Sorcery in the Academy: Universities and the Occult Practices of the Corporate World

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary universities have become sites of the occult in various respects. As higher education has become market-driven and governed by managerial chains of command, academic discourse and procedure have acquired arcane, mysterious aspects and become steeped in forms of ritual and enchantment. Some of these phenomena call to mind certain distinctive features of the southern African supernatural landscape. Therefore, this study examines the ways in which contemporary institutions of higher education have acquired mystical qualities and evolved new magicalities of their own as a result of their process of corporatisation.

Sorcery in the Academy: Universities and the Occult Practices of the Corporate World

Contemporary universities have not only fallen under corporate, managerial control, but they have also become sites of the occult.1 This study maintains that converting universities into market-driven, managerialised institutions has given rise to forms of defamiliarisation and estrangement. Both locally and internationally, universities have become alien academic landscapes. Viewed from a metaphorical perspective, it is as if they are inhabited by otherworldly presences and controlled by unseen forces, while drawing on forms of ritual and enchantment.

In traditional African cosmologies, aspects of which permeate various widely accepted present-day perceptions of actuality on this continent, "the opposite or complement of presence is not necessarily [perceived as] absence, but invisibility", as Francis B. Nyamnjoh observes (2001: 29). Therefore, as Achille Mbembe has contended, in terms of epistemologies in which the visible and invisible are interconnected, it follows that an examination of the former may necessitate an exploration of the latter. Moreover, a study

Endnotes

1 Acknowledging the fact that "corporatisation" can have diverse meanings, Australian academic Margaret Thornton utilises the term to denote the application of business practices to public institutions to make them more like private corporations. The transformation accords with the contemporary neo-liberal political agenda, which includes the privatisation of public goods, deregulation, globalisation and a preoccupation with profit-making (2004: 163).

This definition of corporatisation is applicable here. Moreover, the meaning of "occult" has sometimes been subject to contestation. For example, Geschiere observes that this term can denote both malevolent and constructive forces (1997: 14). This study therefore uses the word "occult" to denote various ritual practices and certain forms of magic, some of them mysterious and sinister. At times, "occult" also encompasses types of arcane, abstract knowledge, only available to specialised practitioners.
of the latter may enhance our understanding of the former (1973: 152 - 153; Nyamnjoh: 29). Indeed, many of the procedures and discourses of the corporatised academy have invisible components to them, serving as agencies for mysterious workings of power. By investigating this opaque and unseen dimension of contemporary academia, light is cast upon the visible: the nature and functioning of universities in their contemporary socio-economic and political context, and the forms of power they impose, reinforce and to which they submit.

One form of modern magic that has particular bearing on the nature and functioning of commercialised, market-oriented universities world-wide is that which Jean and John Comaroff term occult economies, "the deployment, real or imagined, of magical means for material ends". (1999: 279). Peter Geschiere also draws attention to the sinister aspects of this new form of money-making magic, describing it as "the new witchcraft of wealth" (1997: 158); while Rosalind Shaw makes a comparable reference to "shadow economies" in postcolonial Sierra Leone (2001: 66). Meanwhile, Birgit Meyer analyses the perceived relationship between power and money and occult forces in contemporary Ghana, depicting it as "modernity's dark side" (1998: 26).

The Comaroffs apply the term " occult economies" to various strange, mysterious enterprises that promise to produce wealth with almost miraculous swiftness and ease (281, 286). These include the ownership of zombies; pacts with the mamlambo: a deadly wealth-giving spirit; involvement in obscure, dubious money-generating ventures such as pyramid schemes, chain letters and national lotteries; and the muti trade in human body parts (281). However, the Comaroffs neglect to mention universities. Indeed, the current managerialised corporate university could be viewed an occult economy.

**Spirits in the Marketplace**

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2 I am following the line of argument put forward by Nyamnjoh, in his analysis of witchcraft discourses and notions of development in Cameroon, in which he favours a fuller of conception of actuality, accommodating both the visible and invisible (47).

3 The Comaroffs' study has certain limitations, in that it adopts somewhat too homogenous a view of beliefs in the supernatural and socio-political dynamics in Africa. It also foregrounds the workings of economic forces, while downplaying the mystical, magical aspects of the occult economies. Nonetheless, as writers such as Isak Niehaus concede, their argument has much to offer, "despite the overt economism of their claims" (2001: 203). Indeed, their article has exercised a considerable influence over subsequent ethnographic studies in this area. These issues are also raised in another study investigating other occult aspects of contemporary higher education (Wood: 2010); and in Wood: 2008a, 2008b, 2009.

4 The problematic aspects of the term "witchcraft" should be acknowledged. As Geschiere himself notes, the word carries with it a strong sense of moral condemnation. Moreover, translating various local African terms as "witchcraft" can be reductive and misleading, since the original notions may be complex and ambiguous, possessing a diversity of meanings (13 - 14). See also Wood: 2010, Wood: 2009 and 2008a.
In part, this can be related to the fact that universities have entered the marketplace, which is an occult site in certain respects. Education has become a marketable commodity, not only in South Africa but internationally. As globally competitive, neoliberal economic practices have increasingly taken hold, universities have changed from state-protected institutions to hard-pressed competitors in the national and global marketplaces.

