

# “Black Magic” Practices in African Academies: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Socio-Legal Perspective

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## **Abstract**

*Chronic levels of narcissism, animosity, envy, and a fixation with toppling individuals who are thought to be making solid academic progress have grown common in African academies. Anti-progress proponents, whose egocentric behaviour and/or tendencies are linked to “black magic” tactics, no longer regard academic competence/excellence. These African academic “black magicians” place a greater emphasis on individuals than on academic matters, spend more time hopping from one office to the next for no apparent reason, and thrive on institutional politicking. They regard hardworking colleagues as threats or “academic fetishes” who must be “exorcised” from African academies to keep incompetent/sloppy individuals who represent no threat to their positions or minor interests and whom they can manipulate. Based on an examination of legislation limiting black magic in South Africa and Zimbabwe, the article contends that intellectual jealousy, narcissistic behaviour, and other associated evil conduct emanating out of envy in African academies should be categorised as black magic or witchcraft.*

**Keywords:** African academies, black magic, academic narcissists, corridor merchants, legal anthropology.

**JEL Classification:** K38

## **1. Introductory remarks**

Historically, black magic in African societies has often been associated with backward or uncivilized communities.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, highly educated individuals in African societies have been celebrated as the hallmark of civilization and the instruments of reason in the so-called “Dark Continent”, as Africa is often labelled.<sup>4</sup> Strangely, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Africa, practices akin to black magic are becoming rampant in African societies, and strangely more so in African academies. Strange patterns of academic jealousy and extreme narcissist tendencies often associated with black magic, witchcraft, sorcery or voodoo practices<sup>5</sup> are now the order of the day in African academies, particularly in Southern Africa. This emerging trend appears to defy logic and/or reason. Since the critique of the link between law and reason by Legal Realists in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,<sup>6</sup> legal theorists have not focused on the emergence of black magic like practices in African academies. However, we argue that black magic like practices in the African academies are now part and parcel of the social goods of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century African academies that represent a certain social structure from a specific time period. Such black magic practices now play a central role in the establishment of the order, morals, ethics, customs, practices, politics, and other values in African academies in terms of institutional control and/or administration. African academies are now teeming with academic black magicians who have an insatiable/voracious appetite to falsify information in order to get an unfair advantage over their more level-headed and competitive peers. From a socio-legal perspective, this article points to the prevalence of black magic-like narcissistic practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century African academies.

The phrase “black magic”, which we used, is a broad one. Magic, in this sense, refers to a wide range of cultural acts aiming at generating a changing effect through a combination of physical

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<sup>3</sup> Wallace, D., ‘Rethinking Religion, Magic and Witchcraft in South Africa: From Colonial Coherence to Post-colonial Conundrum’, 28(1) *Journal for the Study of Religion* (2015), pp. 23-51.

<sup>4</sup> Mazrui, A., ‘Churches and Multinationals in the Spread of Modern Education: A Third World Perspective’, 1(1), *Third World Quarterly* (1979), pp. 30-49.

<sup>5</sup> Harries, J.O., ‘Witchcraft, Envy, Development, and Christian Mission in Africa’, 40(2) *Missiology: An International Review* (2012), pp. 129-139.

<sup>6</sup> Coplan, K.S., ‘Legal Realism, Innate Morality, and the Structural Role of the Supreme Court in the U.S. Constitutional Democracy’, 86 *Tulane Law Review* (2011), pp. 181, <http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/lawfaculty/809/>.

and verbal strategies that differ from traditional technological interventions. These techniques have been classed as magic, sorcery, and shamanism separately, but we bundled them all together as “black magic”,<sup>7</sup> like the Legal Realists. Black magic, for the purposes of this article, will be construed to refer to the use of narcissist tendencies or supernatural power by some academics for evil and selfish objectives, such as injuring fellow academics physically, mentally, or financially. Such practices shall also be construed as being equal with sorcery, witchcraft, or voodoo practices.

The Oxford Advanced American Dictionary defines black magic as, “a type of magic in which the devil’s power is thought to be used to carry out bad deeds”.<sup>8</sup> In anthropology, the phrase “witchcraft” is used to describe charges of supernatural evil<sup>9</sup>. Academics who practice black magic frequently use their witchcraft tendencies to build their own power structures and use their positions inside these academies (the so-called positive antitype). Envy, anger, and underhanded deals<sup>10</sup> by some academics acting to hurt their competitors are common features of black magic in African academies. In some instances, academics who practice black magic or practices similar to black magic in African academies are known to consult black magicians for rituals intended at providing them power to acquire greater positions of authority.

In this article, we used the societal notions of ritual and magic to critique the black magic like narcissistic practices in African academies. We employed features of law in South Africa and Zimbabwe (Witchcraft Suppression Act),<sup>11</sup> (Witchcraft Suppression Act),<sup>12</sup> to show that some narcissistic practices are akin to black magic which must be regulated against. In law, like in ritual magic, typical formal and performative procedures that appear to be simply distractions or means to mask what is really going on can be used to change the meaning of a set of social conditions.<sup>13</sup> We discussed certain narcissistic activities in African academies that even skeptics might be willing to admit are real enough to be considered legitimate cases of “black magic.” To that end, the article discussed the behavior of some African academics in African academies and surfaced what distinguishes some African academics from other academics in terms of civilization. We pointed out that many contemporary practices in current African academies are no longer in sync with civilized academic values, but rather black magic practices. We used a socio-legal approach guided by our long-term experiences in African academies as legal scholars. As some form of academic ethnographers, we established how some African academics conduct themselves in African academies and observed how they behave like black magicians. We built a clear picture of how such academics as engaging in black magic akin practices perceive their academic communities and social interactions as instruments to a perceived end. We outlined how such academics have abandoned academic civilization’s ethos in favor of bizarre black magic-like techniques. As a result, from a socio-legal perspective, we concluded that there is need to address the scourge of the ever-increasing black magic-like practices in African academies.

