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# ***Miners' magic: artisanal mining, the albino fetish and murder in Tanzania\****

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## ABSTRACT

A series of murders of albinos in Tanzania's north-west mining frontier has been shrouded in a discourse of primitivism by the international and national press, sidestepping the significance of the contextual circumstances of an artisanal mining boom firmly embedded in a global commodity chain and local profit maximisation. The murders are connected to gold and diamond miners' efforts to

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secure lucky charms for finding minerals and protection against danger while mining. Through the concept of fetish creation, this article interrogates the agency of those involved in the murders: the miners who purchase the albino charms, the *waganga* healers renowned for their healing, divination and sorcery skills who prescribe and sell the charms, and the albino murder victims. The agrarian background, miners' ambitions and a clash of values comprise our starting point for understanding the victimisation of albinos.

#### INTRODUCTION

At independence in 1961, Tanzania's political foundations and economy were overwhelmingly agrarian. Under the leadership of President Nyerere, the mineral wealth of the country was left largely untapped for the first two decades of post-colonialism. However, since the oil crisis of the late 1970s, peasant farming has eroded continuously under the influence of stringent structural adjustment cutbacks and the labour-displacing effects of market liberalisation policies. Farming families have been engaged in widespread income diversification away from agriculture with a growing number turning to artisanal mining, especially of gold and, to a lesser extent, diamonds and gemstones. Some have found mineral wealth in an otherwise depressed rural landscape. Their success has not gone unnoticed. Processes of capitalist accumulation and impoverishment now permeate Tanzania's rural areas. A country fostered under an inclusive *ujamaa* philosophy of African socialism with the stated aim of a relatively egalitarian division of the fruits of independence is now experiencing a fundamental upheaval of its moral economy (Bryceson 2010). Within mining settlements, new hierarchies of status and authority are emerging in conjunction with the surge in artisanal mining (Bryceson & Jönsson 2010). Relational ties within mining and between mining and surrounding rural settlements are being embroidered around a new division of labour and its erratic, but sometimes highly lucrative, material rewards.

This article focuses on a disturbing wave of murders of albinos linked to miners' efforts to secure charms for luck and protection against danger while mining.<sup>1</sup> The international press has shrouded the killings in an aura of traditional superstition, overlooking the contextual circumstances, which are at odds with this interpretation. In fact, Tanzania's artisanal mining boom is firmly embedded in global commodity and wage labour markets and capitalist profit-optimisation strategies. At the time of writing, close to fifty albino murders have been reported over the course of nearly two years from late 2007.<sup>2</sup> Most of the reported deaths occurred in Sukumaland, located in north-west Tanzania, the epicentre of Tanzanian mining activities and homeland of the Sukuma people, the country's

largest ethno-linguistic group, who are renowned in Tanzanian popular culture for their witchcraft beliefs, healing, and divination skills.<sup>3</sup>

The Tanzanian government has been quick to react in blaming local healers and warning them that they must immediately stop the practice, but the delivery of justice through the nation's law courts has been slow, with court cases only beginning to be tried in mid 2009<sup>4</sup> and sluggishly proceeding, much to the chagrin of civil society observer groups.<sup>5</sup> The Tanzanian government has appointed an albino woman, Hon. Al-Shaimaa Kwegyir, as a member of parliament in an attempt to positively influence public attitudes. The Tanzania Albino Society (TAS) estimates there are approximately 8,000 albinos in the country. The murders and trials are on-going as we write, generating an air of extreme sensitivity and fear. We concentrate our attention on the context within which these murders have taken place.<sup>6</sup>

Artisanal miners' ambitions comprise our starting point for understanding the tragic victimisation of albinos in Tanzania. In the first section, we discuss the concepts of commodification and fetish creation. We then interrogate the agency of those involved directly and indirectly in the murders: the miners, some of whom seek albino charms, the *waganga*,<sup>7</sup> some of whom prescribe and sell the charms, and the albino murder victims.

#### VALUE-LADEN ECONOMIC CHANGE

The study of the relationship between commodification, the occult and body parts in Tanzania was initiated with Sanders' (2001a) insightful analysis of rumours of human skin trading in south-west Tanzania during the late 1990s. Sanders linked a surge in occult practices and idioms across the country to the pressures and opportunities people faced following the imposition of the economic liberalisation policies of the World Bank and IMF. Ubiquitous commodification permeated Tanzania through the encouragement of mobile trade, commodity and labour markets, and liberalised media coverage. Socially embedded inter-personal ties and economic exchange relationships increasingly gave way to the faceless exchanges of the money-mediated capitalist economy. Amidst new forms of mobility and relationships of economic optimisation, Tanzanians encountered familiar as well as new registers of the occult in myriad forms and places, which facilitated people's exploration and search for meaning and a sense of security in the new amoral economy that engulfed them. Structural adjustment and economic liberalisation fostered a relentless process of commodification that Tanzanians saw as leading to the

commodification of life itself. This called into question the inalienable humanity of personhood and left Tanzanians susceptible, as never before, to the long reach of the market (Sanders 2001a, 2009).

Rumours of a skin trade created general unease without affording the clarity needed to identify the agency involved. The albino murders, on the other hand, are very concrete events and the focus of national public discussion, investigative enquiry and court proceedings. Although most of the information about the murders remains confidential and rumours are rife, there is mounting knowledge about the locational context and agency involved in the demand and supply of charms resulting in albinos' objectification and murder, providing background for our initial interrogation of the agency of the three main actors: the miners, the *waganga* and the albino victims.

In circumstances of rapid change and uncertainty, people are alert to finding ways and means to replace their trepidation and confusion with predictability and material security. As people endeavour to understand and explain the changes, they act to alleviate their anxieties and, where possible, take advantage of the new situation. Graeber's (2005) concept of fetishism as social creativity is especially relevant to these circumstances. He defines a fetish as an object resulting from a process of collectively imagining and creating new social relations in the interface between two value systems. Set in the context of trade between groups with different cosmologies, the traditions of neither value system prevail. Rather the outcome of interaction between the two arises from new ways of thinking and valuing, in a power void between two world views. In this chasm norms are neither agreed nor enforceable. The fetish, construed as an object rather than a subject, emerges from exchange between social agents from distinct situational contexts and value perspectives, serving as a medium of trust and enforcement of the agreement through the threat of supernatural reprisal.

Graeber associates fetishes with the materiality of power. Fetish creation, as a joint endeavour of agents representing two value systems, is an exercise in melding their conceptions of power into one spellbinding object. African cosmologies have tended to be humanist in outlook, based on the high value placed on the regeneration of life, identifying power with physical substances and parts of the human body (*ibid.*), while European-cum-modernist conceptions of power are more materialist, relating power to the possession of specific desired commodities. Graeber cites the interface between sixteenth-century European and West African trading partners to illustrate this. Europeans believed that ownership of gold or other desired material objects bestowed power on them, whereas

Africans believed that power derived from possession of a fetish containing a power-enhancing bodily substance. Intent on profit-making, the Europeans acted instrumentally, not appreciating the binding social relations they were entering. Their African trading partners had pragmatically provided the *modus operandi* for the trade to take place through symbolic construction of the fetish.

In the process of interactive cultural improvisation and hybridisation of two value systems, the fetish becomes an object of displaced desire for one or both partners. The outcome of the exchange is entirely unpredictable, with the possibility of being socially unifying and welfare-enhancing, but also of generating nonsensical travesty or deep tragedy, as in the case of the grotesque valuation and murder of albino victims. Our central question here is why albinos have been fetishised to become the prized repository of exchange and use value.

