

# African Research Review

*An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia*

*Vol. 9(4), Serial No. 39, September, 2015:37-54*

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print)

ISSN 2070-0083 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrev.v9i4.4>

---

## **‘We thought we will be safe here’: Narratives of Tanzanian Albinos in Kenya and South-Africa**

**Ikuomola, Adediran Daniel**

Department of Sociology

Adekunle Ajasin University

P. M. B. 001, Akungba-Akoko;

Ondo State, Nigeria

Postdoctoral Fellow, School of Social and Government Studies,

North-West University-Potchefstroom, South Africa

E-mail: [diranreal@yahoo.com](mailto:diranreal@yahoo.com); [adediran.ikuomola@aau.edu.ng](mailto:adediran.ikuomola@aau.edu.ng)

### **Abstract**

There are paucity of information on the migratory trend and security challenges facing albinos seeking refuge and livelihood in neighbouring African countries. Specifically this study examines Tanzanian albinos' migration, acceptability and security challenges in Kenya and South Africa. The study was purely qualitative in nature, involving a hundred and forty-five persons with albinism (PWA) identified in Nairobi (Kenya) and Gauteng province (South Africa). Realities, myths, folktales and legends about albinos as both disabled and divine beings prevailed in the host communities in Kenya and South Africa. Comparatively socioeconomic factors such as income and educational attainment of PWA and their family members were major factors informing choices of destination and abode. This was evident in a number of affluent albinos living in South Africa. Nevertheless, acceptability and safety continue to elude PWA as spirit beings and strangers. They are left vulnerable as strangers and at best perceived as persons without identity. Similarly the proximity of Tanzania to Kenya

facilitated the choice as a major destination for PWA via land borders. The security expectations were described as poor in both countries. A network of syndicates hunting for albinos, were said to be present in Kenya and South Africa, fostering trades in albinos body parts. The study concluded that distant migration of PWA within Africa, does not guarantee the security of albinos as migrants.

**Key words:** Persons with albinism, migrants, realities, myth, insecurity.

### **Introduction**

Albinism is a genetic condition in which a person lacks the gene for producing melanin - the pigment that protects the skin from ultraviolet light from the sun. Persons with albinism (PWA) may lack pigmentation in the skin, eyes and hair. The exact prevalence of albinism in the human race is not clear but estimates say that the ratio is about 1 in 17,000 (Wiete 2011). In Africa, the range is from 1 in 5,000 to 1 in 15,000 (Hong et al. 2006). In 1995, the range of PWA in Tanzania was 1 in 1, 500 (Lookingbill et al. 1995), while recent range indicate 1 in 3,000. Estimates for Tanzania quote the total population of persons with albinism at about 170,000 (Thuku 2011). It is, however, more prevalent in some parts of the world than in others. In Nigeria, for example the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, (2008) puts it at 1:1100; while in South Africa it is estimated at 1:3900. Statistically, Africa seems to have a high prevalence of people born with albinism. That said, it is important to understand that albinism is found in all races and not just among the people of the black race. The gene that carries albinism is a recessive gene or a gene that is not dominant. The recessive gene for albinism becomes expressed only when two parents carrying the recessive genes pass them to the child (Brilliant 2009). The albinism gene may 'hibernate' for generations only to spring back when a child who carries the recessive gene is born.

There are several classes, types and sub-types of albinism defined by the measure to which there is a lack of melanin and what body parts affected (National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation NOAH; 2008). In most communities across the world, albinism is hardly (or not) understood. Myths and misconceptions surround the condition. A common feature of albinos is that they experience stigma as people with white skin in black societies, as people with disabilities, of low vision or blindness and susceptibility to contracting skin cancers. Major health and social issues for Africans with albinism affect their education, social inclusion, life chances and security. This is amplified in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa largely because the condition is thought of as evil, a curse, or as some form of punishment from the gods or the ancestors for something wrong done by the parents (Blankenberg 2000; Baker et.al. 2010). While in other communities it is believed to be as a result of intercourse during the hot afternoon (Abogunrin 1989; Ayantayo 1999; Delaney 2008). For centuries, children born with albinism have been routinely killed immediately after birth by parents and mid-wives. Myths about albinism continue to persist in many parts