## 2. Black magic: a conceptual background

The principles and practices of “black magic” (also known as “witchcraft,” “voodoo,” and “sorcery”) have been around for a long time<sup>14</sup> and are still practiced today. These terms have traditionally been applied to the bad and unpleasant behavior of individuals from various cultures,

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<sup>7</sup> McLellan, G., *Dancing on the edge: Shamanism in modern Britain*, In G. Harvey (Ed.), *Shamanism: A reader*, pp. 365-374 (London, Routledge, 2003), Kellie, D., ‘Renaissance Drama and ‘Magic Realism’: Mythology and Religion across Time and Genres’, In BSU Honours Program Theses and Projects (2019), [https://vc.bridgew.edu/honors\\_proj/365](https://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj/365).

<sup>8</sup> Hornby, A.S., and Crowther, J., *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford, England, Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Patterson, M., ‘Sorcery and Witchcraft in Malenasia’, 45(2) *Oceania* (1974), pp. 132-160.

<sup>10</sup> Nyabwari, B.G., and Kagema, N.D., ‘The Impact of Magic and Witchcraft in the Social, Economic, Political and Spiritual Life of African Communities’, 1(5) *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)* (2014), pp. 9-18.

<sup>11</sup> [Chapter 9:19] 14 of 1899 [Zimbabwe].

<sup>12</sup> 3 of 1957 [South Africa].

<sup>13</sup> Munro, J., *Colonial Rule of the Akamba; Social Change in the Akamba Highlands 1889-1939*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975).

<sup>14</sup> Hayes, S., ‘Christians Response to witchcraft and Society’ 23(3) *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* (1995), pp. 339-354.

communities, and primitive societies. It is also said that most Western countries derived the concept of black magic (witchcraft, voodoo, and/or sorcery) from the bible's anti-witchcraft laws in the Old Testament. Such laws present a theological conflict between good and evil.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, black magic, witchcraft and sorcery are regarded as evil and satanic in nature.<sup>16</sup> While this conceptual approach may be right and justified, we believe that it has unfairly and incorrectly limited the conceptualization, practice and use of black magic (including witchcraft, voodoo, and sorcery) to matters pertaining to the so-called uncivilized and/or primitive African societies. There is overwhelming evidence in the African academies that black magic or practices akin to black magic are prevalent in civilized African societies.

Unpleasant activities such as excessive malice, covetousness, evil schemes and desire to cause harm, suffering, pain, distress and trauma to another person also amount to black magic, witchcraft, voodoo, and sorcery.<sup>17</sup> As a result, we believe that such unpleasant actions should be classified as "academic black magic/witchcraft/voodoo/sorcery" when they occur in academia. To put it another way, the aforementioned unpleasant behaviors are perpetrated not only by illiterate people in primitive societies, but also by so-called educated people in modern organizations, enterprises, and/or African academies in even more sophisticated, negative, and malicious ways.<sup>18</sup>

It is submitted that cultural anthropologists have somewhat narrowly interpreted the concepts of black magic, witchcraft, voodoo, and sorcery in relation to, *inter alia*, the nexus between modernity and capitalist theories as well as related epistemologies, practices and ontologies.<sup>19</sup> Cultural anthropologists and social historians have also wrongly and narrowly placed a nexus between modernity, primitive societies and black magic.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, cultural anthropologists and social historians have merely restricted the concepts of black magic, witchcraft, voodoo and sorcery to geographical locations of primitive communities and/or societies.<sup>21</sup> They overlooked the fact that contemporary societies also have different forms of black magic, witchcraft, voodoo and sorcery within the geographies of development, including companies, universities and other juristic entities. In this regard, we argue that post-development geographies, decolonial geographies, potential epistemologies and other normative forms of development should be carefully considered to include academic black magic, witchcraft, voodoo, and sorcery which is perpetrated by educated persons, especially in academic institutions.<sup>22</sup> The examples of academic black magic, witchcraft, voodoo, and sorcery include any excessive envy, jealousy, evil schemes, desire to impede academic progress and desire to cause harm, suffering, pain, distress and trauma to one academic person by another. These activities are also known as "academic politics" in the academia.<sup>23</sup> Academic politics is as bad as the occult, black magic, witchcraft, voodoo, and sorcery. Academic politics is perpetrated in multifaceted and cunning ways by persons that are least expected of such academic black magic, witchcraft, voodoo, and sorcery. This academic black magic, witchcraft, voodoo, and sorcery is not limited to colonial, racial and/or other traditional features of black magic, sorcery, witchcraft, voodoo, and the occult.<sup>24</sup> It is found among the African academics in most universities and academic institutions globally.