In the realm of African witchcraft and healing practices more generally, the literature abounds with documentation of how responsive witchcraft and healing patterns are adapted to the changing social and economic order (Colson 2000; Luedke & West 2006; Mesaki 2009). The sudden as well as gradual cumulative influx of large numbers of migrant miners at several strike sites has catalysed much annoyance, resentment and envy in the surrounding Sukuma villages over the past two decades. Cultural and generational divides between the residents of the mining camps and local villagers are readily apparent in a collision of incongruent consumption preferences and social values, interpreted as a rising challenge to the extant rural authority structures. Social change propelled by the rapid mineralisation of the economy has fomented new forms of social division between those who eagerly embrace the fluid materialism of an unknown future associated with mining, chafing against those who retain a foothold in the disintegrating agrarian world once dominated by kin, clan and ethnic loyalties, and are defensive about that known world and their ebbing power to control what is happening to it. Both groups are Tanzanian, but we argue that they represent different sub-cultures, much as teenagers in many countries espouse radically different values from their parents, despite sharing their nationality and social background (Hodkinson & Deike 2007; Roszak 1996). In Tanzania, the values of the two sub-cultures have coalesced around occupational distinctions of agropastoralist and miner, mixed with age differences. Miners tend to be younger than the traditionally trained Sukuma *waganga*. These differences place the two sub-cultural groups in contrasting conjunctural positions relative to the material prospects arising from mining activities, with the possibility of generating new-found well-being and enjoyment for those

who embrace mining, and disappointment and envy for those rooted in the village agrarian order.

However, the miners and the *waganga* have potential mutual trading interests, capable of drawing them into interaction with one another if and when the gap between their differing cosmologies and values can be bridged. The reflexive construction of a fetish provides the bridge for the transfer of money and power between them and their world views. Miners seeking luck and protection make lucrative payments to *waganga* who are rewarded recognition for their power in the realm of the supernatural. Through market forces of supply and demand, in effect, they have mutually created the albino fetish. There are sufficient shared material concerns on the part of the *waganga* and spiritual belief on the part of the miners to motivate them to engage in exchange. But the question remains why the lives of albinos are tragically sacrificed in the process.

The expansion of commodification associated with mineral production now includes a market in body parts for the production of lucky charms. The commodification of body parts metaphorically dramatises the tension between varying metrics of power and wealth of rural agrarian and mining pursuits. We explore how cultural creativity has generated this travesty of human exchange by examining the agency of some of the actors in the fetish exchange in turn below.

#### TANZANIAN ARTISANAL MINERS: PROMISES AND PRESSURES OF SUCCESS

From the 1980s, low agricultural commodity prices and structural adjustment programmes increasingly pushed Tanzania's peasants into the non-farm sector (Bryceson 2002). Rural people coped with adversities and survived materially by looking for alternative income sources. Artisanal mining, involving labour-intensive mineral extraction by people with limited capital investments using basic equipment has, for many, provided a viable alternative to agriculture (Jønsson & Bryceson 2009).

The Tanzanian government recently reassessed the number of people directly engaged in artisanal mining in Tanzania at 1.5 million out of a total population of 40 million (Hayes 2008), indicating the growing significance of artisanal mining as a livelihood source in Tanzania. Although mineral discoveries are made throughout the country, the north-western regions of Mwanza and Shinyanga have seen more mineral rushes than anywhere else. This area is located astride a gold-rich greenstone belt that includes the largest economically exploitable diamond-bearing kimberlite

pipe in the world. Consequently, most of Tanzania's artisanal miners are concentrated in this area (Drechsler 2001; Mwaipopo *et al.* 2004).

Artisanal mining is associated with several adversities, the most significant of which are the difficulties of clearing forests, lack of mine reclamation, injuries from accidents, exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, silicosis, and, particularly with gold mining, mercury poisoning of humans and local flora and fauna (Drechsler 2001; Hinton 2006). Work pressure from occupational risks, uncertainties and separation from home experienced by miners, combined with the euphoria of having occasional large sums of cash, influences miners' behaviour. In contrast to agrarian-based village life where the circulation of cash is typically low, conspicuous consumption of consumer goods, alcohol, gambling and liaisons with women are part of life in artisanal mining settlements (Mwaipopo *et al.* 2004).

What characterises artisanal mining, probably more so than most other livelihoods in Tanzania, is the high level of potential earnings counter-weighted by the unpredictability of mining outcomes, uncertainty of income, and personal risk (Bryceson & Jønsson 2010). Besides the many adversities and limited investment capital, miners do not know the exact location, size and accessibility of the mineral occurrences, and the accountability of partners. They therefore engage in various risk-minimising and cost-sharing practices in order to ensure success and/or a long-term existence within the sector (Jønsson & Fold 2009).

Across Tanzania's mining zones many believe that most activities of the living are shaped or affected by unseen forces of (an)other spirit world, consisting of the ancestors (*mzimu*), God (*mungu*), witchcraft (*uchawi*) and evil spirits (*mashetani*), and that fortune and mineral discovery, and the power to be given or deprived of life, are within the ambit of the invisible world. Like their rural predecessors who sought rain and good harvest by propitiating ancestors, many Tanzanian miners expend a great deal of effort in attempts to assuage or seek favour from the world beyond their own. Although there are several ways to engage with the other realm with a view to reducing, harnessing or controlling one of its resident's powers or intentions, perhaps the most common and readily accessible is through divination and the use of medicines (*dawa*). *Dawa* is a term that can be attributed to numerous artefacts including the concoctions of local 'healers' (*waganga*), witch doctors/sorcerers (*wachawi*) and wizards (*waanga*), home-made herbal remedies (*miti shamba*, lit. 'farm trees'), amulets (*hirizi*), and modern medicines (*dawa ya kisasa*).

While there are incalculable types of *dawa*, the uses that they are put to may, following Cory's (1949: 16) analysis of Sukuma medicines, be divided

into four classes: (i) protective medicines to safeguard against evil influences; (ii) assertive medicines to make people successful in the various walks of social life; (iii) creative medicines to produce fertility in humans, animals and fields; and (iv) aggressive medicines for homicide and bewitching persons and objects. To a large extent, how morally tenable a medicine is within a particular locale depends on the context and the aim, but in general, *dawa* that is used to harm or to generate wealth and status is considered immoral and associated with witchcraft.

In part, this immorality derives from the widely held belief that if people want something that is highly desirable and difficult to acquire or achieve, they must forego something that is equally precious and desirable to themselves or others. In Tanzania, it is with this understanding that people who find sudden wealth are suspected by onlookers of engaging in nefarious dealings with the occult. Rumours associated with this belief include individuals selling their children or other kin to sorcerers in exchange for wealth-creating medicines; or paying sorcerers to create zombies out of the recently dead to assist in income-generating labour activities such as harvesting fields stealthily at night, or to make themselves invisible so that they might conduct property theft. This tit-for-tat exchange however is believed to be ambiguous when it comes to commodification and modernity (Sanders 2009). There is perplexing uncertainty as to whether the accumulation of modern goods has been attained at the expense of others.

When quizzed about the origins of the efficacy of medicine, practising *waganga* and miners with some knowledge of *uganga* attested that the power of medicine is often unknown but taken as true because it is derived from the spirits with whom the *waganga* have direct contact. Others choose to believe that the 'traditional' agrarian way of life has a different *modus operandi* as opposed to more modern walks of life like mining. Miners with this frame of mind may dismiss the spirit world as inconsequential to their mining outcomes. There are gradations of belief on the part of miners, and some firmly trust in the power of the *waganga* to predict when and where a mineral strike will take place and are keen to consult *waganga*, as illustrated in the following case:

Yes, I have used the *waganga's dawa*, no reason to lie. Many times in fact. My mother was the wife of a tribal headman, so these matters were all around me as I grew up. We studied how to return spells that were intended to rob us of our wealth or bewitch us. My mother herself taught us ... Since my mother passed away I depend on my uncle. Also, I help myself as well as other miners, Sukuma and non-Sukuma ... The miners need help to achieve success in mining. I go to their sites to administer the *dawa*, putting it in the pit as well as having them wash

themselves with the potions I provide. I perform a ritual involving recognition of the spirits of that place and speak to them. My task is to appease and release the spirits. [I am a miner but] here I do this sort of thing [communing with the spirits] from time to time especially to facilitate miners' selection of a place to mine. My charges depend on the financial standing of the person. We have a saying *kula na maskini na tajiri* [eat with the poor as well as the rich]. If I ask the spirits about where to find a good place to mine, they will normally answer me within seven days. It all depends on one's ability to speak with the spirits.

