2023

Realms unseen: Albinism and epistemic decoloniality in tanzania

Jane L. Saffitz
Denison University

Recommended Citation
Saffitz, J., L. (2023). Realms unseen. American Ethnologist, 50(4). http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/amet.13203

Received: 3 July 2020 | Accepted: 11 January 2023

DOI: 10.1111/amet.13203

american ethnologist
JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ETHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Realms unseen

Albinism and epistemic decoloniality in Tanzania

Jane L. Saffitz

Department of Anthropology, Denison University

Correspondence
Jane L. Saffitz, Department of Anthropology, Denison University
Email: saffitzj@denison.edu

Funding information
Wenner-Gren Foundation, Grant/Award Number: Gr. 8860; Fulbright-Hays Program, Grant/Award Number: P022A140068; Departments of Anthropology and African Studies, University of California, Davis; Office of the Provost, Denison University

Abstract

Since 2006, albinism has emerged as both a subject and an object of contestation in Tanzania and beyond. An abiding global narrative purports that, as a recessively inherited condition, albinism is fetishized by Africans who falsely attribute otherworldly potentials to albino body parts and commodify them in a grisly market run by "traditional" healers and their patrons. In response, translocal albinism rights stakeholders have formed to cement a singular notion of albinism and, with "it," a notion of unseen power that cancels the agency of particular nonhumans. Their work diverges from those who insist on multiple other instantiations of albinism and worlds unseen, some of which offer compelling explanations of recent violence rooted in entanglement and complicity, rather than an Indigenous cosmology. In this context, I argue for a conceptual and methodological approach to social movements and minority groups rooted in decolonizing unseen realms and embracing epistemic and ontological openness.

KEYWORDS
albinism, entanglement, healing, Pentecostal genetics, Tanzania, unseen realms

On a balmy morning in July 2015, doctors, humanitarians, and state social workers convened in Kwimba, a rural district in the Mwanza region of Tanzania, for a seminar designed to inform the parents of children with albinism of the laws of recessive inheritance. I accompanied them and the 60 or so attendees, who included journalists, donors, and diplomats. Pamphlets littered the wooden tables. Posters were taped crookedly to the chalkboard walls of our outdoor classroom—one was a brightly colored map with photographs of people with albinism from around the world; another was a laminated poster of an albino crocodile. Together, these images visualized albinism—which is, biomedically speaking, considered a congenital condition—as existing across countries and species (see Figure 1). In so doing, they aimed to reify albinism as a universal category of biomedical science with clearly delineated contours.

Common across Tanzania, Understanding Albinism (UA) seminars are one tool in a larger humanitarian arsenal that has emerged to combat the approximately 160 murders of people with albinism in the past 15 years.[1] Leaders organize interventions in an emergent biosocial network of NGO workers, scientists, humanitarians, academics, and Pentecostal Christians, among disparate others, with and without albinism, Tanzanian and non-Tanzanian (Rabinow, 1992). Leaders allege that "traditional" healers (*waganga wa kienyeji*) and their patrons—extractive laborers (e.g., fishermen and artisanal miners), politicians, and elites—fetishize light skin, attributing otherworldly potentials to albino body parts rather than recognizing albinism as "merely" genetic.[2] In this way, healers are suspected of instigating violence (Bryceson et al., 2010). International media outlets have reported widely on such "albinocide," and sensationally, thrusting albinism to the fore of humanitarian interventions at the United Nations, African Union, and US Congress; in Hollywood (e.g., Nyong'o, 2009), and beyond . As a result, remarkably durable narrative explanations of violence circulate across media, documentary films, young adult literature, and academic publications. A common trope across them alleges that Tanzanians lack biomedical knowledge and, in its absence, deny those with albinism full personhood (e.g., Imafidon, 2019). The purported culprits, for instance, are said to capitalize on the liminal status of albinism by visiting healers to purchase *dawa*[3] containing albino body parts (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 1 At an Understanding Albinism seminar, an albinism rights activist holds a picture of two Black parents with their child with albinism. The poster is designed to teach seminar participants that albinism is a recessively inherited genetic condition. Ukerewe Island, Mwanza, August 2015. (Jane L. Saffitz) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