Black magic and supernatural power play a key role, in African academies, as they do in most

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<sup>15</sup> Ankarloo, B., and Clark, S., *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Biblical and Pagan Societies*, (University of Philadelphia Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> York, M., 'Navigating Academia and Spirituality from a Pagan Perspective' 17(1/2) *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* (2016), pp.115-127.

<sup>18</sup> Murrey, A., 'Decolonising the Imagined Geographies of 'Witchcraft' 2(2/3) *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* (2017), pp.157-179.

<sup>19</sup> Murrey, A., 2(2/3) *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* (2017), pp.157-179.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp.157-179.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp.157-179.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pp.157-179.

<sup>23</sup> Roxburgh, S., 'Through the Scrying Glass: Defining Witchcraft in Academic Study' 3 *Cahiers D'etudes Africaines* (2018), pp. 1029-1045.

<sup>24</sup> Murrey, A., *op. cit.*, pp.157-179.

societies.<sup>25</sup> There are academics that have a reputation for practicing black magic in theory and practice. Despite the fact that it is no longer used in many cultures and nations, allegations of witchcraft persist in others.<sup>26</sup> It is very frequent in Sub-Saharan Africa, and it is also very common in more traditional societies around the world.<sup>27</sup> The folks with the fewest ties to the community are the ones who are most frequently accused of witchcraft. Accusations of witchcraft have long been used as a political tool to maintain social order, though not necessarily in the way one might think.<sup>28</sup> The mass hysteria theory<sup>29</sup> and the scapegoat theory<sup>30</sup> are two popular social science explanations for black magic or witchcraft.

The mass hysteria theory has been used to explain events during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, such as the witch hunts.<sup>31</sup> During these religious battles, communities demanded that courts establish an explanation for their ailments, and they frequently asked and forced magistrates to make decisions condemning community members.<sup>32</sup> According to the scapegoat theory, someone from outside the community assumes responsibility for the community's issues.<sup>33</sup> The Salem witch trials, for example, were explained using this method.<sup>34</sup> However, both the mass hysteria and scapegoat theories have substantial difficulties in understanding actual witchcraft accusations and punishment patterns, both historically and across cultures.<sup>35</sup>

While it is intriguing that ordinary people are being accused of witchcraft and prosecuted because they are relatively powerless,<sup>36</sup> accusations are ultimately intended to show policy makers are ready to go to such lengths to bring to account those that practice black magic.<sup>37</sup> It is a message to those who are genuinely threatening the social order. Scholars must be forced to look beyond social typologies and investigate the complexity of behavior in African academics that resembles black magic. Researchers must employ observational methods to analyze a range of details, like educational levels, good research, affluence, meritocracy, and more, to understand the prevalence of black magic and similar practices. This is supported by Dumitrescu who correctly argues that "Universities preach meritocracy but, in reality, bend over backwards to protect poisonous personalities".<sup>38</sup> As a result, some academics in African academics want others to listen to what they have to say about their narcissist behavior, but the focus should be on the essence of what people are doing, which is analogous to black magic. This argument is important to the article's thematic scheme because, when it comes to black magic in African academics, we typically omit narcissist acts from the purview of witchcraft, sorcery, or voodoo practices, even when such conduct qualifies for such categories in essence.

### 3. Narcissistic conduct as black magic in African academics

Like narcissists, most academics are well-educated, self-absorbed individuals who manipulate

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<sup>25</sup> Deme, M.K., 'Heroism and the Supernatural in the African Epic: Toward a Critical Analysis', 39(3) *Journal of Black Studies* (2009), pp. 402-419.

<sup>26</sup> Dehm, S., and Millbank, J., 'Witchcraft Accusations as Gendered Persecution in Refugee Law' 28(2) *Social & Legal Studies* (2019) pp. 202-226; Wallace, D., 28(1) *Journal for the Study of Religion* (2015), pp. 23-51.

<sup>27</sup> Gershman, B., 'Witchcraft Beliefs, Social Relations, and Development' (2022), <https://dra.american.edu/islandora/object/auislandora%3A94964/datastream/PDF/view>.

<sup>28</sup> Ganis, M.Z.N., 'Political and Social Implications of Witchcraft and Legitimacy in South Africa', 60(3/4) *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* (2005), pp. 361-370.

<sup>29</sup> Wessely, S., 'Mass hysteria: two syndromes?' 17(1) *Psychological Medicine* (1987), pp. 109-120.

<sup>30</sup> Allport, G. W., *The Nature of Human Prejudice*, (Addison-Wesley, Cambridge, MA, 1954).

<sup>31</sup> Guilford, G., 'Germany was once the witch-burning capital of the world. Here's why', (2018).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Riordan, V.D., 'The Scapegoat Mechanism in Human Evolution: An Analysis of Rene Girard's Hypothesis on the Process of Hominization', 16 *Biological Theory* (2021) pp. 242-256.

<sup>34</sup> Craker, W.D., 'Spectral Evidence, Non-Spectral Acts of Witchcraft, and Confession at Salem in 1692', 40 *Historical Journal* (1997), pp. 331-358.

<sup>35</sup> Schoenemany, T.J., 'The Witch Hunt as a Culture Change Phenomenon' 3(4) *Ethos* (1975), pp. 529-554.

<sup>36</sup> Currie, E.P., 'Crimes without Criminals: Witchcraft and its Control in Renaissance Europe' 3(1) *Law & Society Review* (1968), pp. 7-32.

