

# Media Framing of Violence Against Tanzanians with Albinism in the Great Lakes Region: A Matter of Culture, Crime, Poverty and Human Rights

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## **Abstract**

This article discusses the coverage and portrayal of violent attacks against people with albinism, in Swahili and English news media in Tanzania between 2008 and 2012. Violence in the Great Lakes district of East and Central Africa surrounding Lake Victoria appears to be driven by traditional ‘witchdoctors’ and carried out by contract killers to meet a market for albino body parts, in a context of superstitious beliefs about albinism, economic inequity and continued poverty. A content analysis revealed that media coverage of the violent attacks was most commonly framed in terms of criminal activity and shameful cultural practices—reflecting sourcing from court and police reports and politicians’ statements—but also as a socio-economic phenomenon and an issue of human rights. These interpretative frames highlight the complexity of the violence, the debate over its causes, and the need for multiple levels of solution. Although the violent attacks are seen as shameful, Tanzanian media provides public space for people to debate and shape knowledge about the impact of cultural and economic development on disadvantaged persons with albinism. This article commends the value of further interdisciplinary and international research to understand and respond to similar phenomena affecting vulnerable groups throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

## **Introduction**

Discrimination and violence against people with albinism has been reported in Tanzanian news articles since 2006.<sup>1</sup> This article analyses and discusses coverage and portrayal of these attacks, in Tanzanian Swahili and English newspapers between 2008 and 2012, by focusing on how the attacks were framed and reported. The thematic content analysis reveals four main ways in which coverage was framed; namely,

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<sup>1</sup> Faraja Mgwabati, “Scholars conduct research on albino killings,” *Daily News*, 15 March 2010.

as crime, as a shameful cultural phenomenon, as the result of poverty and inequity, and as an issue of human rights. Clearly, Tanzanian media has a role in providing public space for people to debate and shape knowledge about the impact of cultural and economic development on disadvantaged persons with albinism and on their own modernising society.

## **Background**

Africans with albinism experience stigma as people with different skin colour to their parents, as well as, often, disabilities of low vision or blindness.<sup>2</sup> Albinism is a group of rare inherited conditions which affect the pigment in the eyes, hair and skin of people throughout the world, including Africa. Estimates of the prevalence of albinism in Africa generally range from 1 in 5,000 to 1 in 15,000,<sup>3</sup> with 1 in 1,500 being reported in the United Republic of Tanzania.<sup>4</sup> Major health and social issues for Africans with albinism are identified as skin cancer,<sup>5</sup> impaired eyesight and the stigma associated with skin-colour difference. These factors affect the education and social inclusion of children and adults with albinism.<sup>6</sup> Interventions and services include special schools, sun protection measures and outreach clinics.<sup>7</sup>

While attacks against people with albinism are a long-standing form of discrimination in the Great Lakes district of East Africa, they have only been reported in news media since relatively recently. The violence

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<sup>2</sup> Esther Hong, Hajo Zeeb, and Michael Repacholi, "Albinism in Africa as a public health issue," *BMC Public Health*. 6:212 (2006); Patricia Lund and Retha Gaigher, "A Health Intervention Programme for Children with Albinism at a Special School in South Africa," *Health Education Research* 17:3 (2002): 365-372; Thomas McLeod, *Albinism and the Contingencies of Stigma in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Masters Thesis, (University College, London. 2009)

<sup>3</sup> Hong, Zeeb, and Repacholi, "Albinism in Africa," 1.

<sup>4</sup> Henceforth referred to as Tanzania: Also see Donald Lookingbill, Georgia Lookingbill, and Barbara Leppard, "Special Report: Actinic Damage and Skin Cancer in Albinos in Northern Tanzania: Findings in 164 Patients Enrolled in an Outreach Skin Care Program," *Journal of American Academy of Dermatology* 32:4 (1995): 653-658.

<sup>5</sup> Lookingbill, Lookingbill and Leppard, "Special Report: Actinic Damage," 653.

<sup>6</sup> Lund and Gaigher, "A Health Intervention Programme," 365-372.

<sup>7</sup> Lund and Gaigher, "A Health Intervention Programme," 367; Sandy McBride and Barbara Leppard, "Attitudes and Beliefs of an Albino Population toward Sun Avoidance: Advice and Services provided by an Outreach Albino Clinic in Tanzania," *Archives of Dermatology* 138:5 (2002): 629-632, [www.archdermatol.com](http://www.archdermatol.com) (accessed 27 January 2010).

was first reported by the printed news media in Tanzania in 2006, when police started documenting the attacks, later coming to international attention through the writing of Tanzanian BBC journalist Vicky Ntetema in 2008.<sup>8</sup> The non-governmental organisation she now leads in Tanzania—Under the Same Sun (UTSS)—has documented 71 murders and 31 survivors of machete attacks in Tanzania.<sup>9</sup> In neighbouring countries, there have been 16 documented murders in Burundi, seven in Kenya with two attack survivors, and there have been reports of attacks and murders in Swaziland, Guinea, Nigeria, South Africa, Congo, Zambia, Namibia, Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso.<sup>10</sup> While attacks are mainly being reported in Tanzania, it is believed that many attacks and killings in all of these countries go unreported or undocumented. It is also likely that infanticide of albinos has been silently practiced in the past<sup>11</sup> and may still be occurring.

