

Rethinking Religion, Magic and Witchcraft in South Africa: From Colonial Coherence to Postcolonial Conundrum¹

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Abstract

Religion, magic and witchcraft are conceptual, socially constructed categories, the boundaries of which have been contested under diverse religious, cultural and intellectual conditions in the west. This paper focuses firstly on the polemical relationship between religion and magic in the context of colonial South Africa, namely, the historical factors that privileged the category religion and the multiple effects of the social and legal imposition of western epistemologies on colonised communities whose practices constituted 'magic', and, therefore, were synonymous with 'witchcraft'. Secondly, examples of strategies to reinforce the religion/magic dichotomy, to collapse their subjective boundaries, and the complexity witchcraft discourses bring to both positions are provided in the context of the religious and cultural hybridity of postcolonial South Africa. A parallel discussion is on the influence Christian and Enlightenment thought had on category construction in the study of religion and questions the extent to which Religion Studies today engages in decolonising the categories religion, magic and witchcraft in ways that do not contradict religious realities in our society.

Keywords: Magic, Witchcraft, Pagan, Postcolonial, Religion, Traditional Healers

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Introduction

The science of comparative religion that developed after the 1859 publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* was dominated by the approach to the material taken by philologist Friedrich Max Muller (Sharpe 1992:47). Despite carrying his own scepticism of Darwinian thought Max Muller was aware of the influence Darwin's evolutionary hypothesis was exerting on research in the nascent social sciences. These disciplines were epistemologically grounded in the legacy of Enlightenment thought that championed the rationalist approach to knowledge and were mostly born in nations involved in colonial expansion. Colonial territories provided fertile ground for Darwinian-inspired scholars, including those engaged in the search for the origins of religion, whose research could be conducted among the 'primitive' nations and be complemented by the writings and tales of colonial administrators, missionaries and travellers. Among the most significant material to emerge in a wide range of this scholarship was that focused on the relationship between religion and magic. In this context, Sharpe notes that the idea of magic 'was eventually taken to represent a stage in the evolution of religion prior to the emergence of religion proper' (ibid.:73). In the late nineteenth century the application of scientific method to the study of religion entrenched religion and science as oppositional categories, and, in religious and secular thought of the time, magic became subject to what Smith (2004:215) calls a 'reduplicated dualism' in relation to both religion and science. In addition to magic being located lower on the evolutionary hierarchy to both religion and science, it was duly associated with irrationality, deviance, heresy, the occult and witchcraft.

South Africa of 1869 was under British colonial rule that had been formalised by the early nineteenth century. In addition to the Calvinism that had been introduced by the Dutch in the first colonial period from 1652, a wide spectrum of Protestant denominations were well established in all parts of the country, and Catholicism – which had been held back by both the Dutch and the British – had finally secured a growing community of adherents. Although Islam and Hinduism both had a religious presence, they were subject to discriminatory policies, and the conversion of Africans to Christianity was advancing in mission school education, with the assumption that their widespread traditional beliefs and practices would be supplanted through the conversion to Christianity. Across the full spectrum of colonial

society there was little to no debate on what constituted ‘right’ religion that was, for the most part, a closed and coherent category, quite rigid in terms of what beliefs and practices could be included and which were unquestionably excluded. The exclusion of ‘magic’ and the practices with which it had become associated were simultaneously influenced by religio-historical circumstances in the west,² where they had been criminalised in witchcraft-related legislation. By the end of the century the implementation of similar legislation in colonial South Africa not only impacted on practices integral to African communities at the time but was also poised to become a site of religious and cultural conflict both within and between different communities in postcolonial South Africa.

A Background to Religion and Magic in Western Thought

Our modern usage of the term ‘magic’ derives from the Greek *magike*, referring to the art and craft of the ancient Medes and Persian priestly class. In ancient Greek societies, a number of words were applied to distinguish between various forms of magic, with *goetia* signifying charms, sorcery or the invocation of demons, whilst *theourgia* was applied to high or benevolent magic that was conducted with the participation of the supernatural realm in human affairs.³ Ancient Greeks and Romans turned to such magical rites to achieve personal goals, for material gains and/or as a route for direct access to the gods. In the early Christian era the binary division between theurgical (high) magic and goetic (low) magic was collapsed and the term ‘magic’ gradually became singularly associated with deviance, sorcery and witchcraft as found in *goetic* systems. According to Tambiah (1990:6–7), the concept of magic as a separate category from religion had first appeared in Judaism, where magic is strongly condemned throughout the Torah and caution is made to anyone ‘who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead’ (Deut 18:10–11).⁴ A full discussion of the semantic

² My usage of the lower case ‘west’ is deliberate and is part of growing academic interest in decolonising knowledge, and its privileged history and status in western hegemonic discourses.

³ For a wider discussion see Russell 1980, pp. 29–31.

⁴ New International Version (NIV).

complexity arising from multiple biblical translations is beyond the scope of this paper, but in biblical texts ‘magic’ is associated with the figure of the witch, with sorcery relating to the use of herbs and plants, with spells, divination and seeking omens, and explicitly with evil and demons. The fact that scriptural interpretations and translations themselves arose in a range of different temporal, linguistic, religious and political contexts is obscured in most general understandings of the term, with ‘magic’ being subjectively defined in the absence of any agreed upon content. The term today bears what Smith calls ‘a negative valence ... that has been, and continues to be, an element in our commonsense’ (2004:218).

The practice of magic, however, did not disappear entirely from the Christian world and in some instances practices and rituals associated with magic were sanctioned when conducted in the realm of the church. Until the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church controlled entry to heaven and also had full recourse to the magic powers of the saints and to the mysteries of what later was denounced as magico-religious ritual.⁵ In the late Middle Ages the new notion that the quintessential magic practitioner, the witch, who owed her powers to having made a deliberate pact with the devil, entered Catholic discourse. Historical notions of the quintessential magic practitioner as a sorcerer, called the witch, now absorbed a heretical character and were ratified in the 1486 publication *The Malleus Maleficarum*⁶ by two inquisitors of the Dominican order named James Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer. This notion was carried to its conclusion in what is known as the ‘witch-craze of the medieval era’⁷ and was retained in Protestant religious discourses. The

⁵ Keith Thomas (1991:59–89) discusses the growing discourses in early Protestantism regarding the magical elements in Catholicism. Also see Pearson (2007:12–13).