Narratives about albinism-related violence manifest in and are reinforced by a form of humanitarian identity politics that understands violence to stem from false or harmful beliefs (*imani potofu*; Hodžić, 2017). This is the implicit and often explicit backdrop against which UA seminars occur. Myriad groups lead seminars, including albinism rights organizations like the Canada-based Under the Same Sun and the United Kingdom-based Standing Voice; international disability rights organizations like ADD International and the Disability Rights Fun; missionaries like the Mennonite Central Committee and the Pentecostal Assemblies of God; and intergovernmental organizations like the Red Cross and organs of the United Nations. At the Kwimba seminar, Tito, a Tanzanian man with albinism who worked for multiple international NGOs, and Dr. Mwita, a Tanzanian dermatologist without albinism, conceptualized genetics as counter to an Indigenous fetishization of albinism, which they expressed through the fuzzy notion that Africans believe people with albinism to be ghosts.[4] That is, in teaching genetics they presented the figure of the carrier for a recessively inherited mutation to index biomedical knowledge and the figure of the ghost to index shadowy "African beliefs" about those with albinism, juxtaposing the former as an antidote to violence and the latter its culprit. Yet this framing eludes the entangled nature of knowledge practices across biomedical and Indigenous epistemes through which ghosts and carriers become intelligible and recent spectacles of violence and activism become possible.

In the 19th century, for instance, naturalists instantiated albinism as a medical condition through taxonomic practices and commodified Africans with albinism by displaying them at ethnological exhibitions and collecting hair and skin samples (Curran, 2009; Tilley, 2011). Decades later, eugenicists and biometricians pored over travelogues, pedigree charts, and colonial medical records, struggling to incorporate "African whiteness" into their classificatory schemas (e.g., Pearson et al., 1913). Their records are peppered with hazy conjectures about the inability of Africans to assimilate alterity and mobilize piecemeal anecdotes into nondescript theories of "African beliefs" that tie albinism to an unseen realm. As I see it, Africans with albinism have thus long been critical to the production of biomedical knowledge (i.e., the carrier), as have non-Africans been integral to the production of albinism's signification as extraordinary (i.e., the ghost).

More recently, albinism has, like other legal classifications of disability, emerged in Tanzania through uneven processes of governance and state formation (Kohrman, 2005). This includes postcolonial Swahili-language planning and the search for a Swahili word for albinism (Blommaert, 2014; Fabian, 1991). It also includes biopolitical initiatives to expand cancer programs: during the height of Ujamaa socialism in the 1970s, for instance, when Tanzania received its first radiation machine, Tanzanian and American oncologists went door to door in Dar es Salaam, searching for people with albinism to count in censuses and enroll in clinical trials (Luande et al., 1985). Together, doctors and patients with albinism founded the Tanzanian Albinism Society (Chama cha Ualbino Tanzania), funded by the socialist state and currently by international NGOs, to instantiate albinism as a medicolegal humanitarian category. While it was not until the mid-aughts that anecdotes about the assumed presence of infanticide long ago (*toka zamani*)

gave way to rumors of contemporary violence, some advocates like the retired oncologist Dr. Jeff Luande understood albinocide to be enabled by and thus entangled with their past efforts to make albinism recognizable to others. As he put it, people with albinism became visible to the wrong people.

From 2014 to 2016 and again in 2018, I conducted fieldwork with diverse teams of translocal stakeholders (*wadai*)[5] who constellated around the forms of albinism they evinced. In doing so, I came to see that the production of authoritative knowledge about albinism-related violence relies on the partitioning of people and practices that ostensibly demonize albinism from those who work for their protection. Taking seriously Dr. Luande's insights that activism and violence may be co-constitutive and dissatisfied by representations of violence that give voice to one marginalized group (people with albinism) at the expense of others (healers and extractive laborers), I also developed close working relationships with the alleged perpetrators of albinism-related violence, entering into knowledge exchanges with healers, learning techniques in fishing and artisanal mining, and listening to politicians as they were simultaneously appealed to for help and accused of complicity. In doing so, I came to see the mutual entanglement of practices that create forms of spectacle around albinism, even as they are bifurcated by categories like "occult violence" and "humanitarian activism."

For Kumbuka, an esteemed Sukuma chief and nonagenarian critical of albinism identity politics with whom I often chatted, for instance, albinism became meaningful in his lineage in the late 19th and early 20th centuries through its use in *dawa*. Over time, he told stories of overseeing a chiefdom, which required consulting trusted healers to manage capricious threats, seen and unseen. At times this meant using human body parts, and in some cases albino body parts, though nonviolently and for collective good rather than personal accumulation—for example, in *dawa* of attraction (*samba*) to bring the rains and stave off drought or in *dawa* of defense (*kiinga*) to protect Sukuma homesteads from a Maasai raid.[6] In these moments, albinism exceeded biomedicine; however, he simultaneously upheld "it" to also be a genetic condition governed by the laws of recessive inheritance.