Violence against people with albinism in the Great Lakes district appears to be driven by traditional ‘witchdoctors’ and carried out by contract killers to meet a market for albino body parts, which are believed to bring wealth and fortune. The body parts are used to make potions sold to people seeking luck and power in situations of unpredictable opportunities for vast wealth in mining, business and fishing ventures and for power, like in political elections. The recent apparent escalation of such violence towards people with albinism is puzzling, with suggestions being made that it results from traditional superstitions, which are no longer being hidden, or is emerging from the process of economic transition and rapid modernisation. Bryceson, Jonsson and Sherrington<sup>12</sup> have written about albino fetishisation and gold mining from an anthropological and sociological perspective,

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander Alum, Michael Gomez, and Edilsa Ruiz, *Hocus Pocus, Witchcraft, and Murder: The Plight of Tanzanian Albinos* (Northwestern University of Law, Chicago, 2009), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Under the Same Sun (UTSS), *Children with Albinism in Africa: Murder Mutilation and Violence: A report on Tanzania* (Vancouver, Canada: Under the Same Sun, 2012), 8.

<sup>10</sup> UTSS. *Attacks of PWA in Africa*, (Vancouver, Canada: Under the Same Sun, 2012), 1.

<sup>11</sup> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Through Albino Eyes: The Plight of Albino People in Africa’s Great Lakes Region and a Red Cross Response*, Advocacy Report, (Switzerland: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2009)

<sup>12</sup> Deborah Bryceson, Jesper Jonsson, and Richard Sherrington, “Miners’ Magic: Artisanal Mining, the Albino Fetish and Murder in Tanzania,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 48: 3 (2010): 353-382.

arguing that new upheavals in Tanzania's moral economy have fostered a commodification of life itself. Yet most writing about this violence has been by newspaper journalists, some of whom have called on academics to apply themselves to the issue of albino killings<sup>13</sup> in order to understand both how to prevent them occurring individually and to contribute to their overall reduction. This article responds to this call by discussing how discrimination and violence against people with albinism are portrayed in Swahili and English Tanzanian news articles. It aims to add to increased understanding about this phenomenon, by examining how such incidents are covered in the media, and to analyse the influence and impact of this coverage by focusing on how it is framed.

### **Methods**

This article reports on a media study which analysed online versions of print newspaper articles accessed from the publically available websites of three media companies: IPPMEDIA Group (ippmedia.com); Majira (majira.co.tz); and Mwananchi Communications Ltd. (mwananchi.co.tz). These groups comprise nine national newspapers, including the Swahili newspapers, *Nipashe*, *Nipashe Jumapili*, *Alasiri*, *Majira* and *Mwananchi*, and the English papers, *The Guardian*, *Sunday Observer* and *This Day*. The sampling frame was all Tanzanian online media, with the sample being accessible articles from the three selected media companies from 2008—when I first became aware of the murders of Tanzanians with albinism—until mid-2012. The data was limited by what was accessible via the internet search engines of the three sites mentioned. While accuracy of media reports is not guaranteed, using media sources that are publically available and relatively cost-free is one way to access data concerning a field of study which is otherwise hard to reach. Media is a major forum in which we conduct “our public conversation”<sup>14</sup> about social justice and issues affecting it. The media is noted for tending to focus on violent and sensational stories, but also for its ability to shape public perceptions and policy, which makes these data sources particularly relevant in this case.

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<sup>13</sup> Prosper Masha, “Ustawi wa jamii na changamoto zake kwa taifa,” *Majira*, 18 April 2009.; Angel Navuri, “UN set to help govt in war on albino killings,” *The Guardian*, 10 February 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Vicki Lens, “Sound Bites, Spin and Social Change: Analyzing the News Media in the Classroom,” *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* 22: 3/4 (2002): 39-53.

