such as schooling, health care, road works, even branches of the police force. This change in meaning is a simple but profound illustration of people's own awareness of the effects of neoliberal policies upon their lives.

As a whole, *Producing African Futures* raises important and interesting questions about the vagaries of securing a future under present conditions. What are the prospects, means, and modes of meeting present needs and preparing for a future? How do current conditions differ from past obstacles and opportunities? This book succeeds spectacularly in showing how Africans are themselves articulating and answering these and related questions. The volume will be valuable reading for historians, anthropologists, and others interested in the cultural manifestation of political economic changes in Africa.

Amy Stambach
University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin

Adam Ashforth. *Witchcraft, Violence and Democracy in South Africa.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. xx + 396 pp. Map. Illustrations. Selected Bibliography. Index. $25.00. Paper.

While residing in Soweto, South Africa's largest township, Adam Ashforth was struck not only by everyday threats of violence, but also by the extremely pervasive fear of bewitchment. This monograph explores different aspects of such "spiritual insecurity" —that is, the anxiety aroused by the indeterminacy of invisible forces—and its political implications.

Ashforth's discussion is organized into three parts. Part 1 provides an overview of basic socioeconomic data on Soweto, a discussion of reasons for increased fears of witchcraft, and an account of what it is like to live in a world with witches. He contends that misfortune can no longer be credibly explained by the apartheid system as a form of structural evil. The rapid rise of a black middle class, increased competition for jobs, declining fortunes of the poor, the advent of HIV/AIDS, an upsurge in crime, the dissipation of community solidarity with its concomitant erosion of norms of reciprocity and sharing—all these have contributed to an increased distrust that is often registered in the language of witchcraft. Those unable to progress often believe that they are held back by the malice of others. At the same time, numerous diviners reinforce and inflame these suspicions. Ashforth contends that while actual accusations of witchcraft are rare in Soweto, witchcraft nearly always forms a subtext to what is spoken about others. He also shows how Sowetans struggle not to succumb to excessive fears of witchcraft, as the fears themselves are believed to enhance the powers of witches.

Part 2, "Sources of Spiritual Insecurity," examines the prominence of belief in the mystical powers of *muthi* (potions made by experts from plant

https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.2006.0034 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and animal substances), pollution, and spiritual beings. Ashforth describes muthi as secret and ambiguous: It can be used for healing and protection or for destructive witchcraft. The powers of muthi are seen as akin to those of spiritual agents, computers that can be programmed, and remote-controlled devices; they are presented as exemplary of "African science." Under the rubric of pollution beliefs, he discusses fears of contamination by sexual intercourse and by invisible forces associated with dirt, death, and evil spirits. Ashforth argues that Sowetans generally do not live in an ordered cosmos ruled by a single almighty deity, but rather in one ruled by a host of ambiguous invisible agents. Yet he notes how difficult it is in the urban context to manage one's relations with the ancestors, who traditionally offer security. Ancestors associated with larger descent groups are no longer available in town, and the fragmentation of households and the diminution of parental authority have also made it difficult even to mobilize smaller families to appease the ancestors. Moreover, Sowetans are taught only a limited range of customs and regularly fail to follow ancestral rules. Hence one's ancestors are often indifferent when forces that seek to kill are at work. Sowetans increasingly resort to Zionist, Apostolic, and neo-Pentecostal churches to secure well-being in the here and now.

In Part 3, Ashforth argues that the postapartheid state has not successfully addressed questions of spiritual security. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission failed to prove the existence of a totalitarian "third force," popularly believed to orchestrate "black-on black" violence. The state has also been slow in responding to the recommendations of the Ralushai and Gender Equality Commissions to treat witchcraft as a serious offence and to regulate traditional healing. Ashforth notes that in doing so, the state would have to deal with the insurmountable problem of evidentiary procedures in cases where invisible agencies are at work and with traditional healers, whose powers derive from personal relations with spiritual beings and who therefore are not amenable to bureaucratic control. Neither has the state used school curricula to eradicate witchcraft beliefs. While Ashforth is essentially correct, I do not agree that this failure threatens the state's legitimacy—he himself notes that few Sowetans find the idea of opposing the ANC government even thinkable. This seems to suggest that government's strategy of separating not only the church, but also witchcraft and spirits, from the state may indeed be wise. In my experience, citizens mainly judge the state insofar as it can provide physical welfare.

Unfortunately, Ashforth only partially realizes his aims in *Witchcraft, Violence and Democracy in South Africa.* The questions raised are indispensable for an understanding of African politics, but the result is a work more innovative in political science than in anthropology.

Isak Niehaus
University of Pretoria
Pretoria, South Africa

https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.2006.0034 Published online by Cambridge University Press