⁶ *The Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of the Witches) was a highly gendered text that associated witchcraft with the behaviour, dress and the ‘inherent personality’ of women. It came to serve as an authoritative text on witchcraft in all civil courts.

⁷ Also known as The Burning Times, this denotes the historical period in Europe between the late 14th and 17th centuries, and refers to the persecution of individuals under the accusation of heretical witchcraft. It overlaps Catholic and Protestant Europe and some 160,000 individuals are known to have lost their lives. Charges of witchcraft continued to be brought against

centrality of magic in these persecutions is affirmed by Knott (2005:172) who says, ‘And yet such antipathy and fear developed within religious circles against magic (or certain types of it) that they took on the appearance of ideological separation, indeed opposition.’ In post-Reformation Christianity, Catholicism became referred to as ‘The Old Religion’ with Protestantism distinguishing itself as freed from ‘the shackles of popery, magic, superstition and monasticism’ (Pearson 2007:11). The Protestant belief in predestination marked a growing divide between understandings of religion and magic through the belief that God’s foreordaining of all things past and present made attempts to avert them through magic both unchristian and irrational. This growing rationalisation of religion led to the progressive elimination of magical ritual and of the charismatic elements that had been at the centre of religion. Religion now developed as a legal-rational authority in contrast to the entanglement of religion and magic that was sustained in heterodox Christian traditions that had arisen as a result of divisions following the Reformation.⁸ Many of these traditions adopted rich ceremonial rituals and practices from orthodox Christian churches, and the western revival of ‘high’ magic was particularly strong in the ceremonial magic of secret societies such as the Freemasons, Rosicrucians and others. Magic was less stigmatised during the Renaissance period, even though it was practiced in secret and therefore considered ‘occult’.⁹ What united these disparate churches and traditions appeared to be their ritualised practices, and the fact that they all, at various points in time, were subject to accusations and suspicions of sexual impropriety, occultism and the practice of magic, thereby ratifying their necessary exclusion from religious orthodoxy.

‘Magic’ in the Academic Study of Religion

The theoretical and methodological approaches taken by scholars in the early

individuals across Europe well into the 18th century, and the last execution took place in Poland in 1783.

⁸ For more detail see Pearson’s chapter ‘*Episcopi Vagantes* and Heterodox Christianity’ in Pearson 2007, pp. 27–42.

⁹ The word ‘occult’ is taken from the Latin *occultus* meaning hidden or secret. It has both astronomical and astrological applications and became associated with the magic sciences from the 1630s.

academic study of religion to the subject of magic were deeply informed by the historical and religious trajectories in its relationship to religion in the west, and by the contemporaneous rationalism that pervaded academic scholarship at the time. It was, therefore, with academic and religious self-certainty and with the symbolic capital afforded to citizens of nations at the pinnacle of colonial expansion that scholars conducted their research in colonial territories. In his study *Primitive Culture*¹⁰ (1871) anthropologist E.B. Tylor referred to magic as misapplied logic and as ‘one of the most pernicious delusions that ever vexed mankind’ (1871:101) and, as the title of his work suggests, as belonging ‘in its main principle to the lowest known stages of civilization, and the lower races, who have not partaken largely of the education of the world, still maintain it in vigour’ (ibid.). Clearly taking inspiration from Darwin’s evolutionary model, a range of theories on magic as a formative and primitive stage in the origin of religion arose in the social sciences. Along with theories of animism,¹¹ totemism¹² and fetishism,¹³ the 1890 publication of *The Golden Bough* by anthropologist Sir James Frazer provided scholars with a working definition of magic in arguing that magic thought was based on the principles of sympathetic magic and contagious magic (Sharpe 1992:90). Describing magic as ‘a false science as well as an abortive art’ Frazer (1994:11) argued that magic was a primitive stage in the history of human religious thought that would be dispensed with once humankind moved away from the belief that they could direct and control

¹⁰ The full publication is available online at http://books.google.co.za/books?id=AucLAAAIAAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s. (Accessed on 21 April 2014.)

¹¹ Animism is a term developed by anthropologist E.B. Tylor to refer to the belief that the individual *anima*, or spirit, is distinct from the body and may wander in dreams, and wander permanently in death. It also includes the notion that the natural world is infused with spirits with which humans can participate in relationship.

¹² Totemism is the practice of venerating, or worshipping, an object or natural phenomenon as a symbol of a group or kinship community. It was emphasised in the *Sociology of Religion* of Emile Durkheim.

¹³ Fetishism is the practice of worshipping an object believed to be inhabited by a spirit or that has magical properties. It resembles totemism, but includes other aspects in the scholarship of Emile Durkheim.

their environment through magical practice. Religion, Frazer argued, was ‘a propitiation or a conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life’ (ibid.:50). Despite arguing for a truly comparative study of religion, Muller himself hierarchically located magic in forms of thinking that, ‘in spite of sense and reason, enables man to apprehend the Infinite under different names and under varying disguises’ (1882:13).¹⁴ From its genesis, the academic comparative study of religion across the social sciences was thus constructed on hierarchical models that privileged western Christian thinking of what constituted religious orthodoxy and rationality. As During summarises, scholars working in religion and magic at the time ‘systematized the magic/reason opposition and inserted it into an implicit colonialist theory of history and society’ (cited in Pearson 2007:109).

What seldom entered into discussion in the aforementioned academic scholarship were debates on the moral distinctions between religion and magic, and yet in all theological and legal discourses, and in mainstream Christian society, magic practices such as divination, conjuration, charms and fortune-telling were, at that time, synonymous with heresy and diabolism and were something ‘Other’ that was done by the heretic, the witch and the ‘primitives’. The certainty of these convictions persisted through the twentieth century and was instrumental in the colonial construction of African religious identities.

‘Magic’ in Colonial South Africa

Fertile evidence of the survival of magical practices was easily found in African communities with whom colonists came into contact. Khoisan¹⁵ is the name for the two major ethnic groups who were the original inhabitants of much of pre-colonial South Africa. Khoisan thought was communicated through myths, tales and rituals that coalesced their beliefs in a spiritual

¹⁴ This 1873 publication was reprinted in 1882 and is available online at <https://archive.org/details/introductiontoth014888mbp>. (Accessed on 28 May 2014.)