<sup>37</sup> Zikr, J., 'Supernatural: An anthropologist's account of witchcraft, shamans and magic' (2019) <https://www.boisestate.edu/news/2019/10/21/supernatural-an-anthropologists-account-of-witchcraft-shamans-and-magic/>.

<sup>38</sup> According to Dumitrescu, I., 'Ten rules for succeeding in academia through upward toxicity' (2019), <https://grad.uic.edu/news-stories/ten-rules-for-succeeding-in-academia-through-upward-toxicity/t>.

and use guilt as a weapon to feed their bloated egos.<sup>39</sup> The thirst for recognition, money, and other symbols of power and prosperity is insatiable amongst African academics.<sup>40</sup> The narcissist's unquenchable need develops intra-psychically as an all-consuming hunger, which seems to an outside observer as demonic possession akin to witchcraft. Others, on the other hand, are purposely harmed by them. They set out to destroy you. To these twisted and perverted spirits, it makes no difference how you feel. These academicians are frequently cutthroat, obviously bad, and egregiously lacking in empathy. Vultures and energy suckers, to put it simply. They deplete fellow academics on all levels, like parasites, on mental, physical, emotional, financial, social, and spiritual levels. Many post-colonial African academics appear to have an overflow of narcissistic academics that prioritize self-promotion over institutional development, academic change, and progress.

During times of upheaval, confusion, and uncertainty in African academics, such egotistical academics frequently climb to prominence like witches on brooms. Once in academic leadership positions, they purposefully create confusion and uncertainty in order to maintain their vice grip on power. Academies are fertile ground for narcissism<sup>41</sup>, particularly in Africa, because of their high levels of poverty, competition, the love for power, contestation of legal, cultural, and moral values, and lack of institutional direction. Narcissist academics take advantage of these circumstances by portraying themselves as loving, battling for disadvantaged and/or marginalized colleagues, and knowing everything there is to know.<sup>42</sup> They are devoid of any sense of morality and disobey all laws, regulations, and traditions.

Aided by weak democratic, institutional and societal checks and balances, these narcissistic academics become autocratic and exhibit practical forms of witchcraft and its related tendencies. Many unsuspecting academics surrender to the control of such narcissist academics charmed by their apparent confidence, outrageous promises and because they play on people's fears, victimhood and prejudices.<sup>43</sup> They unleash considerable pain on fellow colleagues. These academics thrive on the pain of others or work colleagues, leaving damaged victims in their wake, destroying their sense of self or agency, causing lost potential and lost growth.<sup>44</sup>

Narcissist academics (we prefer to call the academic witches) are wounded people who may have been abandoned during critical times of their emotional development. Waelder, a psychoanalyst, first described the narcissistic personality in 1925, and Kohut<sup>45</sup> later coined the term "narcissistic personality disorder" to describe a set of characteristics that include an exaggerated sense of superiority, a lack of self-awareness about the impact of their behaviour, and a contempt for others who they devalue to validate their own grandiosity.

Narcissistic academics are often entitled, have God complexes, and lack empathy.<sup>46</sup> They have a warped perception of reality, believe in their own version of truth, and are unable to view things from the perspective of others. They make stuff up and do not care about other people. They assign blame for their errors to others and downplay the consequences of their conduct. When put in positions of authority (mostly administrative), they encircle themselves with enablers who are blindly loyal to them and elevate them to positions of power. Patronage is how they flatter their facilitators. When their facilitators start to criticize them, they swiftly turn on them. Such academics have no qualms about destroying public resources, institutions, and countries to secure or hold power. They are poisonous. We must be cautious because narcissistic academics who lack conscience, constraints,

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<sup>39</sup> Schneider, A., 'Silent Treatment: Preferred Weapon of People with Narcissism' (2014), <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/silent-treatment-a-narcissistic-persons-preferred-weapon-0602145>.

<sup>40</sup> Gerhart, G.M., *Black power in South Africa: The evolution of an ideology*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>41</sup> Fulford, R., 'A crash course in narcissism from leading universities' (2012), <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/robert-fulford-a-crash-course-in-narcissism-from-leading-universities>.

<sup>42</sup> Hartog, D.N.D., De Hoogh, A.H.B., and Belschak, F.B., 'Toot your own Horn? Leader Narcissism and the Effectiveness of Employee Self-Promotion', 46(2) *Journal of Management* (2020), pp. 261-286.

<sup>43</sup> Schneider, A., 'Silent Treatment: Preferred Weapon of People with Narcissism' (2014), <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/silent-treatment-a-narcissistic-persons-preferred-weapon-0602145>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Kohut, H., 'Thoughts on narcissism and narcissistic rage', 27(1) *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* (1972), pp. 360-400.

<sup>46</sup> Eddy, C.M., 'Self-serving social strategies: A systematic review of social cognition in narcissism' *Current Psychology* (2021), pp. 1-19. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s12144-021-01661-3.pdf>.

or checks and balances can soon become an authoritarian or psychopath, saying that they are not bound by rules/laws or responsible for their relations, institutions, and institutional social order.

#### 4. African academics laced with “rotten stories” and “corridor merchants”

Academics who place a premium on spiteful gossip and ugly corridor talk over academic performance will be referred to as corridor merchants. They spend the majority of their time criticizing academics who strive for academic excellence and work hard. Often, such backbiting corridor merchants work on creating techniques and mechanisms to get rid of hardworking colleagues by spreading a variety of falsehoods, “rotten stories” and spiteful words.

