



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

Monday 12 November 2007 (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.

Rita Astuti, “‘It’s a boy,’ ‘It’s a girl!’: Reflections on sex and gender in Madagascar and beyond” short extract from within pp.29-52 in (eds) Michael Lambek., Andrew Strathern, “**Bodies and Persons**”, 1998 Cambridge University Press

The Vezo of Madascagar downplay differences between the sexes [yet] the first thing a Vezo mother is told after childbirth is the sex of the baby: “it’s a boy!”, “it’s a girl!” [...] To understand this we need the dichotomy between “sex” and “gender” to distinguish between the biologically intractable and the culturally constructed [...]

- 5 Illustrating the tension between “sex” and “gender” is a category of men who become “images” of women (*sarin’ampela*) and shift their gender identity. The reason for discussing *sarin’ampela* together with new-born babies is that these two sets of people illustrate the extremes in the interplay between sex and gender: the first are all gender, the second are all sex and no gender [...]

10 To say a new-born baby is a boy or a girl is actually the *only* thing that can be said about it: the only thing given at the moment of birth, when *everything else* has still to be created. [By contrast] one becomes a *sarin’ampela*. As children, *sarin’ampela* prefer spending time with girls rather than boys, learn to carry water on their head, *etc.* As adults their identity is defined by their performance of “women’s jobs” and adoption of “women’s ways of doing things.”

15 [However], it is difficult to specify what exactly *sarin’ampela* do, as the definition of men’s as opposed to women’s jobs [varies]: in one place men fish and women trade; elsewhere, both men and women are involved in net-fishing, women mainly salt the catch, while men do most of the bartering.

20 The distinction between men’s and women’s tasks is nonetheless never rigid: where men fish, women join in; where women salt the catch, men can help. Similarly, although cooking and fetching water are “women’s jobs,” men can also perform these tasks and do so regularly.

25 [With] “ways of doing things”, male and female distinctiveness is more marked. For example, women carry loads on their head, while men always carry them on their shoulders; women grow and braid their hair, while men cut theirs short; men never wear sarongs, as women do, high around their chest; when women are in groups they make a distinctive kind of laugh (*mitohake*) never heard among men.

30 Hence, whereas men performing “women’s jobs” are not regarded for this reason alone as *sarin’ampela*, men carrying water on their head or doing *mitohake* with other women will certainly be considered as such. However, these actions alone are not enough; they must be accompanied by an unambiguous performance of recognizable “women’s jobs.” In order to be credited with their identity, *sarin’ampela* have to present a more coherently gendered “image” than is ever the case with other men or women.

Doing is therefore essential to *sarin'ampela* identity – whether it be how they tie their sarong, or how they make a living. This raises an important point about gender identity among the Vezo – the fact that one's "image" can be at variance with one's sex, accounts for how some people *become* *sarin'ampela*: they *create* their gender against their sex [...] What *sarin'ampela* do is what all Vezo do: having been born sexed, they *become* gendered by doing. The example of men who become "images" of women proves that for all Vezo "gender" is simply an "image" – something that is *created* through what one does; something one *becomes* [...]

[Nevertheless] *sarin'ampela* are never treated as women when they die. The deceased affects funerary procedures. When the body is washed and put inside the coffin only people of the same sex as the deceased handle the corpse. Then the deceased is buried in either male or female sections of the tomb: a man among men, a woman among women. No woman would handle the corpse of a *sarin'ampela* as if it were "really" that of a woman [...] and there would be no question of burying a *sarin'ampela* in the female section of the tomb, for this would [upset] the ancestors.

During funerals the "image" of *sarin'ampela* is negated. At this point no person is prepared to recognize the "image" of a woman in the body of a man: regardless of how *sarin'ampela* are transformed by how they act, their sexed body [...] remains unchanged. A distinction is drawn here, between a person's "image," which is transformable because constructed through practice; and a person's sex, which is unchangeable – from birth to beyond death. On the basis of this distinction, the corpse of a *sarin'ampela* is treated for what it is: a sexed body, albeit dead.

1. Why do the Vezo stress sex and not gender at birth and death? [6 marks]

 2. Discuss the Vezo distinction between women's work and women's ways of doing things. [6 marks]

 3. Compare Vezo understandings of gender with those found in a society you have studied in detail. [8 marks]
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