

The University of Chicago

The Fetishization of Albinos in Tanzania

By
Caroline Ackley

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Map of Tanzania:



Abstract

While rumors of organ stealing and the efficaciousness of albino body parts have been going on for a long time in Tanzania, there seems to be a recent spike in the killing of albinos. These killings are an intensification of an old story that began in pre-colonial Central Africa. People materialize and utilize fetishized notions of the productive magic of albino body parts. The consumption of magical paraphernalia supposedly made from albinos' bodies is imagined to counteract the decline of the fishing industry. The story of albino killings is about the fantastic speculation of value, and this value supports the localized economy. This illustrates the desire to create and sustain specific market commodities out of albino body parts. Some say this is a story about the economy, the neoliberal, or a functionalist explanation of albino killings. Others suspect this is ultimately a story of the cumulative effects of the circulation of rumor and discourse. These contrasting views are woven to tell the story of alleged albino killings while presenting an alternative interpretation, which suggests that Tanzanian elite utilize these rumors to gather social authority and political legitimacy while benefitting from the moral hierarchy of modernity versus tradition.

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i. Introduction

On May 2, 2010 a twenty-eight year old albino woman and her four year-old son were killed on Tanzania's border with Burundi. The mother and child "had their limbs and organs hacked off by a gang of nine armed men, and the boy's non-albino grandfather who intervened to stop them was killed on the spot."¹ Since the first record of alleged albino killings in 2007, only two of these alleged murders have been convicted under Tanzania's judicial system. According to the Canadian non-governmental organization Under the Same Sun (USS), this leaves 61 of the 63 reported cases unsolved. Police officials are at a loss to explain precisely why there is a new and sudden wave of albino killings. Police commissioner Paul Chagonja said "an influx of Nigerian movies, which play up witchcraft, might have something to do with it, along with rising food prices that were making people more desperate²."

While rumors of organ stealing and the efficaciousness of albino body parts in bringing people wealth and economic success have been going on for a long time, there seems to be a recent spike in the actual killing of albinos. These killings are an intensification of an old story, which began in Central Africa³. This most recent wave of albino fetishization began in 2007 and took the form of killings fuelled by the sale of albino body parts to witchdoctors in the Lake Victoria regions of Tanzania. These witchdoctors use albino body parts to create potions and charms that claim to bring wealth and success to those who purchase and consume them. People materialize and utilize the fetishes of the productive magic of albino body parts for personal gain in a world of depressing (material)realities. This occult story specifies that the market for

¹ *NGO News Africa*

² Gettleman *Albinos, Long Shunned, Face Threat in Tanzania*

³ See Vansina 1990 and Klieman 1962

albino wares is situated amongst a particular class of people: fishermen who live around the Lake Victoria region of Tanzania.

Discourses such as the story of albinos in Tanzania are about violating the normative spatio-temporal constraints of production because they thrive on a fantastic speculation of value. The Tanzanian police estimate that “the value to witchdoctors of a complete set of albino body parts, including all four limbs, genitals, ears, nose and tongue⁴” is \$75,000. If this is true, then the existence of such an occult economy illustrates the creation of a market producing demand for commodities. One possible explanation for this is that as the Nile perch industry declines, market benefits to the fishermen become virtually non-existent. From such a perspective, the albino market has picked up where the fishing market failed, creating another alleged venue for the generation of value. Still, others suggest that this is not simply a phenomenon relating to the effects of neoliberalism on the local economy, or a phenomenon reducible to a functionalist explanation. This story contains many layers and many competing perspectives about how the occult and the neoliberal market economy are working together – along with the cumulative and conflicting impact of rumor and gossip.

I propose that in order to attempt to understand the current albino killings in Tanzania we need to look at this phenomenon through varied perspectives. Many people living around Lake Victoria, including fishermen and witchdoctors, are arguing that albino potions and charms exist. If they are right, this might imply that the decline of the fishing industry has prompted people to resort to a new occult economy in order to obtain the wealth and success they are not earning through capitalist endeavors. Others argue that there need not be a factual occurrence of albino killings for stories about the potions

⁴ UK Telegraph, *Seven New Albino Killings in Tanzania and Burundi*

and charms created from albino body parts to impact Tanzanian society socially and culturally. Moreover, the rumors about albino killings perform a cultural function for Tanzania's political elite. It allows them to represent themselves as proponents of "modernity," "rationality," and "economic individualism" while fighting together with the international humanitarian community against the forces of "tradition," "backwardness," "witchcraft," and "corruption" that retard Tanzania's progress towards a neoliberal state, economic progress, accountability, freedom and democracy. I aim to provide both an emic and etic view of albino killings and the consequent market that has been produced by juxtaposing these conflicting arguments. I look at how the Tanzanian media narrate stories of albino killings and the rumors and gossip that persist, while taking into account the decline of the fishing industry as one factor influencing the increase of occult practices around Lake Victoria. A complete understanding and interpretation of events is only possible by presenting the conflicting etic interpretation against a localized emic understanding of the events.

An emic understanding of any society rests upon the presupposition that members of any society have a set of accepted ideas about their own society and how it differs from others (McGaffey 2000, 2). Such worldviews influence the interpretation of everyday events and shape responses to them. As Peter Geschiere illustrates, discourses on the occult and everyday changes resulting from the influences of modernity are interlaced in many parts of Africa. As he puts it, nowadays "modern techniques and commodities, often of Western provenance, are central in rumors of the occult" (Geschiere 1997, 2). The relation between modernity and the occult is of significance because Tanzanian occult cosmologies have been influenced by development, thus

creating new magic for new situations. According to Geschiere's argument, the belief that albino body parts possess magical properties that can be utilized for personal benefits illustrates a modification or adaptation of beliefs to fit new political and economic situations.

Stories of the occult are often analyzed in ways that question their very rationality. The rationality of witchcraft beliefs has been explored beginning with Evans-Pritchard's work among the Azande in the Sudan. He concludes that the belief in witchcraft is rational within a set of unquestioned prior assumptions (Evans-Pritchard 1937). And as Karen Fields argues, witchcraft is "a construction of the world no more and no less intellectual than its analogues in our own society- 'race,' the 'value' of gold, the 'self' and its cognates. [Such beliefs are] so enmeshed in routine social life that their reality is created and recreated by people acting in the light of them" (Fields 1982, 586). Therefore, if a belief in witchcraft is something that is as socially constructed as concepts such as "race" or the "value of gold", we cannot simply discount the increasing reliance on witchcraft in the economy of Tanzania. Witchcraft must be given the same legitimacy as other socially constructed beliefs, which entail real and sometimes harmful consequences, even with regards to concerns over national legitimacy and authority.

Both the neoliberal and discursive interpretations of the albino phenomena are forced to acknowledge a belief in witchcraft, either directly or indirectly, as well as the social, political, and economic results of such beliefs. The neoliberal approach accepts that there is a localized belief in witchcraft, which persists as a recourse to failures in Tanzanian economics and politics. In contrast, an analysis of discourse insists that it is the persistence of rumors and gossip that prompts people to act and to bring validation to

these fantastic stories. Additionally, rumors allow the social elite to maintain positions of power and authority in the international arena because they are able to place themselves in a position of power by being brokers of modernity and opponents to tradition; exactly the type of ideology international humanitarian organizations want to hear in order to provide more aid money.

By focusing on the fetish of the albino, I illustrate the significance of whiteness, the efficacy of body parts, and the function of fishing (and, nets) in this moment of Tanzania's post-colonial history. I propose a correlation between the fetishization of the white skin of albinos and that of the successful and wealthy Europeans involved in the fishing industry around Lake Victoria. I illustrate three interpretations of the albino killings including the discursive perspective that proposes that the telling and retelling of the magical powers of albinos has prompted people to act on mere rumors and gossip. The neoliberal perspective suggests that the failure of post-colonial structural adjustment policies and the failure of capitalism in a formerly socialist society have prompted people to act in harmful ways. And the final interpretation suggests that Tanzania's elite utilize stories about albino magic and medicine for their social, political, and economic advantage.

I begin by introducing narratives of albino killings in Tanzania through media sources, blogs, and NGO-reports. I situate these narratives in Tanzania's colonial and post-colonial histories, highlighting the importance of the witchcraft ordinance first under the rule of the British, then under post-colonial African socialist policies like *Ujamaa*, and finally under the current influences of global market capitalism. Next, I sociologically situate the Tanzanian fishing industry and the fishermen involved within it.

I economically and environmentally situate the fishing industry and its effects on local people. Then, I illustrate that, as some suggest, the market economy surrounding albino killings is simply a production of production based on the fetishization of albinos and the commoditization of their body parts. Finally, I identify benefits to the social and political elite of the stories surrounding albino killings and the power and efficacy of albino body parts.

iv. Tanzania's Economic and Political History

In the 1990's Africa experienced rapid privatization, liberalization and democratization. Former socialist nations, like Tanzania, shifted economies and ideologies, adapting to a neoliberal world ordered by capitalism and the free market. This story begins with Tanzania's political and economic history. In 1961, Tanzania gained independence from Britain and the first president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere led the new nation to a form of African socialism called *Ujamaa*.

The guiding principles of *Ujamaa* were expressed in the 1967 Arusha Declaration, as consisting in "promoting freedom, nationalism, and independence; unity, co-operation and peace; equality, egalitarianism and non-exploitation; self-reliance, dignity and responsible leadership" (Sanders 2008, 113). *Ujamaa* rejected over-reliance on foreign aid and foreign investment, stating that foreign dependence only leads to exploitation by foreign capitalists. Thus, within the Arusha Declaration there was a "strict leadership code which disallowed government and party leaders from associating with capitalist or feudal practices, holding shares in companies, holding dictatorships in private enterprises, receiving more than one salary, or owning rental homes" (Sanders 2008, 114). The

declaration identified Tanzania as a nation of farmers whose economy was primarily based on agriculture. It noted that reliance on foreign loans would disproportionately aid urban Tanzanian industries and fail to aid rural farmers, who would be forced to repay such loans through agricultural yields.