At this point, it is worth noting that as an actual physical locality, the market can be misleading and unreliable. It entices many with its dazzling wares, yet it is possible for the unwary, the overly eager and those unfamiliar with the terrain to lose their wits, their wallets and their way. All is not what it seems in the market, and as a result of its ambiguous, unseen qualities it has often been envisaged as a gathering place of the spirits in diverse African cosmologies. For example, Misty L. Bastian notes that Igbo-speaking peoples in Nigeria tend to perceive the world in terms of a marketplace, because "everyone and everything in the world passes through their markets." This lends itself to the belief that those who frequent markets are certain to encounter spirits, the inhabitants of the invisible dimension of the world (1997: 133).

The spirit world now extends into another marketplace with comparable qualities. Jane Parish observes that African spirits have become intricately involved with aspects of capitalism, and this has become a marked feature of various forms of the supernatural on this continent (2001: 119). Birgit Meyer makes a comparable point, drawing attention to the way perceptions of witchcraft have shifted during the course of African history, noting that they have become connected to both the hazards and the possibilities of the global forces of capitalism (cited in Geschiere: 280). The occult economies that are now thriving in Africa provide one striking instance of this.

Cyprian F. Fisiy and Geschiere link the expansion of sinister forms of the occult to the expansion of market forces in the developing world, maintaining that "[a]pparently, the forms of enrichment that have come with economic liberalization have given witchcraft discourses yet another lease on life" (2001: 243). Contemporary western economic trends have furthered the growth of the occult in other, related ways. While neoliberal ideologies become more influential worldwide and globalised corporate capitalism wields greater sway, the state's role in the public sector, as economic provider and centre of authority, has declined. As the hollowing-out of the state continues both locally and internationally, various forms of magic flow in to fill the void. Fisiy and Geschiere examine this, concluding that

the defeat of the state - whether of the welfare or the authoritarian type - by the requirements of 'the market' [has left] society at the mercy of an economy that seems increasingly unpredictable and out of control. No wonder that, at the

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5 The depiction of the market as a site of the occult, and many of the points on occult economies in the preceding two paragraphs also appear in Wood: 2010. Some of the information relating to occult economies in this study also draws on previous research in Wood 2009, 2008a, 2008b, 2005: and Wood and Lewis, 2007.
beginning of the twenty-first century, magic seems to have become a fixed corollary of modernity, not only in Africa, but also in the richer parts of the world (2001: 243).

During the last few decades, first internationally and then locally from the latter part of the 1980s onwards, state funding for higher education has diminished, to be replaced by neoliberal tendencies towards commercialisation and privatisation. In part, too, institutions of higher learning have become swept up in that which John S. Saul terms "nouveau market fetishism", faith in the magic of the market ((Saul, 1999: 50, 57). As a result, universities have sought to draw themselves closer to the occult sphere of economic potency.6

In their process of corporatisation, South African universities looked northwards, drawing on corporate academic models that began evolving in the USA and the United Kingdom in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, they borrowed and adapted key features of the managerialism that began coming to the fore at universities in the UK and North America in the 1980s (Webster and Mosoetsa, 2001: 7; Vale, 2009: 1, 4).7 They also turned to Australian institutions for guidance.8 Internationally, these managerialised, market-driven institutions were acquiring various occult aspects, and during the course of their own corporate makeover, similar qualities would begin to permeate South African universities.

A Climate of Fear

6 Roger Southall and Julian Cobbing analyse this issue, mentioning that Rhodes University's former Vice-Principal, Dr Michael Smout, contended that "universities may not be businesses, 'but they need to be more business-like'" (2001: 16). In 1999, UCT's Vice-Chancellor, Mamphele Ramphele, made a similar announcement in a publication intended for UCT staff. Describing herself as an innovator, she stated that UCT should be "run as a business comitted to balancing its books" (cited in Grossman: 94).

A decade before this, in the UK in 1989, Port and Burke had made the following prediction: "In future we believe that all HEI's [Higher Education Institutions] which wish to develop and prosper will have to adopt the principles of business planning and those which fail to plan effectively will find themselves vulnerable to external forces which ultimately threaten their survival" (cited in Green, Loughridge and Wilson: 4 - 5).

7 In Desmond Ryan's discussion of what he terms the "Thatcher government's assault on higher education", many close parallels between Thatcherite education policies and South African universities' experience become apparent (1998: 3 - 32). Various local writers and researchers have drawn attention to this, including Southall and Cobbing, who comment that as South African universities began converting themselves into corporate institutions, they have been "[borrowing] heavily from Western (especially the United Kingdom) universities' experience" (16). Vale also describes how the reduction of state support for higher education in South Africa "drew from the same intellectual well" as Thatcherite Britain. For instance, the theories driving the commercialisation of South African universities were also heavily based on the Thatcherite contention that "the purpose of higher education was to serve the economy" (2009: 1, 4).

8 Raimond Gaita discusses this, pointing out that Australian universities advised South Africa's NCHE and assisted in the drafting of their White Paper on Higher Education (cited in Bertelsen: 139).