of Africa. However in recent times the attribution of albinos as persons whose body parts are endowed with supernatural powers for money making rituals has intensified the spate of killings, by contract killers and witchdoctors in some certain quarters in Africa, most especially in Tanzania, and the Great Lakes district in East Africa region (Brown 2008; Burke, 2012). In other parts of Africa there have been documented cases of PWA being murder in Swaziland, Guinea, Nigeria, South Africa, Congo, Zambia, Namibia, Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso (UTSS 2014). Most of the killings have occurred in Tanzania's western region near Lake Victoria (Brown 2008). Attacks are mainly being reported in Tanzania, which has a reputation for free press, but it is believed many attacks and killings in these countries are not documented, or at best underreported (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2009). Many albinos face persecution, targeted and killed for their body parts which are thought to bring good luck. Since 1998, the organization 'Under the Same Sun' (UTSS) documented 332 attacks on people with albinism in 24 African countries, including 147 in Tanzania alone (Oakford 2014). After the famous 2008 BBC report on the 'Tanzanian trade in body parts' horrified the international community, activists began paying closer attention to the plight of albinos in the country (Ntetema 2008; Schnoebelen 2009). According to UTSS, in 2008 alone about 30 albinos were reported to have been killed in Tanzania. Investigations by the Tanzania police force are often hindered because neighbours and sometimes relatives were involved in the violence and attacks on people with albinism (UTSS 2014).

Brown (2008) noted that the lucrative trade in albino fingers, feet, even penises is driving the killings. The trade in albinos' body parts has also informed the recent practice and family decisions to bury deceased albino relatives in unmarked graves out of fear that their body parts will be harvested even in death (Oakford 2014). Similarly the organization Under the Same Sun (UTSS 2014), through its field work and research; reported the death of 74 albinos, 58 survivors (all deeply traumatized and most are severely mutilated), 16 grave robberies and 2 failed grave robbery attempt. On August 14, 2014, a mutilated body of an unidentified man with albinism estimated to be between the age of 20-25 was found dead by children dumped in a swampy area of Kinyerezi, located in a suburb of Tanzania's largest city, Dar es Saalam. Thus the continuous movement of albinos internally, first from rural areas down to the city centres within Tanzania, and secondly to neighbouring countries where fewer people believe in witchcraft, and where albino rights can be protected as well as their safety as human beings are guaranteed. Less attention is given to the phenomenon of albinos migrating across borders in Africa as well as other categories of persons with disabilities not always in migration literatures. Migration experts often tend to focus on nationalities and gender as key variables in the analysis of migration flow. Because a person with albinism is an illustrative example of the deleterious effects of ultraviolet light, the requirements of absolute protection from the sun due to their extreme

sensitivity to ultraviolet light, and the general bio-medical conditions ordinarily have been thought of as hindering the movement of persons with albinism. However amidst the current insecurity and hunting of PWA in East Africa more and more albinos are faced with no other option but to migrate and seek for better life and hideouts.

### **Notes on Empirical Data Collection**

This article is based on ethnographic data collected in Kenya (Nairobi and its suburbs) and South Africa Johannesburg and its suburbs (Gauteng province). The data for the study was collected in two phases between December 2012 and July 2013 in Kenya and October 2013 to March 2014 in South Africa. Originally the study was meant to be in Kenya only, having discovered from an earlier pilot study, which shows that some Tanzanian families were seeking refuge in Kenya, in order to protect their albino children and/or relatives. Interviews and discussions revealed that educated albinos, (mostly adults and the working class), affluent families with children and relatives with albinism and others with financial supports from NGOs, and religious organizations were also migrating for safety to South Africa. This was also justified as Kenya and South Africa are primary destinations for many East Africans and specifically for many Tanzanians, for the simple reason that Tanzania is the only country in both the East African Community (EAC) and the [Southern African Development Community](#) (SADC).

Thus the need to expand the study on PWA further while researching as a postdoctoral fellow in South Africa became necessary. The study started with the tracing of PWA's residences and locations, through friends and later through head teachers and principals in secondary schools, key informants in shopping malls, markets, and religious centres. At the end of the fourteen months research period, a hundred and forty-five (145) PWAs we engaged in life histories interviews. This was done using a Wengraf (2001) Life –history qualitative research interviewing, which involves a biographic narrative and semi-structured method questionnaire “*tell me the story of your life*”. The interest in life narratives among many contemporary social scientists is not so much in the substantive events these stories depict but the meanings the person attaches to such facts. How people choose to frame the events of their lives says as much about the psychology of the individual—his or her personality, identity, or self— as it does about the events and structural conditions experienced or experiencing (Maruna and Copes 2005). Age and ability to narrate the movement from Tanzania and challenges of current wellbeing and safety conditions in a new environment served as the main inclusion criteria for participation. Respondents' age range falls between 14 and 41 years. The one-on-one interviews took place in residential apartments and shopping centres, and at their convenience. The interviews were jotted and lasted between 50 minutes and 1 hour. Participants were encouraged to express their views without exaggerations and share examples, from their life

experiences in Kenya and South Africa. The shared experiences of respondents form the background from which the topic and subthemes of this article were generated. The analysis of the data concealed the identity (with the use of pseudonyms where necessary) and specific location of the respondents. Respondents' narratives revolve round their migration, current wellbeing and safety conditions and general life challenges. These form the basis of the discussion of findings. First the analysis described the socioeconomic factors such as income and educational attainment of PWA, family members of migrant albinos', choice of destination and abode, acceptability and their safety in a new environment. This was made possible by the postdoctoral fellowship funds from, North-West University Potchefstroom South – Africa (2014), American Council of Learned Society/African Humanities Programme (2013), and the exposure the Partnership for Social and Governance Research (PASGR), Kenya gave from the series of workshops and visits to Nairobi in 2012 and 2013 Multi-method Research Workshops.