In rural areas *Ujamaa* signified cooperation meaning that wealth was not based on individual accumulation, but rather belonged to all those who helped produce it. This exemplified socialist forms of collective services through initiatives such as group hospitals and public schools. *Ujamaa* placed itself in opposition to the ideologies of capitalism, which it proposed were driven by “greed and profit, inequality and conflict, and prone to exploit the poor and powerless, both within and between nations” (Sanders 2008, 114). Instead, *Ujamaa* suggested a world in opposition to limited goods and a zero-sum economy, in which one person benefits at the loss of another.

Ujamaa's vision was not its reality; rather *Ujamaa* came to resemble the Chinese socialist model in which powers were highly centralized and located only at the top of the government. Therefore, development projects were implemented through a top-down model resulting in the nationalization of many commercial and industrial sectors, such as the fishing industry. *Ujamaa* of the 1970's was a time when most household items were not available and there was an increasing reliance on capitalism and corruption to obtain basic goods through a black market. And, the 1970's policy of “villagization” relocated rural Tanzanians into *Ujamaa* villages and situated them into relationships of power between ruler and ruled, urban and rural.

By the mid-1980's Nyerere stepped down and Ali Hassan Myinyi became Tanzania's second president. Myinyi signaled the creation of a new neoliberal ideology, adopting

IMF structural adjustment programs and modifying the formerly strict leadership code of the Arusha Declaration. Myinyi allowed party members to engage in business for personal profit via the creation of the 1991 Zanzibar Declaration, which lay in direct opposition to many of the founding principles of the Arusha Declaration. The nation's third president, Benjamin Mkapa, who was elected in 1995 and again in 2000, furthered this neoliberal vision. Then in 2005, current president Jakaya Kikwete was elected, continuing the transformation to a neoliberal state in both practice and ideology.

Under current President Kikwete, the millennium development declaration was created promoting good governance, anti-corruption, poverty reduction, unleashing market forces, deregulation, and privatization (Sanders 2008, 116). According to the declaration, which is titled *Tanzania Development Vision 2025* (TDV), Tanzania will be “a nation imbued with five main attributes, high quality livelihood; peace, stability and unity; good governance; a well educated and learning society; and a competitive economy capable of producing sustainable growth and shared benefits” (TDV 1999, 1-2). This vision promoted development based on the individual rather than with the collective, as *Ujamaa* ideology suggested. Yet, the neoliberal rhetoric of the *Vision* does not rest in complete opposition to *Ujamaa*. Both *The Vision* and *Ujamaa* indicate that citizens must work hard and attack notions of corruption. Both promote a collective citizenry through universal health care and education and both suggest that their struggle is “aimed at moving the people of Tanzania from a state of poverty to a state of prosperity” (Nyerere 1968, 235). But for many Tanzanians, the neoliberal vision is proving to be an economic failure, thus forcing them into the informal sector or into agricultural practices for economic survival.

Although the neoliberal vision has failed most Tanzanians, there have been a select few who have accumulated immense wealth and seemingly did so overnight. These few but successful elite have benefited from albino rumors by placing themselves in opposition to “backwards traditions,” instead situate themselves as proponents of capitalism and a neoliberal world order. To many Tanzanians who view themselves as poor when compared to those who have more material wealth, this phenomenon suggests that the capitalist free market can lift lives from poverty to prosperity. To be self-reliant, in this view, means to depend on one’s own wisdom and wit, not on the government for economic success. Disparities in the success of the rich and the despair of the poor are understood as different allocations between means and ends. Therefore, when considering the recent rise in occult practices surrounding the fishing industry in Tanzania, we must remember the practices and ideology of both *Ujamaa* and the neoliberal economy.

iii. Literature Review

During the transition from *Ujamaa* to capitalism, Tanzania underwent many transformations, including those of collectivity to individualization, socialism to neoliberalism, and the recent phenomena of the fetishization of albinos in Tanzania’s occult economy. The commodity fetishization of albinos is located in neoliberal *Bongoland*, meaning the place you use your brain simply to survive (Sanders 2008). This is occurring at a time of mass industrialization and, as some may suggest, the failure of the fishing industry around Lake Victoria. Evidence of the influences of the occult is seen in the ways people negotiate the day to day of their lives. In this section I discuss

one interpretation surrounding the alleged albino killings and albino medicine, specifically how the failure of capitalism and the occult have become practically and theoretically intertwined. Then I introduce another conflicting perspective that questions what influence discourse (especially rumor) has on the occult economy that has recently emerged in Tanzania's Lake Victoria region. These narratives illustrate the interplay between the occult and the market economy and they raise the following questions: *why are albinos being targeted in this specific occult practice? And, why is this practice occurring at this point in history?*

Post-colonial structural adjustment policies and other modes of development are arguably an important part of the Tanzanian albino narrative. They influence how people go about their daily lives and interpret the events occurring around them. However, an interpretation and analysis of events based on discourse is not necessarily a story of causation focused on the hard facts of albino killings and mutilations like a neo-functional and occult argument may suggest. Rather, as others propose, an analysis of localized folk theories gives us a glimpse into Tanzanian cosmologies. When referring to such folk theories, I employ the term "witchcraft" in line with Ralph Austen's use of it as "one intended to represent directly the terms used by African and other societies to describe their own beliefs and practices" (Austen 1993, 90). Occult beliefs of this kind have social implications and mirror the ways in which people understand their broader historical experiences⁵. The beliefs and practices involved in witchcraft are frequently moralized by news sources and human rights organizations, but this paper does not directly implicate the occult into any sort of moral hierarchy. Instead, it suggests that

⁵ Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, 89.

Tanzania's elite play to this hierarchy for personal, political and economic benefit and it attempts to understand the occult from a culturally relativist point of view.

According to some, beliefs in the occult are traditionally perceived in opposition to the concept of modernity. It was assumed by colonizers that the political, economic, and social changes of modernity would "civilize the natives" and that through education (whether mission or state sponsored), occult beliefs would fade away and a new logic would ensue. In Max Gluckman's study of political and social processes in the ritual practices of the Mau Mau in Kenya, his arguments conflict with more commonly held arguments about Central African witchcraft movements. Gluckman illustrates that such political and social circumstances do not bring forth a "reversion to pagan ritual" but rather the opposite, he says citing Evans-Pritchard, that "[n]ew situations demand new magic". Just so in the case of Tanzanian cosmology. According to a neoliberal and occult economies interpretation of the albino killings, it is possible that due to the introduction and implementation of post-colonial structural adjustment policies, a demand for new forms of witchcraft has been created.

It is unclear as to whether albinos would have had a similar utility under *Ujamaa* as they now appear to have under *Bongoland*. The vision of *Ujamaa* was lost with the introduction of neoliberalism and capitalist practices, as well as free trade and wage labor. And, as neo-functionalists would suggest, the immoralities inherent in capitalist societies have manifested themselves in many ways, including the sudden proliferation of the occult beliefs in the fishing industry. Therefore, Tanzanian discourse surrounding the power of albinos to bring wealth and success to fishermen could be viewed as a critique of capitalist relations of production and consumption. Yet although this case study of

albinos, the occult, and the fishing industry in Tanzania acknowledges the argument that modernity and neoliberalism do “bad things to good people” (Sanders 2008, 108), it also provides an alternate analytic that challenges such an argument by raising questions about how social change is theorized and what relation an analytic presumes to see between so called moral and material economies in modern capitalist society.

The causative nature of Tanzanian post-colonial structural adjustment policies in regard to occult practice is deemed “new” by Todd Sanders’ article, *Save Our Skins: Structural Adjustment, Morality, and the Occult in Tanzania*. The supposedly new practice in question is that of killing and skinning Tanzanian youths, which can also be interpreted as a distinctive method of organ harvesting specific to Tanzania. Sanders argues that “human skin trading and occult forces and (de)pressing materialities of people’s daily lives are linked.” He continues, “the recent rise of occult idioms and practices in Tanzania is directly related to the way structural adjustment has been presented and implemented” (Moore, Sanders 2001, 162). The harvesting of skins that Sanders discusses parallels the current albino killings in that albinos are being killed for specific body parts, which, when used in potions created by witchdoctors, make success and a fulfilled love life inevitable. Although it has often been argued that structural adjustment policies provide seemingly limitless possibilities for an occult market, an argument based on the circulation of rumor challenges the neo-functionalist argument that “structural adjustment has provided necessary and sufficient conditions for the rapid proliferation of occult discourses and practices in Tanzania” (Moore, Sanders 2001, 162). Instead, this discursive interpretation of the albino phenomena proposes a different model of thinking about “new” occult practices in post-colonial Tanzania. Rather than assert

that structural adjustment policies directly cause occult discourses and practices, it suggests that the phenomenon of albino killings and organ harvesting is not new and did not necessarily originate in Tanzania. In addition, the post-colonial economic and political shift from African socialism to a neoliberal form of capitalism suggests a contradiction between the current occult economy in that the disillusionment of privatized markets and capitalism will bring wealth and success and the rumors and gossip surrounding the albino market. I illustrate that one approach to the harvesting and trade of albino body parts is located within the Comaroff's notion of "millennial capitalism" and I identify that that the albino story can also be located within a contradictory and incongruent discourse based on the localized production and reproduction of a much older albino story.