News articles were located by keyword searches of ‘albino’, ‘albinism’, ‘ngozi’ (skin) and ‘ulemavu’ (disability) and then downloaded from the websites and saved into data files. Thematic content analysis was conducted on 153 Swahili and 121 English articles—a total of 274 articles—using Nvivo9 software. Content analysis builds a systematic overview of the content of the data and of the emerging themes. The concept of media framing was used to analyse and interpret the data, by examining features of the news stories in order to identify a set of ‘frames’ used to present the topic.<sup>15</sup> How stories are framed affects how problems are defined and what are understood to be their causes, consequences and effective solutions.<sup>16</sup> Robert Entman explains how frames make sense of information by “activating schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel and decide in a particular way.”<sup>17</sup> Hence coding categories included how news stories were triggered, their sources, causes and solutions suggested for the attacks, the use of language, and with whom the audience was invited to identify. The coding framework used pre-determined codes from relevant studies, particularly the analysis of US media coverage of human trafficking by Gulati<sup>18</sup> and from Giles and Shaw’s<sup>19</sup> media framing analysis, in addition to coding that emerged with familiarity with the data.

The most frequent sources of news stories were court reports of trials of arrested suspects, and the reporting of attacks on people with albinism from police reports and interviews. Many articles reported on announcements and speeches made by the president, prime minister, members of Parliament and other government officials, while others reported on visiting celebrities, activists and diplomats as well as fund-raising events or the launch of a group or movie promoting the issue (possibly sourced from press releases). Journalist-initiated articles which took an investigative approach and included interviews with survivors and families, or those written as editorial opinion, were the least frequent in the sample. The voices heard most frequently in the media were those of politicians and government officials, followed by leaders

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<sup>15</sup> David Giles, *Psychology of the Media*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 137.

<sup>16</sup> Entman 1993 cited in Girish J. Gulati. “News Frames and Story Triggers in the Media’s Coverage of Human Trafficking,” *Human Rights Review* 12 (2011): 363-379.

<sup>17</sup> Entman 2007 cited in Giles, *Psychology of the Media*, 139.

<sup>18</sup> Gulati, “News Frames and Story Triggers,” 363-379.

<sup>19</sup> Giles, *Psychology of the Media*, 143-150.

of albino associations and the police. The voices heard least were those of the attackers, and then usually only in a limited way through reports on court proceedings, and nothing was heard from those suspected of driving the attacks, that is, the witchdoctors and the wealthy elite seeking a quick way to wealth and power.

### **Emerging frames**

Content analysis of the media articles identified four main interpretative 'frames' used to present the news and invite audiences to make sense of the stories. These frames presented the violence against Tanzanians with albinism as: (1) a crime (2) a cultural phenomenon (3) as related to poverty or inequity or (4) an issue of human rights.

#### ***1. Criminal activity frame***

The attacks on people with albinism were most commonly framed in terms of criminal activity and law enforcement, reflecting the predominant sourcing of news from court and police reports. The main causes of the albino killings were reported in most articles as criminal actions perpetrated to secure wealth and driven by greed. In this 'crime' frame, the activities most frequently reported and commended as solutions were the identification, arrest and punishment of the perpetrators. Major actors in this current and proposed solution are the police force, with cooperation from the community and support from the government. The arrest, conviction and sentencing of offenders were all seen as important law enforcement measures for deterring future attacks. The first major court trials of arrested suspects in 2009 were extensively covered in the media, with "more than 90 people ... arrested for their roles in the grisly trade, including four corrupt police officers."<sup>20</sup> However, there have been relatively few convictions, namely only "six trials and eight people have been convicted and sentenced to hang."<sup>21</sup> While some suspects waited in remand prison, others "have been released under mysterious circumstances"<sup>22</sup> and some police were alleged to have tampered with evidence to assist suspects to escape trial or arrests. Activists were quoted as criticising delays in legal processes and questioning the integrity of the criminal system.

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<sup>20</sup> Andrew Malone, "The albino tribe butchered to feed a gruesome trade in 'magical' body parts," *Daily Mail*, 25 September 2009,

<sup>21</sup> Correspondent, "It is wrong to think that the media is to blame for albino killings," *Guardian on Sunday*, 4 December 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Correspondent, "It is wrong to think that the media is to blame"

Within this criminal frame, people with albinism were primarily portrayed as victims of crime, vulnerable and requiring protection. The other way they are portrayed is as spokespeople and activists who are strong advocates of law enforcement actions. As victims, their voices were heard as survivors and witnesses, within police and court reports or investigative pieces, while some news items reported victims' deaths from the perspectives of witnesses, family members or police officials. The voices of offenders were generally only heard in court reports, and these tended to be only the actual perpetrators of the attacks or those involved in transporting body parts, rather than those suspected of driving the attacks as part of the "murder network."<sup>23</sup> Some media items reported religious leaders' speculations that "politicians who aspired to top positions"<sup>24</sup> were also involved, "due to superstitious beliefs" with great secrecy surrounding the contributions of leaders and well-known businessmen.<sup>25</sup> This is beyond mere speculation; several reports referred to the naming by suspects of wealthy people as behind the murders, which the courts have continued to suppress until such time as there is sufficient evidence to charge them.<sup>26</sup>