### **Demographic Characteristic of Respondents**

The study comprised of 145 respondents (92 males and 53 females) PWA in all. Respondents engaged were more in Kenya (94 respondents), for many reasons, Kenya is a border country which means there is the tendency for many Tanzanian parents with children and relatives with albinos to easily walk through the border, with little or no difficulties financially as well as less immigration restrictions. Secondly extended families were said to be living in Kenya and some were already Kenyan nationals. This provides a relaxed platform to get settled in terms of accommodation, employment and schooling. Similarly apart from the proximity and the presence of relatives, Kenya is described as the economic headquarter of the region, hosting major multinational, non-governmental, charitable, civil liberty, and human rights organizations. The presence of these advocacy organisations gives a perceived and psychology relief to PWAs in the country. Another added advantage that favours the migration of Tanzanians (PWA) to Kenya, is the Swahili language which is well spoken across the East African communities.

In South Africa, 51 respondents were engaged in the study. Distance and the financial implication of migrating to South Africa accounted for the fewer number of respondents in comparison to Kenya. By gender, there were more male respondents (92) outnumbering the females (53) in both countries. Specifically there were 37 males to 14 females in South Africa, as against 55 males to 39 females in Kenya. The proportionate disparity between the number of males and females PWA as obtained in Kenya and South Africa supports extant literatures that men tend to dominate migration statistics in Africa (Piper 2005; Gugler 2008). There are however evidences that women are becoming an increasing part of migration streams in many regions, including Africa (Reed 2010). The possibility of safe guiding male albinos can be

inferred, as many developing countries still give preference to the survival of male children due to the lack of insurance markets and social safety nets generally (Lambert & Rossi 2014). A large literature describes the use of family as insurance, mentioning for instance, family income diversification strategy through migration (Rosenzweig 1988), or children acting as old-age insurance for their parents (Nugent 1985; Hoddinott 1992).

### **Migrants Albinos's: Myths and Realities in Host Communities**

The presence and migration of albinos in societies and neighbourhoods identified as black, is often characterized with a lot of mixed feelings, first as 'migrants', second as 'strange beings'. PWA or even a white person in any black community would most times result in questions that are often not objectively answered. Consequently for PWA there have been a number of explanations for this apparent anomaly and often reasons are alluded, many of which prevail and find their justification in much older myths and folklores (Blankenberg 2000; Baker et. al., 2010). Though just like in many countries, host communities and migrants' relationship has often been strained in times of economic crisis and depression. It has also been noted that in period of intense mortality, infectious diseases, and struggle for survival, host communities tend to put the blame on migrants who are perceived as jostling for the same jobs, and thereby reducing limited opportunities leading to violent attacks on migrants (Morris 1998). Deep seated negative feelings, perceptions and attitudes towards migrants' culture and personality were evident in the xenophobic violence in South Africa, with particular reference to August, 2006; and May 2008 attacks on foreigners (Neocosmos 2008; Matsinhe 2011). Statements from Tanzanian respondents echo the nuances surrounding the xenophobia in South Africa and attacks in times of conflict. They strongly believed that the presence and scapegoating of foreign nationals in any host community extends to all irrespective of skin colour (R11, R2, R120). In Kenya, a respondent in her small kiosk noted that 'it is one of the primary reasons her economic and physical well-being is being threatened'. She elaborated thus:

My life experiences and that of other physically challenged persons, who are not Kenyans, are very much similar in many aspects. As migrants, there is this misconception that we have deliberately come to their country to infect them with albinism. While nationals with same conditions are pitied, we as foreigners are frowned at, once they get to know you are not originally Kenyan, chances of getting assistance reduce drastically, especially among the illiterates (R11/Female/37years/Kenya).

Another respondent noted that, some elderly persons in his neighbourhood often took him as a white person when walking the street alone. This he said gave him some kind of respect at first but later the reversed became the case.

On arrival in Johannesburg, three years ago, some old persons used to think I am white, they will happily speak Afrikaans to me, but when I fail to respond, the expression on their faces automatically change. But now in my neighbourhood, most people have come to know I am not a white boy and, neither am I South African. I cannot speak any of the major languages, but the nick name remains 'the only white guy in the building' (R2/Male/19years/South Africa).

