

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

DEPARTMENT OF ANTROPOLOGY

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Dear Mr. Couffer,

Thank you for your letter; I was interested in your queries, and can understand your puzzlement, and I'll try to make myself clearer.

First witchhdoctor is both pejorative and inaccurate (and vague). It has connotations of some wild creature terrorising superstitious people. It is better to substitute terms like witch or sorcerer, for the people who are believed to have powers to harm others, and to use witchfinder, diviner, or herbalist for those specialists who diagnose troubles and prescribe cures.

Similarly, tribe is a fuzzy word, and also an offensive one. Its use (alas, widespread, even among Africans) is partly a relic of colonial days when all Africa was thought to be divided into tribes, though no-.it is clear that many of the supposed tribes - e.g. Kikuyu in Kenya, or Ibo in Nigeria - had no unity in precolonial times, and with many others the boundaries - socially and territorially - were very fluid. Problem is that it is difficult to suggest another word. Then it is legitimate to use the concept Ethnic group. is rather wishy-washy, and often simply say people. I regard the word offensive as it implies savage, barbaric, etc - you never hear of elegant or polite tribes?

I agree that the word shaman is archaic, I was just quoting from Nadel.

About the goats would be sacrificed - I included that as an example of the scene the author was creating - of the improperly understood exotic, mysterious and probably horrid African scene. I've participated in many goat-sacrifices myself, but I felt that Critchfield was taking it out of context. I did not make myself clear, I'm afraid.

But your most important point concerns the use of tribe, and I'd like to include a zerox of a chapter by the anthropologist Gulliver, who deals at some length with the objections and difficulties involved.

I was interested in your behaving lived in Kenya. I hope to return there next year for another period of nine months fieldwork, near Embu to complete a study of the relationship between people and their plants, and their change.

Sincerely

David Brokensha.

cc: David Hayano.