 because it articulates such central themes as the preoccupation with relative rank, the high value placed on being sociable and hospitable, and the importance of ceremonial life. [...]

The *sevusevu* is highly formalized and the precise prescription of behavior sets it apart from day-to-day life and gives it a sacred aura. [During the ritual,] orators make reference, in an entirely predictable fashion, to shared values and mythic events, and make no mention of
 10 current problems and events. [...] The *sevusevu*, which generally requires people to stay through several hours of drinking until the kava bowl is empty, [symbolizes] a commitment to being sociable characteristic of Fijian culture; participants express their willingness to put aside personal comfort and other activities in order to demonstrate their commitment to the group. [...]

15 Ceremonial speeches delivered during the *sevusevu* reflect Fijian concerns that all relationships must be *dodonu*, or “straight”, [whereby] everyone correctly follows the requirements of his or her role, as governed by time-honored Fijian traditions. *Sevusevu* speeches stress shared values, asserting that Fijians are like family and that they place primary importance on loving each other and worshiping the Lord. [...]

20 But the political and religious basis of the *sevusevu* ritual takes on a new meaning as village Fijians become increasingly aware of other ways of life, and are concerned with defining a place for themselves in the world where urban relatives and members of other cultural groups are often richer and, in some contexts, more respected. [...] Villagers use *sevusevu* to convince themselves and others that they are the guardians of a sacred cultural tradition,
 25 worth more than money. [...]

[For example,] one audience of *sevusevu* [performed by villagers] consists of international tourists at resorts where very truncated *sevusevu* are staged regularly for their benefit. *Sevusevu* are regularly used this way to portray Fijians as friendly, hospitable, and deeply “cultural” people. These ideas are voiced by many villagers, who take pride in believing that
 30 they are the reasons why tourists like to visit Fiji.

A second audience for Fijian assertions of identity are Indo-Fijians [descendants of immigrant workers from India that British colonial authorities brought to Fiji in the nineteenth century]. [...] *Sevusevu* rituals [performed in the presence of Indo-Fijians] portray Fijians as loving people, concerned with community and relationship, in opposition to Indo-Fijians, who are
 35 portrayed as concerned primarily with individual profit [and] as individualists, only out for their own good. [...]

It is significant, however, that all sevusevu speeches are made in Fijian. In fact, it is considered disrespectful to deliver a sevusevu speech in any other language, regardless of whether or not the recipient understands Fijian. Therefore, a more important external audience is other indigenous Fijians, [such as city dwellers and people who have migrated overseas,] who share the language and cultural knowledge to interpret the subtleties of the claims made in sevusevu. [...] One major occasion for sevusevu is fund-raising for church and village, in which urban and overseas relatives are invited home to give money. At such events, rural Fijians use ceremony to define themselves as guardians of tradition, keeping alive the sacred Fijian way of life, while urban and overseas relatives devote themselves to making money. [...] Often portrayed as demanding ne'er-do-wells by their urban and overseas relatives, villagers retort that they are doing valuable ceremonial work, essential to the well-being of the village and the Fijian nation, which urban relatives are obliged to support with cash donations. [...]

Sevusevu are means by which Fijian villagers attempt to promote one definition of local culture over others. Sevusevu speeches express basic assumptions about the cosmos and the society. Equally if not more important is the role of the sevusevu in defining the community in relation to the outside world. Through a long history of colonization by the British and postcolonial struggles with Indo-Fijians, Fijians have been convinced that their sacred and harmonious communal culture is necessary for their survival within their nation. [...] The sevusevu is best understood not only in terms of local assumptions about politics and the cosmos but also by the villagers' need to define a meaningful place for themselves in a larger context.

1. What values of rural Fijian life are highlighted in the sevusevu and the speeches that accompany it? Discuss how the ritual communicates these values. *[6 marks]*

 2. How have the new audiences of the sevusevu ritual affected its meaning in rural Fiji? *[6 marks]*

 3. Choose a ritual, object, or symbol found in another society you have studied that carries multiple meanings depending on who is using or witnessing it. Compare your choice with the sevusevu ritual in rural Fiji. *[8 marks]*
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