The rights of offenders was a topic covered in some media articles, particularly their right to life, since death by hanging is a potential penalty for convicted offenders in Tanzania. Much media debate followed the Tanzanian premier's 2009 tour of the Lakes, when he stated that people caught killing albinos also deserved to be killed. This was considered controversial for its potential mockery of the principle of the rule of law and the constitution and its encouragement of mob justice, rather than due process by trial. Incidents have, in fact, been reported of suspects being rescued by police when citizens attacked them<sup>27</sup> and of suspects' houses being burned.<sup>28</sup> Such stories were accompanied by affirmations that charges needed to be proved and that law enforcement is the work of the legal authorities only, such as police,

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<sup>23</sup> Translated from "mtando wa mauaji," Elisante Kitulo, "Wanaoua albino nao wauawe – Mchungaji," *Majira*, 24 October 2009.

<sup>24</sup> The Guardian, "Muslim clerics want end to albino killings," *The Guardian*, 24 March 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Elisante Kitulo, "Wanaoua albino nao wauawe."

<sup>26</sup> Restuta James, "Polisi watakiwa kutaja wauaji wa maalbino," *Nipashe*, 26 November 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Anceth Nyahore, "'I saw human legs being stuffed into a bag'," *The Guardian*, 11 June 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Thobias Mwanakatwe, "Kura za wauaji wa albino zazua balaa," *Nipashe*, 29 April 2009. <http://www.ippmedia.com/frontend/index.php?l=1576>.

prisons and courts. In these reports, bystanders are exhorted not to take the law into their own hands.

## 2. *Cultural frame: a matter of shame*

Many of the media stories referred to how attacks and murders of people with albinism were driven by superstitions rooted in traditional cultural beliefs. This frames the violence as a cultural phenomenon driven by beliefs that albino body parts and blood can be used to bring wealth and success. The practices related to these beliefs are varied, and include blood being used in medicines and hair woven into fishing nets.

Bones are ground down and buried in the earth by miners, who believe they will be transformed into diamonds. The genitals are made into treatments to bolster sexual potency.<sup>29</sup>

Common to these practices is a perceived relationship between the body organs of people with albinism and “luck in love, life and business.”<sup>30</sup> Personal success may be sought in the form of wealth, sexual potency or even to gain or maintain political office. It is noteworthy that in this frame the abuse is understood as not only driven by economic motivations, but also by a broader desire for power and success in life and relationships.

Beliefs in the supernatural power of albino body parts are considered to be widespread in Tanzania, even rife amongst politicians and leaders. There are claims that everyone in Tanzanian society is implicated: “our people can believe in religion, science and superstition all in the same brain and without contradictions.”<sup>31</sup> The beliefs are linked to other beliefs (or myths) about how albinism is caused and the nature of people with albinism, as well as witchcraft beliefs. These include beliefs “that people with albinism are not human beings,”<sup>32</sup> which can result in their social exclusion or even infanticide. An albino birth may be unwelcome, a cause for suspicion, or signal “a curse to the concerned family.”<sup>33</sup> The mother may be accused of having been unfaithful with a white man, or

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<sup>29</sup> Malone, “The albino tribe butchered to feed a gruesome trade in ‘magical’ body parts”

<sup>30</sup> Adam Ihucha, “Burundi arrests 8 for albino killings,” *The Guardian*, 16/3/2009.

<sup>31</sup> Gaspar A Hiza, “The plight of special groups in Tanzania,” *The Guardian*, 3 January 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Correspondent, “It is wrong to think that the media is to blame for albino killings,” *Guardian on Sunday*, 4 December 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Mgamba, “The untold story of Adam's ordeal,” *The Guardian*, 27 November 2011.



even of having had sexual relations with Satan.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, beliefs that people with albinism have magical power are connected to witchcraft beliefs about “the worship of gods who require sacrificing people to give strength to those..., for whom the ritual is done.”<sup>35</sup> Hence, at times, the albino killings were more specifically labelled as “ritual murder[s].”<sup>36</sup> Some news articles highlighted the role of traditional healers (or witchdoctors) in deliberately spreading such beliefs, and deceiving people.

A recurring and contrasting theme in news reports of an editorial or investigative nature was that the false beliefs occur “where there is a lack of education about what causes albinism, with so-call[ed] "voodoo cults" conferring [a] supernatural interpretation on the phenomenon.”<sup>37</sup> These beliefs were described as silly, stupid, foolish, backward and superstitious. News items contained exhortations for readers to educate others that people with albinism are ordinary human beings with the same rights as others, who should not be hunted or “slaughtered like chickens.”<sup>38</sup> Leaders, politicians and people with albinism themselves emphasised that “wealth does not come from human body organs but from working hard.”<sup>39</sup> Some expressed optimism that people’s beliefs can change with enough education, combined with public awareness about albinism, promoted through campaigns accompanying soccer matches, films, and visits by celebrities, politicians and religious leaders. The media presented itself as having a role in educating society about this disability, and “through [a] ‘group communication’ approach ... making people ... understand that there is no wealth obtained through witchcraft.”<sup>40</sup> It was proposed that journalists could have a role in

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<sup>34</sup> Mgamba, “The untold story.”