This point and the information in the previous endnote also appear in the above-mentioned article on other occult features of contemporary academia (Wood: 2010).
Firstly, there is the extent to which market forces have come to wield a sway over present-day commercialised universities, acquiring a potency of transcendent, almost numinous proportions. Since the market has been elevated in the above-outlined fashion, the edicts of the market must be adhered to, and market value (or perceived market value) rather than academic merit becomes the principal factor determining worth. Accordingly, constant warnings are issued that if staff members or sectors of the university deviate from operating in accordance with this, economic disaster could result, leading to retrenchments on a grand scale, and the closure of parts or the whole of the entire institution. This helps generate another distinctly occult feature of the managerialised university: its ever-present climate of fear, comparable in its all-pervasive nature to a deep-seated terror of dangerous, unpredictable supernatural forces.

As a number of commentators, including Roger Southall and Julian Cobbing (2001) and Eddie Webster and Sarah Mosoetsa (2001) point out in studies in which they examine the current state of universities both locally and internationally, many members of university staff say they feel they are under surveillance, and constantly fear falling foul of management. In an article entitled "Corrosive Leadership (Or Bullying by Another Name): a corollary of the corporatised academy?" Margaret Thornton discusses the way in which this tendency manifests itself at Australian universities, citing the findings of a number of other writers and academics in this regard. She describes how "the new managerialism ... utilises technologies of surveillance, accountability and audit to an unprecedented extent" (2004: 164).

Thornton's point is applicable to many other universities in this country and worldwide. Indeed, some staff members live in such dread as a result of this state of affairs that they could appear comparable to individuals who constantly fear arousing the wrath of unpredictable forms of the occult. In its scale and unpredictability, then, and the terror it evokes, the ever-intensifying "corporate authoritarianism" of the managerialised university is comparable with the occult. "Authoritarian organisations" Thornton remarks, "run on the misuse of power: blame, threats and the fear of being shamed"

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9 There are many examples of this. For instance, in Webster and Mosoetsa's study, one academic stated that the new managerial system made him feel as if he was not a colleague anymore, but a potentially vulnerable employee, who "could be found guilty of insubordination." Another respondent said: "I feel undermined and fear for the future of the discipline." Yet another respondent stated: "[Academics] feel very insecure and feel that they are being monitored." Some respondents expressed "a fear of victimisation of they were too outspoken" (12 - 13, 15).

Similarly, Southall and Cobbing note that there is an "extensive sense of fear amongst large numbers of staff, academic and administrative, that criticism of the institution of senior power-holders will be met with reprisal" (21). Although they are making specific reference to one particular South African university in this regard, their observation is widely applicable.

10 The term "corporate authoritarianism" is utilised by Southall and Cobbing, and they investigate the ways in which this manifests itself at South African universities in their article (2001). Academics from diverse parts of the world have also examined this phenomenon, analysing its nature and effects. For instance, Thornton notes that bullying practices are on the increase in corporate workplaces internationally, including market-oriented universities. Indeed, as Thornton goes on to observe, in a work environment in which "market forces and the pursuit of profits have become dominant imperatives", more pressure is placed on academics to carry out profit-generating work, resulting in bullying tactics at managerial level (161).
There is a connection, as both she and Peter Vale observe, between the autocratic, dictatorial nature of the managerialised university, and the new forms of authoritarianism that have increasingly come to characterise the corporate sector (Thornton: 163 - 164; Vale: 4).

Jonathon Grossman describes the general atmosphere of "fear, caution, self-censorship, passivity and demoralization" among University of Cape Town staff during the latter half of the 1990s, stating that to a significant extent the lack of academic resistance to authoritarian managerial measures could be ascribed to academics' perceptions that they were under threat (1996: 51 - 53, 102). A comparable climate of apprehension is a feature of university life elsewhere. For instance, Southall and Cobbing describe how staff at the East London satellite campus of Rhodes University were informed in 1997 that the institution "was experiencing a 'budget problem' which could only be resolved if certain courses, most of them in the Humanities, were discontinued." However, the university management conceded, if these departments were able to "[devise] new and innovative options to attract more students" within two years, then they need not fear retrenchment, at least not for the following two years, after which another review would take place. If the financial position had not been improved by the end of 1999, "then retrenchments and even closure of several departments might result" (14).

One of the principal ways in which a pervasive sense of disquiet and fear of what the future might hold is generated by regular institutional audits. Once a financial procedure, the audit now "hovers over virtually every field of modern working life" (Shore and Wright, 1999: 558). Michael Power, once a financial auditor, depicts this as "the audit explosion" (1994; 1997: 1 - 14); while British anthropologists Chris Shore and Susan Wright contend that "the audit phenomenon ... has a dynamic of its own and, like Frankenstein's monster, once created, is very hard to control" (570). This image of Gothic horror is appropriate in this context, suggestive of the dread that audits can inspire; and the way in which they loom large in the minds of staff members on many occasions, just as the thought of the monster fills its creator's mind with foreboding. Moreover, the monster is a force of destruction, and comparably the prospect of an impending audit has the potential to wreak havoc in the institution upon which the auditors will descend.

