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# Fortune in the Bones: An Intersectionality of ATR<sup>1</sup> and Albinism Discourse in Malawi

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## Abstract

This study discusses the phenomena of the intersectionality of African traditional religion (ATR) and albinism in Malawi. It is based on data that was collected through qualitative research methods: literature review and interviews. During the past two decades, People with Albinism (PWAs) in Malawi have been victimised through what is considered superstition-driven and witchcraft-related violence in the form of abductions, body mutilations, killings and grave vandalism to exhume their bones for ritual purposes. The study observes that ATR serves as a bedrock for some of the beliefs, which motivate some criminal gangs to commit horrendous violence against PWAs in Malawi. The following reasons are proffered: First, ATR highlights the explicit nexus between the spirit-beings and their confluence with the material world, which is very important in situating the albinism discourse in the Malawian context. Second, the belief in the invisible 'spirit world' and its interconnectedness to the material world has subsequently influenced the development of certain corresponding religious beliefs and practices of rituals. For instance, rituals involving the killing of PWAs are based on the belief that the PWAs are persons whose body parts carry a rare sacred quality that can be used to make charms for acquiring fortunes in the material world. The chapter argues that since the roots of violence against PWAs in Malawi are anchored in some aspects of ATR, such as superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices, the remedy must also be essentially religious to holistically resolve the problem. This can be done by employing life-enhancing aspects of ATR beliefs and practices such as the African ethics and spirituality of Ubuntu/Umunthu. The study's main implication is that the current tide of violence against PWAs

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Joseph Chaphazika Chakanza was an ardent scholar of ATR who argued for the necessity of retrieving and using of the human flourishing qualities of ATR in the contemporary African society. This chapter is dedicated to his unwavering commitment to bring out the good out of ATR.

in Malawi is inconsistent with the African spirituality and ethics of Ubuntu/Umunthu. The life-flourishing qualities of Ubuntu uphold the sanctity of human life and complement human dignity, safety and security, and well-being.

## Introduction

The chapter discusses the phenomena of African traditional religion (ATR) and albinism in Malawi as intersectional to each other. The phenomenon of albinism in Malawi is couched in myths, superstitious and witchcraft-related beliefs, spiritualisation, and socio-cultural constructions that inevitably promote violence against persons with albinism (PWAs). Baker et al. (2021) write that at the root of the religious and socio-cultural construction of albinism in Malawi lie some aspects of the African traditional religious heritage, which some criminal gangs have embraced in committing atrocities against PWAs. Shoko (2016) argues that ATR being an existential reality, implies an all-encompassing influence on individuals and societies. According to Mbiti (1990), African spirituality and religiosity are ingrained and reflected in their worldview and overall behaviour:

Africans are notoriously religious. Wherever the African is, there is religion. He carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party, or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician, he takes it to the house of parliament (p. 1).

The chapter locates the source of PWAs victimisation in Malawi in some aspects of ATR such as superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices embraced by some criminal gangs to commit horrendous violence against and murder of PWAs. Mbiti (1990) states that superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices are widespread on the African continent. Turaki (2006) argues that superstition and witchcraft exemplify the manifestations of African traditional power and spirituality. Witchcraft denotes the use of magic or supernatural powers to inflict harm, misfortune, and death on people. Munyenembe (2011) writes that superstition and witchcraft constitute religious phenomena in Africa because they are inherently spiritual and supernatural or supra-natural with the potency and efficacy to cause evil, injury, and death to human beings. Turaki (2006) adds that the superstitious and witchcraft-related beliefs and practices inspire the

making of African magic-medicine (*muthi*) by using human body parts in order to enhance its potency or efficacy. Mwiba (2018) states that the *muthi* containing human body parts of PWAs is considered stronger when the parts are harvested while the victim is alive. Consequently, this leads to the gruesome and horrendously violent killings of PWAs. In Malawi, the brutality against PWAs is despicable. They are specifically targeted, and their limbs are cut off when the victims, normally children and youths, are still alive (Netshiavha, 2013). Thus, the chapter locates the violence of criminal gangs against PWAs in Malawi in the framework of superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices. In this setting, human body parts are harvested from PWAs to make charms and *muthi* medicines to bring good luck, health, success, and fortunes to the clients of the medicine men (Baker et al., 2021).