The connection between the occult and development is eloquently explored by James Smith (2008) and can be seen as parallel to a neo-functionalist argument based on the development of the fishing industry around Lake Victoria. Development and the neoliberal perspective tend to suggest a recourse to occult practices, which supplement and sometimes replace a capitalist market economy with a modern occult economy. In this economic reordering, development has become an abstraction for reimagining social, political, and economic processes. Smith argues that witchcraft beliefs have a productive dimension by adding to Evans-Pritchard's interpretation of witchcraft among the Azande as a problem that points to its own solution, allowing people to publicly work through "issues and trauma". According to a neoliberal argument, witchcraft is productive in that it allows people to reorder the economy of the fishing industry into an economy of the occult. He continues, "witchcraft and development emerged as opposite potentials of the

same moment, the same act, and the same idea, and notions of witchcraft gave meaning to the utopian vision of development” (Smith 2008, 20). Therefore, as a neo-functional, occult economies interpretation suggests, structural adjustment policies may not necessarily mark the cause of the albino killings; rather, albino killings may potentially provide a commentary on the failure of structural adjustment policies and development to bring wealth to the people who work in the fisheries of Lake Victoria.

A reordering of the economy rooted in occult beliefs and practices is analyzed by Ralph Austen (1993) with regards to a moral economy of witchcraft. Austen proposes that witchcraft is a mode to the attainment of power and wealth. Modernist notions of capitalism and those about witchcraft ironically tend to reference much of the same set of ideas: appropriations of limited resources not collectively and for commercial purposes, but by greedy individuals and for selfish ends. Witchdoctors use albino body parts in potions and charms that can be woven into fishing nets or worn on the body for the sole purpose of attaining “success,” in the pursuit of wealth, power and love. Witchcraft in this form crosses hierarchical boundaries by allowing for the belief in “magical means for material ends⁶” no matter your economic class or social background. A moral economy of witchcraft is a community governed by standards of collective survival and a belief in a zero-sum universe, “a world where all profit is gained at someone else’s loss” (Austen 1993, 90). And, as Tanzania transitioned from *Ujamaa* socialism to a form of neoliberal capitalism, the gap has increased between previously hegemonic ideals of productivity and Tanzanian methods of individual acquisition (Austen 1993). This indicates that a reliance on witchcraft practices like albino killings to attain wealth, power and love are a

⁶ Comaroff and Comaroff 1998, 279.

completely logical means to these ends, especially in the zero-sum universe Austen describes as opposed to the world under *Ujamaa*.

However, Austen's moral hierarchy can be interpreted in two ways: one way is through a neo-functionalist lens and the other is through a discourse-based lens. The neo-functionalists would argue that witchcraft is a mode to attain power and wealth and that witchcraft crosses social and economic hierarchies, allowing everyone the "opportunity" to attain wealth. However, an alternate interpretation of Austen's moral hierarchy of witchcraft reinforces social and economic hierarchies because Tanzanian elites use this moral hierarchy to their advantage by manipulating witchcraft discourse to imply that they are above the use of "backwards" and "traditional" practices. This simultaneously places those that utilize the occult at the bottom of the moral hierarchy. Their manipulation proves favorable in the eyes of the international humanitarian community who place "modernity" and "civic rights" at the top of this international moral hierarchy. When the elites place themselves at the top of the international hierarchy they are in a better position to obtain economic aid and support thus furthering their individual wealth and success.

The neo-functionalist interpretation of the moral economy of witchcraft as proposed by Austen is complimented by Jean and John Comaroffs' argument that there has been a recent rise in occult economies in postcolonial Africa. According to the Comaroffs' occult economies are the "deployment, real or imagined, of magical means for material ends⁷." The occult is implicated in a paradox: on the one hand there are those who are in continual pursuit of magical means for seemingly unattainable ends. On the other hand, there is a conscious effort by many people to eradicate those "others" who

⁷ Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 1.

believe occult stories and rumors, which convince people they can get rich by occult means. This is exemplified in the case of albino killings in Tanzania. Fishermen and miners reportedly use witchcraft for material ends, while the government and international organizations are actively hoping to eliminate those very beliefs and practices. According to formulations such as Austen's and the Comaroffs', witch findings are most likely to occur in locations where economic conditions are most strained and inequality is most evident, locations like the Lake Victoria region. And, the claim that "market forces have stimulated production⁸," meaning the production of medicines from albinos bodies, is evidenced by the obsession that ordinary Tanzanians and internationals have with the details of the killings and the supposed market prices for the body parts. I suggest that the neo-functionalist interpretation of the Tanzanian belief in witches is an "expression[s] of social values" (Wilson 1951, 307) and, as the Comaroffs' have illustrated, occult economies are a response and a reaction to "a world gone awry". According to this view, albino narratives speak to problems in which the only way to create tangible wealth seemingly lies in forms of power that go beyond "the conventional, the rational, [and] the moral" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, 316). Therefore, this suggests that a belief in the occult sometimes results as a means of survival in a world of depressing materialities.

In contrast to Austen and the Comaroffs, an interpretation of the stories told and retold by Tanzanians about the powers of albinos and the success their body parts can bring illustrates that the Tanzanian belief in witchcraft is based on idioms of social value and that the killings of albinos are located within an occult economy based on "moral artifacts" (Fields 1982, 569). This analysis is located in the rumors and discourse about

⁸ Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 290.

albinos in the Lake Victoria region of Tanzania. To substantiate this point of view, I explore the connection between the occult in Tanzania and the market economy.

iv. Situating the Fishing Industry in Tanzania

The killing of albinos began in 2007 and is centralized around the Lake Victoria region of Tanzania⁹, the site of many Nile perch fisheries and tanzanite mines. The Lake Victoria community relies on these fisheries and mines for their economic survival because employment and wage labor in Tanzania are very difficult to obtain. Albino killings have been reported in the Bukombe District, the Bariadi District, as well as the Shinyanga, Mwanza, Rukwa, Kahama and Mara regions¹⁰. Not only do these districts and regions have the most reported albino deaths and mutilations in Tanzania, but this area is also the epicenter of the occult belief, perpetuated by witchdoctors and fishermen through rumors, that albinos possess magical powers which can be utilized for personal wealth and success.

In these regions a majority of the male population are either fishermen or miners who work for private companies. These companies are owned by European businessmen who resell the most sought after commodity in Lake Victoria, the Nile perch, to private distributors or restaurants for consumption. Many men also work in fish factories, preparing Nile perch for international exportation. Upon the building of fish factories on Lake Victoria in the 1980's there was an immense economic boom, and fishermen were promised great wealth on the condition of their hard work. However, the fishing industry in Tanzania has been in decline since around 2005 due to environmental degradation.

⁹ France, *Albino Killings Continue in TZ, Burudi*

¹⁰ On the Spot: Albinos in Tanzania, <http://albinos-in-tanzania.blogspot.com>

The promise of wealth and success was never realized for many fishermen or it is slowly disappearing. Amongst the international news reports, there is a failure to acknowledge any sort of correlation between failing fisheries and increased occult practices. Only a few local news sources cite the decline of the fishing industry as a correlate to why fishermen may be motivated to participate in the albino economy. Local news sources report through a human rights perspective, arguing that the killing of albinos is “horrendous”, “backwards” and “ought to end immediately”.

Although the albino hysteria seemed to begin around 2007, the belief that albinos possess special powers can possibly be traced to historically old cosmologies in Central Africa¹¹. It is unknown how such beliefs may have migrated to East Africa and Tanzania, but nonetheless the belief in the magical power of albinos is present and real in day-to-day life. This specific Tanzanian worldview is one correlate that may possibly influence the use of albino body parts in a reemerging occult economy. The other potential correlate is the failure of the fishing industry and the effects of a declining industry on fishermen. However, it is important to note that these correlates do not work in conjunction with each other and are incongruous in their interpretations of the albino killings.

In the sections that follow, I attempt to analyze the killings of albinos through several lenses including that of the occult and the failure of capitalism, along with the power of rumors and gossip, which motivate people to act in ways that the local and international community have marked as “inhumane”. In order to explore why albinos are being killed, it is necessary to look at the localized occult beliefs of the Lake Victoria

¹¹ See Vansina 1990, Kliemen 1962, and MacGaffey 2000.

region along with post-colonial structural adjustment policies and the transition to capitalism in a formerly socialist society.

Many media sources, such as the Tanzania Daily News¹², argue that one potential correlate for the increase in recent occult activity is the decline of the fishing industry in Tanzania's Lake Victoria region. Since the decline of the fishing industry several new economies, namely the sex trade and the movement of illegal goods, have sprung up, but none is as rooted in traditional cosmologies as that of the albino medicine. If the Tanzania Daily News is correct in their analysis, this might imply that the current state of life for fishermen has prompted the desire and need for an occult economy to fulfill the economic promises that the fishing industry has not and cannot meet.

British colonial officers introduced the Nile perch, a predatory fish, into Lake Victoria in the 1950's to restock the lake with a commercially viable species. It has since wrought environmental havoc by killing off indigenous fish and algae species in the lake. There are currently issues with illegal trade and overfishing in Lake Victoria, which have led to fish scarcities in Tanzania, "[I]arge quantities of illegally traded unprocessed fish, especially Nile perch and tilapia, may be finding their way to export markets in the European Union (EU)¹³." The Nile perch is the most traded fish from Lake Victoria, and its depletion threatens the livelihoods of around 40-million people in Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya. Such a large amount of Nile perch have been exported to Europe that fish exports have a higher export earning than cash crops like coffee and cotton.