(Emmanuel M., 48 years, Matundasi, 19.5.2009).

Miners see luck as an entity that can be procured or transferred to them through the intercession of the *waganga* dispensing *dawa*. The expectation of the miner is that the *mganga* will harness their spiritual powers to make them lucky ('to make their star shine', *kusafisha nyota*). The miner must follow the conditions and rules laid down by the *mganga* aimed at removing curses or protecting against witchcraft and wizardry. Instructions are given on the right conditions in which the client must take the *dawa*, in a way analagous to how a patient seeks health through Western medical treatment. For instance, the patient may be instructed to take the *dawa* at a path junction where he must bathe naked in order to take the luck of all the people passing. Purification is essential. This can entail washing with water infused with certain 'potions' and precautions to avoid pollution such as refraining from drinking alcohol or having sex at certain times or out of wedlock. More complex procedures associated with highly regarded *waganga* might involve being told to look out for certain omens.

The eagerness to believe in the power of *uganga* to facilitate mineral discovery has to be understood in the context of the extremely harsh economic conditions that have prevailed in Tanzania, exacerbated by the seemingly inexplicable and unfair way in which some miners prosper and others don't. *Waganga* divination narratives and promises of success through ritual performance feed the imaginations of those who desire wealth.

One experienced Sukuma miner who considers luck of paramount importance in finding gold relates how he consulted a *mganga* on three occasions. The first instance was the most memorable when he was required to follow various procedures. After a magical trip to a mine site during which he was not asked to pay for his transport or accommodation by the people he encountered, he arrived just at the right time and met a woman who instructed him where to mine:

She took me by the hand and walked me to a site and told me that this was where they worked and that my friend and I would be working with them ... I sat on a stone and watched them for a long time when suddenly someone threw some soil onto my feet. In the soil I saw something shining and to my surprise realized that

it was a nugget of gold. I took it without anyone noticing and two days after sold it for 950,000 Tanzanian shillings (Tsh), which back then was a small fortune. With that kind of money in my pocket, I decided to return home. Before arriving home, I went straight to visit the *mganga*. He bid me welcome and said that he knew everything that had happened and instructed me to show him the money. I told him that I had used some for the bus fare and had given a little money to my friend. This, he did not mind. He laid out the money on the floor and spit at it. He then took 30,000 Tsh and said that the rest belonged to me. For that money I managed to buy a car and a lot of livestock. Before I left the *mganga's* house, he advised me to stay away from alcohol.

(Masaka S., 48 years, Londoni, 23.5.2009)

His second and third encounters with *waganga* did not yield such astounding success, and he has now converted to Roman Catholicism and refrains from visiting *waganga*. Other miners have a sceptical rationalist attitude towards *waganga* derived from unfulfilling past experiences rather than religious beliefs:

One afternoon in 1996, I went to see a *mganga*. When I arrived I told him: 'I mine gold, therefore I request *dawa* to polish my star.' In our beliefs, if someone stays a long time without any kind of accomplishments we say that their star is tarnished. He gave me a certain *dawa* to wash and another for placing in the gold pit. The *dawa* was a powder of pulverised roots. I paid him 500 or perhaps 1,000 Tsh and then left. After that, I did not strike gold and I did not experience any change. And since that day, I have never returned to a *mganga*. The role of the *mganga* is to give the miner heart and many times the person is told to mine deeper and he gets gold. And this is largely because there will be gold at deeper depths rather than due to the *mganga's* power.

(Peter B., 39 years, Matundasi, 19.5.2009)

Despite the existence of many sceptical miners, there are sufficient numbers of people who do believe in the *waganga's* power so that the disbelievers in a mining team often accept *waganga* intervention for the sake of group morale, or to ward off ill will from other miners or local people in the mining area given that most of the miners are migrants, making it advisable to have good relations with the original residents of the area. In diamond production, the claim owner may pay for his diggers to be purified by a *mganga* to ensure that the diggers remain hopeful, and in the process the claim owner may be exerting control and discipline over his diggers. Sometimes enlisting the help of a *mganga* is a collective decision on the part of miners, a decision that cannot be taken lightly since it is perceived that a great deal is at stake socially and economically, as described below:

We were mining in a big group and selected two from our group to go and visit a Sukuma *mganga* in order to become successful in our mining endeavours. When

they came back they told us about certain rules and conditions that the *mganga* had stipulated including the need for their willingness to sacrifice relatives. We decided to extricate ourselves from the project, but we heard later that the others had earned a lot of money from their mining activities.

(Focus group discussion with five artisanal miners, Mabadaga Machimboni, 12.4.2009)

Despite these weighty moral issues, scepticism about *waganga's* effectiveness and utility persists in many miners' minds, often spurred by the prices that the *waganga* charge for their services. Respectable *waganga* are not generally assumed to be profiteering. Their prices depend on the nature of the service rendered. *Waganga* are reported to be understanding if miners cannot pay immediately, but in such cases the miner must pay a symbolic amount followed by further payment once he can afford it. Others see the *waganga's* charges as too high or are loath to accept some of the healers' insistence on behavioural change or other actions, which impinge on their lifestyle or lead to adverse repercussions. As one informant stated, if a *mganga* asks for a lot of money before he treats you or if the price is high you know he is a con man (*tapeli*).

#### SUKUMA WAGANGA

##### *Medical practices*

The Sukuma have been long known in Tanzania for their skills as healers. Sukuma knowledge of *uganga* is admired and often remarked upon as the cause of the economic success of artisanal miners who seek their services (Sanders 2001b).<sup>8</sup> For decades, their acclaimed knowledge of medicinal plants and healing practices has attracted patients from other parts of Tanzania seeking consultation and treatment. Famous *waganga* establish clinics, which usually consist of a collection of small thatched round huts, situated along up-country roads remote from towns and other habitation. Set back from the road, they are often demarcated by an ostrich egg perched on top of one of the huts.

Tanner (1956a, 1956b), writing about beliefs in magic amongst the Sukuma during the colonial period, observed that *waganga* claimed that their knowledge of the world of the spirits was relayed to them through dreams, spirit possession and, less directly, through the teachings of elder *waganga*. In addition to adopting the role of medium between the two realms, the Sukuma *mganga* is understood to be a force for good within a community, maintaining the two worlds in a state of equilibrium.

Concepts of good and evil vary, but evil in many African cultures tends to be unassigned to a specific agency. In other words, evil is seen as an

imperfection or absence of good without attributing causation to individual agency (Bewaji 1998). In this light, witch killings and other physically harming practices inflicted by *waganga* on individuals who are identified as repositories of errant evil spirits are justifiable if not praised as ridding the society of evil. Traditionally, the *waganga* were expected to bring about a normalisation and harmonisation of relations between people and between realms. However, this role is changing. Present day *waganga* are increasingly associated with developing medicines and spiritual interventions that facilitate the individual patient's quest for wealth accumulation and success.

Sukuma *waganga* traditionally received rigorous training and rituals to gain their credentials as healers (Stroeken 2001). It is incumbent on the initiated to put their healing knowledge into practice, which could be likened to a Western-trained doctor's allegiance to the Hippocratic oath. The principles of Sukuma healing rest on the extraction of the energy force from the natural habitat combined with *shingila*, the medium through which the force is transferred to the patient, which is perceived as 'a "penetrator" from the human world that makes healing power meaningful and effective' (*ibid.*: 294).

In practice, there is not necessarily a clear line between a *mganga* (healer) and *mchawi* (sorcerer). The diviners link the two through visions and efforts to create a desired future outcome. Through a diviner's exploration of a client's past relationships and current motivations, the client's frustrations or aims are contextualised and comprehended, before the *mganga* makes suggestions for altering existing circumstances and relational ties to achieve the desired outcome. The transition of the *mganga* from healer to dealer in the occult arises from the range of spiritual powers that extends from healing individual ailments and smoothing social disruption to bending the future in favour of the individual at the expense of someone else.