The chapter endeavours to uncover the multi-faceted influence of some aspects of ATR on the albinism discourse in Malawi by addressing the issues in the following four sections: (1) general discussion of albinism in sub-Saharan Africa; (2) the socio-cultural context of albinism in sub-Saharan Africa; (3) the nexus between African Traditional Religion (ATR) and albinism; (4) the retrieval of positive ATR beliefs and practices such as the African spirituality and ethics of Ubuntu/Umunthu to enhance the quality of lives of PWAs in Malawi.

## General Discussion of Albinism in Sub-Saharan Africa

Hong et al. (2006) remark that the word “albinism” etymologically comes from the Latin word “albus” meaning white. Oetting et al. (1996) say that albinism refers to a group of inherited genetic disorders in which a person has partial or complete loss of pigmentation (melanin), which is responsible for the colouring of the skin, eyes, and hair.

Lynch et al. (2014) infer that people with albinism have different levels of melanin, which causes variations in skin colour, hair colour, and eye movements. Tambala-Kaliati et al. (2021) argue that albinism begins at birth and lasts the rest of a person’s life. Lund (2005) states that PWAs are inclined to suffer from at least two lifelong physical and health problems, i.e. vision impairment and ultraviolet skin damage, which can lead to skin cancer. Braathen and Ingstad (2006) conjecture that the genetic disorder of albinism can be passed down from either parent and is difficult to prevent, particularly if both parents are unaware of their family history (Lynch, Lund, and Massah, 2014). Baker et al. (2010) convey that if both

parents have albinism or bear the gene, their children are more likely to be born with it. Tambala-Kaliati (2021) extrapolates that health issues associated with albinism in sub-Saharan Africa are aggravated by poverty, lack of sunscreen lotions, lack of hats with large brims, lack of clothing which covers almost the entire body, lack of sunglasses, and lack of access to adequate health care (Hong et al., 2006).

Mártinez-García et al. (2013) explain that there are several types of albinism characterised by different gene defects. They include Oculocutaneous albinism (OCA), Ocular albinism (OA), Hermansky-Pudlak syndrome, Chediak-Higashi syndrome, and Griscelli syndrome. Lund and Roberts (2018) observe that although OCA is a worldwide phenomenon, it has a high frequency in populations in sub-Saharan Africa, at least 1 in 1755 in the Southwest African country of Namibia and 1 in 2673 in Tanzania in East Africa. Lund and Gaigher (2002) estimate that the prevalence of albinism in sub-Saharan Africa is in the range of 1 in 2000–5000. Bradbury-Jones (2018) notes that PWAs in sub-Saharan Africa are feared and viewed with suspicion, while simultaneously they are considered to have mystical powers due to their perceived difference in skin colour. As a result, there is a misconception that their body parts can bring good luck, success and wealth. Also, they are believed to be a curse, bringing bad luck. Cruz-Inigo et al. (2011) aver that the condition of albinism is loaded with symbolical representations and meaning associated with its efficacy. Unfortunately, the mythical understanding of albinism contributes to the prevalence of various superstitious-driven attacks against people with albinism.

## The Socio-Cultural Context of Albinism in Africa

Ikuomola (2015) argues for the significance of the socio-cultural context of albinism in Africa in order to adequately address the causes of violence against PWAs. Reimer-Kirkham et al. (2019) intimate that the socio-cultural context of albinism in Africa is highly embedded in myths, superstitions and witchcraft beliefs and practices (Lund and Gaigher, 2002, p. 367). In this chapter, a myth is defined as an unusual traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the worldview of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon (Culpepper, 2000). Dapi et al. (2018) observe the prevalence of myths concerning albinism in Africa. This chapter considers superstition to refer to three things. First, irrational beliefs are at odds with scientific knowledge (Vyse,

2013). Secondly, superstition is comprised of various beliefs and practices that are attributed to spirit-beings, fate, magic, and are alleged to have mystical or supernatural influence (Petrus and Bogopa, 2007). Thirdly, superstition constitutes beliefs and practices associated with luck, charms, amulets, and various paranormal phenomena (Geschiere, 2008). The chapter gives a threefold definition of witchcraft.

