



Madumo, a Man Bewitched

By Adam Ashforth

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Madumo, a Man Bewitched By Adam Ashforth

No one answered when I tapped at the back door of Madumo's home on Mphahlele Street a few days after my return to Soweto, so I pushed the buckling red door in a screeching grind of metal over concrete and entered calling, "Hallo?"

So begins this true story of witchcraft and friendship set against the turbulent backdrop of contemporary Soweto. Adam Ashforth, an Australian who has spent many years in the black township, finds his longtime friend Madumo in dire circumstances: his family has accused him of using witchcraft to kill his mother and has thrown him out on the street. Convinced that his life is cursed, Madumo seeks help among Soweto's bewildering array of healers and prophets. An *inyanga*, or traditional healer, confirms that he has indeed been bewitched. With Ashforth by his side, skeptical yet supportive, Madumo embarks upon a physically grueling treatment regimen that he follows religiously-almost to the point of death-despite his suspicion that it may be better to "Westernize my mind and not think about witchcraft."

Ashforth's beautifully written, at times poignant account of Madumo's struggle shows that the problem of witchcraft is not simply superstition, but a complex response to spiritual insecurity in a troubling time of political and economic upheaval. Post-apartheid Soweto, he discovers, is suffering from a deluge of witchcraft. Through Madumo's story, Ashforth opens up a world that few have seen, a deeply unsettling place where the question "Do you believe in witchcraft?" is not a simple one at all. The insights that emerge as Ashforth accompanies his friend on an odyssey through Soweto's supernatural perils have profound implications even for those of us who live in worlds without witches.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

When Ashforth, an Australian social scientist now at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, returned to South Africa for the summer he found his friend Madumo, an affable, philosophically inclined, habitually unemployed young man, actively tormented by witchcraft. Cast out by his family, shunned by his friends, and plagued by bad luck, Madumo, with Ashforth's help, began a desperate search for a cure. Their quest took them to Mr. Zondi, a traditional healer (inyanga) who consulted the spirits in a small tin shack in the slums of Soweto, to the headquarters of the Zion Christian Church, an African-evangelical hybrid where they were barraged by eager prophets, and to the distant suburbs of Johannesburg, where they hosted a ritual feast for the ancestors. Journalistic in tone, Ashforth's book joins Karen McCarthy Brown's *Mama Lola* in a growing tradition of personal ethnographies where the narrator is less than omniscient, confidants are friends and not "informants," and the boundaries are blurred between observer and observed, between truth and fiction. Ashforth offers his compelling story with very little in the way of explanation. He makes no appeals to anthropological theory—the book does not even include a glossary. Indeed, one of his major points is that spiritual beliefs are untranslatable. He concludes that witchcraft is "something akin to a religious mystery," ultimately incomprehensible to those who have not experienced it. (June)

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From Library Journal

Deviating from the tendency of most works on witchcraft in sub-Saharan Africa to examine and interpret the phenomenon from a broad sociopolitical and cultural standpoint, this book is a narrative of individual experiences. Ashforth (social science, Inst. for Advanced Study, Princeton Univ.) takes as his protagonist his South African friend Madumo, who seeks political and economic motivations behind the superstitious tales he reports. Not for readers insistent on scientific rigor and discipline, this work neither attempts to explain nor pretends to understand witchcraft or why it is so widespread among black South Africans. The author raises many questions without providing convincing answers. Nevertheless, the meticulously detailed accounts and contemplative discourses make the book both exciting and informative. Recommended for larger public libraries. —Edward K. Owusu-Ansah, Murray State Univ. Lib., KY

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From Kirkus Reviews

From an Australian academic now US-based, a discursive and languidly paced account of an alleged bewitching in Soweto, South Africa, that suggests wider political and psychological significance. Since 1990 Ashforth (Social Science/Institute for Advanced Study) has spent months visiting and living in Soweto, where he befriended Madumo, the classmate of an exchange student he had once taught in Minnesota. When he returned to Soweto on a recent visit, he learned that his friend was in trouble. Then in his 30s, Madumo was unemployed and living in a small, barely furnished room. He'd lost his tuition money and had turned to dealing drugs and counterfeiting. His family blamed him for his mother's death and refused to let him stay in her Soweto house. Overwhelmed by his troubles, Madumo told Ashforth that he believed he had been bewitched. A skeptical Ashforth questioned Madumo's old friends, as well as devout Christians like his landlady—and all admitted that there might be something to Madumo's claim. Ashforth agreed to pay for Madumo to consult an inyanga (a healer whose skills are regarded as benign, unlike those of a witch). The treatment recommended was costly, physically debilitating, and lengthy. While Madumo subjected himself to painful purges and tried to follow the healer's directives, Ashforth continued his investigation and learned that witchcraft was endemic in South Africa. Madumo, a reflective man, suggested that it was currently widespread because of the recent political changes: in the old days, apartheid could be blamed for every ill,

but now that it no longer exists there is no universal evil to hold responsible for unemployment, misfortune, and poverty. And as some blacks become wealthy and successful while others don't, it is tempting to blame some external force for one's problems. A persuasive and interesting account that gets lost in the drawn-out and diffused story of an unorthodox healing -- *Copyright © 2000 Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

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Oren Nelson:

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Juan Dishon:

Your reading 6th sense will not betray you actually, why because this Madumo, a Man Bewitched guide written by well-known writer we are excited for well how to make book that could be understand by anyone who all read the book. Written inside good manner for you, still dripping wet every ideas and creating skill only for eliminate your own hunger then you still skepticism Madumo, a Man Bewitched as good book not simply by the cover but also with the content. This is one guide that can break don't ascertain book by its deal with, so do you still needing one more sixth sense to pick this kind of!? Oh come on your studying sixth

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