Another revealed that the hatred of West Africans are transferred to them when they get to know, that they are not South Africans, but a migrant with albinism:

Since most time I walk with my relatives and make friends mostly with other migrants from West Africa, the hatred is doubled, because some see me as a white girl dating a black guy which is often not the norm in the country, while others see me as evil and dissociate themselves from me. At night younger once will chant derogatory remarks in their dialect. As a migrant in this condition all I do is to make sure I try as much as possible to return early to my apartment and hang out with only friends that are known to me and my guardian (R12/Female/22 years/South Africa).

The dissociating habits of some communities members from PWA, was narrated as having serious effect on the integration of albinos to the mainstream population. Respondents (R34 and R15) revealed that they are often systematically sidelined at school, religious, and business centres:

It was much better in Tanzania in terms of making new friends. All you need is to speak Swahili and say hi to someone, you get connected. But as a migrant in Nairobi, some Kenyans are still able to differentiate through my accent that I am a Tanzanian. Even as a student, I was always on my own. Nobody will want to get close except when there is a compulsory group assignment (R34/Male/25years/Kenya).

Similarly another noted that the discrimination is often based on superstitious beliefs:

In some shops, especially those owned by West African migrants or black South Africans often do not like to attend to albinos in the morning. One of them was bold enough to tell me that whenever an albino or someone with a disability comes around to the market, it

affects sales negatively. There are so many superstitious beliefs. It hurts to recount them! (R15/Male/41years/South Africa).

### **Superstitious Belief: Even Other Migrants Are Not Left Out**

Superstitious beliefs were described as not only common to South Africans and Kenyans but also with other nationalities. A respondent (R91) gave an insight to the roles superstitious beliefs play in informing the jokes and derogatory remarks netted on albinos. He narrated the inability of his younger brother to cope with some of the gestures and annoying remarks about albino/albinism, thereby changing apartments several times in different neighbourhoods in Braanfontein, Hilbrow and Alexander, (Johannesburg Suburbs), where a number of West African migrants reside, in order to avoid them.

Even other nationalities, especially West Africans have their own beliefs about us. Sometimes in an argument or discussion, you will hear statements like ‘don’t argue with an albino’, ‘you have started again, later you will complain that things are not going on well with you’. The belief is that when an albino goes angry, it will affect their businesses. As a friendly person I do not take these comments seriously, more over the situation is far much better compare to Tanzania, where most people pretend to love you during the day, but want to kill or sell you at night. I have learnt a lot in the past decades while migrating through Tanzania, Kenya, and now to South Africa. The situation hurts, but one must learn to be calm and careful always as an albino. This was however not the case for my brother who came directly from Tanzania. For him he just could not condone it the same way I do. Though he is more educated, such beliefs and comments did not go well with him. He made enemies with my West African business friends and citizens. He had to change his flats several times to avoid people he considered not sensitive enough to our conditions as PWA (R91/Male/42years/South Africa).

The above comments on derogatory remarks reinforced by beliefs justify Blankenberg’s remarks in his study of albinism in South Africa, saying ‘the spiritual beliefs about albinos and their world is not only of the after world but a part of the present world, and its manifestations are real with real effects. The effects go a long way in hurting many albinos and put them in their shells (Blankenberg 2000). For Norma, (R22) her first destination was Polokwane before settling in Johannesburg. After a light reception, welcoming her to South Africa by her relatives, she was told about life and the economic opportunities therein in the country. She was all happy, not until she had an encounter with some suspected kidnappers, before she realized that South Africa has similar characteristics with so many other African countries in terms

of violence and crime. Recounting her ordeal around the popular park station in Johannesburg, she echoed:

On arrival, my brother in-law explained the weather and environmental condition as very cool. He said so much about the weather than the people. This did not make sense to me until I was attacked at the park station one night when returning home after work. I had to run for safety, luckily for me I met a man who came to my rescue. That was the last time I would ever walk alone late, without any company. Following this incidence, my in-law told me that 'I should never think that because it is South Africa, it simply means you are safe' (R22/Female/32years/South Africa)

### **Grateful But Not Satisfied**

Amidst the fear, stigma and insecurity, one thing common to most of the respondents is that they were not satisfied with their current residence and would prefer a more secure and better environment and if possible further migration to Europe or America. Many hoped for a better accommodation and location, not undermining the relative psychological security they enjoyed, at least "not living in Tanzania was too much to thank God for", respondents often echoed in their statements irrespective of their current living conditions and fears. In Kenya, over 50 percent of them were living in substandard apartments and in low income areas. A typical case was respondent (R2) living in the notorious and popular Dandora dumpsite in Kenya, she described the environmental condition as dangerous and unhealthy, but manageable because there are no better alternatives and finances to relocate elsewhere. He narrated his living condition thus:

Dandora is a suburb of Nairobi known for its dumpsite harbouring about 850 tonnes of solid waste generated daily by 3.5 million inhabitants of Nairobi. The site was once a quarry that the City Council of Nairobi sought to use temporarily. In recent times the presence of human beings, birds and pigs thriving in the dumpsite, as well as waste pickers scavenging heaps of rubbish for food and income is no longer news. Living in a settlement filled with all sorts of industrial, agricultural, domestic and medical waste, the health implication can best be imagined (R2/Male/27years/Kenya).