First, witchcraft is the art or science whereby people endowed with mystical powers manipulate the supernatural and natural forces in order to cause harm to human beings or their property. Secondly, witchcraft which encompasses sorcery and black magic involves an anti-social or inhumane use of mystical or supernatural powers to harm people and their possessions, harm animals, plants, and the entire environment. Thirdly, witchcraft denotes evil such as the occurrence of mysterious illnesses, bad luck, misfortunes, accidents, or sudden death that witches inflict upon their perceived enemies (Van Wyk, 2004, p. 1201).

Taylor et al. (2019) argue that various myths and misconceptions regarding albinism reflect African traditional understanding of albinism and rationalize its subsequent stigmatisation and violence against PWAs. Cruz-Inigo et al. (2011) list at least fourteen myths and misconceptions concerning albinism which were collected in various African countries, i.e. Zimbabwe, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, and South Africa: (1) weaving the hair of PWAs into a net improves the chances of catching fish; (2) body parts of PWAs worn as amulets bring good luck, fortune, and health; (3) body parts of PWAs are necessary ingredients for witch doctor potions; (4) PWAs have magical superpowers and can cure diseases; (5) intercourse with a lady with albinism will cure HIV/AIDS; (6) spitting on a PWA prevents the condition in one's family; (7) mother of a child with albinism was laughed at by a person with albinism during pregnancy; (8) albinism is caused by a missing top layer of the skin; (9) PWAs and their mothers are possessed by evil spirits; (10) the devil stole the original child and replaced it with a PWA; (11) albinism is very contagious and spreads through touching; (12) PWAs are housed by ghosts of European colonists; (13) PWAs have low brain capacity and cannot function at the same level as others; (14) mother of a PWA was impregnated by a white man; and (15) albinism is a curse from the gods or from dead ancestors. As a result, being in contact with a PWA will bring bad luck, sickness or even death. Although most Western scholars of albinism argue that the deconstruction of myths and superstitious beliefs concerning albinism in Africa

should be based on genetics or biology, this chapter contends for the effectiveness of the African religio-cultural based deconstruction. Mbiti (1990) argues that there is no distinction between the ATR and the African socio-cultural fabric because religion permeates the entire African socio-cultural fabric. Machoko (2013) points out that the socio-cultural construction of albinism in Africa and its perpetuation is based on some aspects of ATR beliefs, myths, stereotypes, and practices. Hence, ATR should be employed in addressing issues associated with the socio-cultural context of albinism in Africa (Reimer-Kirkham et al., 2019).

## **The Nexus Between African Traditional Religion and Albinism in Malawi**

This section of the chapter answers the question: “What is the influence of African Traditional Religions (ATR) on the albinism discourse in Malawi?” Although most Africans are adherents of Christianity and Islam, beliefs and practices associated with ATR play a crucial role in their daily life (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012). Therefore, it is imperative for this chapter to probe how ATR beliefs and practices influence the discourse of albinism in Malawi.

Olupona (2014) contends that ATR refers to the indigenous religions of the African people; hence, ATR is not a homogenous religion but a heterogenous one constituting a variety of homegrown religions arising out of the African soil. It deals with their belief systems, cosmology, ritual practices, ceremonies, festivals, thought patterns, symbols, arts, society, and so on (Turaki, 2020). Mabvurira (2016) argues that ATR permeates all aspects of African life and informs the African worldview and its interrelationship with the cosmos, culture, society, and daily life.

Bon Massa, the former president of the Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi (APAM) bemoaned the rising cases of violence against PWAs in Malawi:

It is unfortunate to observe a heightening trend of abductions and killings of PWAs in Malawi. These killings are being driven by superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices that regard us (PWAs) as mysterious beings who have some mystical powers which can be used to bring success, fortunes, and good health (Chimjeka, 2022).