### *Spiritual and material worlds in Sukumaland*

Amongst the Sukuma, neither Islam nor Christianity historically attracted large numbers of converts. Through time, the Sukuma have sought to ensure widely dispersed residential settlement and freedom of movement. The relatively high mobility of the Sukuma as agro-pastoralists and their frequent lack of knowledge of where their ancestors and other relations are buried contributed to their lack of appeal to their ancestors (Wijzen & Tanner 2002). Sukuma agro-pastoralists led mobile lives searching for pastureland and alliances with local people in ever widening networks

(Abrahams 1981; Brandström 1990). They traditionally sought wealth and status in cattle and wives. Bride price paid in cattle was the pivot for the generational transfer of power.

Sukuma homesteads, composed of several households of multi-generational, blood-related kin, were headed by the oldest male who exerted generational control by managing bride price payments and favoured access to women through polygamous practices. Outside the homestead, the cohesiveness of Sukuma society came through the etiquette of labour cooperation, ritual adherence and pervasive fear of witchcraft. Any concentration of power was viewed as socially destabilising and potentially evil. Social status evolved through cumulative lifetime work achievements, rather than a pre-ordained social hierarchy or existing family wealth (Wijsen & Tanner 2002).

The Sukuma gained awareness of the flora and fauna of extensive areas of forests and savannah through livestock grazing (Jangu 2010). Collecting plants from faraway localities, their healers had at their disposal a wide range of plant and animal material for making herbal medicines. Most settlements in Sukumaland had a healer or diviner. The chief system maintained by the British colonial government under indirect rule ensured that chiefs were answerable to the elders, and the elders relied on diviners to provide them with wise counsel and advice.

In the 1970s, Nyerere's implementation of a villagisation programme, which concentrated settlement in villages, destabilised Sukumaland. The unease of living in closer proximity to one's neighbours led to a cultural, rather than a political, outburst. Stroeken (2001) argues that this was expressed in the rising incidence of witchcraft accusations. Previously, most witches were identified amongst kin within the confines of the homestead compound, but accusations of witchcraft began to spread to residents of the village at large (Abrahams 1981; Mesaki 1994).

Mesaki's (1994, 2009) insightful research on Sukuma witchcraft patterns over the last three decades documents that 3,693 people were killed in witchcraft-related incidents in Tanzania between 1970 and 1984. Sixty-four per cent of the deaths occurred in Sukumaland, with women being the prime targets of the witch killings (85% of 2,347 killings). From 1997 through 1999, the victimisation of older women was even more pronounced. They constituted 91% of the 185 witch suspects who were killed (Mesaki 2009: 79). Elderly women found themselves in an increasingly vulnerable position as younger family members migrated from the homestead leaving them without adequate familial support.

The destabilising force in the countryside is now the economic decline of peasant agriculture and the surge in artisanal mining (Bryceson 1999;

Bryceson & Jønsson 2010). Sukuma homesteads are being depleted of youthful labour at the same time as large numbers of migrants are arriving, spurred by the area's numerous mineral strikes. The livelihood restructuring away from agro-pastoralist activities and social values deflects from the Sukuma's conservative homestead-based, decentralised settlements resting on patriarchal authority. A key indicator of this shift in social values is the rise in property crime and the inability of local law enforcers to act.<sup>9</sup>

These changes are now undermining the authority of local male elders. The Sukuma social values and forms encouraged work achievement over ascription, but such achievement was defined within a Sukuma-inflected agro-pastoralist way of life. As youth have started seeking income in non-agricultural pursuits, elders have continued to farm, upholding the work ethic and communal sentiments (Madulu 1998). The agrarian work ethic traditionally inclined rural people to disapprove of material wealth that did not result from the sweat of one's brow. Swahili-speaking town-dwellers, fishermen and miners who are seen to be dependent on trade and 'lucky finds' are criticised for their 'unearned' wealth (Wijsen & Tanner 2002). Their greater purchasing power has been a potential source of envy. As shops filled with consumer goods under Tanzania's economic liberalisation during the 1990s, elders expected young men to continue to practice traditional Sukuma frugality, shunning luxuries like corrugated iron roofs and motor bikes in favour of virtuously investing in cattle for bride price payment (Madulu 1998). But with the growing momentum of mining and Lake Victoria fishing in the region, elders have lost their controlling grip on the local economy, and watch young men spending lavishly on alcohol, women and entertainment, modern housing and motorbikes (Jønsson & Bryceson 2009).

The mining boom accentuates the comparative rootlessness of people, with heavy male and female migration to mineral strike sites. Historically, very few rural people were acquainted with mining as a livelihood strategy. When mineral strikes started occurring in the 1980s, mining became the shortcut to wealth, far more attractive than agriculture or petty trade. However, all the unknowns of mining cause a mixture of high expectations of wealth, uncertainty, perplexity and fear. Why have some people found wealth within a very short period, while others prospect and mine for years without success?

These questions spur miners to seek the divination skills and medicines of *waganga*. Given that so many miners are migrants new to the mining site area, they tend to rely on word of mouth from those already treated to identify a 'good' *mganga*. In other cases, miners travel considerable

distances to find the right *mganga*. But there is also a new breed of *waganga* who is readily at hand, advertising their talents in the bars that miners frequent at night (Jangu 2010; Stroeken 2001, 2010). Lacking the requisite traditional training for becoming bona fide Sukuma *waganga*, these are entrepreneurial *waganga* looking for gullible miners, and are similar in outlook to miners in terms of their quest for cash. In effect, they are straddled between miners' and *waganga*'s subcultures. Mesaki (2009: 83) observes that professional standards started declining during the 1990s:

... divination, which used to be considered an honourable profession, has now been invaded by a plethora of dubious people, some of whom are most likely charlatans. The irony is that even the charlatans are able to operate with the tacit acknowledgement of the government. The Department of Culture at the district level issues 'permits' to traditional *waganga* ... However some of these healers misuse their permits by embarking on more lucrative activities, such as identifying witches for money. This has resulted in the emergence of a new set of characters in Sukumaland, the *bapembeji* (plural, comen) who exploit people's fears and anxiety; a common trajectory of this relation being the hiring of unscrupulous thugs to kill supposed witches.

Mesaki draws attention to a division of labour between 'diviners' who identify witches and 'paid thugs' who dispose of the witch, often in the spirit of doing so for the public good since witches are deemed to be a threat to the community generally.

#### THE ALBINO FETISH

What is striking about the current wave of albino murders is that researchers who have studied Sukumaland have yet to cite any precedent in traditional beliefs and practices for the targeting of albinos. Historically there has been no special symbolism, nor any traditional practices to suggest that albinos would become implicated in such rituals.<sup>10</sup> Worldwide, albinism is rare in human populations, but in East Africa, its incidence is considerably higher.<sup>11</sup> The disadvantage of human albinism is the carrier's susceptibility to skin cancer and blindness through exposure to the sun. While many albinos lead active work lives, others have tended to be sheltered in the home, set apart from the rest of the agrarian population, giving them a reclusive, often invalid, status in the household and community where work in the open air is the norm.

A hushed practice of mercy killing at birth is rumoured to be the fate of many albino infants, linked to the anticipation of their perceived physical vulnerability and inability to pull their weight in the local farming efforts. In the agro-pastoralist community, albino or deformed babies were

sometimes placed in the cattle kraal gateway and those not trampled to death were allowed to live.<sup>12</sup> Births were reported as stillbirths, by their distraught families and complicit midwives, and tended not be given a formal burial. In Tanzania, albinos are frequently referred to as *zeruzeru*, which is believed by some to derive from the English word zero and by others as an archaic term for ghost-like creatures, which is likely to relate to their lack of skin pigmentation as well as the denial of the albino's personhood, reflected in the frequent absence of any burial markings at their death.