¹⁵ The Khoisan are divided into two groups, namely the Khoi-Khoi (Hottentots) and the San (who later became known by the derogatory label San ‘Bushmen’).

universe in which good and evil coexisted, and in which humans, nature and the spirit world were in reciprocal communication. The Bantu-speaking¹⁶ peoples – to whom, despite the complexity in this usage, I refer to as Africans in this paper – were pastoralists who migrated into southern Africa from the east coast during the first millennium CE, and, by the time of colonisation, were inhabitants of the region from the Cape through to Natal. The African worldview centres on the belief that departed ancestors continue in their earthly roles of protection, guidance and admonition from the spirit realm, and that the sustaining of reciprocal obligations between the living and the departed is a prerequisite for social, physical, and psychic health and well-being, making critical the practices of divination, sacrifice and ancestral rituals. As oral traditions, pre-colonial history is largely speculative, and it is worthwhile noting the caution of Chidester who says that, ‘Any attempt to reconstruct pre-colonial African Religion, therefore, must also remain conjectural’ (1992:3). However, in their encounters with the Khoisan and Bantu, colonists and missionaries held no such conjectural thoughts and, with evidence of an abundance of ‘magical’ practices in these communities, the early construction of an ‘African Religion’ that privileged colonial Christian categories developed in a number of different ways.

Christianity was constitutive of the colonial project, albeit not a primary motivation for early colonial expansion. Various waves of colonists established their specific ‘settler’ churches wherein inclusion rested on adherence to Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Africans who became members of these churches were primarily in a labour relationship with settlers who required their renunciation of traditional practices. It was in the establishment of Christian missions to South Africa that the conversion of African peoples to Christianity was the primary agenda. Notwithstanding a difference of religious agenda, both settler and missionary communities held a *mélange* of notions underpinned by a Christian orthodoxy that included constructions of the heretic, the witch and the ‘pagan’ in their epistemological field (Wallace n.d.:181). Ratified in biblical texts, all were conceptually associated with ‘magic’. The colonial interpretation of many African practices as magic contributed to the view that Africans were ‘pagans’ who

¹⁶ The term ‘Bantu’, which came to be (mis)applied to all black South Africans, is attributed to philologist W.H.I. Bleek’s classificatory system of a number of linguistically distinct pastoralist groups.

had no religion, and it was also used as evidence of a ‘primitive origin’ of religion as colonial writings fed back into European scholarship, reinforcing the view that the roots of human religious expression lay in the practice of magic. In contrast to the predominant view that Africans had no religion at all, this process led to what Chidester (1996:219–266) discusses as the ‘discovery’ of (a primitive) African religion. Documenting the beliefs of ‘African Religion’ was conducted in the search for similarities with already established Christian categories. With magic practices positioned outside the category ‘religion’ and denounced in Christian orthopraxy, African beliefs and practices garnered accusations of superstition, and, importantly, were associated with witchcraft in legislation in various European countries.

A significant factor in the early construction of African Religion was that colonial writings on African beliefs and practices required observation, dialogue and translation, all of which were to the advantage of colonial observers and scribes. The linguistic barrier between colonists and Africans made what linguist Eugene Nida (1964:159) referred to as formal equivalence, or word-for-word translation, impossible, and documentation relied on translations skewed in favour of colonial understanding and interpretation. Nida, who worked primarily in biblical translation, advocated a dynamic, or functional, equivalency wherein the translator ‘does not insist that he understand the cultural patterns of the source language context in order to comprehend the message’ (ibid.:159). The implicit cultural bias to such translations was clearly evidenced in colonial territories. Bantu languages had no direct equivalency for the English terms ‘religion’, ‘magic’ or ‘witchcraft’, and the colonial application of these words to African beliefs and practices was solely from their own frame of reference. For example, the fact that Africans had no word for witchcraft but employed a number of different words to refer to a range of moral ambiguities in diverse behaviours and practices was lost in translation. African meanings were thus subsumed within well-established and privileged categories in western Christian intellectual and religious circles.

The Magic of African Diviners

In their encounters with African communities, colonists were soon made aware of an individual who appeared to cross the boundaries between their

categories of religion, magic and witchcraft, and this was the African diviner, or *Isangoma*.¹⁷ *Izangoma* were individuals found in the employ of tribal chiefs and homestead communities, and who performed an indispensable function in relation to what Evans-Pritchard spoke of as ‘a belief in the mystical causation of phenomena and events to the complete exclusion of all natural causes’ (1937:65). Life experience is seldom unaccompanied by misfortune, affliction and adversity, each of which can occur in the physical, social and/or psychic dimensions. In African systems of thought these phenomena are neither a random nor a chance occurrence and explanation is sought in an integrated network of relationships that involves the individual, the community and the spirit realm. *Izangoma*, who are ‘called’ to their role by the ancestors, undertake a lengthy process of training in order to mediate human concerns with the spirit realm. This includes learning to achieve altered states of consciousness to communicate with the spirit world, interpret dreams, use divinatory methods to enable their diagnosis of the causation of misfortune or disharmony and prescribe the correct medico-magical responses necessary for treatment and healing. With more limited training themselves, *Izangoma* traditionally referred their patients to herbalists/*Izinyanga*¹⁸ after diagnosis. This category of healers included individuals with specialised training in the medicinal and magical properties of herbs, plants and animal parts to be used as medicine. The import of traditional medicine/*muthi* to African lives is coextensive with the belief that many items in the natural world have inherent healing properties as well as symbolic and spiritual properties that, once harnessed, have effective potencies beyond the physical and the mundane. With ancestral assistance, *Izangoma*, who have the knowledge and occult skill to harness and mobilise these potencies, thereby base their *muthi* prescriptions on their knowledge of the complex supernatural system of imitations and correspondences that inhere in natural substances. However, the power to perform these patently magical acts resided equally in *Izangoma* and witches/*abathakathi* in a traditional context that

¹⁷ *Isangoma* is the singular term for which *Izangoma* is the plural. Both include the definite article.

¹⁸ *Inyanga* is the singular term and *Izinyanga* is the plural. The definite article is included in both words.

has regarded the metaphysical world as being a-moral. Spiritual forces, traditionally, were seen as intrinsically neither good nor bad, although their power could be channeled for moral or immoral purposes (Ellis 2007:46).