Studies have confirmed the presence of dangerous elements such as Lead, Mercury, Cadmium and PCBs, which affects human skin and digestive tracts in Dandora dumpsites (Kimani 2007). This no doubt will further compound the insecurity issues

facing PWA living in unhealthy environment. For PWA, seeking refuge in the slum it is nothing more than sympathetic. According to R33,

In locations such as Dandora, lack of security remains an issue that put him and his family members into their shell. One has to be aware of gangs and thieves, as well as paying the local youth group for protection. *It is just a place to stay till one gets enough savings and probably a better job, to move to a more secured location'* (R33/Male/39years/Kenya).

Similarly he noted that security officials also capitalize on their condition as migrants to demand for bribe or what they call 'settlement' from family members. Thus he is compelled to give bribe to the police in order to avoid paying frivolous fines. *Same is the situation in low income neighbourhoods around Johannesburg in South Africa (Ikuomola and Zaaiman 2014).*

### **Discrimination and Insecurity: Beyond the Person with Albinism**

The discrimination of persons with albinism, in schools, relationships, in securing decent jobs have been found to negatively heightened the socio-economic relationships with their peers. Against this background, tense social relations between PWA and their host communities exists Similarly vacuums such as poverty among migrants, violent abuses of basic human rights and access to basic resources and services, provide a fertile breeding ground for distress which explains many migrants' life's misfortunes (Heslop and Gorman 2002). One of such misfortunes and ill feelings are said to extend beyond PWA to members of their family without the genetic condition. R113 in South Africa narrated how her younger sister fell out of a relation with his South African boyfriend on his first visit to the uncle's house for the simple reason that he is an albino:

As the common practice, once a girl is old enough to have a boyfriend, she is always advised to let the family know the person she is dating. I could still remember the day she brought the young man home; we were all happy waiting that evening. I thought he must be a gentleman at first sight, surprisingly, I noticed he was not too comfortable while he was being introduced and the way he shook my hands informed me that he was scared and did not like my presence. After this visit, my sister started having problems with him. He once told my sister that she kept it away from him 'that she has a family member with albinism' As if it was a crime, she tried to educate him, to no avail, only for him to call it quit. When I got to know about the story I felt hurt. Though he has been uncomfortable with the relationship with a migrant, which informed the longtime it took him to visit the house.

They have been friends for about two years. My condition thus became the final reason not to continue with the relationship. Ignorance is a big problem. When has albinism become a plague? And why should migrants albinos suffer more? These are questions I keep asking myself most times (R113Male/43years/South Africa).

The study also revealed the belief that children and albinos were sought after for ritual cleansing by raping albinos for the purpose of curing persons infected with HIV/AIDS. It is in this regards the hunt for albinos and disables were said to be on the increase. Statistically South Africa is often regarded as the world capital of rape, with a rape case in every four minutes (News24 2012). Media reports in 2012 stated that Interpol named South Africa as the world's rape capital, and said women were more likely to be raped than educated. Earlier in 2009 Medical Research Council study found that one in four South African men admitted to raping a woman (MRC 2009; Mathews et.al. 2009). The fear of sexual violence was highlighted by women, while other forms of violence was common to all gender, irrespective of age and location. Despite these frightening statistics, sexual violence against migrants (albinos) does not often make the headlines. Though many migrants (irrespective of having genuine documents) tend to watch their steps in order not to be added to the already bulge statistics of victims.

#### **Insecurity of PWA: Narratives of the Sangomas and Kidnapping Syndicates**

Sangomas are believed to fulfill different social and political roles in the community, including divination, healing physical, emotional and spiritual illnesses, directing birth or death rituals, finding lost cattle, protecting warriors, counteracting witches, and narrating the history, cosmology, and myths of their tradition (Janzen 1992; 1995). The fear of albinos being used as sacrificial lambs for money making rituals have also been in the news with the heavy influx of Western and East African migrants into South Africa (Oakford 2014), similarly a large number of unemployed and unskilled foreign nationals have fallen prey to the antics of sangomas who often set up outlets and with bogus adverts promising quick wealth to whomever is interested. The threat to lives of albinos in South Africa may not have made much headlines, but recent evidences have been captured in one of the interviews with Peter Ash, the founder of Under the Same Sun (UTSS) in 2011, he noted the wide spread of albinos body part from Tanzania and Burundi in East Africa; Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire in the West Africa and South Africa and Swaziland in Southern Africa respectively. He further analysed albinos' body part as becoming a lucrative business:

People born with this genetic condition live in fear every day. There exists a lucrative black market in albino body parts used to make what is promoted as powerful 'muti' medicine by the sangomas. The hand, arm or any albino organ is combined with other ingredients and then

sold for thousands of dollars: \$3,000 for a hand or over \$100,000 for an entire set of organs. Sometimes body parts are even shipped across borders (Thuku 2011).