The chapter contends that superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices concerning the phenomenon of albinism in Africa are the driving

forces of violence against PWAs. However, these superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices are anchored by some aspects of ATR, including the spirit phenomenon and the role of witch doctors in the killing of PWAs. Therefore, the chapter engages with these aspects of ATR in order to demonstrate how they influence the albinism discourse. Moreover, the chapter draws out the religious implications of the violence against PWAs in Malawi.

## Spirit Phenomenon and Albinism

Imafidon (2017) affirms that ATR and the African traditional worldview consider PWAs in terms of alterity or otherness. The otherness, separateness, or difference of PWAs in Africa is not only a physical phenomenon but also an ontological otherness in some African communities. This is because, from this perspective, PWAs first and foremost belong to the world of the spirits, though they appear human. Their ontological otherness lies in the fact that, apart from being human beings they are also regarded as ghosts or spirits (Baker, 2010). Machoko (2013) suggests that the traditional Shona people of Zimbabwe regard PWAs as water spirits who manifest themselves as mermaids (*njuzu*). Cimpric (2000) explains three myths that demonstrate the connection between PWAs and water spirits. First, PWAs are considered as water spirits in Western DRC. Secondly, the birth of a person with albinism was believed to be the result of a woman having sexual intercourse with a water spirit in the Central African Republic (CAR). Thirdly, the hair of people with albinism was used by fishermen in order to attract fish in Lake Victoria, and that belief recalled the links between albinism and the water spirits in Central Africa.

The belief that PWAs are not fully part of the world of the living but are ghosts (*Mzukwa*) is also reinforced in Malawi by the *Nyau* or *Gule Wamkulu* cult. It is also believed that 'if you laugh at a '*Nyau*' (a member of a secret society of the Chewa people in Malawi who often wear masks and perform the dances '*Gule Wamkulu*'), you will have a baby with albinism' (Lynch, 2014, p. 218). Van Breugel (2001) argues that the association of albinism and *Nyau* or *Gule Wamkulu* has a specific religious significance because just as the *Nyau* symbolically represents the invisible spirit world; similarly, persons with albinism are also regarded as ghosts (*mzukwa*). Hence, PWAs are not considered to be proper human beings but ghosts (*mzukwa*) who are reincarnated spirits of the dead in a bodily form.



One study participant related how he was constantly being ridiculed that he was a ghost:

My friends always ridicule me almost on a daily basis that I am not a human being but a ghost ... I suffer a lot of challenges at home, school, and in my community. I had to daily negotiate with rejection, stigma, and discrimination in virtually all spheres of my life because I was considered as a ghost and not a proper human being.

Baker et al. (2010) opine that the 'death myth', which is common in Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, supports the notion that PWAs do not fully belong to the world of the living but belong to the 'spirit' world. The 'death myth' states that PWAs do not die a natural death but simply go into the bush and disappear. This belief is commonly heard in South Africa (Lund and Gaigher, 2002). Baker et al. (2010) narrate that participants in a study on albinism in Malawi expressed the belief that PWAs do not die a natural death; they just disappear and, more specifically, that 'they die or disappear before they reach the age of 40'.<sup>2</sup>

Bradbury-Jones et al. (2018) argue that ATR and the African traditional worldview ascribe a special spiritual status to PWAs, which makes them enigmatic and fearsome, capable of either blessing or cursing humanity. For this reason, superstitious beliefs about albinism have been linked to violent assault and murder of PWAs in sub-Saharan Africa (Bryceson et al., 2010). Taylor et al. (2019) submit that body parts of PWAs are used in witchcraft-related rituals that typically involve them being made into charms or amulets capable of bringing good luck, good health, success, opulence, wealth, protection, etc. Mulemi and Ndolo (2014) establish a symbiotic relationship between superstitious and witchcraft beliefs regarding albinism in sub-Saharan Africa and poverty or livelihood insecurity. Subsequently, economically and socially deprived people seek alternative ways of overcoming poverty by invoking supernatural powers associated with mystical or superstitious beliefs and witchcraft (Thuku, 2011). Thus, in this framework, PWAs are either targets for making magical charms in order to bring success and wealth to the financially insecure or scapegoats for perceived calamities or misfortunes in the traditional African community (Mulemi and Ndolo, 2014).

