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Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa

Adam Ashforth

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How does democracy fare when the people governed insist they live in a world with witches? If the government of a people afflicted by witchcraft refuses to punish witches, how does it avoid becoming alienated from the perceived needs of its people or, worse, seen as being in league with witches? In Soweto, South Africa, the constant threat of violent crime, the increase in black socio-economic inequality, the AIDS pandemic, and a widespread fear of witchcraft have converged to create a pervasive sense of insecurity among citizens and a unique public policy problem for government.

In *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa*, Adam Ashforth examines how people in Soweto and other parts of post-apartheid South Africa manage their fear of 'evil forces' such as witchcraft. Ashforth examines the dynamics of insecurity in the everyday life of Soweto at the turn of the twenty-first century. He develops a new framework for understanding occult violence as a form of spiritual insecurity and documents new patterns of interpretation attributing agency to evil forces. Finally, he analyzes the response of post-apartheid governments to issues of spiritual insecurity and suggests how these matters pose severe long-term challenges to the legitimacy of the democratic state.

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