<sup>35</sup> Michael Eneza, “Albino killings: And suppose premier Pinda was right after all?,” *The Guardian*, 14 February 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Mkinga Mkinga, “Interpol leads regional operation to end albino killings,” *Citizen*, 11 February 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Ondigo, “Albinos want naming of traditional healers,” *Guardian on Sunday*, 2 June 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Ochieng, “Albinos speak out loudly and clearly,” *Sunday Observer*, 22 March 2009.

<sup>39</sup> Grace Chilongola, “Walemavu wa ngozi Mwanza waandamana kupinga mauaji,” *Nipashe*, 10 February 2009.

<sup>40</sup> Deogratias Mushi, “Feature media can end albino killings,” Daily News Online, 26 February 2009.

investigating the causes and looking “for lasting solutions” to the problem.<sup>41</sup>

The framing of albino killings as cultural phenomena related to witchcraft means that these acts are also portrayed as bringing shame (*aibu*) to the nation before the world, and damaging its reputation. This shame results from portrayals of Tanzanians “as superstitious and without *utu*.”<sup>42</sup> The concept of *utu* is best translated as ‘humanity’; these statements suggest that the inhumane actions of a few criminals imply, by association, that all Tanzanians are somehow lacking basic humanity. One article commended the free discussion in the press of this shame, rather than the more common response of hiding the shame.

It is a real shame to our nation but I admire the way we bravely face that shame. That problem is not unique to Tanzania. Tanzania may be the country which has adequate freedom press to put to the public over its own shameful areas. Viva Tanzania.<sup>43</sup>

This writer is here suggesting that the same problem is occurring in other countries but is not being reported as widely due to less press freedom and the deliberate hiding of such shameful practices.

### 3. *Socio-economic frame*

Another major explanation is that the attacks occur for economic reasons, that is, that they are “income-generation ventures” which are “fueled by lust to get rich quickly.”<sup>44</sup> Albino body parts are a commodity valuable for their high monetary value and perceived supernatural or moral powers. At the heart of attacks against them, is the disturbing portrayal of people with albinism as commodities, perceived by their attackers as non-human or sub-human. While this attitude was condemned by the media, articles also reported the monetary values of albino body parts, and the language used to refer to people with albinism as *dili* (deal).

In 2009 the *Sunday Observer* stated that “fortune seekers believe that the blood or portions of the albino body guarantee prospects in gold or fish, which are very important sources of income in the Lake Victoria

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<sup>41</sup> Mushi, “Feature media can end albino killings.”

<sup>42</sup> Administrator, “Watanzania Botswana wampa changamoto Rais Kikwete,” *Majira*, 7 May 2009

<sup>43</sup> Hiza, “The plight of special groups in Tanzania.”

<sup>44</sup> Ley Mlelwa, “Albino killings: Acknowledge witchcraft,” *Sunday Observer*, 15 February 2009.

regions of Shinyanga, Mara, Mwanza and Kagera, where the problem is most acute.”<sup>45</sup> It seems the ‘gold rush’ in the Lake Zone thus created a demand for albino body parts. Such a poverty frame, in the context of economic inequity, explains the involvement of “greedy heartless gold miners and fishermen... in the Lake Zone... trading in the body parts of albinos, including limbs, hair, skin and genitals,”<sup>46</sup> and witchdoctors who “use poor and desperate people to carry out their dirty work of looking for albino body parts.”<sup>47</sup> The news reports portray how a complex mix of individuals motivated by greed or desperation in a context of poverty and opportunity makes sense of the actions taken. There is a lot of money at stake in “this murderous trade”<sup>48</sup> involving a range of players: from rich clients to poorer hired assassins, acting as a “business network.”<sup>49</sup> The most emotionally charged descriptions were used for family members, who crossed over from the category of family member to enemy when they acted as “merchants of death”<sup>50</sup> to collaborate in selling their relatives.

There were also views expressed which pointed to external conditions of poverty and inequity, rather than personal greed, such as by a leader of an opposition political party (National Convention for Construction and Reform [NCCR],- Mageuzi) who stated that the main reasons for albino murders were “poverty, unemployment and witchcraft beliefs.”<sup>51</sup> Residents in the Lake Zone area, specifically from Mwanza, say the problem results from increasing poverty<sup>52</sup> in their area despite its natural resources, because these are owned by and are generating profit for foreigners. Such a frame points to an inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities as the contextual background for the phenomena of mutilation and murder. A guard interviewed

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<sup>45</sup> Ley Mlelwa, “Albinos as a hunted segment of society,” *Sunday Observer*, 8 March 2009.