These academics (both in lecturing roles and in management) focus on passive, guarded, and cautious engagements with their similar minds with the ultimate goal of individualizing the workplace, using gossip as their tool of choice. They make use of cunning and unscrupulous methods to obtain an advantage at work, and they thrive on dishonesty and spreading lies. They are highly delusional and are overwhelmed by the delusion of grandeur.

The corridor merchants employ nasty talk as a means of reinforcing their shared viewpoints and erroneous group solidarity to bolster their disruptive tendencies at work. The corridor merchants are frequently unstable and lack the necessary skills to carry out their responsibilities. In some cases, the corridor merchants are fiercely competitive academics who cannot take seeing colleagues who are simply superior to them. They guffaw hysterically, wildly and/or uncontrollably at the slightest hint of a view that is credible but which their miniscule academic intellect cannot process or condense. In the process of wildly exposing their ignorance, they want to appear knowledgeable yet even a half-baked student can see the rot without the slightest of efforts. Such academics define the rot that now characterizes African academics.

Unbeknown to the corridor merchants, their talking activities frequently take on a fatalistic tone, dividing the workplace and jeopardizing excellent research and learning as well as the retention of qualified people. Malicious gossip reduces the productivity of African academics, diverts other academics' attention away from their responsibilities, fosters academic segregation, and can cause a great deal of hardship to those who are the recipients of such malicious gossip.<sup>47</sup> When chatting, such corridor merchants frequently have group-serving or, better yet, self-serving goals. Academic black magic, witchcraft, voodoo, and sorcery in the form of “academic politics” powered by gossip is more common in the academia. For instance, instead of collegiality and celebrating academic excellence among peers, some academics are very envious and jealousy of others that are more productive than them in terms of published articles, published books, published book chapters, published conference papers, postgraduate students successfully delivered and other academic achievements.<sup>48</sup> These academic colleagues are extremely retrogressive, exceptionally negative and disastrous in their conduct towards any academic achievement of their fellow colleagues. They deliberately manufacture and publish dubious, illicit, rotten, concocted, fabricated, treacherous and perfidious stories against their fellow colleagues that are more academically productive than them as indicated above. All these negative activities occur directly in the offices, workplace corridors and boardrooms of various academic institutions and they constitute what we have termed “rotten stories” and “corridor merchandising”. This kind of academic witchcraft and sorcery is perpetrated by highly-educated academics in African academics in a bid to, *inter alia*, discredit, demonise, deny and impede academic progress of their colleagues.<sup>49</sup> They devise evil schemes to frustrate and impede academic progress and/or cause harm, suffering, pain, distress and trauma to their fellow academically productive colleagues.<sup>50</sup>

Instead of befriending and learning from those that are more productive, academics that

<sup>47</sup> Danha, F., ‘Workplace gossip: Everything you need to know’ (2022), <https://www.thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/workplace-gossip-everything-you-need-to-know>.

<sup>48</sup> Emmeche, C., ‘The Borderology of Friendship in Academia’, 3(1) *AMITY: The Journal of Friendship Studies* (2015), pp. 40-59.

<sup>49</sup> Lima, A., ‘Blacks as Study Objects and Intellectuals in Brazilian Academia’ 33(4) *Latin American Perspectives* (2006), pp. 82-105.

<sup>50</sup> Emmeche, C., *op. cit.*, pp. 40-59.

engage in academic black magic, witchcraft, voodoo, and sorcery negatively criticize, doubt and scrutinize the work of other academics that are more productive than them.<sup>51</sup> For instance, they desperately waste time downloading the published journal articles of their colleagues and put them in turn-it in hoping to find plagiarism. Some also assume if one delivers more postgraduate students, then one would have written for their students or appointed friends to examine them. They also assume that if one co-authors a conference paper, a book chapter or a journal article and/or attends an academic conference with their students, then there must be something wrong or unethical they are doing with such students. These are some of the examples of “rotten stories” that are peddled in the offices, workplace corridors and boardrooms of various academic institutions by hopeless academics that do not embrace the success and academic excellence of their colleagues.<sup>52</sup> They are insincere armchair critics who wrongly think that for every excellent academic progress made by another academic, there must be something wrong, evil or negative that could have been done in respect thereof. Instead of drawing closer to those that are making good academic progress to explore how they are doing it and learn, some academics think with a neo-sorcery and neo-witchery attitude that target, fight and demonise hard-working academics at various academic institutions.

### 5. Corruption: the academic black magicians’ magic wand

Corruption has a negative impact on learning in academies.<sup>53</sup> Academic black magicians in African academies create corruption, erode social trust, intensify inequality, and sabotage transformation and growth in the African academic sector. Academic black magic in African academies ranges from academic cheating to bribery and nepotism in teaching employment to bid-rigging in supply procurement. Corruption in education is a threat to society’s well-being since it erodes social trust and exacerbates inequality.<sup>54</sup> It sabotages growth by undermining the development of educated, competent, and ethical leaders and workers in the future.