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<sup>2</sup> The lack of melanin in the skin of people with albinism makes them vulnerable to skin cancer and without adequate health care, their life expectancy is limited, which may explain the assumption that people with albinism 'disappear' at this age.

Bakamana et al. (2021) posit that the pursuit of spiritual meaning in ATR rapidly translates into the pursuit of mystical and supernatural powers. Traditional Africans believe that their destiny and well-being are controlled and manipulated by supernatural, mystical, or unseen mysterious powers. Hence, they embark on a quest for power in order to predict, control, and manipulate the spirit-powers for their own benefit. Turaki (2006) mentions that mystical power generates or deposits power in things or objects. The potency, efficacy, and durability of this power vary in objects to the extent that some objects are inherently endowed with more powers than others. In this respect, the human body parts of PWAs, especially their bones, are coveted since they are believed to be endowed with more mystical powers than the human body parts of persons without albinism (Lipenga and Katemecha, 2021). Turaki (2006) argues that the mystical or mysterious powers embedded in things or objects can be extracted for use in rituals and sacrifices. For this reason, medicine men and women, diviners, witchdoctors, sorcerers, seers, rain-makers, priests, etc., extract the mystical powers embedded in natural objects, plants, and animals for medicine, magic, charms, amulets, fetishes, and talismans. Therefore, the ritual killing of PWAs in Africa and the exhumations of their remains from graves are partly motivated by this belief that their body parts and bones contain great mystical powers, which should be extracted for use in witchcraft or magical-related rituals in order to gain fortunes (Taylor et al., 2019).

Therefore, a correlation between the belief in spirit phenomena and its corresponding influence in the ritual murders of persons with albinism in Africa can be established (Caviglia, 2012). Vincent (2008) writes about *muthi* murders in South Africa, which refers to the killing not only of PWAs with the purpose of harvesting body parts for use as traditional medicine or *muthi*. The *muthi* is said to have mysterious powers, which enable its users to achieve at least one or more of the seven results. **First**, the killings of PWAs in Africa intensify during election times as demand increases for magical potions by politicians seeking to win in an election, to be re-elected, or to be appointed for higher positions in the government (Uromi, 2014). **Second**, it is believed that through the power of the magical potion, businessmen can become rich overnight, or if their business is failing, it can be boosted to astounding success (Kayombo, 2021). **Third**, the raping of women with albinism in Africa is believed to bring wealth, good health, cure infertility and diseases such as HIV/AIDS (Machoko, 2013). **Fourth**, the killing of PWAs in Africa is believed to bring good luck,

fortunes, wealth, success, good health, protection, etc. (Kisanga and Mbonile, 2017). **Fifth**, the killing of PWAs in Africa is believed to ward off evil spirits. In other words, it can bring deliverance from curses and calamities (Benyah, 2017). **Sixth**, the killing of PWAs in Africa enables fishermen to catch more fish because PWAs are associated with water or marine spirits (Cimpric, 2000, p. 31). **Seventh**, the killing of PWAs in Africa is believed to enable miners to source greater wealth by striking more gold or other minerals (Bryceson et al., 2010).