<sup>46</sup> Mlelwa, “Albino killings.”

<sup>47</sup> Gerald Kitabu, “Only education will end albino killings,” *Guardian*, 7 September 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Malone, “The albino tribe butchered to feed a gruesome trade in ‘magical’ body parts”

<sup>49</sup> Translated from ‘mtandao wa biashara hiyo’ Benedict Kagu. “Waliohukumiwa kifo wateja wenzao,” *Majira*, 1 October 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Translation from ‘wafanyabiashara ya kifo’; Richard Mgamba, “Adamu aeleza babaye alivyomuza kwa muuaji-5,” *Nipashe Jumapili*, 8 January 2012.

<sup>51</sup> Beatrice Shayo, “NCCR yapinga kura kwa watuhumiwa wa mauaji albin.....” *Nipashe*, 9 March 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Rabia Bakari, “Lipumba: Mgogoro Mahakama ya Kadhi matokeo ilani ya 'kisanii',” *Majira*, 12 July 2009.

anonymously suggested that the lives of albinos should not be entrusted to poorly paid guards, who might be tempted into “trading albinos in [their] charge if approached with millions of shillings.”<sup>53</sup> This alternative voice positions poverty as an environmental vulnerability to temptation which could lead anyone to crime and violent acts, including the reading audience.

#### 4. *Human rights frame*

Many articles used the words ‘rights’ and ‘justice’, often in general terms but also specifically in conjunction with the rights to life, to education, to freedom of movement and in reference to the rights of children, disabled persons and as citizens. For example, it was reported that “albino pupils do not attend school and adult ones are in constant hideouts, which violates the right to work and the right of movement.”<sup>54</sup> The murders were condemned as violations of human rights, with responsibility for these acts most often credited to the attackers while the Tanzanian government was also criticized for inaction. The right to life, amongst other rights, was framed legally, in relation to the constitution and international conventions as well as framed as a ‘human’ right, which required recognition and responsible protection by the community. This human rights frame was expressed most strongly in editorials and investigative pieces, as well as in stories reporting politicians’ speeches and from press releases and interviews with leaders of NGOs, human rights, disability and albino groups. In this frame, Tanzanians with albinism were mainly portrayed as fellow citizens and family members, as well as advocates and activists. The recommended responses arising from the human rights framework included moving albino children to safer boarding schools and camps, appointing an albino Member of Parliament, and running educational campaigns to raise public awareness.

Overall in the selected media articles, the word ‘albino’ was more often used in both its Swahili and English versions than the preferred term of ‘albinism’. Words used for people with albinism in Swahili were *mlemavu wa ngozi* (literally meaning skin-disabled person) or *watu wenye ulemavu wa ngozi* (literally meaning people with skin-disability). Clearly they are being recognised, in the media at least, as people with a disability arising from a genetic condition, with a focus on the disability

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<sup>53</sup> Robert Ochieng, “Guard doubts association's ability to protect albinos,” *Sunday Observer*, 15 February 2009.

<sup>54</sup> Mlelwa, “Albinos as a hunted segment of society.”

of 'skin colour'. This framing of albinism as a disability is an important aspect of describing people with albinism as humans and citizens, whose visible difference has positioned them as vulnerable to human rights abuses.

A common theme was to state that people with albinism are humans, intimately included in social relations as 'fellow countrymen,' or as 'our' children or brothers and sisters. As such they deserve the same rights, respect and love as anyone else, because they are humans and created by God. Prime Minister Pinda said,

They are our fellow human beings. I want all of us, as Tanzanians to ensure they get the same rights as everyone else, especially the right to life.<sup>55</sup>

This warm social identification and inclusion was most apparent in the press material that framed mistreatment of people with albinism as an abuse of human rights. In contrast, arguments that "people who kill their own people deliberately have no right to live"<sup>56</sup> suggest that the murders of people with albinism are viewed as inhumane acts and hence that the killers are in some way outside the borders of humanity and hence undeserving of human rights. Many media items spoke of the good name of Tanzania in terms of human rights, stability and "as an island of peace in the Great Lakes Region."<sup>57</sup> Unsurprisingly, decisive and numerous arrests and timely sentencing were also perceived as giving messages to the world that Tanzania was reclaiming its good record for human rights. Some activists argued that delayed or dismissed convictions of arrested suspects have, instead, spoilt this image.

## **Discussion**

The multiple media frames identified in this study are interpretative packages that seek to explain the phenomenon of the violent attacks on Tanzanians with albinism and to analyse and recommend solutions. The multiplicity of these frames hints at the complexity of the issue being addressed and debated in the media, and the need for multiple levels of action and solution. The dominant framing of the attacks as criminal acts requiring law enforcement solutions is nevertheless linked to the

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<sup>55</sup> Correspondent, "Pinda says albino killings damaging to country's image," *Guardian*, 21 September 2011.