Furthermore, drawing on Power's conclusions (1994, 1997), Shore and Wright describe how the conducting of regular inspections of this nature has become a form of policing, with auditors metaphorically patrolling institutions armed with "disciplinary mechanisms that mark a new form of coercive neo-liberal governmentality" (557). As a result, the word "audit" is routinely invoked as a warning to university staff that those who fail to comply with managerial edicts will be tested and found wanting. Thus, the university audit serves to generate a sense of fear that those being audited will fall short of the mark.

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11 According to Power, the UK began developing into an "audit society" from the early 1980s onwards (1997: 4). Power outlines three factors that have given rise to "the audit explosion" in the UK, some of which have bearing on the South African context. Firstly, there has been the rise of New Public Management (NPM), next "a shift in regulatory style" in the public sector, and finally the ascendancy of quality assurance (1997: 42).
(the exact nature of which often tends to be shrouded in uncertainty) and face the consequences.

As the above examples indicate, university staff live in the shadow of ever-impending disasters, both real and imagined, just as there are those who believe that unseen, malevolent forces hover over their lives, with the ability to strike suddenly and unexpectedly. Departments are closed down, sometimes swiftly or without warning; contracts are not renewed, temporary staff are discarded; long-term staff are demoted or retrenched; and members of staff, from senior management down, are often taken to task and reminded of the precariousness of their position.

In order to legitmate the above-outlined forms of control and intimidation, and also as a way of seeking comfort in the midst of this terror, various occult practices and rituals relating to the corporate world are resorted to.

**Rituals, Talismans and Templates**

The Comaroffs also observe that, in contemporary African society, ritual can serve as a means of asserting a degree of symbolic control over a milieu that appears to be swiftly and dramatically changing (1993: xiv). Universities in this continent and other parts of the world now make use of aspects of ritual and magic for similar reasons. Cast adrift from their traditional moorings and left at the mercy of larger, more powerful outside forces, they have resorted to forms of academic-bureaucratic jargon and procedure with ritualistic, otherworldly qualities in attempt to regain some sense of control over a situation that appears to have slipped beyond their grasp. The sociologist Dominique Desjeux (1987) is of the opinion that witchcraft discourses should not be perceived in opposition to western modernisation, but as attempts to "manage [the] insecurity" that it generates (cited in Geschiere, 1997: 221). Éric de Rosny, a Catholic priest in Doula, Cameroon, makes a similar point, maintaining that beliefs in witchcraft serve as a means of "mak[ing] life in modern circumstances more livable" by offering possible ways of apprehending it and responding to it (cited in Geschiere: 221). Some of the occult beliefs and practices in contemporary higher education that will be discussed below fulfil this function, offering ways of "managing the insecurity" of the current higher education milieu. Moreover, the Comaroffs depict ritual as an essential part of the process by means of which group identities and features of society can be reconstructed (1993: xvi). Indeed, universities have sought to recast themselves in a corporate mould partially by ritualistic means.

The Comaroffs draw attention to the political aspects of ritual, mentioning the role ritualistic colonial pageantry and intricate, ostentatious bureaucratic ceremonies played in buttressing colonial power structures, "making imperial authority manifest and compelling" (1993: xvii). The ritualistic aspects of corporate universities fulfil a comparable reactionary role, enforcing managerial and corporate authority. This study will examine the ways in which these forms of ritual can acquire oppressive, life-denying aspects.
Various occult practices are employed in academia as forms of corporate magic, in attempts to ward off the external threats with which universities are ever beset, and to create the right conditions for the magic of the market to take effect. Moreover, aspects of the occult are utilised to impart and sustain the belief that the most effective teaching, learning and research takes place within commercialised, managerialised universities. These occult phenomena include rituals, invocations and incantations; the accumulation of talismatic, fetishistic objects (most of which take electronic form); an occult hierarchy; ritual sacrifices; and a predilection to consult professional occult practitioners.

First, words of power, expressions and incantations deriving from the globalised corporate world, are invoked repeatedly, as if frequent repetition will bring into being that which they denote, or will summon up the divinities of the market to work a transformative magic upon the institution. These terms, which possess a talismatic quality, and an almost voodoo-like potency, include "quality", "excellence", "mission", "premier", "benchmark", "strategic", "top rank", "world-class", "flagship", "team-building" and "auditing". These words are sometimes underpinned by mission statements and policy documents, mythic in their gap between theory and praxis, and appearance and actuality. These above-cited terms derive some of their impact from the mantra-like fashion in which they are frequently intoned. Moreover, by employing terminology such as this, with its associations of affluence and commercial prestige, its academic users partake symbolically in the magic of the corporate world.

"Quality", one of the principle words of power is routinely uttered for purposes of ritual and magic, as if calling upon this concept will cause it to manifest itself. Bronislaw Malinowski is of the opinion "that magic is an elaboration of the infant experience that a certain utterance could bring about the gratification of specific wants" (cited in Pels, 2003: 11). Like faith, the notion of quality exists alongside hope: denoting that which it is hoped will eventually come to pass through the magical potency of words. Moreover, if the concept of quality is invoked often enough, it seems almost as if, like faith, it will come to cover a multitude of shortcomings. In today's disillusioned, dispirited academic world, we may not have much faith left, and minimal hope, so the greatest of these is quality.