After the initial introduction of the Nile perch the economic boom of the local fishing industry was massive. Then, in the 1980's fish processing factories were built

¹² Mgwabati, *Albino Killings is a Social Economic Problem*

¹³ Wambi *Massive exports deplete fish stocks in Lake Victoria*

around the lake with the intention of exporting Nile perch, tilapia, and fishmeal to countries in Europe and Asia. The factories were owned by European, Asian, and Israeli companies, thus altering the flow of money away from the local economy and towards countries where fish catch is exported.

The industrialization of the fishing industry aided in the conversion of the Tanzanian fish market from a viable local economy to a global export industry. The overfishing of the Nile perch is a result of too many fishing vessels on the lake and too many fishermen utilizing poor fishing methods. In addition, “motorizing fishing boats have decreased the employment opportunities and de-localized the formerly community-based fishermen¹⁴.” To help control the problem of overfishing, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda signed the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization (LVFO) in 1994. Yet as Dickson Nyeko of LVFO stated, “The number of registered fishing boats on Lake Victoria has increased by 16% since December 2005. The boats are travelling further, using illegal gear in an effort to satisfy the remaining fish processing factories on the lake¹⁵.” Factories are continually closing and those that remain open are operating below capacity. The crisis was so dire that in May of 2010, Tanzania banned fishing in their territorial waters to foreign fishermen. In 2005 the fish stock was estimated to be 750,000 tons; then in 2008 the stock was reported to have dropped to 340,000. By 2010 the fish stock has risen to 400,000 tons thanks to the ban on fishing in Tanzania’s territorial waters¹⁶. Not only has the fish stock decreased, but fishing employment has also decreased due to the mechanization of fishing with motorboats. Thus, as men are encouraged to work in fish factories, new economies influenced by the fish industry have

¹⁴ Auerbach *Lake Victoria perch, At the head of the predatory food chain*

¹⁵ Wambi *Massive exports deplete fish stocks in Lake Victoria*

¹⁶ McAdams, Mande *Nile Perch Stock in Lake Victoria Recovering Slowly, After Fishing Ban*

been created, “crime and weapons smuggling have also become a vital part of the new economy. The planes that fly out full of fillet often come back with crates of weapons to supply to continent’s wars¹⁷.” Some would argue¹⁸ that among these new economies is an old economy, which has adapted itself to fit the current economic situation around Lake Victoria. This is an occult economy where the primary commodity is albino body parts.

Overfishing of the Nile perch has also led to a food crisis due to the increase in food prices making daily food unaffordable to many people in the region. Many people have resorted to eating fish bones, skin, and heads because fish meat is no longer affordable¹⁹. The overall quality of life is reduced by something as simple as not getting enough nutrients and animal proteins from the once prosperous fish meat.

Lake Victoria supplies fish for both domestic markets and international export markets. It is estimated that over 30 million people in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda rely on fishing for their livelihood. The problem of overfishing is affecting all of East Africa, however, Tanzania is the international hub for fish exportation. “In early 2000’s, nearly five cargo planes from Ukraine, Holland and Belgium used to land at the Mwanza Airport, on the Southern shores of Lake Victoria every week, to carry an estimated 400 tones of fresh Nile perch fillets to European and Asian markets²⁰.” The Nile perch is not only used for its meat but, “its hide is used to make belts and purses, while its bladder is sold to English alcohol-makers who use it as a filter and to Orientals who prepare soup

¹⁷ Auerbach, *Lake Victoria perch, At the head of the predatory food chain*

¹⁸ Geschiere, Austen, Comaroff’s, Tanzania Daily News

¹⁹ *The Nile perch in Lake Victoria: local responses and adaptations*

²⁰ McAdams, *Mande Nile Perch Stock in Lake Victoria Recovering Slowly, After Fishing Ban*

stock with it²¹.” The mass exportation is benefiting European and Asian markets but locals are suffering economically and physically.

The physical suffering and economic problems created by overfishing of the Nile perch in Lake Victoria prove to be compelling evidence for a neo-functionalist analysis of the recent albino phenomena. When this approach is taken alone, it may shed light on the current occult economy. However, this type of argument is subject to critiques of functional reductionism. It is convenient to say that people are compelled or even economically forced to participate in the albino economy because of the failure of the fishing industry and economic individualism. Critics of the neo-functionalist argument would suggest that localized beliefs, as illustrated through rumor and gossip, and perpetuated by word of mouth in the local and international media, have also influenced the creation of the albino market. The following sections of this paper will discuss a contradictory analysis of the occult beliefs of people living around Lake Victoria and the power and influence of rumors and gossip in motivating people to act in ways that the local and international community has labeled as “a strange belief.”²²

v. Rumors and Gossip

One interpretation of the albino killings and the subsequent occult economy is rooted in the circulation of rumor and gossip. These rumors act as a type of collective representation of social and political sentiments towards the current state of affairs in Tanzania. This approach might individually shed light on the phenomena in question and challenge the neo-functionalist interpretation of the events presented in the Tanzanian

²¹ Chege, *Lake Victoria: a sick giant*

²² Magobe *Superstitious Albino Killings in Tanzania Must Stop*

media and international human rights organizations. The perpetuation of rumors and gossip surrounding the power of albinos also serves as a means for the Tanzanian elite to reappropriate a moral hierarchy of witchcraft for their own social, political, and economic benefit.

The story of the albino killings centers on a few key actors: witchdoctors, the middlemen who hunt and kill albinos, and the albinos themselves. Outlying actors in the albino narrative and discourse include the Tanzanian government, the international community (namely NGOs), the local and international media, and governmental institutions such as the local police force. Each actor plays a specific part in the occult narrative and when combined, these parts may potentially provide one answer to the vital questions of *why albinos?* And, *why this point in time?*

The number of albinos living in Tanzania is not known exactly and estimates tend to vary greatly. The Tanzanian government has mandated that when a child is born with albinism the family must register them with the Tanzania Albino Society (TAS). However, many families do not register their children who are born with albinism and consequently the Tanzanian government does not have an official count on the number of albinos in the country. TAS suggests that of the estimated 150,000 [according to their count] albinos in the Tanzania only 8,000 are registered with TAS because many albinos are killed at birth²³ because of the belief that they are a curse on the family. Contrastingly, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that Tanzania has approximately 170,000 albinos and other sources estimate that Tanzania has upwards of

²³ Kiishweko, *JK Orders Crackdown to Stem Murder of Albinos*

300,000 people with albinism, while local sources estimate the number of albinos to be as low as 50 people²⁴.

If albinos survive to adolescence, the Tanzanian government attempts to provide them refuge from potential harm through nationally recognized disability status. Albinos are able to gain disability status because they suffer from a lack of skin pigmentation and are prone to skin cancer as well as vision problems. Organizations like the Action on Disability and Development (ADD) in Tanzania attempt to provide albinos with governmental protection of their rights through disability status.

The creation and involvement of organizations like ADD in the protection of albinos signifies an alternate understanding of the albino phenomena as compared to the neo-functionalism and occult approach. Neo-functionalists argue that the albino phenomena is a result of the failure of capitalism in a post-socialist African country. In contradiction to the neo-functionalists, an analysis based on discourse can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, a belief in the occult has been perpetuated by rumors and gossip creating a sort of “truth” motivating people to act. This motivation to act then reinforces the rumors and gossip, giving them validity in the daily lives of Tanzanians. Secondly, rumors and gossip are a means of the Tanzanian elite to create a sort of propaganda in which the political elite, who often participate in occult practices themselves, place themselves at the top of a moral hierarchy in order to gain support from the international community. Organizations like ADD and international NGOs like Under the Same Sun appeal to donors who view the Tanzanian elite as pillars of “civic rights” and “defenders of the disabled and minorities”. Rumors and gossip about the albino killings and albino

²⁴ Magobe, *Superstitious Albino Killings in Tanzania Must Stop*

medicine may potentially function as mere hype instantiated to please western donors, NGOs and humanitarian organizations.

Yet, the disability status ascribed to albinos and defended by ADD does not necessarily ensure their safety. It merely provides institutional support through means such as health care, education and skin cancer prevention, often funded by international organizations²⁵. In addition to governmental support, the international community has set up safe havens for albino youth to take refuge, to continue schooling and to live without the fear of being killed. Peter Ash, a Canadian living with albinism, founded the charity, Under the Same Sun (USS). The organization USS is dedicated to “defending albinos in Tanzania from murder or mutilation by gangs who sell their body parts to witch doctors²⁶.” USS created safe schools and living spaces aimed at youth with albinism hoping to provide a space in which they can live and study without fear of the perpetuation of rumors and gossip, which have prompted people to kill them for their body parts.

However hard international organizations may try, the institutional protection of albinos does not necessarily protect them from the rumors and gossip of members of the Lake Victoria community. Around Lake Victoria albinos are a valuable commodity, with their estimated wealth based on specific beliefs surrounding their supposedly inherent magical powers. It is believed that their body parts, if harnessed properly, can bring wealth and success to those who utilize potions and charms created by witchdoctors from various albino body parts depending on your economic or social ailment.

²⁵ See the project support list of Under the Same Sun, www.underthesamesun.com

²⁶ McNeil, *Bid to Stop the Killing of Albinos*

“Some fishermen believe that, if they weave the red hair from an albino into their nets, fish will be attracted by the golden glimmer. Miners for gold, rubies and tanzanite are reported to pay large sums for juju (magic) amulets, which they wear around their necks or strapped to their arms and which are made up with a potion mixed from albino body parts. Others are said to bury the bones of albinos in the ground they are digging²⁷.”