<sup>56</sup> Anceth Nyahore, "Waliohukumiwa kifo wana kesi nyingine ya mauaji," *Nipashe*, 26 September 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Edwin Agola, "Tanzanians told to support government in war against albino killings," *Guardian*, 22 September 2009.

framings of cultural practices, poverty (or inequity) and human rights, so that strong messages of firm legal consequences are presented in Tanzanian media as a way to increase the nation's standing in the global arena as a modernising society committed to human rights. Nevertheless, describing these framings as distinct highlights how these interpretations conflict, and epitomises the debate over whether superstitious beliefs, individual greed or structural inequalities in a rapidly modernising society are the necessary conditions for the occurrence of violence against people with albinism. This debate is exemplified in the following statement by a resident of Dar es Salaam, that it was not witchcraft that was at play "but cold-blooded murder, which is punishable by law."<sup>58</sup> The causal explanations of these frames then direct the suggested responses: awareness campaigns, better policing and legal responses, and/or a broader community response.

This content analysis has shown how people with albinism are portrayed in the media as crime victims, economic commodities, 'skin-disabled' and as humans with rights. The identified frames are all concerned with important questions of what it means to be human in a local and global context and how to incorporate concepts of disability, difference and cultural beliefs into these understandings. In particular, the growing recognition of people with albinism as persons with disability is important for future legal reform and human rights advocacy.<sup>59</sup> The frames also address the factors that threaten ideals of humanity and 'utu', in particular poverty and the inequitable distribution of wealth, evil and greed for power and wealth, attitudes towards disability and difference, and the commodification of human bodies. While mechanisms for understanding how all these relate to each other are complex, press stories tend to simplify these to narratives of power, greed and love.

The various frames primarily invite media audiences to identify with being, as yet, inactive bystanders who can be motivated to be involved in preventing crime, to put aside superstitious beliefs, to become more aware of the issue and supportive of policy responses. The human rights frame invites the closest identification with those affected, namely people with albinism and their families. Only one article, which strongly espoused a poverty explanatory frame, suggested any identification with members of the criminal network. So while the roles of victim and offender are clearly recognised polarities, the third position of "silent

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<sup>58</sup>Keregero Keregero, "Govt sued over albino killings," *The Guardian*, 21/3/2009.

<sup>59</sup> Alum, Gomez and Ruiz, *Hocus Pocus, Witchcraft and Murder*, 13-16: 47.

bystander”<sup>60</sup>—exhorted to be instead an outspoken witness—is the main role the audiences are invited to assume.

The media coverage of violence against Tanzanians with albinism analysed in this study relied mainly on official sources and was primarily framed as a criminal matter, then as a human rights issue. The most frequent kinds of articles identified in this study were sourced from court and police reports and interviews, and from official announcements and speeches, with the voices of politicians and government officials, leaders of albino associations and police being those most heard in Tanzanian online news articles from 2008 to 2012. The fewer articles which were journalist-initiated tended to use a wider range of sources and correspondingly reported alternative views, such as concerns that politicians may also be involved in the criminal networks and about the vulnerability of family members and impoverished villagers and guards to the temptations of quickly accessed wealth. These connections are similar to the findings of Gulati<sup>61</sup> who analysed US media coverage of human trafficking and noted the dominant narratives of crime and human rights frames over poverty and neo-imperialist frames. Gulati<sup>62</sup> also found that alternative views were marginalised and generally only given voice in media-initiated stories. As is the case in this study, he also found such stories were more likely to point to social and economic inequalities as the cause.

Although the violence against Tanzanians with albinism is clearly seen as shameful, Tanzanian media provides public space for its people to debate and shape knowledge about the impact of cultural and economic development on disadvantaged persons with albinism. By disseminating information and increasing awareness, newspapers can be considered “part of the public education process.”<sup>63</sup> Ndlela<sup>64</sup> argues that media in urban Africa are playing more central roles as communicative spaces and in shaping the public sphere. The frames described in this

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<sup>60</sup> Jon Vegar Hugaas, “Evil’s place in the ethics of Social work,” *Ethics and Social Welfare* 4:3 (2010): 254-279.

<sup>61</sup> Gulati, “News Frames and Story Triggers,” 363-379.

<sup>62</sup> Gulati, “News Frames and Story Triggers,” 363.

<sup>63</sup> Lydia Temoshok, Margaret Grade, and Jane Zich, “Public Health, the Press and AIDS: An Analysis of Newspaper Articles in London and San Francisco,” in *AIDS: Principles, Practice and Politics*, eds. Inge B. Corless and Mary Pittman-Lindeman (New York: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation, 1989), 535.