Policymaking and planning, management and procurement, and lecturer behaviour are all affected by corruption in African academies.<sup>55</sup> Cheating and other academic violations; bribery, nepotism, and favouritism in admissions, lecturer appointments, and university supply procurement; diversion of funds and equipment; lecturer absenteeism; and exploitation of students for sex or unpaid labour are just a few examples.<sup>56</sup>

Poor educational outcomes are exacerbated by corruption. African academies’ funding is diverted, robbing tertiary institutions of resources, and nepotism and favouritism can result in lowly skilled academics being placed in classes.<sup>57</sup> When families are forced to pay bribes for services, it disadvantages impoverished students and decreases equal access to education.<sup>58</sup> Female students may drop out of African academies because of their male lecturers’ solicitations for sex. What manner of black magic exceeds such practices? None at all.

### 6. The “I know it all syndrome”: academic black magicians’ poisoned chalice

Academics in African academies sometimes create hierarchies and live in secluded worlds.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Lima, A., *op. cit.*, pp. 82-105; Emmeche, C., *op. cit.*, pp. 40-59.

<sup>52</sup> Wood, F., ‘Kinship, Collegiality and Witchcraft: South African Perceptions of Sorcery and the Occult Aspects of Contemporary Academia’, 51(1) *Tydskrif vir letterkunde* (2014), pp. 150-162.

<sup>53</sup> Kirya, M., ‘Education sector corruption: How to assess it and ways to address it’, 4(2019) *Education* (2019), pp. 5, <https://www.u4.no/publications/education-sector-corruption-how-to-assess-it-and-ways-to-address-it.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Du Plessis, P., ‘Corruption in Education – Stealing the Future’, 5(23) *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* (2014), pp. 1308-1316.

<sup>58</sup> Eckstein, M.A., *Combating academic fraud. Towards a culture of integrity. IIEP Series on: “Ethics and corruption in education”*, (Paris, IIEP-UNESCO, 2005).

<sup>59</sup> Ylijoki, O., ‘Invisible hierarchies in academic work and career-building in an interdisciplinary landscape’, *European Journal of Higher Education* (2022), DOI: 10.1080/21568235.2022.2049335.

These customs are remnants of past hierarchies (based in patriarchy). Graduate students are at the bottom of the hierarchy, followed by tutors, junior lecturers, lecturers, senior lecturers, Associate Professors, and finally full Professors. At academic conferences around Africa (and indeed elsewhere in the world), one may observe all the alpha African academic black magicians bickering and backbiting. Unfortunately, part of what happens in any academic field is posturing—showing how many graduate students you have, where you have been published, or telling people, in so many words, because you have not cited my work, you are not doing an exceptional job in your research area. In other cases, academic black magicians may just verbally abuse or even fire a junior academic or subordinate for mentioning someone they dislike. At the bottom of such practices is the “I know it all syndrome”.

The “I know it all syndrome” in African academies is often championed by the so-called paragons of virtue whose black magic tendencies blind them to their underlying problems. This group of people feels compelled to be correct all the time, even when they are demonstrably incorrect. Their behavior suggests that they cannot stand being judged or be regarded as acting inappropriately. They want to say something even if it is not required of them. They want to make a winning argument when they make an undesirable point just because they are in a position of power. When nothing is brought up by colleagues, they simply want to bring up concerns, no matter how ridiculous, to demonstrate their intelligence. They cannot afford to make a mistake. They have an unquenchable desire to be correct and feel compelled to do so. They are oblivious to the fact that there are numerous routes to Rome. There are two types of academics in this category. Academics with Narcissistic Personality Disorder and a desire for dominance over others are one group.<sup>60</sup> When they are unable to persuade and/or convince colleagues to join their cause, they resort to coercive measures laced with cutting rage. This attitude is equivalent to practicing black magic. Academics with Borderline Personality Disorder make up the other group. When things do not go their way, they often get despondent, as if the world is collapsing around them.<sup>61</sup> Attachment is a delicate thing. The emotional cost will be terrible if they perceive you are confronting or separating them. And their feeling of assurance is as firm as it is shattered.

African academies are a closed world with a burgeoning number of factions. This tendency promotes the stereotype that African academics, like witches, are solitary individuals who do not collaborate. When thesis or dissertations are subjected to proposal assessments, physical examinations, and oral examinations, students and supervisors often receive a taste of this dynamic. At this stage, students and supervisors can only hope that the examiners are objective, or that, in the case of examination panels, those who sit on the panels get along well. If this is not the case, the examination process and/or the thesis/dissertation can become a proxy war ground for other issues. Students are frequently caught in the middle of debates over methodological preferences, even when they assume the academics agree on the subject’s core premises.

Black magic inclined African academics (both junior and senior) often attack students in a confrontational manner, frequently based on wholly irrelevant and unconstructive arguments. Fellow academics frequently express their unhappiness with such tactics, which can leave students and fair-minded people feeling dejected and apprehensive for the remainder of their studies or assessment. Unfortunately, this is all too common in African academies and quite harmful. It is not only detrimental to the student’s mental health and desire to pursue the field, but it is also detrimental to the discipline itself.

These black magician-like academics have a condescending attitude towards fellow academics and students. Condescension is a feeling of superiority or exclusivity, which is frequently conveyed through disdainful and/or pompous remarks or behaviors that exclude others.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Cooper, A. M., and Ronningstam, E., ‘Narcissistic personality disorder’, 11 *American Psychiatric Press Review of Psychiatry* (1992), pp. 80-97.