The birth of an albino child can be a source of family tension. In the diamond mining settlement of Maganzo, a recent albino birth generated a mixed reaction. The father wanted to 'lose the child' because he believed it would bring misfortune on the family, but the mother resisted and, fearing her husband's wrath and threats to the child, ran away with the child. Nonetheless, in caring families, albinos have been able to lead largely normal lives insofar as their health permits, until the recent spread of belief in the albino fetish.<sup>13</sup>

Current evidence suggests that this is a recent innovation rather than a tradition in Tanzanian *waganga* circles. However, historical records infer the use of body parts in East African rituals. Writing on the ingredients of Sukuma magical medicines in the colonial period, Cory (1949: 21–2) stated that human excreta and finger nails were used in medicinal concoctions, and that 'war medicine' was reputed to include the human flesh of fallen enemies, which would be consumed by Sukuma males prior to battle. *Shingira shihanya*, the flesh of deceased wizards and those killed through witchcraft, was considered to impart the power to kill. At present, some Tanzanians see the import of macabre Nigerian videos, which miners and local villagers view as evening entertainment in the mining settlements, as a likely source of innovation. Increasing reports of witchcraft involving body parts in southern Africa (Vincent 2009), and a recent spate of murders of Kenyan taxi drivers associated with mutilation and missing body parts,<sup>14</sup> point to a growing trade in African body parts.<sup>15</sup>

Tanzanian miners have various views on how and why *waganga* started recommending albino body parts as lucky charms to improve their mining efforts. Those interviewed treated the topic gingerly and were usually at pains to personally disassociate themselves from the practice. One miner, suspicious of the *waganga*'s intent, saw the use of the albino fetish as a means 'to deceive people because these *waganga* believe that the *zeruzeru* aren't missed in the community. They believe that they are not useful people and if they die they are not lost' (Simon S., 48 years, Maganzo, 6.6.2009).

One sceptical miner pointed to the analogy between finding rare gold and using rare albino charms when asked about the significance of albino bones: 'I really don't know. Perhaps because they are so few ... Using albino body parts is just plain harmful' (Peter B., 39 years, Matundasi, 19.5.2009). Others denied that there was anything magical about albino body parts or the presence of albinos: 'It is complete stupidity and doesn't have any meaning; anything we have *zeruzeru* also have' (Johannas C., 39 years, Idukilo, 5.6.2009). 'It's just nonsense. They don't bring success. I know completely because a long time ago I worked with albinos in mining and so I asked myself, why weren't diamonds produced at the pit where we worked?' (Simon S., 48 years, Maganzo, 6.6.2009).

Nonetheless, while miners condemned some *waganga* for prescribing albino charms, many felt that the role of the *waganga* in Tanzanian society remained vital to general well-being: 'The bad *waganga* are those that cause these murders but let's be careful [about abolishing them all]. Many Africans have the belief that some illnesses can't be treated at a hospital. People with these ailments depend on traditional medicine, so those so afflicted would be very adversely affected if all *waganga* were forced to give up their practices' (Peter B., 39 years, Matundasi, 19.5.2009).

A Sukuma *mganga* discounted the power of the albino fetish and suggested the culpability of gangs searching for albinos:

We Sukuma do not have a culture of killing people. Our duty is just to be *waganga* using substances extracted from the trees and plants ... The government's moves to constrain *waganga* are very justified because some *waganga* have been causing the death of albinos. That is both wrong and non-functional. Body parts of wild animals may work, but not human body parts. Lions, elephants, etc. are known to have strong powers but the use of albino body parts won't help miners succeed. Maybe some *waganga* think it helps, but there are also some *waganga* who do it for the money and are deceiving people.

(Emmanuel M., 48 years, Matundasi, 19.5.2009)

Local discussion of miners' and *waganga*'s intended means and ends, as opposed to the tragic outcomes of their actions and the inevitable views on the apportionment of blame, is riddled with disgust, fear and vested interest. The materialist profit-seeking rationality of all the agents directly involved, be they miners, *waganga* or the assassins, is underlined by deep-seated beliefs in the power of charms. The albino fetish is a mental construct which requires the abduction, murder and dismembering of albinos for their body parts. The bones are commonly pulverised and either buried in the mine pit, often in the belief that they will turn into gold or gemstones, or alternatively applied on the body during bathing or carried on the body in various forms of amulets for protection or increased luck.

Newspaper reports indicate that most of the murdered albinos were between the ages of 10 and 30. They met their death at the hands of male gangs of assailants,<sup>16</sup> either barging into homes and killing and dismembering sometimes in full view of the victim's family, or alternatively through abduction. Given the sheltered lives of albinos, a local person, not infrequently an extended family member, is likely to be involved who knows the habits, movements and needs of the targeted albino, and leads the victim to a secluded location on the basis of familiarity and trust, where other members of the gang are on hand for the murder and dismembering. The way in which the victim is killed varies, some being subjected to brutal butchering attacks, others preceded by drowning or strangulation, but almost all include body dismemberment with a machete.<sup>17</sup>

*Waganga* sell the fetish to miners for very large sums of money.<sup>18</sup> The *waganga* prescribing, the gangs procuring, and the miners paying for and using the albino fetish are all implicated, but the accusations and arrests are overwhelmingly levelled at the gangs engaged in the actual murder. At the close of 2008, out of ninety arrests only eight were *waganga*.<sup>19</sup> There are only hazy outlines of the agency involved in the inexorable creation of an albino fetish. As protagonists, the *waganga* and miners, representing old and new orders, seemingly converge in their beliefs, motivations and ambitions. Literature on African witchcraft and modernity reveals an interplay between rich and poor and the spirit and material worlds that is relevant to understanding the nature of the albino fetish and its destruction of human life.

In South Africa, witchcraft has been manipulated by powerful and sometimes rich sections of the society at the expense of the poor and helpless (Comaroff & Comaroff 1993, 1999). Geschiere (1997) notes that West Africans now accumulate power and wealth through witchcraft, in contrast to a pattern in which witchcraft is deployed as an instrument for levelling inequality; and that the occult thrives in secretive environments, a point which bears on the present study. Miners harbour secrets. Those who find a rich vein are better off keeping it secret. Secret recourse to magic gives a miner a hoped-for advantage over fellow miners. Agreeing to the *mganga's* offer of an exceptionally powerful charm, an albino body part, is necessarily a secretive undertaking.

The physical appearance and perceived vulnerability of most albinos makes them enigmatic and an easy target for those who believe that human sacrifice is a requisite step towards the aggrandisement of wealth and power. Miners endeavour to enhance their wealth, while *waganga* and their accomplice assassins seek immediate profit at the high end of the market, servicing miners who are cash-rich relative to themselves and most rural

dwellers. *Waganga's* societal role is associated with a conservative patriarchal rural order that is losing its authority as wealth-begetting miners consume conspicuously and attract the attention of local women. However, in the exchange, there is likely to be a net transfer of power and wealth to the *waganga*, from miners who need not only luck but also protection against physical threats to their well-being. By playing on miners' insecurities and selling the albino fetish to them, *waganga* gain wealth and reinvigorate their power and status in the countryside.

The albino fetish exchange may in effect be helping to level the status of the exchange partners. The fetishised albinos are helplessly caught in between. The fact that miners seek the *waganga's* skills to facilitate their mining returns validates the *waganga's* still potent cultural power. By selling albino charms, *waganga* immediately gain wealth and status in consonance with the neo-liberal commodification process. This trade-off originates in the devaluation of albinos' personhood in the traditional rural order. Paradoxically, albinos experience revaluation and are vested with wealth-bestowing powers akin to a deity. The albino fetish has become the most expensive charm because it is perceived as harnessing spirits that are far more powerful than any plant or animal charm that *waganga* could otherwise offer. In so doing, the traditional belief that individual wealth is bought at the cost of human life is fulfilled: *waganga*, assassins and miners, who are party to the fetish exchange, sacrifice the albino victim in their pursuit of personal gain.