The word "quality" originally had an almost mystical aura, because, like holiness or faith, quality traditionally stood for something intrinsic and intangible that could not be interrogated, weighed or measured. However, as Roger Southall and Julian Cobbing have pointed out, in the current university context, quality can be quantified (2001: 16). For instance, the quality of a department is assessed numerically (in terms of undergraduate and postgraduate student numbers, numbers of graduates, and the number of articles

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12 This phrase is adapted from Ryan, who observes that "in the general rhetoric of the market used by the Thatcher government, the incantation 'manufacturing industry' bore almost voodoo power" (16).

13 Most of the points in this paragraph and many of the general observations in the preceding paragraph also appear in Wood: 2010.
published in select, approved journals, among much else). At both individual and institutional levels, teaching and research productivity is evaluated similarly. The income that such statistics generate, rather than the inherent academic merit of that which they denote, becomes the primary consideration. And so, as Southall and Cobbing conclude, ironically quality has come to stand for that to which it is diametrically opposed: quantity (16).

Like "quality", the term "mission" has spiritual aspects to it, evoking images of a sacred quest, a venture charged with mystical significance, or an enterprise of critical consequence. Citing Norman Fairclough's study of market discourse (1995), Eve Bertelsen observes that this form of language "is infused with a spirit of drama, of engagement in bold or momentous undertakings, which serve to legitimize its terms" (1998: 136). The term "mission" is frequently employed for this reason. Accordingly, the creation of institutional mission statements are designed to bestow a noble, hallowed quality on corporate endeavours, partly as a result of the high-minded rhetoric they employ and the lofty ideals to which they lay claim. Bertelsen goes on to outline how "mission", with its sacred associations, harnesses spirituality to market forces, thereby elevating the corporations and institutions that employ this term (even if only at the level of discourse). Indeed, in terms of its special capacity to mingle the sublime and the secular, and utilise the spiritual to legitimize the pursuit of mammon, "mission" delivers one of the principal goals in the sphere of corporate endeavour: VFM, or value for money (Bertelsen: 142).

The sacred aspects of mission statements also relates to their fetishistic function, as part of the ritual paraphernalia of the corporate sector. They are often enshrined in important places, close to seats of managerial authority; while subordinate staff members are periodically instructed to display them, like icons, in their own departments or divisions. Like fetishes, the significance attached to mission statements derives primarily from their symbolic identity as emblems of corporate branding, while the specific messages they contain generally tend to be viewed as matters of secondary importance. There are, furthermore, certain points of comparison between mission statements, cluttered as they are with the power words of market-oriented managerialism, and the embroidered samplers bearing religious homilies that were once a feature of many nineteenth century western homes. The latter items, decorative though they may have seemed, also served to create an impression of piety. For their part, mission statements are suggestive of a faithful adherence to corporate principles.

In order to assess quality, and to ascertain the extent to which an institution's academic activities are in keeping with its mission statement, another ritual procedure takes place, involving the completion of templates. Since hardly anything of substance can be performed without doing this, templates have become fetishistic objects. Martha Kaplan and John Kelly have devised the term, "state familiares", to indicate the "magical vehicles of power" such as flags and the printed word, utilised by the colonial state to impose and reinforce colonial authority (Kaplan, 2003: 188 - 189). This concept could be adapted to the current academic context, in which items such as mission statements and templates
function as corporate and managerial familiars, instituting and augmenting the dominion of the market and managerial authority.

Like fetishes, templates may appear commonplace to outsiders, but to those carrying out lengthy ritual activities involving these items, they may seem fraught with meaning, sometimes obscure, but very powerful and far-reaching in its possible implications. Like talismans, too, templates have to be gathered together in large numbers to ward off the evil eye: those of external assessors and auditors.

As with the performance of a ritual, the completion of a template depends more on the enactment and form than actual substance. In this, as in many of the other rites of corporate academia, the necessity of following the correct procedure is almost obsessively reiterated. Provided words of power are employed (the specific terminology mandatory for parts of this ritual activity are generally stipulated in sacred texts such as policy documents) and an appropriate format is adhered to, the ritual act of filling in a template often appears to be of principal importance, while its actual content seems a matter of lesser concern.

The Comaroffs state that ritual encompasses "mundane meaningful practice": apparently commonplace everyday activities that have acquired a mystical significance (1993: xvi). The routine bureaucratic tasks that have now become one of the principal features of contemporary university life, such as the completion of templates, provide one example of this. Mundane in the extreme, their ritual qualities derive particularly from their monotonous aspects that crush many other areas of academic activity under their ceremonial weight, and the ritualistic regularity with which such tasks have to be performed. The arduous nature of template completion bestows another ritual dimension upon the process. The onerous features of this activity derives in part from its time-consuming nature, the laborious detail and mental application required to fill in each of the sections according to the official stipulations, the esoteric terminology and the obscure bureaucratic minutiae that need to be summoned up in order to ensure that each section contains what is required. Just as certain religious rites can seem more meaningful if they demand a great deal from their participants, so templates may appear more significant the more difficult they are to complete. Completion of templates are ritualistic, symbolic enactments of productivity that become a substitute for academic productivity itself. As "the bureaucratic octopus tightens its tentacles on university life" (Lodge, 2008: 26) academics lose the time and the space to think and thus to develop their teaching and research.14