The diagnoses of *Izangoma* through divinatory systems fall into three general explanatory categories. Firstly, that symptoms are attributable to a personal breach in behaviour towards the community or in failing to sustain ancestral obligations; secondly, that symptoms are attributable to the anger of the ancestors, whose withdrawal of protection has left the individual vulnerable to becoming a victim of supernaturally inflicted harm; and thirdly, that the affliction is caused by a personal and deliberate act of malevolence. All of these explanatory systems fell into colonial categories of witchcraft and magic, with the third earning *Izangoma* the reductionist designation as ‘witch-doctors’. In the colonial search for congruency between their own notions of the agency of ‘witchcraft’ and African understandings of deliberately malevolent individuals, an easy functional equivalence was made with the English word ‘witch’. *Abathakathi* are believed either to inherit their malevolency through the bloodline, usually of the mother, or to develop their power and skills with deliberate intent to inflict harm. The gradual assimilation by Africans of a functional equivalence between *umthakathi* and ‘witch’ was, however, not accompanied by their appropriation of the meanings colonists uniformly applied to both African healers and *abathakathi*. Through a colonial gaze, the *practices* of both *Izangoma* and witches fell directly into the pejorative category of ‘magic’, and the African *belief* in magic thus functioned as either a superstition or a heresy. All of the aforementioned constituted ‘witchcraft’.

Izangoma, Magic and the Law

The ability of *Izangoma* to incorporate the negative effects of colonial expansion on African lives in their diagnoses of social harm and imbalances made them equally indispensable to chiefs in negotiations with colonial agents over land and cattle rights. In a legal move to reduce their influence, the Natal Code of Native Law No 19 of 1891 directly targeted the practices of *Izangoma* in prohibiting ‘the practice in philtres (magical charms), charms,

divining and witchcraft' (Xaba 2007:332). This legislation gave limited recognition to *Izinyanga*, albeit that it 'restricted African herbalists to treating only Africans and only in African areas' (ibid.:332). In effect, legal recognition was given to cultural practices in indigenous medicine solely within a context stripped of their spiritual underpinnings that, in being associated with magic, superstition and witchcraft, were duly criminalised. The need for supernatural diagnoses through culturally valued divinatory practices in rapidly changing circumstances was unabated, leading *Izinyanga* to start doing their own divining as *Izangoma* advanced their knowledge of the medicinal and magical properties of *muthi*. These forms of strategic resistance to colonial legislation were born of economic and religio-cultural necessity and marked a start to the blurring of the roles and practices of these previously distinct categories of healers.

The rationale and wording of the anti-witchcraft legislation that was promulgated across Africa during the colonial era was based implicitly on the colonial Christian interpretation of what practices constituted witchcraft and reflected Enlightenment thought that the belief in witchcraft was a superstition, thereby giving 'symbolic expression to the civilizing mission of colonialism' (Niehaus 2001:184). The wording of the Witchcraft Suppression Act (3) of 1957¹⁹ (henceforth referred to as the WSA (3)) mirrored the words and reversal of attitudes on witchcraft of the British Witchcraft Act of 1735, despite its having been repealed in 1951.²⁰ This Act reflected the intellectual thought of the time and penalties were directed at individuals who 'pretend to exercise or use any kind of Witchcraft, Sorcery, Inchantment [sic], or Conjurat[i]on'.²¹ Undermining African belief in the reality of witchcraft, the wording of the WSA (3) deemed it as 'pretence' along with practices colonially associated with magic. *Izangoma* were particularly compromised by the legal prohibition of practices such as making claims to supernatural

¹⁹ The WSA (3) of 1957 is available at <http://www.justice.gov.za/salrc/dpapers/dp129.pdf>. (Accessed on 15 March 2014.) This Act was later amended by The Witchcraft Suppression Amendment Act (50) of 1970 that made it an offence to 'pretend to exercise supernatural powers'.

²⁰ The Witchcraft Act of 1735 remained in force well into the 20th century until its repeal and replacement by the Fraudulent Mediums Act of 1951.

²¹ For detail of this Act see www.corvardus.f9.co.uk/religion/wicca/witch1736.htm. (Accessed on 18 March 2014.)

power, fortune-telling, spells, claims to the power to locate stolen goods, and the pretended knowledge of ‘occult or crafty science’. Their radical disempowerment in fulfilling a critical dimension of their role in their communities was underscored by making the primary offence of the WSA (3) the imputation, or accusation, of witchcraft. In repetition of repealed British legislation, the WSA (3) made a concrete connection between witchcraft and the practice of magic in Clause 1 (f) of the WSA (3) of 1957 that states,

Any person who conducts himself in the manner below shall be guilty of an offence: - (f) For gain pretends to exercise or use any supernatural powers, witchcraft, sorcery, enchantment or conjuration, or undertakes to tell fortunes.

In this clause, witchcraft and sorcery are carelessly conflated with practices that inhered in the specialised skills of *Izangoma*, and which were increasingly being adopted by *Izinyanga*. According to Wallace (2012:4) *Izangoma* were further prejudiced by Clause 1 (c) that made it illegal to solicit or employ a ‘witch-doctor’. A peculiarity in the WSA (3) is that it provided no definitions of terms, and, when cases under the Act were brought before the courts, magistrates would make recourse to dictionary definitions of ‘witch’ and ‘witchcraft’ that, at the time, were listed in general terms as ‘a sorcerer (usually a woman), and one who has dealings with the devil or evil spirits’ (ibid.), effectively conflating (magical) practices colonially associated with witchcraft, with heresy and evil. An outcome in the African context was, as Ellis succinctly says, ‘Traditional practices, in becoming sublimated in the category “witchcraft”, have also gained a new moral character – an evil one’ (ibid.:46).

The unremitting demand for the skills of *Izangoma* and *Izinyanga* in African communities through the apartheid years makes it patently clear that the WSA (3), whilst bringing complexity into their overt involvement in witchcraft-related incidents and fears, had no impact on the value of their role in their community value. In fact, their rising numbers were commensurate with insecurities and threats associated with racially motivated social, political and geographic disruptions. The word ‘witchcraft’ was increasingly appropriated by Africans through their growing fluency in English and, not least, through the conversion of Africans to Christianity during the colonial and apartheid years. With the Bible translated into various Bantu languages

from the mid-nineteenth century, the formal equivalency found between the word ‘witch’ and the Zulu *umthakathi* was strongly reinforced. In the African Christian context this equivalency added the concept of heresy to traditional understandings of malevolent practices and practitioners. Traditional African practices and beliefs were resilient and found renewed expression in the African Initiated Churches (AICs)²² where new religious functionaries, the Prophet-Diviners/*Abathandazi*, incorporated traditional interpretations of misfortune and traditional ways of addressing and responding to fears and allegations of witchcraft within a Judeo-Christian context. Although the degree to which African traditional practices are given expression in these churches is on a continuum from high to low, the belief that invisible spiritual forces can be harnessed for both healing and harm was reinforced through growing exposure to Christian texts and teachings. African belief in the reality and dangers of witchcraft was ratified by being an unbiblical position. However, the sustained belief that magical properties inhere in natural substances and that they can be, through a variety of magical technologies, skilfully activated for healing or damaging outcomes became a point of division between the AICs and mainstream Christian churches.