Emotively charged, the albino fetish bridges the gulf between the miners and *waganga*, serving both agents' aspirations for wealth and power.<sup>20</sup> The creation of the albino fetish remains a murky area. Who specifically instigated it? It is unlikely that anyone will ever be able to trace this. Who is propagating it? Unidentified *waganga*, be they bona fide traditionally trained or commercial upstarts or both, have ubiquitously vested albino body parts with special powers under competitive pressure to gain an edge in the lucky charm market. Only a handful of miners, convinced of the power of the albino fetish, could spark rumours with an outreach capable of launching a new ritual fashion, which is then sustained on the basis of miners' curiosity, competitiveness and cash outlays. But it is important to stress that many miners reject the fashion on rational grounds, or condemn it from a humanist position. As for the *waganga*, it is impossible to establish whether the fetish-initiating and prescribing *waganga* are restricted to the commercially motivated con-man fringe of practitioners. Court proceedings to date, which focus primarily on the contract killers, do not reveal the layered complexity of the *waganga's* supply of the albino fetish.

The albino fetish seems to be taking a somewhat similar course to the Sukuma witch killings, whereby diviners targeted old women well beyond their productive and reproductive prime as witches. Culturally ostracised and not accorded a social identity, albinos occupy a void in which they are seen as receptacles for the spirit world, or in the words of Stroeken (2008: 156) a fetishised ‘token emptied of intrinsic meaning, purified from cultural norms and brought down to the coincidence of convention’. In fetish creation, they are dehumanised and deified. The Comaroffs (1993) draw attention to how the human body and emotions are consumed in witchcraft, unveiling changing power relations and values. Witchcraft is not merely a metaphor for social change, but acts out social change, and often shapes it. As global mineral market chains expand in the region, the illusive wealth-bestowing powers of the market become concentrated in human bodies that were previously devalued, while mineral deposits previously ignored become the central pivot of the local and national economy.

The succession of brutal murders of albinos in Sukumaland has inflicted a reign of terror on them and their families. Fear of abduction has prevented many young albinos from attending local primary schools.<sup>21</sup> Most albinos hide in the confines of their home, knowing that even there they are not safe. The Tanzanian government has provided sheltered accommodation for some during this crisis, but this is not a long-term sustainable solution. For the most part albinos have lost their freedom of movement and live in fear for their lives (Red Cross 2009).

#### MURDER WITH IMPUNITY?

The tragedy of the albinos’ predicament in Tanzania has been compounded by the outrage of the victims’ families and a concerned national and international public, who witnessed a lack of judicial response to the growing number of albino murders for a year and a half from the time the murders began. Mesaki (2009) recounts a similar situation with respect to the cumulative murder of witches in Sukumaland during the 1970s and early 1980s. The 2,347 witch-related deaths were followed by 1,662 arrests, but only seven cases had been prosecuted and ended in convictions by 1988. He observes that court proceedings were greatly impeded by lack of substantive evidence. The murderers tended not to be local but had been led to their victim by locals, sometimes family members. Those giving evidence were therefore not familiar with the ‘hit and run’ assassins and afraid of pointing to those locally involved for fear of reprisals.

The albino murders quickly attracted media attention when they began in 2007. Despite mounting internal and external pressure, the Tanzanian government was slow to prosecute anyone for the crimes. The first convictions for albino murders took place in neighbouring Burundi in July 2009, where nine out of the eleven men charged were convicted for the murder of albinos. They had formed a gang operating in Burundi to export albino body parts to Tanzania's lucrative market.<sup>22</sup> Immediately after the Burundi trial, and under pressure from a lawsuit promulgated by human rights activists,<sup>23</sup> the Tanzanian government announced that they were proceeding with a clutch of murder trials in zonal courts in Mwanza and Shinyanga.<sup>24</sup> The first Tanzanian conviction emerged in September 2009<sup>25</sup> for the murder of Matatizo Dunia, a 13-year-old boy who was hacked to death in full view of his family. Three men were convicted and sentenced to death.

The second conviction that followed, with widely reported court proceedings, affords insight into the agency involved in the murder. The victim was a 54-year-old albino man from Isanga village with learning difficulties. His brother-in-law promised to take him for medical treatment at a distant hospital. Their journey began in the middle of the night. On the way, the victim was jumped on at a river crossing, pinned down and drowned before his legs and head were chopped off. In addition to his brother-in-law's involvement, three other men were accused, one being the village chairman. The local reference point for the trade in the albino body parts was Lamadi, a local settlement located at the fork of roads to Uganda and Kenya. In the court proceedings it was alleged that a Lamadi businessman had commissioned the assassins to kill an albino, destined for delivery to a local witch doctor.<sup>26</sup> The named businessman and unnamed *mganga* were not tried.

Some local newspapers suggested that witch doctors behind the albino killings were being protected by government officials.<sup>27</sup> With the local justice system stretched by the expense of staffing and costs of transporting and accommodating witnesses, there was a temporary hiatus in the albino court proceedings, but upon resumption verdicts were reached. Seven men were convicted and sentenced to death in the first two cases tried.<sup>28</sup> International NGOs, which had worked to speed up justice, were dismayed by the death penalty.<sup>29</sup> The chairman of the Tanzanian Albino Society, Ernest Kimaya, did not share their view: 'It is in the holy books that a person who kills must also be killed. So those murderers have to be hanged to death since he who lives by the sword shall perish by it.'<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, the Tanzanian government put tight clamps on *waganga* activities. In January 2009 traditional healers' licences to practice were

revoked by the Tanzanian Prime Minister. Two months later the government issued a general call for people to come forward with any information about *waganga*'s activities in connection with the albino killings, and to report *waganga* who were still practicing. While the murders declined in number, the murder of a 4-year-old albino girl, and the chopping off of the hand of a 13-year-old albino girl in April 2010, following the first death sentence convictions in late 2009, indicated that the albino fetish was not going to be eradicated simply by the death sentence threat.<sup>31</sup>

The integrity of *waganga* was in the public spotlight. People asked for the arrest of 'fake *waganga*', but the decentralised nature of Sukuma society and the traditional training of *waganga* did not afford easy distinctions between 'fake' and 'professional' *waganga*. It was generally believed that inadequate accreditation procedures and loose professional ties of Sukuma *waganga* made it possible for many unscrupulous interlopers to practice as *waganga*, and that they were to blame for the albino murders.

Tanzania's Prime Minister, Mizengo Pinda, announced in January 2009 that people caught red-handed murdering albinos should be killed on the spot.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, the *sungusungu* village-based communal militias have not responded to this call and have kept a low profile. *Sungusungu* generally deal with local criminality and have been known to punish adulterers, runaway wives, debtors and suspected witches (Abrahams 1998; Mesaki 1994). Sometimes violent, the *sungusungu* have been accused of the extrajudicial killing of suspected thieves before trial. However, *sungusungu* normally act as peacemakers with village council members, arbitrating disputes and fining or ostracising people for statutory and 'social' crimes. *Sungusungu* rely on what is colloquially termed *ndege ya chini*,<sup>33</sup> with the assistance of diviners to solve local crimes and accusations of witchcraft. In crimes conducted by influential locals and people with economic power, the *sungusungu* are rarely able to act because they are so deeply embedded in the local community's political structure.<sup>34</sup> Under these circumstances, the overlap between state, citizenry, class and ritual authority militates against the *sungusungu*'s ability or desire to engage with albino murder cases. Thus, it is not only the Tanzanian national government which has been slow to respond to the murders. At the local level, the checks and balances of power in Sukuma rural society, so closely linked to local diviners, are in disarray and largely unable to provide self-regulation, let alone remedially address the threats to albinos' lives.



Over the past two decades, the bonanza of successive artisanal diamond and gold strikes has rocked rural Sukumaland. Traditionally, the Sukuma's agro-pastoralist culture valued hard work, frugal living standards and collective well-being. Presently, few rural dwellers in Sukumaland doubt that miners work hard, but it is the way that they earn their money, the large amounts that some of them earn, and the conspicuous way they spend it, that are resented by many rural dwellers.

*Waganga* traditional healers and diviners have been axiomatic to the traditional order of Sukumaland. Miners are now inadvertently destabilising the political and moral economy of the Sukuma countryside, through their work activities at the base of global gold and diamond value chains and their pursuit of individualised lifestyles. Local people, gravitating towards the mining settlements' service economy, become indirectly dependent on artisanal mine earnings. Ironically, *waganga* play a key part in the miners' service economy as well. Miners who seek magical intervention from the *waganga* demonstrate their regard for the *waganga*'s expertise.