In South Africa, another respondent corroborated and highlighted the fact that more White South Africans tend to be friendly and have less superstitious belief on albinos as mysterious and spirit beings. Respondents R19, with relatives in Johannesburg, but schooling in Potchefstroom, noted that he feels more secure in Potchefstroom, because of the predominance of Whites in the municipality. He however has some reservations as highlighted thus:

Though South Africa is generally better than any other part of Africa for albinos, but this cannot be said in the locations where most blacks live. Just the way many South African whites do not visit or play around black dominated locations, I also do not go there (R19/Male/29years/South Africa).

Another respondent (R71), schooling in Klerksdorp, maintained that his financial status keeps him in the locations (black neighbourhoods) during school session despite the crime rates and amidst the fears of possible hunters:

Living in the location, where poverty, crime and strong traditional belief systems in witchcraft and traditional healers persist is a difficult choice [...] The crime rate against foreigners is very higher, and as an albino I am constantly in fears because on few occasions my room has been bugled. Nevertheless staying in the location is cheap and I have not got sufficient amount to relocate to the main city where security is much better. But trust me after my studies nothing will hold me back (R26/Male/31years/South Africa).

The labeling and stigmatization of migrants albinos was also described as painful, nick names such as '*colonial masters*,' '*white spy*,' and '*black Afrikaner*' were commonly used, though some times as playful jests and other times when in a heated discussion or argument. This was described as hurting:

Can you imagine being called a colonial master just because one is light skinned. This would not have been painful if I do not know the meaning behind it. Even migrants of different nationalities also join in calling us names, especially for us living in the suburbs (R10/Male/35years/South Africa)

The above narratives reveal how racial discrimination in South Africa affects PWA in their residences. Similarly the idea that most blacks hold strongly to their cultural or traditional belief, with the perception of albinos as spiritual beings rather than a medical

condition heightens the fear and insecurity of PWA wherever they live. Thus the manifestations play right into the daily life experiences and trajectories of PWA. The inability of many cultures to decipher the reality of 'White' skin on a 'black' person and especially among persons with low knowledge of science, create more problems that are loaded with symbolism and meaning. Labels of white and black go much beyond simply descriptive terms (Blankenberg 2000). Albinism specifically among Black South Africans is discussed alongside the issues of race and the perpetuation of racism in all its guises. The narratives of respondents R10, R26 give a clue to what it is to be a migrant and being an albino in another country. Within a racialized society, the connotations of blackness include 'savage', evil and bad and those of whiteness include good, purity and 'civilized'. In both South Africa and Kenya, trust on people is said to be limited as many doubts even their neighbours. According to R63, 'the person whom you think is your friend today may just be a syndicate who will sell you to a sangoma the next day'. Similar, R24 concurred that 'even in Kenya, kidnapping and killing of albinos still persist but only minimal in the rural areas, though not like in Tanzania. For another (R69), 'people pretend a lot these days only for them to betray, charm, and hypnotize others all in the name of making quick wealth'. The following statements elaborately capture the limited trust and hope PWA's have in their current environment:

I always stay indoors, and anytime I go out it is usually not too far from the place where I live, for the fear of being kidnapped for ritual purposes. There have been cases of albinos disappearing at nights and others being killed. We thought we will be safe here in South Africa. This is not to be as we still live in fear, but it is only much better than Tanzania, but in the rural areas, a lot of cases go unreported (R10/Female/25years/South Africa).

The fear still persist, I remember my mum told me we have to be skeptical about the environment and our neighbours. After five years, in Nairobi, the only trusted people are my household members and a catholic priest. There are stories of syndicates and their networks in Kenya and other parts of East Africa dealing in human parts. This we are made to know by the police and the church. Often I am told to be cautious about friends, everywhere I go, that I should always be careful, avoid unknown persons and try as much as possible to move with a relative, when it is dark (R24/Male/29years/Kenya).

Even in school, though I sometimes want to explore like other colleagues, something in me always caution me, reminding me of the plights of the unlucky ones left behind in Tanzania, and of those who have been killed. So life as an albino is almost not safe anywhere in

Africa. My future plan is to travel to Europe, Australia, or America (R26/Male/South Africa).

The sangomas and the syndicates, may not live in the same neighbourhood, the fear is socialized into migrants albinos in South Africa. The awareness of these set of people create a permanent fear and conditions that limit PWA exploration of their environments as well as opportunities that may enhance their socio-economic status. For younger respondents, in their teens, especially girls, they live their lives around known relatives, and trustworthy neighbours.