Magic in Postcolonial South Africa

Gilbert and Tompkins (1996:2) correctly caution against viewing the term ‘postcolonialism’ as a temporal concept. With foundations in Frantz Fanon’s publication of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), postcolonial studies developed into a multidisciplinary field after Edward Said’s groundbreaking 1978 publication *Orientalism* opened up an intellectual space within which to critique the multiple effects and outcomes of western imperialism on colonised subjects. Postcolonial theory includes a radical critique of the effects of the imposition of colonial epistemologies on the subjective realities of colonised subjects. In the context of this paper, the power and privileging of Christian colonial epistemologies and their subsequent translation into discriminatory policies and legislation are highlighted as instrumental in the colonial marginalisation of the African religious worldview and expression. It

²² Also called Indigenous and Independent Churches, the African Initiated Churches began as a breakaway movement by Africans from predominantly white mainstream churches.

is important to also give attention to strategies of resistance to these processes within the colonial period, the degree to which colonised subjects internalised and appropriated aspects of the colonial worldview, and the post-1994 pervasiveness of neocolonial discourses amongst previously colonised and colonising subjects in our society. All of these perspectives are critical to attempts to understand the complex dynamics in the relationship between religion, magic and witchcraft from the start of our colonial period to the present.

Religious discourses are often the location for moral rhetoric that essentialises a group identity yet can also disguise issues of prejudices underpinned by racial and/or cultural difference. Moral discourses can in turn be drawn on in response to insecurities related to rapid social and/or political change. The move towards political change that began in the last years of apartheid undoubtedly raised multiple concerns in sectors of the white, previously advantaged citizens of South Africa, and I argue that certain religio-moral arguments of the time can be seen as a cloth that masked the fears of a ‘civilised, moral Us society’ being potentially overcome by the ‘immoral, uncivilised darkness of Them’. In the very closing years of apartheid the Christian conflation of magic with evil, and consequently in direct opposition to religion, was endorsed in the 1992 formation of the Occult Related Crimes Unit (ORCU) within the South African Police Service (SAPS). The first head was Colonel Kobus Jonker, who had converted to an evangelical branch of Christianity in the early 1980s. According to Wallace (2009:135) the ORCU revived ‘the hysteria of the debunked international “Satanic Panic” of the 1980s’²³ through the 2000 publication of the book *Satanism in South Africa: Knowledge, Insight, Hope, Help* that ‘was circulated to schools, law enforcement agencies, social welfare agencies, psychologists, therapists, and was made compulsory reading for all detectives training in South Africa’ (ibid.). This unreferenced and poorly researched

²³ The ‘Satanic Panic’ is a term given to the period in the 1980s in the US during which conspiracy theories regarding an outbreak of ‘Satanism’, particularly amongst teenagers and in certain New Religious Movements, inspired parent protection groups, and responses from police, counsellors and therapists, and some religious organisations. Largely de-bunked by the 1990s, it seems to have cycles of revival in some quarters. The phenomenon is not related to the Church of Satan started by Anton Szandor LaVey in 1966.

publication had white teenagers as its primary concern, and, written from a singularly evangelical Christian perspective, it lacked consultation with the religio-spiritual communities whose symbols and practices it denounced as Satanic. With no reference made to traditional African occult/magical practices, an alarmingly eclectic depiction of ‘Satanic’ signs included many symbols associated with western esotericism and magic alongside the Islamic sickle and star, the Jewish Star of David and the Taoist Yin-Yang that is on the flag of South Korea. Whilst it is astonishing that this publication carried the influence it did six years into South Africa’s new democracy, it was peculiarly unchallenged despite its infringement of constitutionally guaranteed religious freedoms.²⁴ The ORCU was ostensibly disbanded in 2001, but a pandemic of Satanic fears was to burgeon in the decade ahead and within African communities themselves.

An exception in response to the ORCU was that of contemporary Pagans:²⁵ a religious community that had made their public emergence in South Africa in 1996. ‘Paganism’ is an umbrella term for a number of traditions that share, in particular, the recognition of the masculine and feminine aspects of Divine reality,²⁶ the belief that the Divine is imminent in the material world, and that human participation with the Divine is afforded through magic. Predominate Pagan traditions are modern Witchcraft and the religion of Wicca founded in Britain in the 1940s by Gerald Brousseau Gardner, who brought the religion into the public eye after the 1951 repeal of the Witchcraft Act in Britain.²⁷ Whether Wicca and Witchcraft can be viewed as discrete traditions is contested, but their magical practices draw – on a continuum – on features from the history of ceremonial magic (High Magic), from folk magic (Low Magic), and on revivals and survivals of magic and

²⁴ Religious freedom and equality is guaranteed in Section 15, Chapter Two of the 1996 Constitution.

²⁵ During my postgraduate research into contemporary Paganism it became necessary that I capitalise Paganism, Witch and Witchcraft to denote a self-identification with the terms, and to avoid the complexity when referring to all other usages of these terms. I apply the same rule to S/satanism.

²⁶ Pagan conceptions of Divine reality can be bi-theistic, polytheistic, pantheistic or panentheistic according to the specific religion or tradition followed by a Pagan individual or group.