## The Role of Witchdoctors in the Killings of PWAs

Lugira (2009) argues that a witchdoctor (*Sangoma, Inyanga, Sing'anga, Mzuza, Waganga*, etc.) is a type of healer who treats illnesses believed to be caused by witchcraft. The term witchdoctor is sometimes used to refer to healers, particularly in regions, which use traditional healing rather than contemporary scientific medicine. Roelofse (2014) argues that the witchdoctor is a key player in making and administering the *muthi*-magic (*mankhwala, shonga, muthi, juju* etc.). Mbiti (2015) explains that the witch doctor is often a powerful community leader, revered by many for his or her perceived supernatural powers and ability to carry out magic. Aquaron et al. (2009) concurs that witchdoctors usually have commercial interests in promoting the notion that PWAs carry certain supernatural powers. Also, their body parts and bones can be used in making charms, potions, spells, chants, invocations, and incantations in order to bring about a client's success. Masanja (2015) argues that the witchdoctor succeeds in peddling the narrative that the body parts of PWAs have magical powers because, in African epistemology and metaphysics, the witchdoctor is considered to have secret knowledge of how the spirit world works, particularly concerning witchcraft. Thus, people use their services to get help when dealing with metaphysical issues of witchcraft, superstition, magic, divination, etc. According to Lipenga and Katemecha (2021), witchdoctors in Malawi may incorporate different parts of the body of the PWA into their work in order to bring about the desired change for the client. For example, the hair of PWAs may be woven into fishing nets in order to catch plenty of fish. Vincent (2008) explains that witchdoctors in South Africa make some *muthi*-magic concoctions using fingers, arms, legs, skin, eyes, genitals, and blood of PWAs.

Bota (2020) clarifies that witchdoctors have been accused of fuelling the killing of PWAs in sub-Saharan Africa. They are said to give instructions

to perpetrators of the crimes on how to kill PWAs and harvest their body parts, thereby operating as the heads of criminal gangs with middlemen that help them carry out the killings in a discreetly organised form of criminal activity. Bucaro (2009) argues that the witchdoctor is also considered to be the fulcrum of the clandestine market for PWA body parts, which forms a very lucrative enterprise for the dealers (Dave-Odigie, 2010, p. 68). Bota (2020) argues that in 2015, the government of Tanzania introduced provisional licences to witchdoctors and banned those who practised without a licence. The ban followed the discovery that witchdoctors fuelled attacks on PWAs as they spread rumours that body parts of PWAs were an important concoction to their practice. Consequently, the police in Tanzania arrested at least 200 unlicensed witchdoctors as part of a nationwide crackdown in connection with the wave of attacks and murders on PWAs in the country.

## **Religious Implications of the Violence Against PWAs in Africa**

Machoko (2013) opines that ATR presents two main implications of the violence perpetrated against PWAs in sub-Saharan Africa. **First**, the ritual murder and rape of PWAs are done in order to eradicate dangerous signs of societal and spiritual pollution because albinism is considered as a curse and a disdain in traditional African societies (Blankenberg, 2000). **Secondly**, PWAs are murdered or sexually assaulted in order to offer a more acceptable sacrifice to the ancestors for the socio-economic and political blessing of the whole society. Bakuluki and Mpyangu (2014) indicate that the shedding of blood in a sacrificial context implies that human or animal life is being given back to God, who is, in fact, the ultimate source of all life. Therefore, the ritual murder, mutilations, and rape of PWAs in Africa should be understood in the sacrificial context, whereby they are believed to have magical powers or supernatural characteristics, which makes them ideal people for ritual sacrifice (Cimpric, 2000).

## **Retrieval of ATR Beliefs and Practices in Enhancing the Lives of PWAs in Africa**

In this section of the study, I expound on my main argument for the chapter that, since the violence against PWAs in Malawi is influenced by some

negative aspects of ATR such as superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices, the solution to the issue also lies with some positive aspects of ATR. Therefore, I focus on retrieving, appropriating, and applying the life-enhancing beliefs and practices of ATR, such as *Ubuntu/Umunthu*, as the means with which to combat the ongoing violence against PWAs in Africa. In other words, this chapter proffers the African spirituality and ethics of *Ubuntu/Umunthu* as positive aspects of ATR that can be used in combating violence against PWAs.