Templates feature prominently in one of the most regularly enacted rites of contemporary academia: the university audit. Power highlights the ceremonial, performative features of this process, contending that "[a]t worst, auditing tends to become an organisational ritual, a dramaturgical performance". These carefully staged productions, Power

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14 David Coldwell discusses the effects of this (2008: 3). Then, citing psychologist Eric Santner, Peter Stewart comments that "Kafka's fictional accounts of the terror of unavoidable bureaucratic entrapment" provides another, comparable image of this state of affairs (2007: 3).
maintains, have intensified over the years, giving rise to "increasingly formalized rituals of accounting and verification" (1997: 141, 138). Expanding on Power's points, Shore and Wright conclude that "[t]he audit visits enhance 'performance', but in a different sense to that intended by the government's discourse" (567). Further to this, Marc Abélès maintains that there are parallels between "modern political rituals" and traditional rites that have been the subject of anthropological study (1988: 391). Shore and Wright expand on this point, observing that the university audit calls to mind aspects of older ceremonial procedures while, in Abélès's words, "invent[ing] an altogether new costume for itself" (Abélès: 398 - 399; Shore and Wright: 567).

Meanwhile, sometimes simultaneously, another very different ritual practice is promulgated. While the threat of impending audits looms over institutions, the value of "team-building" is propounded. Not only has this word acquired a mystical status of a kind, but it is also provides one example of the way in which the arcane ritual activities of the corporate world have become an integral part of contemporary university procedure. Once upon a time, the notion of academic collegiality (problematic though it often might have been in practice) sufficed, but now that managerialism has overtaken collegiality, the belief prevails that the rituals of team-building are needed in order to equip a group with the wherewithal to carry out its work. Just as ritual spiritual activities may induce a brief sense of tranquility or holiness, which soon wears thin under the pressures of daily life, so team-building rituals may foster a temporary sense of camaraderie, which soon evaporates when participants return to a stress-laden working environment peopled by authoritarian managers and insecure subordinates.

**Corporate Divination**

While the rites of the occult academy are enacted, the otherworldly quality of this environment is intensified by visitations from workers of magic, otherwise known as consultants. Like many established practitioners, supernatural or otherwise, they charge a high price for their services, which many of those who call upon them can ill afford. (However, the underlying assumption is that market-related prices are indicative of professional excellence, esoteric or otherwise.) With the diverse, interdisciplinary nature of universities, the tasks that consultants are called upon to perform are often those for which there are in-house skills, yet like workers of magic, consultants tend to be perceived as beings set apart, authority figures possessing rarefied expertise by means of which they will perform wonders. Their status derives in part from their association - or claimed association - with the corporate world. With the special insights to which they lay claim, consultants might, for instance, profess to see into the heart of a situation, prescribing rituals for healing and offering guidance as to the way forward. Through acts of corporate divination, they may, too, predict the future. Their divining tools, which often involve that which British academic Paul Taylor describes as "the cabalistic

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15 Various researchers and writers, Vale included, discuss the importance currently attached to consultants in institutions of higher teaching and learning (1).
incantations of PowerPoint presentations" (2003: 1), may offer their audience glimpses of what lies ahead.

Comparable figures in the corporate world are the prophets and holy men, "truth-makers adept at selling their wisdom," the "business gurus" periodically invoked by managers of American corporations as sources of guidance and inspiration (Newbrook, 2005: 104). Moreover, Ian Roper mentions the role played by certain high priests of quality management such as W. Edwards Deming (1986), Joseph M. Juran (1988) and Philip B. Crosby (1979), who played an influential role during the "quality management boom" in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s (2004: 125).

Sometimes consultants or external assessors are called upon to perform a process of "sniffing-out", comparable to that performed by spiritual practitioners summoned to locate the source of the evil lying at the root of a misfortune. On many other occasions, this task is carried out by some of those who have high seats in the hierarchy of the corporate university, and are thus equipped with the authority to identify real or perceived threats, utter warnings and pronounce punishments. This is an ongoing activity, because a fundamental aspect of corporate university practice is the process of apportioning blame. Just as witch-finding often identifies the most vulnerable members of a community (for instance, the elderly, the indigent or single women) as the wrongdoers, so the "sniffing-out" in this context tends to zero in on the lower-level members of the university community. In other words, the academic staff, particularly those in the more vulnerable disciplines, tend to be linked to the misfortunes which the workers of corporate magic are called upon to identify and address. In this country, for example, the Humanities and some of the softest of the Social Sciences tend to be singled out for particular punishment. Regular witch-hunts of this nature reinforce the ever-present sense of fear. The basic function of a witch-hunt is to pin-point the source of evil. (The authority of the spiritual practitioner in question often depends on this.) Inevitably, then, on a number of occasions, the innocent are picked out as the wrongdoers. Thus, because many members of the university community cannot be sure who will next be identified as the locus of evil, some of the most vulnerable members of the academic sector live in fear that it will be themselves, or their department.