²⁷ For more on this history see Wallace (2009:125–127).

occult practices in western history. Self-identifying Pagans and/or Wiccans/Witches attracted early media attention that focused on questioning their links to Satanism, and on the fact that they ‘do spells’. From a Christian religious perspective these practitioners of magic clearly fell outside of the category ‘religion’ as was evidenced at the World Parliament of Religions held in Cape Town in 1999. To illustrate the extent to which the new democracy provided a space for previously marginalised voices to challenge and debate the reality of religious plurality and equality in South Africa, and the degree to which Christian colonial thought continued to impact on the conceptual categories of religion, magic and witchcraft, Wallace (2009:133–134) quotes from newspaper coverage at the time.²⁸ Both Anglican Archbishop Ndungane and the late Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris publicly objected to the participation of Pagans at the Parliament. Expressing disappointment at the number of ‘unorthodox’ religious groups allowed to attend, particularly Witches and members of ‘so-called’ Pagan religions, Archbishop Ndungane argued for renewed debate on the category ‘religion’ in saying,

I don’t think that’s a religion. As we understand it here and if we put it in the South African context, people will say it’s not on. I think we need to sit down and work out criteria for what needs to be included and excluded. It should not be open to everybody who says they are a religion (Ibid.:133–134).

The late Chief Rabbi Harris extended this neo-colonial religious discourse in the same article by objecting to the presence of both *Izangoma* and Pagans in saying that

Religions should be democratic, but the wider the definition the more one loses depth – the whole thing becomes an exercise in artificiality. The fear is that one gets a bunch of weirdos using the Parliament of Religions to get publicity. I would much prefer it to be more mainstream (Ibid.:134).

²⁸ Jordan, Bobby 1999. *We’re Disenchanted with Witches*. Sunday Times, 12-12-99 is available at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/fire/conversations/topics/2089>. (Accessed on 15 June 2014.)

In a new political space in which previously marginalized voices could be heard, a response to Rabbi Harris' comments came from Philip Kubukeli, president of the Western Cape Traditional Healers and Herbalists Association, in which he asserted his view that both African traditionalism and Paganism represented bona fide religious beliefs and practices. Objecting to what he perceived as religious hegemony, Kubukeli said of Harris, 'He has still got apartheid. All the religions were invited to take part in the Parliament – they wanted an indication of the religions which we have in the new South Africa' (ibid.:134).

Renewed Legal Debates on Witchcraft and Magic

Seldom, if ever, were Pagans publicly questioned on their views of the occult and magical practices of the *Izangoma* or on their responses to understandings of witchcraft-related violence that had escalated in the 1990s in many African communities. Notwithstanding limited individual contacts made with their fellow previously marginalized magical practitioners, Pagans had never engaged as a community with African religionists in discussion or initiatives related to African witchcraft, nor on the vastly different meanings that the W/witch held in their two communities. A change came in 2007 when the provincial government of Mpumalanga was commissioned by central government – who have not yet repealed the WSA (3) – to draft a proposal for its replacement.²⁹ Known as the Draft Mpumalanga Witchcraft Suppression Bill of 2007³⁰ (henceforth referred to as Draft Bill 2007), the document mostly retained the wording and offences of the WSA (3) with only two notable inclusions. Firstly, it provided a definition of terms by which witchcraft was defined as:

²⁹ Prior government initiatives to legally address witchcraft-related violence in the 1990s and that included discussions of 'magic' and *muthi* practices were the Ralushai Commission (1996) and the Commission for Gender Equality (1998).

³⁰ The proposed Draft Bill 2007 was not officially distributed but can be read at <http://methodius.blogspot.com/2007/07/mpumalanga-witchcraft-suppression-bill.html>. (Accessed on 9 March 2014.)

the secret use of muti, zombies, spells, spirits, magic powders, water, mixtures, etc, by any person with the purpose of causing harm, damage, sickness to others or their property.

As the first opportunity for Africans themselves to decolonise colonial presumptions in the WSA (3), strikingly little change was made to primary offences, and the offences of consulting a ‘witchdoctor’ (Draft Bill Chapter 6: Clause 1c), the ‘pretending’ of supernatural powers (ibid.:1f) and of a knowledge of witchcraft (ibid.:1d) were sustained. The definition (above) reflected how notions of African witchcraft now referred to a phenomenon that was not authentically African, nor one resulting entirely from the imposition and adoption of Christian interpretation, but was rather, as Stephen Ellis (2007:35) says, ‘an unfortunate amalgam created in part by comparing religious ideas and practices from different places without sufficient precaution’. Due to the degrees of hybridity in post-1994 South African society, any assumptions that wording in the Draft Bill 2007 indicated a high degree of assimilation of colonial thought by ‘Africans’ must be balanced with consideration of the religious and/or cultural worldview of those who drafted the legislation.

As a referent to their religio-spiritual practices, the word ‘magic’ is not one that has been incorporated into the broader African vernacular where it refers only to sleight of hand trickery; but it is increasingly used by Africans in secular, academic and legal contexts where it, understandably, lacks coherent definition. Its use in the definition of the Draft Bill 2007 carries the tacit knowledge that certain practices and products fall into the category of ‘magic’, and that it is their *covert* use that transforms them into the practice of witchcraft. That it is *Izangoma* and *Izinyanga* who are most recognised for their expertise in the medical and magical properties of *muthi* brings renewed challenges to both groups of practitioners – known collectively as Traditional Healers since the 1970s – in articulating the ‘how and what’ of their own magic practices relating to persistent witchcraft fears and accusations in their communities. This difficulty was evidenced in the inclusion of a Code of Conduct for Traditional Healers in the Draft Bill 2007 document itself, with their *muthi* practices being the centre of caution. The Traditional Healers Organisation (THO)³¹ lodged a formal objection to being

³¹ The formal objections made by the THO were previously available online

legally singled out in the Draft Bill 2007, and thereby implicated in the witchcraft pandemic itself. A representative Pagan group also formally objected on the grounds that a negative definition of witchcraft in a legal document was unconstitutional and prejudicial to self-identifying Witches and practitioners of magic. These two groups, who both collapse the fixed boundaries between religion and magic that have been imposed on them, came into conflict over a working definition of witchcraft. No valuable inter-group discussions focused on how each defined magic. The fact that the meanings that inhere in each of their understandings of the witch and of magic are informed by vastly different cultural and religious histories remained obscured in most of their dialogues.³² Both groups submitted their own draft proposals, and, with the THO making a conciliatory gesture to Pagans in using the Swazi word *butsakatsi* instead of witchcraft in their title,³³ they nonetheless defined witchcraft as ‘the harmful use of medicine, charms, and/or magic’ in their document. In avoiding their own notions of hexing (to curse or cast a spell for bad luck or misfortune) in dialogues with Africans over witchcraft as a malevolent practice, the South African Pagan Rights Alliance (SAPRA) defined witchcraft as ‘a religio-magical technique that employs the use of divination, herbalism, sympathetic magic and ritual’.³⁴ Further conflicts developed after the events of 2007 and highlighted the unresolved issues of definition that persist on the boundaries of religion, magic and witchcraft. The THO that lobbied against the Draft Bill 2007 is one of two hundred such organisations registered with the South African Companies Act and there is insufficient dialogue between them on official matters. The position on the issue formally taken up by some Pagans also lacked full consensus and initiated growing dissent on how they can respond to witchcraft violence and persecution in African communities without compromising their own religious identity. Some, to heated debates, have

and were not printed for general circulation.