## Ubuntu/ Umunthu

Bradbury-Jones (2018) argues that one of the solutions to the multi-faceted challenges faced by PWAs in Africa is the retrieval of the essence and practice of the African spirituality of *Ubuntu* or *Umunthu*. Nussbaum (2003) opines that *Ubuntu* provides a good starting point for understanding sub-Saharan African spirituality and morality because African spirituality is an all-embracing and holistic phenomenon that stems from the historical, socio-cultural, and religious heritage of the African peoples. Mkondo (2007) argues that *Ubuntu* is not an abstract principle nor a set of rules; rather, it is the religious foundation for African spirituality, philosophy, worldview, and way of life. John Mbiti captures the essence of the African spirituality of *Ubuntu* through his classic phrase: “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (Gathogo, 2022, p. 3). Nussbaum (2003) relates that *Ubuntu* is the basis of African communal cultural life. It expresses our interconnectedness, our common humanity and the responsibility to each other that is deeply interwoven in the fabric of our society.

Nussbaum (2003) affirms that *Ubuntu* is the capacity of African culture to express mutual companionship, reciprocity, respect, generosity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interest of building and maintaining a community with justice and mutual caring. Membe-Matale (2015) declares that from this inherently humane and humanistic perspective, only by being members of this universal human community can we fully know, experience, and express ourselves as individuals (Haws, 2009). Consequently, *Ubuntu* has repercussions on the discourse of albinism in sub-Saharan Africa because it creates a life-enhancing environment for PWAs in Africa. Apart from its life-giving qualities, *Umunthu* also serves as a moral criterion for judging whether or not a particular form of human

behaviour affirms the humanity of all persons in the community. It follows, then, that the violence against PWAs in Africa is against the very notion of *Umunthu*.

Metz (2007) gives a twofold categorisation of the nature of harmony or community in African thought. First, community implies that one has a moral obligation to be concerned about the good of others by being sympathetic and helpful to them. *Ubuntu* exemplifies the virtue of beneficence in its endeavour to achieve the common good of all, mutual consideration and aid, sympathy and concern for the welfare of others (Metz, 2016). Second, community implies that one has a moral obligation to think of oneself as bound up with others by being a member of the community and actively participating in its shared values and practices. In this case, an individual has a duty to identify himself or herself with others. The African values of community or harmony entail the combination of identity, solidarity, and hospitality (Metz, 2011). Thus, the violence perpetrated against PWAs in Africa is contrary to the values of *Ubuntu* for two reasons. First, it is inconsistent with the African moral obligation for an empathetic and sympathetic orientation towards humanity. Second, it fosters the disintegration of African society by disrupting the cordial harmony that exists in African communities.

Metz and Gaie (2010) argue that community or harmony entails that every human being is expected to consider him/herself as an integral part of the whole and assume the responsibility of promoting the common good of all (the summum bonum). Mokgoro (1998) asserts that the purpose of our life is community-service and community-belongingness. Therefore, the abductions, body mutilations, and killings of PWAs in Africa are contrary to the values of *Ubuntu* for two reasons. First, this violence suggests the otherness, stigmatisation, and marginalisation of PWAs in African communities instead of fostering the spirit of belongingness. Secondly, it prohibits the participation of PWAs in the socio-economic development of their communities because of safety and security concerns, which they have to negotiate on a daily basis (Mswela, 2017).

Sindima (1991) proposes that the African spirituality of *Umunthu* refers to the quality and fullness of human life. In this case, *Umunthu* is concerned with the existential reality of living in space and time. The term *Umunthu* implies the fullness of life in socio-historical conditions and demonstrates an authentic way of living in the world. As such, *Umunthu* is against all that jeopardises human life or prevents its fullness (Musopole, 2021). Mabvurira (2020) insinuates that *Ubuntu's* emphasis

on humanity suggests that whatever is good for humanity is *Ubuntu*, and whatever harms humanity is against *Ubuntu*. Therefore, the abductions, killings, and body mutilations of PWAs in Africa are inconsistent with *Umunthu*.

Mabvurira (2020) argues that one of the sayings of *Ubuntu* is: "If and when one is faced with a choice between wealth and the preservation of the life of another human being, one should opt for the preservation of life" (p. 75). Therefore, the current tide of violence against PWAs in Africa is inconsistent with *Ubuntu* because it reflects a pursuit of wealth through the commodification and pricing of PWAs' body parts.