<sup>64</sup> Nkosi Ndlela, “Reflections on the Global Public Sphere: Challenges to Internationalizing Media Studies,” *Global Media and Communication* 3 (2007): 324-329.

article are persuasive positions taken in defining the problem and in making news a kind of “morality play”<sup>65</sup> underpinned by a web of values. The press articles in this study reported both commendations about media coverage and questioning about its own role. While this is not proof of impartiality or lack of bias, it does indicate a freedom in the press and the presence of democratic processes of discourse and debate which are encouraging. In fact, Tanzania ranked 34<sup>th</sup> in the world in the World Press Freedom Index 2011-2012<sup>66</sup> and was ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in Africa. This ranking is close to Australia, which ranked 30<sup>th</sup>, and higher than South Africa and the US. It would appear that the media is providing a public space in which to deal with keenly felt national shame in a courageous way. It has been suggested by Under the Same Sun<sup>67</sup> that the higher reporting of attacks on people with albinism in Tanzania may be related to a freer press and better systems of reporting, rather than a higher occurrence per se than in neighbouring countries.

## Conclusion

The identification of media frames expands the space in which to debate and shape knowledge about violence towards persons with disability and other differences beyond predominant or official representations. While the media reporting of discrimination and violence against persons with albinism in the Lakes Zone is a shame for Tanzania, it is also a demonstration of free press, democratic process and the struggle of a rapidly modernising country striving to retain its value of *utu* (humanity). There is a need for a census of disabled persons<sup>68</sup> and for improved reporting and investigation across Africa of violence against people with albinism and other similarly vulnerable groups. More research is needed to understand the different rates of reporting of these practices in sub-Saharan African countries.

Framing that only focuses on crime prevention and eradication implies an overly simplistic response, as noted in other studies on human trafficking<sup>69</sup> and does not account for the multiplicity of frames identified in this media analysis. Moreover, results point to the paucity

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<sup>65</sup> Gans 1980 cited in Lens, “Sound Bites, Spin and Social Change,” 42.

<sup>66</sup> Reporter without Borders (2012) *World Press Freedom Index 2011-2012*, <http://www.rsf.org/crackdowns-on-protests-cause-big-25-01-2012,41729.html>.

<sup>67</sup> UTSS, *Children with Albinism in Africa*.

<sup>68</sup> UTSS, *Children with Albinism in Africa*.

<sup>69</sup> Mojca Pajnik, “Media Framing of Trafficking,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12:1 (2010): 45-64.



of understanding from the viewpoints of those who perpetuate or support the violent abuse of human rights, indicating the need for research that investigates such perspectives. Within the identified interpretative frames, journalists strive to persuade audiences of appropriate responses, though the naming of appropriate solutions is rarely evident within the poverty frame, and structural responses to inequalities mainly absent.

This article focused on Tanzania as a case study, and used a common type of media research undertaken by Western scholars who have lived in Africa,<sup>70</sup> such as myself. Ndlela, writing on African media research, suggests increasing interdisciplinary and international collaboration across disciplines and borders to respond to issues raised by globalisation.<sup>71</sup> The framing of albino killings as ritual murder driven by witchcraft beliefs connects them to ritual mutilations and murders in other African countries, such as those directed against children in Uganda<sup>72</sup> and even, for example, people with hunchbacks in West Africa.<sup>73</sup> Cross-national research could investigate characteristics of attacks on persons to obtain their body parts for witchcraft use, how these vary or are similar in different sub-Saharan countries, including the possible targeting of different vulnerable groups. Interdisciplinary research could be conducted across the fields of disability, human rights, anthropology, sociology, economics, law, criminology and media studies as well as social work. Exploration of this issue in relation to discourses of traditional religion and practices of ritual murder throughout Africa and the concept of human trafficking of body parts has begun in Uganda and Malawi.<sup>74</sup> Further investigation may develop additional appropriate ways of understanding and responding to the complexities of the recent attacks against Tanzanians with albinism and other vulnerable groups throughout Africa.

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<sup>70</sup> Nkosi Ndlela, "African Media Research in the Era of Globalization," *Journal of African Media Studies* 1:1 (2009): 55-68.

<sup>71</sup> Ndlela, "African Media Research," 66.

<sup>72</sup> Jubilee Campaign & Kyampisi Childcare Ministries. *Child Sacrifice in Uganda: A report by Jubilee Campaign and Kyampisi Childcare Ministries*, Jubilee Campaign & Kyampisi Childcare Ministries, 2011

<sup>73</sup> Leo Igwe, "Ritual Killing and Hunchbacks in Nigeria," *Sahara Reporters*, 3 July 2012.

<sup>74</sup> Jubilee Campaign & Kyampisi Childcare Ministries, *Child Sacrifice in Uganda*.

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