³² For a full discussion of these initial debates see Wallace (2008:104–121).

³³ The draft proposal of the THO was called *The Control of Butsakatsi Practices Bill* and related comment is available at www.penton.co.za/the-witch-word-in-south-africa/. (Accessed on 5 March 2014.)

³⁴ This definition is available in the Pagan e-zine PENTON at <http://www.penton.co.za/the-witch-word-in-south-africa/>. (Accessed on 5 March 2014.)

called to relinquish the term ‘Witch’ in favour of ‘Pagan’. Without full community support, SAPRA has pursued ‘reclaiming’ the term at public and official levels and, in articles and discussions on social media sites, came to label the African belief in witchcraft as a superstition, albeit that this neocolonial perspective mirrors the tone of denial in the WSA (3) that has been shown to exacerbate witchcraft violence, thereby effectively closing doors to constructive inter-religious consultation and dialogue. Pagans are almost exclusively white and, as a community, mostly eschew racial, gender and religious discrimination. However, SAPRA debates teeter on a slippery boundary in distinguishing the ‘white’/benevolent magic of the Pagans from the ‘black’/malevolent magic practiced by Africans, who in turn have their own difficulty in separating healing, curative magic practise from magic practices perceived as bringing fear, misfortune and even death into communities.

A development in 2012 shone light on the persistent divide on what can and cannot be included in the category ‘religion’, on the degree to which aspersions of deviance continued to be levelled at magical practitioners, and the extent to which postcolonial debates on the religion/magic dichotomy reflected what Said referred to in the title of Chapter 1 in *Culture and Imperialism* as ‘Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories’ (1994:3). These factors were evidenced in the re-establishment of the ORCU, in its reconfigured ethnocultural base and the expanded religious context of its vision. Now headed by Colonel Attie Lamprecht of the SAPS, the re-formed ORCU transcended the predominantly white membership of its predecessor, and, with confusing, biased and unsubstantiated conflation of religious and cultural phenomena, the reformed ORCU drew on the definition of ‘occult-related crime’ that had been published in 2000 in a special edition of the SAPS community magazine SERVAMUS:

Occult-related crime means any human conduct that constitutes any legally recognized crime, the modus operandi of which relates to or emanates primarily from any belief or seeming belief in the occult, witchcraft, satanism, mysticism, magic, esotericism and the like. Included in the scope of occult-related crime are ritual muti/medicine murders, witch purging, witchcraft-related violence and sect-related practices that pose a threat to the safety and security of the Republic

of South Africa and/or its inhabitants.³⁵

It is important to question the religious and political underpinnings of a police unit dedicated to ‘occult-related crimes’ in the absence of clarification on, or training and experience in, the content of the category ‘occult’ outside of a monocular lens, and why beliefs in, for example, magic and esotericism are listed amongst complex and distressing socio-cultural phenomena and practices. In addition, and with an overtly discriminatory agenda, the ORCU failed to reflect the degree to which magic and occultism are practiced in South Africa today. The occult science of astrology is embedded in Hindu religion and practice; numerology and systems of protection against the Jinn³⁶ have a long history in Islam; New Age occult and esoteric practices have become ubiquitous even in secular institutions; Sufi women and foreign ‘healers’ sell spells and talismans in local shopping centres; magic and occult practices are integral to the religion of many Pagans; and astrologers, *Izangoma*, spirit mediums and psychics ply their trade to diverse religious and cultural communities in annual psychic fairs in large cities. Most significantly, the recourse to magical and occult technologies remains prolific in a plurality of African religious and cultural contexts wherein individuals confront difficulties in securing official recognition for healing and protective magic systems that are simultaneously open to abuse through malign intention. Sadly both benevolent and malevolent intentions drive the economic and symbolic capital of the *muthi* industry, which reflects consumer beliefs that life’s exigencies can be interpreted and responded to through engagement with the spiritual intersections between natural and supernatural forces. It is unlikely that certain religious sectors of society will publicly disclose the degree to which their members hold a belief in magic and the efficacy of its practice,

³⁵ The full title was *The SERVAMUS Special Community Edition: Drugs & Occult-related crime* (2000). It remains available for purchase, and is listed as a product on their Facebook group *Servamus Community Based Safety and Security Magazine* whereon they state that ‘this publication is still used and distributed’. (Accessed on 12 April 2014.)

³⁶ In Islam the Jinn are a class of spirits below angels. They have supernatural powers and, through the ability to manifest in human or animal form, can bring both fortune and misfortune.

indicating a tacit knowledge of its marginalised public status and a tendency to present more normative religious identities. Constructing a positive public identity is made more difficult for all Pagans through the positive valence some traditions accord to magic and the occult in public spaces, wherein they remain contested and/or denounced. For African traditionalists and many African Christians, the public reclamation of ‘magic’ highlights a complex entanglement with what Lowman and Mayblin refer to as ‘the epistemic legacies of colonialism’ (2011:4). On the one hand, there is an imperative to give voice to the decolonisation of African traditional practices, and on the other, there is a struggle to articulate this in the context of their own modern, rational Christian identities. A further problem is to avoid the essentialising of African Christian identities in the polemics against magic as this obscures the radical differences between Africans who practise magic, overtly or covertly, in their churches or communities, and those, for example, who spearhead its denouncement within the ORCU or from church pulpits.