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16 Certain prominent commerce and management guru figures include Tom Peters and Stephen Covey, among various others (Newbrook, 2005: 104). Meanwhile, Geschiere compares and contrasts the roles played by contemporary "gurus" of another kind in Africa and the United States, analysing the roles played by "important experts of revelation" such as western political spin doctors on the one hand and traditional diviners and prophets (known variously as nyangas, ngangas and n'angas in diverse parts of central and southern Africa). He draws attention to certain noteworthy points of comparison between them (2003: 159 - 182).

17 However, both here and elsewhere, other very different disciplines, including engineering and the natural sciences, have been penalised when their academic activities have proved insufficiently profit-generating. For example, Greene, Loughridge and Wilson describe how this took place in Portsmouth University in 1994, in which "traditional high status departments like Physics" received less research funding than "departments like Psychology which earned significantly more in the research assessment exercise" (5).
A comparable process of "sniffing-out" involves detecting another harmful emanation from the spirit world: ghosts, or to be more precise, ghost employees. Some contemporary universities, especially those with a long history of maladministration and mismanagement, appear to believe that regular ritual exercises designed to detect these supernatural presences are indicative of corporate excellence. In order to identify ghost employees, members of university staff are called upon to participate in various procedures, some of which have taken on a ritualistic quality, in order to prove that they exist in flesh and blood. Witch-finding, however, tends to feature more prominently in the rituals of corporate academia, in order to intensify managerial control and maintain a climate of fear. Therefore, certain aspects of witchcraft accusations could be considered in more detail.

**Kinship, Collegiality and Witchcraft**

"Witchcraft", Geschiere contends, "is the dark side of kinship. ... It expresses the frightening realisation that aggression threatens from within the intimacy of the family - that is, from the very space where complete solidarity and trust should reign without fail" (212). In other words, a member of an extended family may be accused of bewitching one of his or her own family members by his or her own kin. Geschiere's point has some bearing on the issues under discussion, for he goes on to point out that kinship norms have been expanded in numerous contemporary African societies, especially as a result of factors such as urbanisation. Thus notions of kinship can now incorporate those to whom individuals are connected by other than flesh and blood ties (212 - 213). For instance, urban "kin" of this kind can now include those with whom an individual has significant links as a result of professional connections; and also through involvement in civic structures, church groupings, sporting bodies and other social and community networks. Moreover, as Geschiere maintains, concepts of kinship can be "stretched to include ... urban elites": wealthy and influential people with whom it might prove profitable to be connected (213). In the light of these redefinitions of the concept of kinship, academic colleagues are, symbolically speaking, kin to one another.

Shore and Wright make reference to the "panoptican model of accountability" now prevalent in higher education, in terms of which university staff members are expected to be visible and inspectable, amid ongoing internal and external forms of evaluation (566). Meanwhile, former academics who have "crossed over to the managerial dark side", as Taylor puts it (1), are now required to monitor the performance of the staff over whom they preside. So an individual may be accused of inadequate performance or unprocedural academic practices by his or her one-time colleagues, or academic kin, as a result of their involvement in systems of managerial control. Small wonder, then, that this tends to give rise to a general atmosphere of mistrust.

Those at the pinnacle of the occult hierarchy preside over this fractured network of unhappy academic kin. Although this has always been a feature of university life, in today's managerialised university, the high priests and holy men of management (most of these are still male) have acquired an awful - in various senses of the word - authority, in
terms of the extensive forms of power and control with which they have vested themselves. Moreover, their status as beings set apart from the rest of the university community is reinforced by the general awareness among staff members that management earns far more than they do, in terms of direct salary payments and perks. Geschiere discusses the extent to which new forms of affluence and power can disrupt domestic and extended family networks in Cameroonian society (10). This has bearing on the current academic context, in which new types of authority and economic privilege have become concentrated at managerial level, exercising a divisive effect.

The Agents of Redemption

Within an occult system of this nature, there are other subsidiary players at work. Just as agents of redemption fulfil a key function in certain mystical and spiritual doctrines, so they also play an important role in the occult academy. In this context, they take the form of Quality Assurance personnel, certain members of Teaching and Learning Centres (TLCs) and members of university committees and managerial structures fulfilling related functions. These agents of redemption offer various forms of guidance and salvation to those who seek to mend their ways by putting aside their former academic aspirations and becoming efficient, productive components of the "new-generation" commodified academy. Firstly, their agency is necessary for acolytes who wish to rise higher in the occult hierarchies of their institutions. For instance, staff members seeking promotion at various universities, including some in South Africa and the UK, may be required to complete TLC courses in teaching first. Moreover, agents of redemption may offer staff members counselling during times of ritual trial. For instance, university staff may be directed to Quality Assurance personnel or the TLC for assistance in preparing for the ritual ordeals of departmental or institutional audits. Periodically agents of redemption also provide instruction in the correct performance of ritual procedures, such as the completion of templates. The problem, however, is that these agents of the occult academy and the unseen external forces to which it is in thrall are not always to be trusted. Just like certain mystical teachers to whom some seekers after the truth turn in times of need, some of their wisdom may be inadequate or of dubious provenance. Moreover, like members of cults or religious fundamentalists who take on the initiation of newcomers so as to ensure that they conform to the codes of the collective, these academic occult practitioners carry out forms of indoctrination, training others in the norms and practices of corporate managerialism.