### **Conclusion**

Migrating out of Tanzania is basically a safety measure embarked upon by PWA and their families to ensure they realize their full potential as human beings. As the study reveals, this is yet to be achieved. While socio-economic status determine the migration patterns of many PWA, as shown in the choice of Kenya over South Africa as a destination because of its proximity, relative safety, and language. However South Africa was the most preferred of the two in terms of security, but distance and cost were barriers. Thus PWA with higher socioeconomic status considered South Africa among other factors for its economy, political stability, weather, security, and better opportunities. Nevertheless the security of lives of PWA was marked with stigma and fear in both countries. The inability of many people to comprehend the biomedical conditions called albinism plays a major role in the problems faced by PWA from their countries of origin and among host communities abroad, with a few persons literate in the sciences, especially among rural dwellers. This explains why in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there are still many adherents of cultural practices that are inhumane to humanity, and consequent forced migration of PWA out of their countries of origin. Some of the inimical practices are embedded in the belief, myths, folktales and legends about albinos as disabled, spirited and divine beings, which cut across many Africa countries. Perceived misconceptions of PWA as narrated buttressed the fact that PWA are not safe as migrants. The stigma, fear and the psychological effect of the history and current spate of killings in Tanzania, and the continuous hunt by money ritualists, syndicates, rapists and unscrupulous traditional healers who deal in human body parts of albinos in East and Southern Africa, inform the insecurity and the inability to integrate fully in their new environments. Thus this study concludes that distant migration, does not necessarily guarantee the security of PWA as migrants within Africa because of the similar cultural practices that abound, and calls for a united and consolidated legal rights for the protection of PWA across borders, as well as stiffer punishment for criminals and persons threatening the existence of PWA.

## References

- Abogunrin, S. O. (1989). *Ethics in Yoruba religious tradition*. In S. Cromwell Crawford (ed.), *World Religions and Global Ethics*. Paragon House Publishers.
- Ayantayo, J. K. (1999). The challenges of African social ethics in a global context in *coping with culture* (ed.) Ifie, Egbe. Ibadan, Oputoru Books.pp. 118– 135.
- Baker, C., Lund P, Nyathi, R. & Taylor, J. (2010). The myths surrounding people with albinism in South Africa and Zimbabwe. *African Cultural Studies* 22 (2): 169–181
- Blankenberg, N. (2000). That rare and random tribe. *Critical Arts* 14, (2): 6–48.
- Brilliant, M. (2009). Geneticist. Interview on discovery channel’s my shocking story: albino crisis / Part 2 – (12:55 to 13:38). <http://www.yourdiscovery.com/web/my-shocking-story/first-5-minutes/> for information.
- Brown. M. (2008). Albinos are hunted for body parts in Tanzania <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/africa/albinos-are-hunted-for-body-parts-in-tanzania>
- Burke, J. (2012). Discrimination and violence against Tanzanians with albinism in the Great Lakes region: crime and national shame – A paper presented at the 35th AFSAAP Annual Conference. Accessed 3/12/13 <http://afsaap.org.au/assets/BURKE.pdf>
- Delaney, J. (2008). *Albinos under siege in Tanzania: Witchcraft behind rash of killings* 3 Dec, Epoch Times, [www.theepochtimes.com](http://www.theepochtimes.com) Accessed 11/02/2012.
- Heslop A & Gorman, M. (2002). Chronic poverty and older people in the developing world. CPRC Working Paper No 10 Chronic Poverty Research Centre. [http://www.chronicpoverty.org/uploads/publication\\_files/WP10\\_Heslop\\_Gorman.pdf](http://www.chronicpoverty.org/uploads/publication_files/WP10_Heslop_Gorman.pdf)
- Gugler, J. (2008). Women stay on the farm no more: Changing patterns of rural-urban migration in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 27(2): 347-352.
- Hoddinott, J. (1992). Rotten kids or manipulative parents: Are children old age security in Western Kenya?" *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 40(3):545-655.
- Hong, E., Zeeb H., & Repacholi, M. (2006). Albinism in Africa as a public health issue. *BMC Public Health* 6: 210–16.