The telling and retelling of the efficacy of albino body parts is evident in the above example because it is believed that albino hair will “glitter” in the sun and attract fish to nets. The repetition of such a belief has prompted people to find a certain “truth” in such rumors because, alternatively, the practice of weaving tin foil into fishing nets would serve the same function as albino hair, but no one is using tin foil. As Karen Fields argues, witchcraft beliefs must be given legitimate authority, just as other socially constructed beliefs are, because there are real consequences, which as in the case of albinos, people are manipulating for their personal gain.

Witchdoctors are also said to hire middlemen to hunt and kill albinos for their body parts. The middlemen receive a commission for their work and are necessary to the occult economy and the albino narrative. Sometimes middlemen are also consumers of albino potions and charms. However, it is difficult to identify middlemen and those involved in the albino trade due to the secrecy of this specific occult practice. A village leader, local neighbors of albinos, and family members of albinos have all been accused of acting as middlemen in the albino economy due to their efforts to kill or attempt to kill albinos for their body parts²⁸.

²⁷ Smith, *Albino African Live in Fear After Witchdoctor Butchery*

²⁸ Kampama, *Magu Trader “Was Buyer of Albino Parts”*

Other key players in the albino narrative include the Tanzanian government and the international community, who have officially condemned this occult practice and even all occult practices. This condemnation is expressed through a human rights perspective and focuses on the technicalities of the killings and the justice brought through the judicial system. Perhaps the continual fixation on the details of albino killings and mutilations serves as deliberate hype to attract the attention of western donors. By taking a human rights stance the Tanzanian government is able to appeal to western constructs of “good governance” including defending human and civil rights. This hype allows political elite to garner attention and support for their actions in fighting “backwards traditions.” This support is just what the political elite need to maintain their positions of power and authority.

The international community interprets albino killings in Tanzania through a human rights lens, including the technicalities of international legal conventions and the local justice system. In 2008, the European Parliament published a report stating that Tanzania had violated several human rights conventions, including: the United Nations (UN) Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities²⁹. By appealing to international conventions, the human rights community is compelling political elite to adhere to a codified set of guidelines that influence their ideas and responses to the albino phenomena. If President Kikwete can simply “check off” that he has appeased specific UN conventions then he will be ensured good standing with the international community and most likely will receive more aid money.

²⁹ European Parliament, *Albino Killings in Tanzania*

Prompted by the international community, the Tanzanian government has taken a more juridical and institutional approach to stop the killings and to maintain the image of a functioning democratic state with a fair, just, and protective judicial system. In order to maintain control of Tanzania's people and institutions, President Kikwete instituted a secret ballot system in which people can safely and confidentially accuse members of their community as having participated in albino killings³⁰ or plans to kill albinos. Local newspapers have not provided any data or follow-up attesting to the success or failure of this "big brother" type of system. As another preventative and punitive measure, Kikwete reinstated death by hanging for those found guilty of participating in the albino economy³¹. According to local reports at least four men have been hung, and the general opinion of the people supports the reinstatement of death by hanging³². The local police have been placed on "high alert" and are to keep a look-out for suspicious activity, even though there have been reports of police having been paid off or even implicated in the albino economy themselves³³.

The local courts have tried upwards of 20 people who have been caught trying to kill albinos or to sell albino body parts since 2007³⁴. However, in the grand scheme of the rumors told about albino killings, the number of albinos killed does not correspond with the number of those accused of participating in the albino market. At the same time, juridical evidence presented in court to convict those involved is minimal or nonexistent, but the government (with the support of the international community) is reportedly committed to providing "justice" for the albino community. An

³⁰ Daily News, *Clerics Urge Muslims to Expose Albino Killers*

³¹ BBC, *Death for Tanzania Albino Killers*

³² BBC, *Death for Tanzania Albino Killers*

³³ BBC, *Tanzanians to name albino killers*

³⁴ BBC, *Albinos in Burundi flee killings*

understanding of the albino phenomena through discourse may on its own provide a deeper understanding of Tanzanian cosmologies and is in opposition to a neo-functional analysis. In the following section I explain the differences in the three interpretations of the albino killings and what each argument may do to help us understand *why albinos?* And, *why now?*

VI. Conjuring Albino Killings in Tanzania

To attempt to understand the neoliberal and occult economy analysis of the albino killings we ought to begin with a “simplified case³⁵” and Marxist economic terms. We must begin with Marxist fetish theory which attempts to “explain this [the notion of the fetish] as false consciousness based upon an objective illusion: material objects turned into commodities conceal exploitative social relations, displacing value-consciousness from the true productive movement of social labor to the apparent movement of market prices and forces³⁶.” In other words, the commoditization of albino body parts is reflecting exploitative social relations between fishermen and the fishing industry. Capitalism, like witchcraft, only has real and tangible effects because people believe in it and the powers they supposedly hold. The market only functions because people believe in the value and power of money, reifying its effectiveness. Similarly, witchcraft is so enmeshed in routine and daily life, much like the economy, that people’s lives and realities are created around such beliefs.

In the Lake Victoria region of Tanzania the Nile perch are a profitable commodity to the international community. Europeans devour the Nile perch at such an alarming

³⁵ See Fields 1982.

³⁶ Pietz 1985, 6.

rate that the over-fishing of Lake Victoria for these specific fish is coming at a cost. There are long-term environmental risks to the continued fishing of the Nile perch but there are other, more pressing concerns for the local economy. The local economy of Mwanza, a district of Tanzania located on the southern border of Lake Victoria, is based on fishing and fish factories to supply Europeans with Nile perch. However, the trickle down of money from the pockets of European consumers and the profits from the European suppliers and factory owners to the Tanzanian fish factory workers and the Tanzanian fishermen is virtually non-existent. The lack of economic gain by fishermen is in some sense unexpected due to the introduction of capitalism in a post-socialist country. The promise of wealth was seemingly limitless, while the materialization of such wealth was virtually nonexistent.

The Nile perch fishing industry was welcomed due to the high potential for economic success. Yet, fish factory workers and fishermen are not seeing these promises fulfilled and their bellies remain empty. Fishermen and the community of Lake Victoria have found a solution, or so it seems: the production of an occult economy specializing in albino body parts. What has emerged, according to neo-functionalists, appears to be a market economy based on the fetishization of albino body parts, which promise wealth and success to those who believe in and engage in this “lucrative” trade. The recent increase in the killing of albinos is a result of people materializing and utilizing fetishes of the magical powers of albino body parts in the pursuit of capitalist notions of wealth and success. Fishermen, who feel slighted by the failures of capitalism, turn to witchdoctors, who promise potions and charms made from albino body parts to fill a void and to bring riches. The telling and retelling of this story is based on the fetishization of

albino body parts and has subsequently sparked a “truth” amongst many people.

According to neo-functionalists, the continual reiteration of the efficacy of albino body parts has motivated people to participate in this occult economy. Given the failures of the fishing industry, fishermen “are working harder and catching less...[T]he populations of smaller fish, which traditionally have been their source of livelihood, have been decimated either by larger predators or by overfishing. The big, oily Nile perch, generally referred to as *mbuta* is too far out in the open waters for the little fishing boats, and too big to be caught in the unsophisticated nets³⁷”.

The Tanzanian mining sector parallels the Lake Victoria fishing industry in that between “1997 and 2005 Tanzania exported gold worth more than USD 2.54 billion, but the country only earned USD 252 million.³⁸” The mining and fishing industries are failing to provide local workers with the economic success promised to them as incentive for working in European fish factories and gold mines. One article even called the failure of creating wealth in these industries a “resource curse,³⁹” because according to the author, the more natural resources you have the more you are exploited. The massive influx of foreign investors in Tanzania’s fishing and mining industries is not lucrative for local workers.

This occult economy based on “moral artifacts⁴⁰” in which witchcraft is both present and real: it is both useful and sometimes vital to the procurement of wealth and success. This economy is also based on the fetishization of albino’s white skin and their body parts, as Pietz argues, the problem of the fetish in any society “remains specific to

³⁷ Chege, *Lake Victoria: A Sick Giant*

³⁸ CCT, BAKWATA, The Tanzania Episcopal Conference, *How Tanzania is failing to benefit from gold mining*

³⁹ Mgwabati, *Albino Killings is a Social Economic Problem*

⁴⁰ Fields 1982, 569.

the problematic of the social value of material objects as revealed in situations formed by the encounter of radically heterogeneous social systems⁴¹.” According to this interpretation, the fetish of the albino is rooted in the real presence of witchcraft in Tanzanian society.

In opposition to an interpretation of albino killings based on the occult economy, others argue that, whether there is any truth or validity in the efficacy of the potions and charms is not of importance. Whether these rumors and stories create a logical truth in any society is also not of importance. To them, what is vital in the albino narrative is that there is a belief in specific rumors and gossip -- in fact, a belief, a powerful enough to motivate people to act in ways many outsiders view as “barbaric” and “illogical⁴²”.

According to this interpretation, the fetishization of albino body parts and the creation of a market for such albino commodities is not simply a story about the market economy or the neoliberal, and cannot be accounted for through a functionalist explanation. Rather, the materiality and repetitive power of the singular fixation on albinos in Tanzania is what gives them their social value and economic value in the occult economy.

What if we were to treat the accounts of Tanzanians who believe in the powers of albino body parts as a type collective representation--not as an exoticized formulation of a shared religious belief, but as part of a collective social discourse located within a dialectic different from that which we are accustomed to? Although print and television reports on albino killings seemingly lack vital criminal evidence to implicate any of the accused, according to some, an assessment of the discourse surrounding the albino killings suggests that it is enough that these stories are repeated and circulated for many

⁴¹ Pietz 1985, 8.

