



MARKSCHEME

May 2001

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Higher Level

Paper 1

Notes on Individual Questions

Since the ethnographic context described in the passage is generally well known, some candidates may invoke knowledge of South African contemporary history as background to the text. However, care should be exerted not to reward candidates who are familiar with the South African situation and penalize candidates who have less detailed knowledge. As always, scripts are evaluated primarily on the basis of whether they provide an anthropologically informed analysis of the information presented in the passage.

*Extract (pp. 1217-1221) from Adam Ashford (1996), **Of Secrecy and the Commonplace: Witchcraft and Power in Soweto**, *Social Research* 63:1183-1234.*

1. When and why is witchcraft viewed as ‘another social problem’ (line 10) in post-Apartheid South Africa?

[4 marks]

The basic answer to this question is clear from the passage. It is in public forums that witchcraft is presented as a social problem. This is particularly the case when these forums involve whites. As Ashford implies through the use of the adjective ‘another’ (line 10), post-Apartheid South Africa faces many social problems, of which witchcraft is only one. Whites see witchcraft as one of many symptoms of the backwardness, traditionalism, and lack of education of blacks, a view shared by both local media and observers from the First World. Acceptable answers will spell out these basic tenets in the candidate’s own words.

Better answers will capture the complexities of the situation in a variety of ways. For example, perceptive candidates will read between the lines and point out that whites can only see the ‘peculiar superstitions’ of blacks and not their own. When read in the context of an anthropological understanding of political ideology, the passage suggests that some whites focus on witchcraft beliefs and practices as one way of denigrating post-Apartheid society and politics. Good answers will also pick up the implication that black South Africans hold different views of witchcraft in public or when whites are present than they do amongst themselves and in private. In other words, only one version of the problem can be voiced in public discourse, while other versions are unacceptable, even though these other versions may better capture the complexities of the situation.

Fewer points will be awarded for answers that address the question only partially (*e.g.*, focusing on ‘when’ but not ‘why’) or that fail to demonstrate an analytic understanding of the situation, for example.

- 2. What specific problems does the government of South Africa face in developing a public policy to deal with witchcraft? [6 marks]**

Many people die every year in South Africa because of witchcraft: they are killed because they are accused of being witches, or they are killed by witches for their body parts, to be used in witchcraft practices. However, some parties in South Africa (*e.g.*, whites, the media, public discourse) and overseas do not believe in witchcraft, and would greet with derision the admission that witchcraft is anything but a sign of ignorance and backwardness. In order to present itself to the world as the modern democratic government it claims to be, the government is therefore under pressure to either suppress the problem (*e.g.*, by not legislating it or by repressing it legislatively) or seek to resolve it through education. Neither course of action will work: the first will simply change nothing or drive the problem underground; the second is doomed from the start because witchcraft beliefs are deeply ingrained in prevailing symbolic structures.

Successful answers will bring out some version of the above argument, which can take a variety of forms. Whatever form candidates choose, they must demonstrate an understanding of the various forces at play, each of which suggests a course of action for the government that contradicts the others. Better answers will highlight that these forces are of varied nature: local and transnational, symbolic and material, statal and societal, public and private. Less successful will be answers that fail to acknowledge the complexity of the situation, or that do not recognize the dilemma that the government faces.

- 3. Explain why many people in South Africa see secrecy as a characteristic that both the power of the state and the power of witchcraft share. [5 marks]**

Secrecy characterizes the activities of both the state and witches, and thus links the two forms of power together in the minds of black and white South Africans alike (if somewhat differently). Secrecy is part and parcel of the activities of witches, who act upon people without their knowledge, use tools (*e.g.*, body parts) obtained under cover, elicit the help of invisible forces (*e.g.*, spirits), and must operate without attracting the attention of official authorities. Secrecy is also associated with the activities of the state, in a variety of ways: many suspect that politicians use witchcraft for political ends; under Apartheid, the state depended on covert action and its legitimacy was supported by ideas from the outside, and decades of that regime imprinted in the minds of people the belief that the state is by definition secretive; under Apartheid again, the outlawed resistance movement, from which the current regime derives, relied on secret societies and covert action as well.

Candidates may base their discussion on a comparison of the forms that the power of the state and the power of witchcraft take, or they may focus on the functions or uses of this power, with equally fruitful results. All answers must take a critical but non-judgmental stance, as expected of candidates with training in Social Anthropology. Naïve judgmentalism and a failure to address the question critically can only earn the candidate a maximum of **[3 marks]** in the best of circumstances. Particularly successful answers will also emphasize the importance of viewing state power in historical light, demonstrating how the current regime has inherited the secretive associations of both government and anti-Apartheid resistance in the days of Apartheid. Perceptive candidates will point out that symbolic associations attached to socio-political institutions may persist despite obvious changes in the configuration of these institutions.

- 4. Compare South Africans' understanding of how power works with ideas about how power works in *one* other context that you have studied. [5 marks]**

Candidates may choose any situation in which power operates, through institutions, resistance to these institutions, or non-institutional practices. This question encourages candidates to think of power and people's understanding of power as autonomous, but of course closely related, dynamics. Candidates should identify specific ways in which the situation they have chosen resembles or differs from the South African case. They should organize their answers in a clear manner, and the best answers will utilize anthropological concepts (*e.g.*, power, resistance, institutions) to capture similarities, differences, and generalizations. Candidates must situate the comparative case chosen in terms of group, place, author and ethnographic present.