<sup>61</sup> Leichsenring, L., Leibing, E., Kruse, J., New, A.S., and Leweke, F., ‘Borderline personality disorder’, 377(9759) *The Lancet* (2011), pp. 74-84.

<sup>62</sup> Driver, J., and van Aalst, M., ‘Say More Than You Think: The 7-day Plan for Using the New Body Language to Get what you Want’ (New York, 2011), <https://www.scienceofpeople.com/condescending-body language/>.



Condescension is prevalent and is a hallmark of the academic witch-like behavior in African academies. One would think that African academies underpinned by the *Ubuntu* (meaning humanity to others) value system and the related principles<sup>63</sup> would be free of condescension because everyone is trying to learn something new, and researchers are supposed to pass judgment on ideas, not persons. Anyone who spends time among African academies and their pupils, on the other hand, rapidly learns the contrary. Academic black magicians and their condescending attitudes are often characterized by arrogant behavior (mainly from Doctors and Professors) who believe they are superior to everyone. “Intellectual cesspools” is the best way to describe such creatures.

These “intellectual cesspools” have a condescending demeanor. A condescending academic attitude might be associated with a person’s university, field of study, or job title, among other things. Academic black magicians in several African academies may not consider academics on short-term contracts or who are not nationals of the host country to be true colleagues. In the workplace and at conferences, black magician-like “theoretically” prominent academics in a specific field of study may disregard emerging researchers. This effectively makes people at the bottom of the African academies’ status ladder invisible. This kind of dismissive attitude is comparable to black magic practice, and it creates a dreadful academic atmosphere.

Many students, unbeknown to these academic black magicians, get their sense of worth from their peers, academics, and their achievements in the academies. Sarcastic and/or spiteful comments about their looks, taste, or intellectual talents can be extremely hurtful. This condescending attitude, on the other hand, has consequences that transcend beyond the immediate emotional impact. Some colleagues and students may quit if senior academics and/or professors make negative statements about them. Junior academics may even forgo a career in academia as a result of senior academics’ and senior administrators’ dismissive attitudes. Another possible effect for African academies is that pertinent questions and concerns from junior colleagues and students are not addressed because, in the eyes of the black magic academics, they are not raised by the appropriate individuals. Alternatively, study findings may be dismissed because they come from a supposed wrong field.

Academic approaches that are similar to black magic are not healthy for African academies. People are less likely to support African academies when it comes to money or academic freedom if they believe academics are inflated with self-importance.

## **7. The incompetent gatekeepers: all in the name of the supposed “transformation” in African academies**

One of the depressing developments emerging from the noble process of affirmative action in African academies, particularly in Southern Africa, is a growing number of academics who are riding on policy initiatives to transform African academies but who largely are incompetent. Governments in an attempt to rid their countries of colonially and/or Apartheid induced inequalities in academic institutions, amongst other institutions, have adopted deliberate pro-black policies and laws to reverse pro-white affirmative action policies and legislation.<sup>64</sup> Instead of focusing on quality academics, the pro-black policies and laws have benefited, amongst others, a cabal of power hungry and narcissistic opportunistic academics who under normal circumstances would not qualify as academics. They struggle with research and publication and are often free riders in other academics’ research projects in the name of mentorship and capacity building.

Once such academics maneuver their way to influential academic positions, they make it their ambition to frustrate and push out competent academics to maintain a vice-grip on power. They care the less about institutional integrity and focus on self-aggrandizement at all costs. Like true black magicians, they hijack projects which decent academics have worked hard for and purport to be the champions of such initiatives. Like black magicians who thrive on the power of the devil in order to

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<sup>63</sup> Murove, M.F., ‘Ubuntu’ 59(3-4) *Diogenes* (2014), pp. 36-47.

<sup>64</sup> Badat, S., ‘Redressing the Colonial/Apartheid Legacy: Social Equity, Redress, Higher Education Admissions in Democratic South Africa’ (2011), [https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/vc/documents/Redressing\\_the\\_Colonial\\_or\\_Apartheid\\_Legacy.pdf](https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/vc/documents/Redressing_the_Colonial_or_Apartheid_Legacy.pdf).

do evil, these default beneficiaries of affirmative action focus on causing chaos in African academies and are often divisive and addicted to excessive lying and misrepresenting facts. They do not respect protocol and often by-pass administrative procedures to curry favors from equally corrupt, incompetent and inept high-ranking institutional administrators. These black magic academics have reduced the noble transformation agenda into a circus and largely a poisoned chalice. They propagate xenophobic sentiments so that they can shore themselves with incompetent like minds. They undermine hardworking compatriots and frustrate them until they retreat into a shell or resign altogether. Such behavior is evidently akin to black magic and must be frowned upon. It should be equally classified as a brazen form of black magic that must be outlawed.

### 8. Towards a new jurisprudence to outlaw black magic academics

Despite the fact that several governments have semi-rejected or prohibited black magic, witchcraft, voodoo and sorcery practices, we contend that this approach only rejects the obvious.<sup>65</sup> Such countries include South Africa, where the Witchcraft Suppression Act<sup>66</sup> as amended (Witchcraft Act) was enacted to regulate and condemn witchcraft activities in the South African communities (sections 1-2). For instance, the Witchcraft Act provides, *inter alia*, that any person who uses supernatural means to cause a disease or injury, or accuses another person of witchcraft or who professes to have witchcraft and sorcery powers shall be liable to an offence (section 1). If convicted, such persons will face an imprisonment term for a period not exceeding 20 years or a fine and/or a whipping not exceeding ten strokes. Nonetheless, the Witchcraft Act does not define the terms “witchcraft” and “sorcery”.