⁴² *A Nairobiian's Perspective!*

to consider them true. These stories are in an indeterminate location, between fact and metaphor⁴³, balancing the divide between the visible and the invisible. Many anthropologists suggest that the metaphorical truth of such stories is not an adequate enough explanation and instead propose a single lens through which to understand localized worldviews. But others argue that these stories reflect an occult economy, or a response to a world in which the only apparent way to create material wealth seems to lie in forms of power and knowledge. These forms of power and knowledge lie beyond the rational and instead are found in available “occult techniques” of creating value⁴⁴. When political and economic transformations impose hierarchies of power and knowledge and subsequently fail to deliver promises of economic success, it is only understandable to return to more localized methods of creating value to navigate the modernizing world.

The data used to suggest the “failure of capitalism” according to the neo-functional interpretation and the data used to interpret rumors and gossip has been gathered from accounts told in local and international newspapers, blogs, television reports, and YouTube videos. Rather than only reading and listening for explanations of why albino killings are “wrong” and “bad”, this analysis also focuses on how readily and commonly the story of albino killings is told. In a discourse analysis, the rumors and stories surrounding the albino killings are accepted as moral artifacts and given anthropological significance. Many Tanzanians know this specific narrative and many people are talking about it, illustrating that this belief is both present and real in Tanzania. The aspects of the stories retold in this analysis are based on localized “facts” which must be present to prove the narrative’s validity for the actors and to motivate them to act on

⁴³ Scheper-Hughes 1998, 4.

⁴⁴ Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, 316.

these “facts.” The reoccurring discourse is necessary to support claims aimed at explaining “*why albinos?*” and “*why now?*” An interpretation of events based on the neoliberal or based on discourse follows a temporal progression of the steps and actions involved in the narratives of albino killings. In the data available for this research, not a single narrative provided a complete description detailing or discussing a complex series of events involved in any specific albino killing. Instead, fragments of various stories have been pieced together to create an “ideal type” account of the albino killings, given the limited data provided by available sources.

In the media and throughout Internet blogs, there are major discrepancies regarding which actors are involved in the Tanzanian albino organ and skin trade. The neoliberal interpretation of events suggests that fishermen and other people living around Lake Victoria are said to utilize fetishes of the productive magic of albino body parts. Furthermore, the market for albino body parts is represented as violating the normal spatio-temporal constraints of production: the fishing industry is in decline and, as some suggest, people then resort to occult economies in order to work around the environmental and economic failures of the fishing industry. Albino killing stories thus seem to relate to a fantastic speculation of value. The fetishization of albinos and their body parts has made their market price increase, thus making albinos a more valuable market commodity.

There are numerous references in the media and blogs to fishermen and miners, and sometimes family members and business men, and even one village leader, as those who are seeking to benefit from potions and charms made with albino body parts. However, the media and news reports fail to provide a discourse analysis suggesting who

these fishermen and miners really are and their motivation to act on local rumors. In the media, fishermen and miners represent a nebulous and faceless group similar to the anonymity the media provides for many victimized albinos. We know little to nothing about these fishermen except that they have been implicated in acts that are “erroneous and barbaric⁴⁵.” According to the data provided by journalists, bloggers, and the NGO Under the Same Sun, all of the consumers, who tend to be fishermen and miners and in one instance a village leader⁴⁶, involved in the albino economy are male. Women are not said to be active participants in the consumption or production of the albino market; women are rather overwhelmingly reported as being victims and/or grieving family members. It could be suggested that this gendered pattern in the rumor of albino killings is a reformulation of occult beliefs centered on the occult power of women. Aside from this, media sources provide little to no data referencing the specific demographics of these fishermen and miners forcing interpretations of the albino phenomena to be loosely based on speculation.

Almost all of the news reports used in this study blame fishermen and miners for partaking in “this shameful and disgraceful act of trading human parts in a quest for richness⁴⁷”. Some even correlate “this recent wave of mass killings...to ancient tribal beliefs in supernatural powers some refer to as “witchcraft,” which can also be used to inflict harm or damage to property or the members of a community⁴⁸”. One Tanzanian blog cites the annual per capita income in Tanzania as a meager \$450 and argues that the

⁴⁵ *A Nairobiian's Perspective!*

⁴⁶ Kapama, *Magu Trader “Was Buyer of Albino Body Parts”*

⁴⁷ Mgwabati, *Albino Killings is a Social Economic Problem*

³ Pollock, *Tanzania: Albino Killings Related to Ancient Tribal Beliefs*

underground market of albino body parts is a “lucrative business⁴⁹”. Another blog cites an article in the *Guardian*, which proposes that due to environmental degradation in Lake Victoria many of the fish are dying and fishermen are forced to resort to potions made from albino body parts⁵⁰.

The most commonly cited explanation of the motivations of fishermen and miners to engage in this specific occult practice is the potential monetary benefits gained from potions and charms made with albino body parts,

“[T]he Daily News reported the arrest of a 35-year-old fisherman at Lake Tanganyika who had allegedly attempted to sell his 24-year-old albino wife to two businessmen from the Democratic Republic of Congo for 3.6m shillings (about £2,000). Another report told of a man caught at the border carrying a bag containing a baby's head. He told police that a Tanzanian witch doctor had offered to pay him according to the weight of the head⁵¹”.

The failure of the Tanzanian state to provide wage labor or economic aid to those who barely make enough money to survive is not specifically mentioned in the explanations of the fishermen’s motivations. On the one hand, the Vice President of Tanzania, Dr. Ali Mohammed Shein, argued that the killings of albinos is correlated with corruption, “corruption...is the major source of many problems specifically...albino killings [,] which in totality contribute to economic, social and political problems. Corruption has affected the implementation of government plans, including the aspect of development,

⁴⁹ <http://thebrightesthub.com>

⁵⁰ <http://mytanzania.wordpress.com>

⁵¹ Smith, *Albino Africans Live in Fear After Witch-Doctor Butchery*

and there is great decrease in government revenue⁵².” Dr. Shein attributes the albino killings to corruption within Tanzania’s institutions, yet he fails to mention how corruption came to be a “moral economy” in Tanzanian society. Conversely, the neoliberal and occult model suggested by Sanders’ argument in *Save Our Skins*, implies that the failure of structural adjustment policies introduced by the IMF and the World Bank led directly to an increased engagement in occult practices as a means to economic survival: “the recent rise of occult idioms and practices in Tanzania is directly related to the way structural adjustment has been presented and implemented⁵³.” His argument is an echo of the Comaroffs’ explanation of the rise in occult economies, namely the sale of body parts, in postcolonial Africa. According to the Comaroffs, the selling of albino body parts in Tanzania would simply be the deployment of “magical means for material ends,”⁵⁴ or a utilization of occult practices to gain riches. Whether albino killings are attributed to corruption or the failure of structural adjustment policies, there has been an increase in “magical means for material ends.” The production and reproduction of stories, which promise wealth and success for fishermen who engage in this occult economy, is strong enough for people to act and perpetuate these rumors and gossip. The trouble begins when we search for tangible evidence of the crimes and the fishermen’s implication in these acts, all located within the speculation of news reports. The discrepancies between media representations of albino killings and the data used to argue the basis of these crimes points to the power of rumors in perpetuating beliefs that may or may not be true but which are influential enough to be told and retold as a material truth.

⁵² *Government Calls for concerted Fight Against Child Abuse*

⁵³ Sanders 2001, 163.

⁵⁴ Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999.

There is no first hand evidence from a miner or fisherman as to why they engage in the albino economy. All the media sources used in this study speculate reasons for the participation of fishermen and miners in this occult discourse and practice. However, as Stephan Palmie argues, “the historical imagination,” in this case the historical imagination of the key actors, “is not a mere deposit of past social experience, but a repository way of engaging the present⁵⁵.” Thus, as Palmie suggests, a sort of comfort may be found in raising questions such as *why do fisherman engage in this occult practice?* The answer may partly lie in the explanation that such questions may be more important than “hard facts”. Utilizing a neoliberal and occult lens to explain the reason fishermen engage in the albino economy tends to lead to a reductionist, functionalist explanation, and is unsatisfying as an individual explanation for the purpose of this paper, which is to analyze the albino killings through several yet contradictory lenses. If the data were available, the answers that actors participating in the albino economy may give as their reasons for engaging in the occult economy could give more insight into Tanzanian cosmologies and localized meanings of everyday experiences of knowledge and power and how different groups of people are implicated and negotiate political and economic hierarchies.

Witchdoctors and their middlemen are represented as key actors in the narratives of albino killings. They are vital producers and mediators of the albino market. As long as there is a demand for albino potions and charms, witchdoctors and the men they contract to hunt and kill albinos will continue to act as the suppliers of the market wares in economy. Witchdoctors provide the commodity in order to satisfy the fishermen’s fetishization of albino body parts, while middlemen are said to be hired as contractors by

⁵⁵ Palmie 2002, 14.

the witchdoctors to perform the attacks on albinos and to extract specific body parts and organs necessary for the potions and charms witchdoctors sell. In 2009, a spokesman for a traditional healers association claimed that “members of his association were offering service to more than 30% of the country’s population⁵⁶,” indicating that witchcraft in Tanzania is deeply rooted in daily routines. Why not go to a healer who advertises a quick and successful solution?

Many albino advocates suggest that if the killings of albinos were stopped through a human rights intervention, the trade in albino body parts would disappear, though there is the possibility that the rumors about it might persist. However, human rights advocates fail to mention that albinos are surrounded by a myriad of rumors which attest to their status as “ghosts” and to their alleged ability to bring wealth and power to those who purchase charms and potions made of albino body parts, including blood, skin, and hair. To focus solely on the “hard facts” of albino killings provides a shallow understanding and explanation of the fetishization of albinos. But even a second order assessment surrounding the beliefs people have about albinos, which will provide insight into Tanzanian worldview’s and into the world of the occult is unsatisfying on its own.