The *waganga* compete with one another to attract customers, and somewhere along the way the albino fetish was creatively devised in the interface between miners' demands for an effective charm and *waganga* efforts to supply a charm for which miners would be willing to pay handsomely. The rarity of albino body parts, analogous to the rarity of gold and diamonds, attracts miners who believe in the power of the albino fetish to generate mineral discovery. The *waganga* prescribing albino body parts may be part of the cadre of the traditionally trained, or imposters posing as trusted *waganga* to gain a foothold in a lucrative market.

While the international and national press sensationalise the albino murders as primitive killings fuelled by greed and poverty, it is important to distinguish these murders from historical patterns of Sukuma *uganga* practices and suspected witch killings. Differences are evident in a then and now comparison of the exchange between the miner and the *waganga*. First, Sukuma *waganga* were traditionally consulted to offer retrospective interpretation of events and social interaction; their main role was to remedy affliction of one or another type, notably to cure illness, reverse misfortune, and restore the status quo of well-being. Now, miners are asking *waganga* to facilitate their future mining success.

Second, illness was formerly explained in terms of the wider community in which the individual lived. Emphasis was placed on identifying what misalignment had taken place in the individual's social relationships in his/her family and local setting. Now, social interrelationships between the miner and his family and neighbours are not so much at issue. Mining

clients may seek help to prevent discord between mining colleagues, but they are primarily imploring *waganga* to provide the instrumental means to achieve their material profit-seeking goals. The *waganga* are less psychologists than pharmacists, and are on hand to dispense the most effective medication to enable the individual to succeed.<sup>35</sup> Gangs of paid assassins with local accomplices murdering albinos do so without reference to or concern for the resolution of local interrelationships. They are also engaged in a profit-making service.

Third, the social ideal amongst Sukuma was traditionally one of egalitarian consumption. This nonetheless took place amidst the accumulation of cattle and wives by patriarchal patrons who regulated homestead production and controlled social relations. *Waganga* facilitated social rule enforcement and maintenance of the decentralised power nodes of the patriarchal homestead heads, generating awareness, respect, awe and fear in the regulatory powers of the spirit world that they mediated. But this power base has now been seriously eroded as Tanzanian agriculture has declined and mining has surged. The albino fetish has unobtrusively become a means to redress the local power imbalance through trade in a fetishised commodity vested with value reflecting the convergence of interests of the old and new order. Now *waganga* are on a 'charm offensive', projecting themselves as the medium through which material success can be gained. They trade in neo-traditional modernity at the expense of the safety, welfare and human life of local albinos. In the creation of the albino fetish, albinos have paradoxically been both dehumanised and deified.

Evans-Pritchard's (1937) classic work on witchcraft among the Azande of Sudan stresses that witchcraft and magic were utilised to explain *why* rather than *how* things happened. Now, given the current craving for magic with favourable future outcomes, we see *waganga* taking on a new role of facilitating individual material success rather than social harmony and understanding. The albino fetish has creatively emerged from exchange between agents representing two very different value systems: that of a localised patriarchal, agro-pastoralist community with its power source vested in male elders, and that of comparatively young miners in new settlements tied to global value chains. At a symbolic level, the albino fetish represents the perpetuation of collective human-centred valuation, in conformity with Tanzanian *waganga* traditional practices, but through fetish commodification, *waganga* and miners realise value through the dehumanisation of the conduit of value, the albino. In other words, the result is a travesty of human-centred valuation: albinos' lives are sacrificed for the individual monetary gain of miners, *waganga*, and their assassin accomplices.

Wijzen (2008) argues that the Sukuma have historically been a far too pragmatic people to let religious rituals and magic beliefs get in the way of their daily livelihood pursuits and material objectives. This accords with our assessment that the albino fetish does not represent deeply rooted traditional spiritual beliefs, and observation that witchcraft murder has historical antecedents in Sukumaland. Albino bodies are a newly fashioned commodity rooted in accelerating capitalist competition, dramatising the existence of pockets of opportunistic wealth accumulation amidst proliferating poverty. Miners' search for luck and success has given impetus to the creation of a fetish, with interest in it spreading to various walks of life.

It is useful to step back from the Tanzanian albino fetish to consider magic in other mining settings. Nash (1979, 2001) and Taussig (1980) point to the layer upon layer of disparate beliefs that are accommodated within the world view and belief system of Latin American tin miners. Their unsynthesised retention of beliefs from an agricultural past and successive waves of foreign ideological influences were linked to the potential for dichotomised self-expression and identity in relation to their choice between capitalist acculturation or traditionalist beliefs. Certainly this has resonance with Tanzanian miners, some of whom believe in *waganga's* powers, and others adamantly disbelieve or adopt attitudes ranging between the two positions.

The interface between miners and *waganga* has created a fetish around which miner, *mganga* and assassin all have material gain rationalised in a symbolic world of scarcity in which albinos and minerals are intimately linked. The production of the fetish through the act of murder is integral to the process of seemingly limitless commodification embedded in the logic of capitalism. The albino fetish promises wealth and success, in a way very similar to the logic and promise of the global market, whereby liberalised competitive markets are seen as optimisers of the world's wealth and welfare in all places, for all functions, at all times. The human costs involved in market operations are always discounted against economic efficiency and successful wealth generation of individuals and capitalist firms. The global market is in effect a mega fetish, engaging people in exchange from a multitude of cultures, all under the belief of net gain for everyone. There are seemingly never any losers. Those who can't compete should simply go elsewhere, find some other place to live and work, or disappear like the *zeruzeru*.

Despite these correlations, there is a difference between Tanzanian miners' albino fetish and the global market fetish of neo-liberalism. Albino deaths are tragic and seen as such in Tanzania. By contrast, while the

Western liberal world condemns the albino deaths as barbarism, there is ideological blindness to the implications of the global market fetish in the developing world. Global capitalism has an enveloping logic that can undermine livelihoods, destabilise local rural economies, and distort the humanism of long-standing agrarian cultures and exchange relationships within families, communities and nation-states worldwide, with scant regard for the welfare outcome of those adversely affected.

Returning to Graeber's (2005) concept of fetish creation, and in order to update fetish creation in relation to global capitalist trade, we acknowledge that the albino fetish is not foreign trade per se. Tanzanian miners and *waganga* trading partners represent different sub-cultures within a national culture undergoing rapid and radical transformation. Miners of the neo-liberal global order and *waganga* of the rural agrarian order are polarised on the basis of occupation, generation, and above all their positionality vis-à-vis global neoliberal market opportunities. They have nonetheless created an arena in which their values become interactive, which Graeber sees as a dimension of action divorced from the object that is jointly created. The object is vested with intrinsic powers, which, in the case of the albino fetish, implicates both agents in the act of murder. 'Fetishes exist precisely at the point where conventional distinctions between "magic" and "religion" become meaningless, where charms become deities' (*ibid.*: 427).

In conclusion, it is important to stress that many miners are indifferent to, scorn or condemn the use of albino body parts, at the same time as fascination with the fetish now extends beyond the arena of Tanzanian miners to other occupational walks of life and neighbouring countries, propelled by people eager for material success. It is grossly simplistic to assume that the albino fetish simply reflects primitive beliefs which can be eradicated through education. Nor can it be regarded solely as a response to a capitalist profit motive that can be addressed by curbing exploitative practices or supporting the poor. The albino fetish arises from the logics of two incongruent social orders, which have collided with one another. The fetish has bridged the divide generating a symbolic modus operandi between the old agrarian order and a new coalescing mining-centred power bloc in Sukumaland. In the quest for mutually beneficial exchange and material rewards, miners and *waganga* have simultaneously marginalised, dehumanised, objectified and deified albinos, many of whom are among the rural society's most vulnerable members.

However, in this arena of cultural improvisation, albinos are starting to assert themselves as protagonists, taking the lead in demanding justice through the death penalty – a first step in rectifying their dehumanisation

through posthumous deification. With the scheduling of further court cases, they are now increasingly positioning themselves as active agents endeavouring to relegate the albino fetish fashion to the dark corners of Tanzanian history. Western liberals may wince at the biblical justice that one albino spokesman called for, but fetish creation as well as fetish deconstruction are about corporeality and the fascination and fear that body parts invoke in the human imagination across cultural divides.