Majola (2019) identifies several qualities of a person with *Ubuntu*. They are: welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, willing to share, open and available to others, willing to be vulnerable, and affirming of others. Therefore, the present-day dehumanisation of PWAs in Malawi totally destroys the spirit and essence of *Ubuntu* (Kaigoma, 2018).

At this juncture, it is imperative to question the effectiveness or the efficacy of *Ubuntu* in resolving the plight of PWAs in Malawi. The question can properly be phrased in the following way: "Why does violence against PWAs persist in Malawi in the midst of the *Ubuntu* spirituality and ethical theory?" In their provocative article: "The end of *Ubuntu*", Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013), give the harshest critique of *Ubuntu* by insinuating that it has reached its end as both a way of life and an ethical theory, hence it should be eliminated because it fails to solve problems in contemporary Africa such as the violence against PWAs. Kayange (2020) demonstrates the limitations of associating *Ubuntu* with a version of radical communitarianism that gives priority to the community over the individual. Kayange (2020) articulates that *Ubuntu's* appropriation of radical communitarianism both isolates and denies individuality or any individualistic elements in the African traditional way of life and thought (Eze, 2008). Consequently, this inevitably leads to the isolation and denial of the unique individuality of PWAs in African communities and provides a basis for their discrimination. Therefore, in view of the afore-mentioned critique of the theory and praxis of *Ubuntu*, when applying the concept, its retrieval, appropriation, and application there is need to understand its limitations and work towards improving it in order to ensure its efficacy in resolving contemporary problems in African society.

Rather than a matter of *Ubuntu's* inherent shortcomings, one also needs to consider the theory-praxis gap. Imafidon (2017) identifies a gap existing

between *Ubuntu* theory and praxis. This gap questions the Africans' commitment to the practice of *Ubuntu* in real-life situations. This gap is evident in the way PWAs are being brutally attacked in contemporary Africa (Mabovula, 2011). Ndareba (2021) argues that the retrieval of *Ubuntu* to resolve the current social issues in Africa demands the appropriation of both its theory and praxis in contemporary society. Metz (2007) opines that most African people talk about *Ubuntu* on a theoretical level, but they fail to practically live the values of *Ubuntu* in their daily lives. Letseka (2012) argues that *Ubuntu* expresses the fundamental reverence of human life and dignity, which are understood to be deeply rooted in the community. Hence, the praxis of *Ubuntu* in contemporary African society has the potential to eliminate the violence against PWAs.

## CONCLUSION

The chapter has demonstrated the intersectionality of African traditional religion (ATR) and the albinism discourse in Malawi. Some negative aspects of ATR serve as sources of various myths, superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices, which contribute to the stigmatisation, discrimination, and violence against PWAs in Malawi. The violence is exemplified by abductions, attacks, killings, body mutilations, and grave exhumations of the bones of PWAs. The chapter observes that horrendous crimes against PWAs are perpetrated based on the belief that their body parts can be used to make charms, fetishes or magical concoctions that can bring good luck, health, material and financial prosperity to the beneficiaries of these concoctions. Although the superstitious and witchcraft related beliefs concerning albinism cannot be scientifically proven, they have their epistemological basis and praxis in some aspects of ATR. Thus, the main argument proffered in this chapter is that since the roots of the plight of PWAs in Malawi are based on some aspects of ATR such as superstitious and witchcraft beliefs and practices, the solution must also be essentially religious, in order to holistically resolve the problem. This can be done by employing life-enhancing aspects of ATR beliefs and practices such as the African ethics and spirituality of *Ubuntu/Umunthu*. Consequently, the chapter demonstrates how the African religio-cultural framework of *Ubuntu/Umunthu*, if practised, can be utilised in curbing the violence against



PWAs in Malawi. *Ubuntu* is the basis for African spirituality, communal life, ethics and worldview. Hence, *Ubuntu's* life-enhancing and flourishing qualities should be retrieved, appropriated, and employed to ensure the human dignity, well-being, and safety of PWAs in Malawi.

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