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**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
HIGHER LEVEL
PAPER 1**

Wednesday 21 May 2014 (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 Auyero, J. and Swistun, D. “Flammable, Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown”, Oxford University Press, New York, 2009.

In 1931, the Shell oil refinery opened in Flammable [a shantytown]. Flammable is today surrounded by one of the largest petrochemical compounds in Argentina. Here, the soil, air and water are polluted with lead and other chemicals.

5 Experts agree that, given the compound’s industrial activities, Flammable is unsuitable for human residence. One study found that children in Flammable are exposed to lead and, not surprisingly, have many health problems*. For example, Claudia’s youngest child has had seizures since he was a baby and another was born with her left leg much shorter than the right leg.

10 Daily life is dominated by ignorance, error and doubt regarding the sources and effects of toxicity. For example, we were told: “Sometimes you can’t be outside, your throat stings. It smells of gas. Even if we close our doors, it smells”. Yet, when residents talk about the specifics of contamination, when they have to put a name to the sources, location, and contents of pollution, things become unclear.

15 Misinformation, denial and shifted responsibility are three manifestations of the collective schemes of perception that we call “toxic uncertainty”. For example, residents say that oil contaminates water streams, but they also consider it harmless. Some residents believe that the refinery is completely safe; others think it is highly contaminating.

20 Residents are aware that lead is harmful, but most think that it lies elsewhere. To them, it is not located in the entire neighbourhood but only in the poorest parts. It is not stored in their bodies but in those of the poorest residents. As Susana told us: “It’s the mothers’ fault. They allow their kids to play in the garbage; they don’t bathe them ... that’s why they get contaminated”.

One way of thinking and living pollution acknowledges its existence but denies its seriousness. Many adults use their own bodies as instruments of denial. As Francisco put it: “I raised three kids here. I have been inside many compounds, and I don’t have health problems”.

25 How are we to explain this complex combination of error, denial and confusion? Why do Flammable residents doubt or deny the “hard facts” of industrial pollution?

30 Environmental contamination was not suddenly imposed on Flammable residents ... The Shell oil refinery opened 75 years ago; the gradual increase in industrial pollution levels occurred at the same time as people took roots in the neighbourhood through work, family and friendship networks. The process which most of the residents went through is important for understanding how they think and feel about Flammable – not as an outsider might, but in a way that is part of their history and the routine organization of daily life. Routines work smoothly to obscure increasing environmental hazards. Perceptions of danger are thus grounded in everyday routines.

Two additional powerful actors – state officials and doctors – shape the understanding of the origins and effects of toxic contamination by making contradictory claims about them. The contradictory statements shape the confusion which results in shared (mis)understandings.

On the one hand, state officials discuss contamination, denounce the companies that operate the oil industry, demand a study of the effects of industrial pollution and promise the relocation of the shantytown. On the other hand, they show up in Flammable talking about relocating the residents. And then they disappear. Residents told us that local doctors also advise them to leave. Other times, residents report the silence of doctors concerning their illnesses. How can residents not be confused if state officials, even those responsible for their well-being, send such contradictory messages?

These collective schemes of perception (what people see and don't see, what they know and don't know) are socially produced, but this production is not simply a cooperative creation. Perceptions of hazards are shaped by powerful actors. The knowledge actors have about their environment is the joint product of the history of that place, the routines and interactions of its residents, and the power relations they are caught up in. In Flammable, “not knowing” is one example of material suffering and symbolic domination.

Flammable : environmental suffering in an Argentine shantytown by Auyero and Swistun (2009) 665w from pp.50–61. “By permission of Oxford University Press, Inc”

* health problems: lead may cause a range of health effects, from behavioural problems and learning disabilities to seizures and death

1. Describe Flammable residents' views of their environment. *[6 marks]*
 2. Using theoretical perspectives, explain how the authors understand knowledge to be socially produced. *[6 marks]*
 3. Compare and contrast the power relations in Flammable with the power relations in **one** society that you have studied in detail. *[8 marks]*
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