

Social and cultural anthropology
Standard level
Paper 1

Wednesday 20 May 2015 (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.
- The maximum mark for this examination paper is **[20 marks]**.

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 adapted from Parish, J. (2011), “Social suffering and anxiety: deciphering coughs and colds at Akan anti-witchcraft shrines in Paris”, *Anthropology & Medicine*, 18(3): 303–313. Reproduced with permission from Taylor & Francis Ltd, <http://www.informaworld.com>.

Abe is an Akan* shrine priest and an immigrant from Ghana. His anti-witchcraft shrine in a poor suburb of Paris is regarded as one of the most powerful and most popular in Europe in solving illnesses and misfortune and creating economic opportunities for clients. Through divination, the shrine diagnoses common colds suffered by recently arrived, unskilled female Ghanaian migrants as something more socially and economically evil, witchcraft.

In treating illness and suffering, the Akan anti-witchcraft shrine is often presented as a model of unchanging and old-fashioned ideals. This fails to acknowledge the extensive repertoire of Ghanaian witchcraft discourses and contemporary divinatory practices. Successful treatment combines and reinvents traditional divination methods, paracetamol medicines and positive thinking in order to empower clients and present them with the possibility of new social and gainful employment prospects.

Witchcraft is the most commonly found explanation for misfortune at shrines. Divination attempts to place illness and social suffering in its widest social, economic and political context. Witchcraft revolves around the nature, meaning and question of suffering in the world.

Grace had recently arrived in London, United Kingdom, from Ghana to attend college, and was staying with relatives. She went to consult Abe in Paris because she suffered from a repeated sore throat and flu-like symptoms. At first, she ignored her symptoms, but became worried when one night she “felt a spiritual presence” in her bedroom. The next day, she thought she saw strange female creatures, wearing red capes and floating in the air. She recognized one as her father’s youngest sister. She felt very worried that this meant her illness could be witchcraft, a harmful spirit sent by a relative. She thought her relatives had grown tired of her problems and that she had overstayed her welcome as they now had to support her.

The witch, said Abe, is a resentful woman who “picks and feeds upon the unhappiness of young women” who feel that they have let family members down by becoming an economic burden. Abe reassured Grace that through continual social participation in kinship and social networks, she would find permanent work and feel less isolated. As her relatives in her new residential location got to know and like her, she would build up her own persona and this would temper the animosity directed towards her by the witch who Grace now believed to be her aunt.

Akan shrine priests have traditionally asked questions about clients’ social relationships, requiring answers that are confirmed through the throwing of sea shells or the killing of birds. These divinatory practices allow them to gather information about their clients’ backgrounds. Abe employs novel methods within his healing repertoire, including “road maps”, divination, non-prescription cold medicine, popular psychology and the power of positive thinking.

- 35 Abe reserves the more complicated technique of the “road map” for recently arrived migrants. It enables him to help clients make sense of the new world they have entered, to create a “social” map as quickly as possible. On each shrine visit, he plots relatives and friends, people the client has met and places they visit frequently. This is because a new immigrant is heavily dependent on a limited kinship network for survival. The less attached a client becomes to a
- 40 limited social network, the weaker the grip of the witch and the more likely there will be future social and economic opportunities.

- Abe told Grace that her “road map” was still not extensive enough. She complained that her cold symptoms were making it hard for her to get out and she had even lost work opportunities. On her next visit to the shrine, Abe told Grace that a witch had been caught and could no longer
- 45 harm her. Grace began to feel more confident, outgoing, and eventually found regular employment as a healthcare assistant in London.

Unhappy young migrant women believe that witches infect them with minor illnesses. Their symptoms are linked to their adjustment to life in Europe, the stresses of fulfilling their obligations to their social network and the pressure upon them to send money home to Ghana.

- 50 A person only becomes well once they begin, with the help of the shrine priest, to forget about self-blame and recrimination and to successfully participate in the world again.

* Akan: the Akan are an ethnic group from Ghana in West Africa

1. Describe why female Ghanaian migrants may decide to consult an anti-witchcraft shrine priest. [6]
 2. Explain why Abe’s anti-witchcraft shrine is successful in solving illness and misfortune. [6]
 3. Compare Ghanaian immigrants’ approaches to suffering to those of **one** other group or society you have studied in detail. [8]
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