Likewise, in Zimbabwe, the Witchcraft Suppression Act<sup>67</sup> as amended (Suppression Act) was enacted to regulate and control witchcraft activities. This Act prohibits the imputation of witchcraft on another person and the supply of witchcraft materials to cause harm, injury or death to another person by a witch-doctor or a witch-finder (sections 3-9). The Suppression Act vaguely defines “witchcraft” to include the “throwing of bones” and the use of charms and/or devices adopted in the practice of sorcery (section 2). This semi-denial approach to witchcraft and sorcery activities was a contentious issue in Zimbabwe, with some persons arguing that the Suppression Act was a half-baked product of the previous colonial regime that wrongly failed to recognise the existence of black magic/witchcraft in the Zimbabwean communities.<sup>68</sup> It is submitted that the Suppression Act was enacted by white colonial settlers who erroneously rejected the existence of witchcraft in Zimbabwe, thereby distorting the native people’s African traditional beliefs.<sup>69</sup> Accordingly, the Suppression Act was amended to statutorily recognise the existence of witchcraft in Zimbabwe and this amendment only came into effect in July 2006. The courts are now able to hear expert evidence of witchcraft-related cases and convict those that engage in witchcraft and sorcery activities in Zimbabwe.<sup>70</sup>

As indicated above, black magic, witchcraft and sorcery were wrongly interpreted in colonial and Eurocentric approaches which distorted and/or totally rejected various forms of the occult, black magic, voodoo, sorcery, witchcraft in the society. In this regard, we argue that more emphasis must be placed on the recognition of diverse and more contemporary forms of witchcraft and sorcery that are not only limited to black people, primitive communities or uneducated persons in uncivilised societies. We argue that a contemporary jurisprudence should be carefully developed to move away from the flawed semi-denial approach stated above and embrace various forms of witchcraft and sorcery, including academic witchcraft and sorcery that is rampant in academic institutions.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Beidelman, T. O., ‘Witchcraft in Ukaguru’ *Witchcraft and sorcery in East Africa* (1963), pp. 57-98.

<sup>66</sup> 3 of 1957.

<sup>67</sup> [Chapter 9:19] 14 of 1899.

<sup>68</sup> Ciekawy, D., and Geschiere, P., ‘Containing Witchcraft: Conflicting Scenarios in Postcolonial Africa’ 41(3) *African studies review* (1998), pp. 1-14.

<sup>69</sup> Mavheko, C., ‘Witchcraft Suppression Act Undermines Culture, Tradition’ (2015) <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/witchcraft-suppression-act-undermines-culture-tradition/>.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Murrey, A., *op. cit.*, pp. 157-179.

Academic politics and other negative academic practices that are perpetrated by retrogressive academics should constitute academic witchcraft and sorcery.<sup>72</sup> Any definition or prohibition on witchcraft should also be extended to academic witchcraft and sorcery.<sup>73</sup>

## 9. Concluding remarks

This article has made a compelling argument for considering weird, narcissist, envious, and hating acts, among other things, to be black magic. We have eloquently demonstrated that black magic is not limited to ostensibly uncivilized societies, but is also prevalent among educated intellectual elites. Because African civilizations generally perceive educated people as resistant to black magic, witchcraft, voodoo, or sorcery-like inclinations, this shift in perspective can be challenging. Black magic and related rituals are so common in African academies that to reject the idea of black magic, witchcraft, voodoo, or sorcery among academics is to plainly violate God's revealed word. As a result, we propose that black magic-like acts in African academies be regarded in the same way as the illegal black magic practices included in the legal frameworks of South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Academics in Africa are dealing with and trading with bad spirits. The heinous acts that characterize African universities prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that certain academics are influenced by malevolent spiritual forces. Academic politics and malice in African academies can only be explained by the fact that some academics are under the control of discarnate rebellious spirits with the ability to sway them towards bad acts.

As a result, it is necessary to widen the definition of black magic to encompass acts such as envy, jealousy, malice, and anger, as well as other aspects that currently characterize African academies. It would be a bad thing if practices like those seen in African academies were not designated as black magic worthy of being outlawed.

This article, we feel, has presented arguments for more research to be performed to better understand the nature of black magic practices at African academies and other academic institutions around the world. Such an approach might be able to halt a troubling trend of black magic, witchcraft, voodoo, and sorcery-like practices becoming more prevalent in African academies, which are intended to be places of reason, civilization, and progress (unlike the pattern prevailing in backward societies). African academies must be rescued from this self-destructive cycle.

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<sup>72</sup> Roxburgh, S., 'Through the Scrying Glass: Defining Witchcraft in Academic Study', 3 *Cahiers D'etudes Africaines* (2018), pp. 1029-1045.

<sup>73</sup> Murrey, A., *op. cit.*, pp.157-179; Oster, E., 'Witchcraft, Weather and Economic Growth in Renaissance Europe', 18(1) *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (2004), pp. 215-228; York, M., *op. cit.*, pp.115-127.

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