These discourses severely compromise the constitutional rights of all magic and occult practitioners in our society, and a great deal of detail is required on the religious, social and psychological contexts in which the ‘crimes’ the ORCU claims to have a mandate to address are executed. Some of these have gained the attention of the Education Department, who have responded to what they term ‘satanism’ or ‘harmful religious practices’ in schools.³⁷ The fact that the religion of Satanism has never been proven to be associated with these events is obscured under a blanket denouncing of all occult practices, and I argue that they cannot be understood outside of religio-social contexts and forces that are known to exacerbate moral panics and concerns. The aetiology of these disturbing events does not appear to lie in the ‘occult communities’ themselves, and the effects of the elevation of focus on demons, magic, witchcraft and satanism in many churches warrants greater attention as a contributing factor to the alarming rise in community fears. As is the case with random murders of persons accused of practicing witchcraft in some communities, there is a danger in attributing ‘witchcraft’ or ‘occult practice’ to negative events in society in the absence of a deep

³⁷ For more information see <http://www.justice.gov.za/brochure/2014-Harmful-Religious-Practices.pdf>. (Accessed on 17 March 2014) and for pertinent comment and reflection see <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2013-03-26-burn-the-witch/>. (Accessed on 17 March 2014.)

investigation into contributory factors such as poverty, family dysfunctions, embedded social problems and the religious context(s) in which they arise. South African society today is beleaguered with political tensions, unequal distribution of basic resources, HIV/AIDS and unacceptably high levels of crime and gender-related violence. Without unbiased and critical investigation into the intersection of these issues with rampant social and spiritual insecurities, ‘magic as evil’ discourses and its marginalising from what is regarded as religious orthodoxy and orthopraxy, will be kept alive by those for whom magic is not an integral part of how they *do* their religion.

Re-thinking Religion Studies?

Warne’s (2004:30) comment that ‘One practical effect of postcolonialism has been to undercut traditional Western formulations of both philosophy of religion and phenomenology’ is salient, and yet its practical application to revised theory and method in the study of religion is questionable. South Africa’s identity transition to a post-apartheid, postcolonial state renewed onus on many social science disciplines, not least Religion Studies, to confront their own foundations in western Christian epistemologies and the ways in which these continue to be privileged in both theory and method in the postcolonial context.³⁸ Academia in the social sciences had essentialised the religion/magic dichotomy, with ‘magic’ being colonised as evil, primitive and/or irrational irrespective of its long history and role in western history. Early scholars were themselves inheritors of the legacy of a religious history through which magic had gained interpretation as a Christian heresy and/or as witchcraft. In South Africa where practices of animism, fetishism, totemism and divination have survived notions that they would be overcome by the fruits of the Christian colonial project, there remains an overly fixed rigidity in Religion Studies courses to where these are located and how they are framed. The belief in, and practices of, witchcraft with which such magical practices are ubiquitously associated are located within modules on ‘African (Traditional) Religion’, with a notable silencing of their significance within other traditions and on the influence of their discourses on the subject. That the SAPS’ singularly pejorative definition of ‘occult’ includes many beliefs

³⁸ See Alfaisal (2011:24–40) for in-depth discussions on postcolonialism’s involvement in the marginalisation of indigenous epistemologies.

that fall directly into the international ambit of Religion Studies is for our concern due to their prominence in our religiously plural society. Also of relevance to our discipline is the need for attention on the academic, religious, political and/or social forces that resist decolonising the category 'religion', that resist and/or deny the inclusion of magic despite its range of applications in a plurality of religious contexts, and that compromise our liberty as scholars to disentangle it from subjective associations with evil. Equally relevant are the facts that we are a society with alarmingly elevated fears of supernatural harm, many disturbing events do occur and the search for a scapegoat, whilst understandable, comes at the risk of failing to understand and identify the social factors that undoubtedly fuel their prevalence. These factors all warrant scholarly attention as they are woven into the religious fabric of society in both interpretation and response, and a non-prejudicial engagement with them could lead us towards an inclusive and relevant Religion Studies that can fully participate in the decolonisation and unsettling of dominant neocolonial discourses that do remain intact.

Conclusion

Religion, magic and witchcraft are interrelated, conceptual categories, and what is included in, or excluded from, each is contingent on specific historical, cultural and religious contexts in which their meanings are constructed and reproduced. In changing contexts, meaning is imposed on, appropriated by and/or contested by diverse linguistic, ethnic, religious and cultural communities. In this paper I have discussed these processes as they apply to the category 'religion' and have argued that the religious landscape of post-1994 South Africa revealed the impact that processes in our colonial history had on current debates on how, and whose, 'religion' is recognised and affirmed in our society. Magic is a far more complicated category as most magic practices remain criminalised in our statutes, are ostensibly policed by our law enforcers and are negatively implicated in a smorgasbord of social ills. The conflicted relationship between religion and magic remains heavily weighted by our colonial inheritance and has found new support for both their sustained opposition and their radical reconciliation across racial and cultural boundaries. There is a long history to the plurality of meanings in the terms 'witchcraft', 'religion' and 'magic' within and between South

African communities today that necessitates highly contextual and religiously nonpartisan academic investigation. Whether the belief that witchcraft is a dangerous and harmful practice is grounded in empirical reality or not is inconsequential in light of the fact that millions of our citizens recognise it to be so and live their lives accordingly. Demands for this belief to be recognised and the practice criminalised through legislative reform have accelerated since the mid-2000s,³⁹ and have been accompanied by inter-religious and inter-cultural divisions on how the term would be legally defined. For Pagan Witches who assert their constitutional rights, this is of the utmost concern. The wide calls for the criminalisation of witchcraft have been tested in difficulties meeting legal requirement for clarity in what constitute ‘witchcraft’ practices without recourse to the perplexing and contested term ‘magic’. An additional challenge is repeating the patent failure of legislation based on subjective moralities.

In a political climate in which there is a timely need to prioritise more radical transformation in academic structures and syllabi, the social sciences are beholden to reflect these issues in their theory, method and course materials. The relationship between religion, magic and witchcraft is as contested in present-day South Africa as it was during the colonial period. What has changed significantly is the global and local imperative to bring a postcolonial perspective into current discussions on matters of deeply personal and public concern, and includes the need to call into question the extant primacy of western knowledge systems. To fully engage in this process would require critical reflection within Religion Studies as to why its research into the religion/magic/witchcraft nexus falls behind that in other social science disciplines. Perhaps, as Alfaisal (2011:24) suggested of postcolonialism itself, there is a prior necessity for Religion Studies to decolonise its own epistemological assumptions for this end to be met?

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³⁹ The South African Law Reform Commission has announced that a proposed review of the WSA (3) will be issued for public comment in 2015.

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Rethinking Religion, Magic and Witchcraft in South Africa

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