## NOTES

1. The link to albino murders has also been associated with the small-scale fishing industry at Lake Victoria (*The Citizen* 20.10.2008).

2. Some uncertainty regarding the exact number of killings exists since not all murders have been reported to the police. There have been thirty-five police-investigated murder cases. Many observers do not distinguish between murders and physical assault cases that were not fatal. Tanzania Albino Society (TAS) statistics record forty-six albino killed and seven wounded (interview with Ernest Kimaya, TAS Chairperson and Ibrahim Daudi Tully, TAS Secretary in Kisarawe District, 16.3.2010). Since then, there have been five albino attacks, one resulting in the death of a four-year-old albino girl (*Nipashe* 21.4.2010).

3. In this study, 'Sukumaland' is used to denote Mwanza and Shinyanga regions, the original homeland and areas of historical migration of the Sukuma people. However, Sukumaland is increasingly inhabited by people from various ethnic groups as mining and trading activities expand. Similarly, Sukuma people have migrated in large numbers to the surrounding regions of Kagera, Tabora, Rukwa and Mbeya.

4. In May and June 2009, court cases were instigated in Shinyanga, Mwanza and Tabora, along with a trial in Burundi where eleven suspects were charged with twelve albino murders and the transport of body parts to Tanzania (*Daily News* 5.5.2009, 7.6.2009; *Radio Nederland Wereldroep* 20.5.2009).

5. In August 2009, Canada-based albino campaign group *Under the Same Sun*, criticised the suspension of the trials of suspected albino killers at Kahama and Shinyanga High Courts. The Tanzanian Government cited lack of funds as the reason for delay (*The East African* 17.8.2009).

6. Our intention is to offer provisional analysis in the hope of encouraging research and discussion to counter the primitivist interpretations underlining much of the national and international press coverage (e.g. 'Albino Africans live in fear after witch-doctor butchery', *The Guardian* [London] 16.11.2008). In the debate about whether reports of occult practices are rumour or reality, Caplan (2010: 6) quotes Paul Richards: 'But I still have a nagging sense that some of these events may have been real ... I think it would be wise for us to at least entertain this possibility, and perhaps then to develop some theory about when fantasy passes into opportunity.'

7. The Kiswahili prefix distinctions for 'medical practitioner' are: *waaganga* (plural), *mganga* (singular) and *uganga* to refer to traditional medicine per se. Kiswahili rather than Kisukuma terms are commonly used to denote traditional medicine. Our interviews with informants were conducted in Kiswahili.

8. Cory (1949: 13) noted that Sukuma medicinal practices have no identifiable origins, and result from an amalgam of beliefs and practices from the areas' inhabitants and those that encompass and pass through it.

9. An alternative village-based law enforcement institution in the area consists of local *sungusungu* vigilante militias, which originated in Mwanza and Shinyanga in the late 1970s, instigated by villagers as an effort to protect themselves from cattle raids. It has since been co-opted by the government to provide a semi-structured system of communal policing throughout the region (Abrahams 1998).

10. Personal communications, Koen Stroeken, 14.3.2009; Ray Abrahams, 12.6.2009. A more general debate within the Tanzania Studies Association (January 2009) about the position of albinos in Tanzanian society did not reveal a precedent for albino murders. Dr Jeff Luande, Tanzania's foremost expert on skin cancer who has been treating albinos for decades, commented that the killings seemed to 'come from nowhere' (Red Cross 2009: 13).

11. Genetic mutations associated with the population forming the Bantu migration from west to southern Africa over 3,000 years ago increased the average likelihood of albinism at birth from 1:20,000 to 1:3,000 in East Africa (King & Summers 2005), inferring that the albino population in Tanzania, a country with a population of roughly 40 million would be 13,000, 5,000 more than the TAS estimate of 8,000.

12. Personal communications, Koen Stroeken, 14.3.2009, and Simeon Mesaki, 3.9.2009.

13. Interview with Simon S., Maganzo, 6.6.2009.

14. *Capital News* 1.9.2009.

15. See Scheper-Hughes (2000) for an insightful overview of the growing international trade in body parts.

16. The gangs themselves are said to use 'I don't understand' (*sielewi*) charms, which seem to desensitise them to their actions. Despite African reverence for the buried dead, it is rumoured that some deceased albinos are dug up for their bones. Hence a new practice has begun of some burying their albino relations in concrete coffins to prevent thieves from exhuming the graves.

17. Confirmed by Al-Shaimaa Kwegyir MP who visited several of the victims' families (interview, 16.3.2010).

18. Tanzanian police placed the market value of a complete albino body at US\$75,000 (Red Cross 2009, confirmed by Hon. Al-Shaimaa Kwegyir, who has tried to convince the media to avoid mentioning the price, as it could result in escalated killings). US\$2,000 for albino bones was the price quoted by one *mganga* in a video made in 2009 by BBC journalist Vicky Ntetema when she posed as a potential client (BBC News <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/a/hi/world/africa/7523796.stm>). On 3 February 2010, two men were arrested in Kagera Region in possession of two albino body parts, which they tried to sell for 600,000 Tsh (US\$450) (*Daily News* 6.2.2010).

19. *Daily News* 2.11.2008.

20. Whitehouse (2002) argues that low-frequency, high-arousal rituals create meaning that is deeply imprinted in the minds of the initiate. This may be akin to miners' attraction to the albino fetish whose promised effectiveness involves the traumatic use of body parts to symbolically cement belief in its power to deliver success.

21. Tanzanian schools for the disabled in Mwanza region have had a large cluster (103) of albino boarding students seeking safety there (Red Cross 2009).

22. BBC news service, 28.5.2009 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/africa/8071405.stm>). Sukumaland has been a destination for Burundian refugees for many years.

23. Human right activists led by the Legal and Human Rights Centre and the chairperson of TAS petitioned before the High Court in Dar es Salaam on 20 March 2009, for failure to take action against albino murderers (*Daily News* 7.6.2009).

24. 6 March 2009 was the beginning of the government's nation-wide campaign to ask people to come forward to name those suspected of albino killings (*Daily News* 9.5.2009).

25. *Daily News* 23.9.2009.

26. *Daily News* 11.6. 2009.

27. 'Tanzania: Dar told – resume trials of albino killers', *The East African* 17.8.2009. In the earlier court proceedings for the witchcraft killings, Mesaki (2009: 85) observed that 'justice was up for sale' as the local-level courts were increasingly not attending to petitioners. In Shinyanga, traditional healers were alleging that the police force had extracted over 30 million Tsh from them for not arresting them (*Tanzanian Affairs* 2009: 32).

28. The death penalty in Tanzania had not been carried out since 1995.

29. *Times Online* [London] 4.11.2009.

30. Kimaya voiced his surprise that NGO 'activists, who had been pressing the Government to take tough actions against the albino killers, were now campaigning in their favour', urging the government to speed up subsequent trials so that 'the remaining suspects ... could all be punished for their crimes', *The Citizen* 7.11.2009.

31. The press reported that the girl's assailants made efforts to keep her alive (*Majira* 30.4.2010), which may be interpreted as an attempt to evade the death sentence by stopping short of murder.

32. The Prime Minister stated: 'It may be an unusual statement by a prime minister, and I wish to confirm that I made the remarks to send a clear message to albino killers. They should know that if they are caught, they will have to face the fate they had hoped their victims would suffer... A person who knows that he will be killed when caught in the act of killing an albino will think twice before embarking on such an evil mission' ('PM: Yes, killers of albinos should die', *The Citizen* 28.1.2009).

33. Literally a 'low-flying bird', a term used to describe rumour mongering and secret confessions about crimes.

34. Every adult male (18 years and above) belonging to an established household within a village is a member of the *sungusungu* with the leaders composed of village elders, village government council and local diviners.
35. See Stroeken 2010 for a detailed study of the Sukuma *waganga's* therapeutic roles.

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