- Ikuomola, A. D & Zaaiman, J. (2014). We have come to stay and we shall find all means to live and work in this country: Nigerian migrants and life challenges in South Africa. *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology* 9(2):371-389
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2009. Through albino eyes the plight of albino people in Africa's Great Lakes region and a Red Cross response. <http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/general/177800-Albinos-Report-EN.pdf>
- Janzen, J. M. (1992). Ngoma: Discourses of healing in Central and Southern Africa. University of California Press.
- Janzen, J. M. (1995). Self-Presentation and Common Culture Structures in Ngoma Rituals of Southern Africa. *Journal of religion in Africa*. 25:141-162
- Kimani, N.G. (2007). Environmental pollution and impact to public health: Implication of the Dandora municipal dumping site in Nairobi, Kenya. A United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) PILOT STUDY REPORT. [http://www.kutokanet.com/Storage/UNEP\\_Dandora\\_Environmental\\_Pollution\\_and\\_Impact\\_To\\_Public\\_Health\\_2007.pdf](http://www.kutokanet.com/Storage/UNEP_Dandora_Environmental_Pollution_and_Impact_To_Public_Health_2007.pdf) Retrieved 11/02/2011
- Lambert, S. & Rossi, P. (2014). Sons as widowhood insurance: evidence from Senegal. Paris School of Economics working paper N° 2014 – 05. <http://hal-encp.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/98/69/24/PDF/wp201405.pdf>
- Lookingbill, D., Lookingbill, G. & Leppard, B. (1995). Special report: Actinic damage and skin cancer in albinos in northern Tanzania: Findings in 164 patients enrolled in an outreach skin care program, *Journal of American Academy of Dermatology*, Vol. 32 no 4. 653-658
- Maruna, S. & Copes, H. (2005). What have we learned in five decades of neutralization research? *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*. University of Chicago Press.
- Mathews, S. Abrahams, N., Jewkes, R. (2009). Alcohol use and its role in female homicides in the Western Cape, South. Africa *J Stud Alcohol Drugs* 70(3): 321-327
- Matsinhe, D. M. (2011). Africa's Fear of Itself: the ideology of *Makwerekwere* in South Africa. *Third World Quarterly*. 32 (2): 295–313
- Morris, A. (1998). Our fellow Africans make our lives hell: The lives of Congolese and Nigerians living in Johannesburg, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21(6): 1116-1136.
- MRC, (2009). Preventing rape and violence in South Africa: call for leadership in a new agenda for action. [http://www.mrc.ac.za/gender/prev\\_rapedd041209.pdf](http://www.mrc.ac.za/gender/prev_rapedd041209.pdf)

- National Organization for Albinism and Hypopigmentation. NOAH, (2008) - [http://www.albinism.org/publications/what\\_is\\_albinism.html](http://www.albinism.org/publications/what_is_albinism.html)
- Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, (2004/2008). EdData- National Population Commission and ICF Macro.
- Neocosmos, M. (2008). The politics of fear and fear of Politics: Reflections on xenophobic violence in South Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 43(6): 588- 589.
- News24 (2012). South Africa > SA named world rape capital. <http://www.news24.com/Multimedia/South-Africa/SA-named-world-rape-capital-20120420> Retrieved, 10/08/2014
- Ntetema, V. (2008). In hiding for exposing Tanzania witchdoctors. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7523796.stm>. Accessed 9/7/2001
- Nugent, Jerrey B. (1985). The old-age security motive for fertility. *Population and Development Review* 11(1) 75-97.
- Oakford, S. (2014) Fuelled by superstition, people are violently attacking Ibinos in Tanzania. Accessed 23/09/2014. <https://news.vice.com/article/fueled-by-superstition-people-are-violently-attacking-albinos-in-tanzania>.
- Piper, N. (2005). Gender and migration. Background paper for Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) and appendix to the GCIM Global Report on Migration, Recommendations to the Secretary General.
- Reed, H. E., Andrzejewski, C.S. & White. M. J. (2010). Men's and women's migration in coastal Ghana: An event history analysis. *Demographic Research* 22: 771-812.
- Rosenzweig, M. R. (1988). Risk, private information, and the family." the American economic review, 782. Papers and Proceedings of the One-Hundredth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association. P. 245-250.
- Schnoebelen, J. (2009). Witchcraft allegations, refugee protection and human rights: a review of the evidence. New Issues in Refugee Research. Research Paper No. 169. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4981ca712.pdf> (accessed 21 February 2014).
- Thuku, M. (2011). Myths, discrimination, and the call for special rights for persons with albinism in sub-Saharan Africa. In Amnesty International editorial review on Special Programme on Africa.
- UTSS (2014). Reported attacks of persons with Albinism-Most recent attack included. <http://www.underthesamesun.com>. Retrieved 30/09/2014

- Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative Research Interviewing: biographic narrative and semi-structured method*. London: Sage.
- Wiete, W. (2011). Life of albinos in East Africa threatened: A most bizarre and dramatic consequence of having a skin colour disease. Retrieved 30/09/2014 <http://colorfoundation.org/> accessed February, 02/02/2012.

**Acknowledgements:**

*I am greatly indebted to the American Council of Learned Society and African Humanities Programme (ACLS/AHP), for awarding me a postdoctoral research grant that led to the initial research on the 'Socio-cultural conception of Albinism in Southwestern Nigeria' as well as the staff and management of the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR) for exposing me to the East African Communities. Similarly, I appreciate, the School of Social and Government Studies, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa, for giving me a second opportunity to research on migrants in South Africa. Lastly the comments and suggestions from participants at the 2014, Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba, Canada, Strangers in New Homelands Conference tagged 'Building Inclusive Communities for Newcomers and Host Societies' were instrumental in producing this article.*