The fetish of albino body parts and the magical powers they hold have “an ordering of power derived from its status as the fixation or inscription of a unique originating event that has brought together previously heterogeneous elements into a novel identity.⁵⁷” As Wyatt MacGaffey stresses, “a fetish is always a composite fabrication.” But the heterogeneous components appropriated into an identity by a fetish are not only material elements; desires and beliefs and narrative structures establishing a

⁵⁶ BBC, *Tanzania “Healers” Flout Ban*

⁵⁷ Pietz 1985, 5.

practice are also fixed (or fixated) by the fetish, whose power is precisely the power to repeat its originating act of forging an identity of articulated relations between certain otherwise heterogeneous things⁵⁸.” The fetishization of albinos begins at birth with rumors circulating about their mothers: “many men accuse their wives of infidelity when albinos are born. Some even accuse them of having had sex with a *tokolosh*, a devil’s imp who is said to be produced by witchcraft from a tree root and to live under beds⁵⁹.” Mothers are consistently at fault if an albino child is born. Often times albino children are smothered or murdered at birth because “many families still regard having an albino child as a bad omen or curse⁶⁰.” According to Isaac Mwaura with the Albino Association of Kenya, “[a]lmost 90 percent of albinos living in the region [Lake Victoria] were raised by single mothers because the fathers believed their wives were having affairs with white men⁶¹.” In some places people believe that albinism is contagious and to ward off an albino spell they spit⁶². However, there is also stereotype that albinos are very intelligent and accomplished scholars. There is even a commonly told rumor that adult albinos do not die; instead, they simply vanish. There is a belief that “albinism is said to be considered... a punishment from the gods for an ancestor’s wrongdoing or intercourse during menstruation⁶³.” And in Tanzania, the commonly employed label *zeru-zeru*, is used to describe albinos, yet “traditionally this is a word for ghost-like creatures and is derogatory⁶⁴.” The word has officially been banned in Tanzania (since 2000) in an effort to control and modify the perpetuation of specific beliefs surrounding albinos. One blog

⁵⁸ Pietz 1985, 5.

⁵⁹ McNeil, *Black, Yet White: A Hated Color in Zimbabwe*

⁶⁰ ADD, *The Importance of Changing Attitudes*

⁶¹ Odula, *10,000 Albinos in Hiding After Killings in East Africa*

⁶² McNeil, *Black, Yet White: A Hated Color in Zimbabwe*

⁶³ Ekah, *Albino’s- The Hunted Species*

⁶⁴ BBC News, *Surprise of Tanzania’s albino MP*

post by a Tanzanian even reiterates “traditionally, midwives were known to kill albino babies, declare them stillborn and bury them secretly⁶⁵.”

All of these rumors have combined to make albinos a very valuable commodity in which their body parts and their respective powers can be harnessed in potions and charms which bring wealth and success to those who chose to utilize these powers. Cosmologies surrounding albinos and their powers can be traced to the early Kongoese Kingdom, but it is not known how these ideas spread to East Africa. Regardless of how these beliefs came about, they continue to have a very strong and powerful impact on modern Tanzanian society. New technologies and procedures that were implemented after the colonial period “did not have meaning because they were new or powerful, but because of how they articulated ideas about bodies and their place in the world, and because of the ways in which they reproduced older practices⁶⁶.” Similarly, technological advances in the fishing and mining industries do not have meaning simply because they are new, but rather the failure of such advances in technology to bring wealth to the people has led to a rearticulation and a reproduction of old beliefs and practices. Witchdoctors and their middlemen have not “invented” a new practice, instead they are simply reordering an old belief with new practices in new times.

The killing and mutilation of albinos by middlemen is an important thread in the albino discourse. In the media the method of killing is sensationalized and a part of the fantastic. The killings are violent and gruesome, compelling the international community and human rights activists to label the occult as “barbaric” and “backwards⁶⁷.” The killings serve a function within the albino discourse, reiterating the fear and respect

⁶⁵ Shadmia, *6-Year-Old Albino Girl Killed for Body Parts*

⁶⁶ White 200, 5.

⁶⁷ *A Nairobiian's Perspective!*

demanded by the powers of the occult and witchdoctors as well as a physical articulation of the fetishization of albinos.

The most important aspect of the killings is that the act itself shows the depth and power of the belief in albino magic. The belief in the efficacy of albino body parts for creating success and wealth is so strong that sometimes-dead albino bodies are exhumed in order for people to capture any remaining organs on the body⁶⁸. Nyerere Rutahiro was murdered in March of 2010,

“He [Rutahiro] was eating dinner outside his modest rural compound, when a gang of four strangers burst in, and threatened to arrest him. As his wife Susannah looked on helplessly, the men began to hack at Nyerere’s arms and legs with machetes. “We want your legs,” they shouted, “We want your legs,” his wife recalls, still deeply traumatized by what she saw⁶⁹.”

Nyerere’s body was laid to rest in a cement-sealed grave to prevent any looters from digging up his body and taking his body parts for the albino trade. According to some, the fetishization of albino body parts in conjunction with the failure of structural adjustment policies and the failure of capitalism has led to extreme action among the people most directly impacted a loss of the economic dream. The beliefs people have about albinos and the stories people are telling about the power of albinos have become part of daily life and motivated mass action.

Albinos and their body parts are commodities within a neo-functionalist interpretation, in an economy created for the purpose of the production of generating

⁶⁸ Ground Report, *Superstitious Albino Killings in Tanzania Must Stop*

⁶⁹ BBC News, *Living in Fear: Tanzania’s Albinos*

viable income in a world where reality is failing them and the occult is becoming the new reality. *Why albinos?* Because the fetishization of albinos has perpetuated a belief that their body parts can bring wealth to people who harness the power of albino charms and potions correctly. Perhaps there is even a correlation between the whiteness and wealth of European fish factory owners who pass in and out of Mwanza without seemingly having done any work. The magic of the white European is done behind closed doors, unbeknownst to the African worker. What does this stem from? A false consciousness among local fishermen based on an illusion in “a fixed power to repeat an original event of singular...synthesis.”⁷⁰ Some suggest, as Tanzania transitioned from a socialist state to the current neoliberal order, the fetish became an institutional construct of the social value of things. The material fetish of albinos and their body parts has become institutionalized within the fishing industry and become a fixed part of the economy. *Why now?* Because individualism coupled with a zero sum economy is not bringing the riches and successes people were promised.

In the discourse about albinism and albino killings, different body parts are given different powers and efficacies. The albino commodities that make people rich include “potions made with albino blood, shoes made of albino skin, tendrils of albino hair woven into fishing nets and amulets with albino body parts⁷¹.” In 2008, a complete set of albino body parts was valued upwards of 75,000 USD⁷². Albino hair woven into fishing nets is said to attract fish because the light of the sun reflects off of lighter objects better than darker objects. This belief and practice illustrates a connection between the occult and a belief in rumors surrounding the powers of albinos, as well as people’s desire to

⁷⁰ Pietz 1985, 11

⁷¹ McNeil, *Bid to Stop the Killing of Albinos*

⁷² Pollock, *Albinio Killings in Tanzania Related to Ancient Tribal Beliefs*

participate in a capitalist economy. But as rumors and gossip illustrate, fishermen who attest to the success of albino body parts were not cited in any source material, thus leaving the question of *why?* unsatisfied. The retelling of these stories is simply fantastic speculation, which has led the believers of these stories to act on rumors and gossip. A belief in the success of albino body parts has become a reality whether or not there is any truth in success of the potions and charms. The fact that people believe in such success is enough to make it a truth or a “moral artifact”.

According to a neoliberal interpretation, the market economy for albino body parts is said to bring in big money for both the witchdoctors and supposedly for those who utilize albino potions and charms. In 2008, two men from Burundi were arrested and confessed to killing albinos to sell body parts to Tanzanian witchdoctors. They stated “they got 1 million Burundian francs (\$840) from a Tanzanian who had promised them three million francs for albino hair⁷³.” The powers of these beliefs are so strong that it has created a market that crosses national boundaries to fulfill the demands of the Tanzanian economy. However, the albino commodity is always reported as being from Tanzania no matter who the middlemen are in the market economy. Burundians cross the Tanzanian border looking for wealth in the albino trade, just as the fishermen rely on the charms for their success, and just as the witchdoctors rely on the money of the fishermen for their survival.

The consequences of engaging in the albino market are continually evolving based on the need for the Tanzanian government to maintain legitimate control of its state and its people. At one point the association of traditional healers was banned from practicing, however very few traditional healers are actually members of this colonially

⁷³ Shadmia, *6-Year-Old Albino Girl Killed for Body Parts*

created institution. The British utilized this institution as means of control, similarly to the way the current Tanzanian government is doing. Reporters were often unable to meet or discuss with witchdoctors and the few who managed this feat were met with strong resistance.

President Kikwete has invoked the judicial system as a means of punishing those implicated in the occult economy. He instituted a secret ballot in each village allowing people to anonymously accuse their neighbors of being witchdoctors, middlemen, or consumers in the albino economy. Kikwete has placed local police on high alert, although many of them are involved in the trade or can look the other way for a small bribe. Since the police crackdown in March of 2008, “170 witchdoctors have [...] been arrested⁷⁴.” The death penalty was reinstated and several fishermen and middlemen have been hung to act as a deterrent to others. The reappropriation of control and power by the judicial system is vaguely reminiscent of mechanisms of control during the British colonial period. Under the colonial regime, the judicial system was utilized as a means to invoke fear and to legitimize national rule, no matter how corrupt and inefficient the courts were. But in the present system, the courts are forced to recognize the belief and the practices of the occult thus reinforcing their place in society.