Shore and Wright discuss the role played by individuals who fulfil functions of this nature in higher education and society at large (as, for example, psychiatrists, educationalists and medical specialists, among much else). Within their institutional or broader social contexts, these experts are believed to have access to specialised knowledge which they share with those who seek "to engage in the process of self-improvement in order to modify their conduct according to the desired norms" (560). Thus they may form part of structures of social control and confinement, ensuring conformity and compliance. Drawing on Foucault's terminology in Discipline and Punish (1977), Shore and Wright draw attention to the way in which these practitioners can
constitute part of the "individualising and totalising" "political technologies" at work in institutions that "order and discipline each individual and the system as a whole" (560). In other words, to cite Foucault again, these agents of redemption partake in the carceral mechanisms that exercise "a power of normalization" over members of a social context who are regarded as disrupting or deviating from the norms, or regulations, governing their milieus (1977: 308).

Therefore, while appearing to offer salvation, agents of redemption act as conduits for managerial authority, and the invisible but omnipresent forms of economic and political power and influence that wield sway over the institution as a whole.

Conclusion

The ambiguous role played by the agents of redemption is indicative of a general tendency in the occult academy, for many of the features of ritual and enchantment with which contemporary higher education has become imbued have an ambivalent, ironic edge to them. One striking aspect of this could be considered in closing. As various commentators, including Geschiere, the Comaroffs and Pels, have maintained, "modernity generate[s] its own enchantments" (Pels: 32). Paradoxically, this sometimes takes place as a result of the way in which contemporary discourses and procedures can bring forms of magic into being by denying them. Pels explains that while "modern [western] discourse reconstructs magic in terms that distinguish it from the modern, this at the same time creates the correspondences and nostalgias by which magic can come to haunt modernity" (4 - 5). Ironically, the metaphorical parallels with occult beliefs and practices that characterise contemporary academia have arisen as a result of the nominally pragmatic, objective and factual notions of efficiency, productivity, rationalization, cost-effectiveness and accountability: the key principles governing the nature and functioning of present-day corporatised institutions of higher education. Yet during their process of corporatisation, universities have acquired arcane aspects and evolved new magicalities of their own.

Kaplan's observations concerning the ways in which concepts of magic can be reinvented to suit contemporary conditions are pertinent here. "The sites may change" she maintains, "but surely we also (as Clifford Geertz [1973: 5] once put it) live in webs of meaning that we spin ourselves and vest magical potencies in our newest familiars too" (199).

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18 There have been various instances of academic staff resistance to these internal and external committees and bodies that can act in the interests of the internal and external authorities in the higher education sector. For instance, when members of the University and College Union (UCU) at Keele University in the UK embarked on "action short of a strike" in 2008, they refused to co-operate in an audit for the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, and adopted a strategy of non-participation in Teaching and Learning Committees (Beckett, 2008; UCU Press Release, 2008.).

19 Recent ethnographic studies, including those by Pels, Taussig (1997), Meyer, Geschiere and the Comaroffs, explore various manifestations of this tendency, as does this paper.
In conclusion, then, universities have not simply entered the market, but have become drawn into the occult component of the marketplace. Universities have now begun to pay the price for this. The poisonous metaphoric presence of wealth-giving spirits and corporate divinities infects university policy and practice, rendering the discourse and rituals of managerialism unpredictable, ominous and enigmatic. Meanwhile, teams of academic zombies perform endless bureaucratic rituals. This description is suggestive of a key function that an analysis of the occult aspects of academia can fulfil. African vampire stories, Luise White maintains, contain western elements (such firemen and blood transfusion) which are transmuted into images of vampiric menace, thereby implicitly critiquing forms of colonial and neocolonial control (2000: 29). Various studies of African occult economies also suggest that we re-examine the nature and the workings of the forms of western power and control to which they are related and on which they draw. The Comaroffs' research is one well-known example of this, as are Geschiere's studies of beliefs in forms of wealth-giving magic in the Cameroon. For instance, Stephen Gudeman observes that Geschiere's description of the notion that material well-being is generated by zombie labour (1992) invites us to reconsider capitalist economic practices and reflect upon the non-rational features of "western models of profit" (1992: 288). In this respect, research of this nature serves as a form of defamiliarisation. According to Viktor Shklovsky, this technique removes dulled, automatized perceptions of the familiar by making it seem unfamiliar and strange. This may result in a re-appraisal of well-known, commonplace features of our experience (1965: 11 - 12).20 This study aims to fulfil a similar function by defamiliarising the corporatised university. In this way, it seeks to open up the monologic discourse and practice of managerialism, with its "verbal-ideological centralization and unification", to new interpretative possibilities.21

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20 J.R.R. Tolkien's concept of Recovery is a comparable concept. Tolkien contends that Recovery can take place by means of fantasy, which situates the timeworn and mundane in a new or unfamiliar context, thus making them seem original and striking. In this way, Recovery bestows new dimensions or depths of meaning on the familiar and the everyday (1966: 56).

21 Bakhtin's description of the "centripetal" forces of language, with their monologic qualities, seems an appropriate phrase to deploy when alluding to the closed, centralized nature of contemporary managerialised universities (1981: 272).
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