As asserted earlier, the gossip and rumors surrounding albinos is not a new phenomenon. What is new is the recent spike in albino killings based on a belief in albino body parts as a conduit to material wealth. There is already an evolution of this occult practice recorded in different regions of Tanzania. On January 4, 2010 in southwest Tanzania, notably the Mbeya and Iringa regions, “a number of women have been seriously injured...after assailants broke into their home under the cover of darkness

⁷⁴ BBC News, *Mothers Hacked in Albino Attacks*

and sliced off their private parts.” The news report continues, “These acts are an additional smudge on Tanzania’s already badly soiled image, coming in the wake of albino killings, which are still making international headlines⁷⁵.” Women’s genitals are now the fetishized commodity of Mbeya and Iringa, and if the genitals are utilized properly they can promise to make people who engage in this market wealthy just as albino body parts, predominately female body parts, around Lake Victoria promise. For example, Mbeya is facing “numerous and formidable” development problems, “social and economic services are deteriorating... school enrollment rates are declining; food situation is precarious; infant and maternal mortality rates continue to be high; unemployment is on the rise triggering” a migration of youth from rural areas to urban centers⁷⁶. Similar to Mwanza’s reliance on the fishing and mining industry, Mbeya’s economy is based primarily on the private mining of gold. These two regions illustrate a gendered fetishization of women’s body parts for accumulation of wealth. The occult economies of the Lake Victoria region and of southwest Tanzania illustrate a nationwide reliance on magical means for material ends and the ability of rumors and gossip to travel vast distances.

Not only does fetishization of albinos illustrate the power of occult economies, it also illustrates that albino killings are one way for the Tanzanian government to assert its legitimacy as a governing body over its people. With the influx of NGOs and foreign aid money into Tanzania, it is sometimes unclear who is actually ruling the country, the country’s democratic government or foreign aid money? The Canadian NGO, Under the Same Sun (USS), went to the UN in 2009 to lobby Tanzania to appoint a special

⁷⁵ www.allafrica.com, *Shocking Savagery*

⁷⁶ The Planning Commission Dar es Salaam and Regional Commissioner’s Office Mbeya, *Mbeya Region Socio-Economic Profile*

prosecutor for albino killings and for the army to impose martial law in the Lake Victoria regions because many police officers are implicated in the albino market⁷⁷. In addition to USS, the Tanzania Albino Society (TAS) has partnered with Sightsavers International (SI). SI has appeared at press conferences condemning albino killings and is currently pressuring the government to “take action to change the law and protect albinos.” However, which law to institute and how to protect albinos is unclear and not even suggested; this is an ideological campaign. Christopher Dadenekeye from TAS states, “We need to clear out these [witchcraft] beliefs that albinism is the result of a curse put on the family and the witch-doctors should be arrested⁷⁸.” The legitimacy of rule sometimes lies with the Tanzanian government and other times with foreign NGOs, which hold more power in governmental affairs. As Karen Fields iterates, colonial regimes ruled East Africa while lacking legitimacy, thus illustrating the relationship between “order secured by culture and order secured by political power” (Fields 1982, 569). In this moment for Tanzanians, witchcraft and the occult have become part of the daily routine, which the government is having difficulty controlling. In order to secure its good standing with the international community and to ensure that foreign aid money and NGO support will continue, the government must maintain its legitimacy by exhibiting specific actions found in favorable democratic states. The albino killings have provided just this opportunity. The Tanzanian government is evoking several measures of a “good” democracy in controlling and reacting to the albino hysteria. The judicial system and institutions such as the police force, the local media, local NGOs, and local schools are all taking a turn in iterating the government’s legitimacy over witchcraft. For

⁷⁷ McNeil, *Bid to Stop the Killing of Albinos*

⁷⁸ ADD, *Tanzania Albino Society*

example, the *New York Times* identifies “four police officers” as those implicated in the killing or trading of albino body parts. Oddly, the point of this article is to reiterate the legitimacy of the Tanzanian government in controlling the albino killings. But, it also reifies the importance of occult cosmologies in the routines of daily life. And, much like the British colonial order, Tanzanian officials and institutions are faced with no other choice but to “press into service the culture they found,” (Fields 1982, 568) the government must come to terms with the persistence of witchdoctors and their craft in a failing capitalist society.

The problem of legitimate authority in state power, according to Fields’ interpretation of Weber, “is two subjective attitudes working together: a consciousness on the part of the rulers that it is their right and duty to command (and that privilege of doing so is merited); and a consciousness on the part of the ruled that it is right and one’s duty to obey⁷⁹” (Fields 1982, 572). Thus, just as during the British rule, witchcraft beliefs resurrect the issue of sovereignty. With witchcraft now under the purview of the law and a criminal offense⁸⁰, punishable by death by hanging, who is doing this punishing? In September of 2009 a *BBC* report states that “officials banned witchdoctors from practicing, however many have continued to work” and a court “sentenced one person to life in prison and eight others to jail for the murder of albino people whose remains were sold⁸¹.” Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete stated in May of 2008, “I call upon you to discard superstitious beliefs and shortcuts to getting wealth. They are wrong beliefs and

⁷⁹ See Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, pg. 124-126; Weber *The Sociology of Religion*, pg. 75.

⁸⁰ The Witchcraft Ordinance (1928) during British rule of East Africa aimed to both stop the accusation of witches and their trial. Witchcraft was removed from the purview of the law. It was demoted from the status of a crime to that of a superstitious belief.

⁸¹ *BBC, Death for Tanzania Albino Killers*

we should abandon them⁸².” President Kikwete demanded a “halt” to beliefs associating albinos with witchcraft and that a committee ought to be formed to research traditional healers who propagate these beliefs⁸³. Such statements by the President illustrate that the Tanzanian government must acknowledge witchcraft as a reality; no matter how much they disapprove of it and view them as outdated beliefs. For the people of Tanzania, witchcraft is a feature of routine; beliefs in witchcraft are “products of a moral community. They are neither error nor lies because they are not mere matters of belief” (Fields 1982, 586). Thus, in order for the Tanzanian government to maintain its legitimacy as a governing body they must accept the “collective consciousness” that witchcraft brings as a “moral artifact” of society. And no Tanzanian fishermen will be free of capitalist societies’ fetishes until they have freed themselves of the morals of capitalist society, like procurement of excessive riches.

vii. Concluding Remarks

The phenomena of albino killings can be analyzed through various lenses that are at odds with each other. One lens positions itself as a neo-functionalist and occult economy argument, the other is based on a collective representation of rumor and gossip people tell and retell about the albino killings, and the final lens is based on a manipulation of moral hierarchies to maintain legitimate authority and power. Each of these interpretations might individually shed light on the phenomena in question, but these lenses cannot be combined.

⁸² Magobe, *Superstitious Albino Killings in Tanzania Must Stop*

⁸³ ADD, *First Albino MP Appointed in Tanzania*

According to a neoliberal and occult interpretation of the albino phenomena, the decline of the fishing industry has prompted the people living around Lake Victoria to create and utilize a new economy, an occult economy based on the magic and medicine of albinos. However, the neoliberal and occult explanation of albino killings in Tanzania tends to propose a more functionalist explanation of “*why now?*” than many are willing to accept. A simplified version of the neoliberal argument proposes that albino killings are a result of failed post-colonial structural adjustment policies. According to this argument, it follows that structural adjustments of the market economy were at the core of the transition from African socialism to the current capitalist state, “structural adjustment has provided necessary and sufficient conditions for the rapid proliferation of occult discourses and practices in Tanzania⁸⁴.” Thus, an interpretation of the data present suggests that capitalism has provided seemingly limitless possibilities for an occult market.

The critics of the neoliberal interpretation suggest an analysis of the discourse surrounding the albino phenomena. They propose that an interpretation of rumors and gossip provide a more in-depth glimpse into Tanzanian beliefs and daily lives. Rumor and gossip serve as a collective representation of Tanzanian’s social and political sentiments. The power of rumor and gossip also illustrates the efficacy of social constructs in an ordering of people’s daily lives. We must find a legitimate belief in witchcraft because it is embedded in routine and has the potential for real and sometimes harmful consequences. Yet again, this interpretation proves unsatisfying due to a lack of available ethnographic data regarding localized cosmologies. Had this study allowed for extensive field research, this interpretation might have been instantiated and influential.

⁸⁴ Moore, Sanders 2001, 162.

The third and final interpretation of the albino phenomena is based on the reappropriation of a moral economy of witchcraft. Rumors and gossip serve an important function for Tanzania's cultural elite. It allows them to represent themselves as proponents of "modernity," "rationality," "civic engagement," and "economic individualism." To international human rights organizations, these are all important indicators of good governance and a successful democracy. These indicators include prompt foreign bodies to give more aid money, reifying the moral hierarchy of occult beliefs and placing the cultural elite at the top of that hierarchy.

Whichever interpretation one selects, the phenomena of albino magic and medicine is a reformulation or a reinterpretation of past occult beliefs and practices. This new phenomena may be based on the fetishization of "whiteness" or it may be a gendered fetishization. No matter which fetish you chose, occult beliefs have and will continue to evolve and adapt to social, economic, and political changes in Tanzanian society, suggesting that Evans-Pritchard was right all along: "[n]ew situations demand new magic," the only difference is in how we interpret it.

viii. References

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