FIGURE 2 A cartoon drawn by a Tanzanian albinism rights activist. Such drawings are meant to inform the public of the causes of violence against people with albinism. A patient/customer says, "Healer, I want wealth," and is met with "Bring me the arm of an albino." Dar es Salaam, January 2016. (Jane L. Saffitz) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

Across various sites, then, formations of albinism have become central to disparate agendas. In tracing multiple competing instantiations of albinism, I came to see that "its" meaning emerges through particular encounters like UA seminars. While indebted to approaches that locate the category albinism amid structural forces (Bryceson et al., 2010; Jangu, 2012; Mesaki, 2009; Myhre, 2017; Stroeken, 2011) and knowledge practices (Baker et al., 2010; Brocco, 2015; Franklin et al., 2018; Imafidon, 2019), my treatment of the multiplicity of albinism enables a consideration of the political and ethical contestations surrounding a nascent category without granting "its" meaning a priori. This consideration also does not rely on preformed categories that, as Dr. Luande reminds, ultimately became untenable (i.e., violence and activism). By not assuming coherence, I argue that competing instantiations of albinism as genetics and albinism as *dawa* become the grounds for calls to decolonize an unseen realm and its mediating role in science and religion.

Drawing on the notion of cosmopolitics (Latour, 2004; Stengers, 2005) to foreground the undecidedness of who or what composes worlds, scholars in anthropology and science and technology studies have stressed the partial connectedness of seemingly divergent knowledge practices (Strathern, 2004). In her work on Indigenous cosmopolitics, for instance, Marisol de la Cadena (2010, p. 347) points to the imbrication of Indigeneity in Andean nation-states politics where the latter's denial of ontological difference leads to a hybrid formation wherein the former becomes "more than one, yet less than two." In this case, even while modernist states relegate Indigenous knowledge to the domain of culture, cosmopolitics provincializes the universality of science and its alleged separation from politics (de la Cadena, 2010; see also Chakrabarty, 2000). A related form of cosmopolitics is at play in Tanzania, where "traditional" healing and biomedicine have long been partially connected through "motley" and "contingent" assemblages (Turnbull, 2000; see also Langwick, 2011). In this context, formations of albinism as genetic are often distinctly Pentecostal and, as such, locate the alterity of albinism in a God who chooses genetic mutations, to the exclusion of nonhumans like *mashetani*, *majini*, and *mapepo* that animate unseen realms but, for Pentecostals, cannot make albinism.[7]

The albinism that emerges through what I call "Pentecostal genetics"—itself a hybrid knowledge form—aims to cancel albinism as *dawa* by consigning its status to a "belief in ghosts" that is seen to enable violence. Parsing which practices can lay claim to visibility and knowability, Pentecostal genetics amplifies the binaries that structure explanations of Tanzania's "albino situation," including violence/humanitarianism, belief/knowledge, "witchcraft"/science, and rumor/fact and lay claim to particular futures. At the same time, Kumbuka asserts the agency of nonhumans as potentially moral actors contiguous with science and religion. In so doing, he points to the importance of knowledge practices in social movements that

are neither nativist nor exogamous. As I argue, he evinces a decolonial cosmopolitics based on onto-epistemic openness to both bodies and their potentials, on the one hand, and realms unseen, on the other.

For Achille Mbembe (2015, 2021), decolonization is a relational process of rejecting the epistemic coloniality (e.g., Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) that centers European knowledge as universal and negates what exists outside its borders, while also working to develop pluriversal (i.e., cosmopolitical) "alternatives." The alternatives he has in mind do not reject Western knowledge forms but rather embrace an in-betweenness—an entangled space of partially connected knowledge forms that, like albinism, have no single point of origin. Critical to this process, he suggests, is an embrace of "a plurality of narratives from silenced voices and invisible places" that necessarily bracket the dualisms that undergird Western thought (Mbembe, 2021, p. 79). Building on his analysis, I underscore conditions of ongoing coloniality whereby Pentecostal instantiations of an unseen realm, emergent through their opposition between ghosts and carriers, are enabled by extant colonial legal statutes dating to the 1920s that dichotomize engagements with unseen power as either medicine or witchcraft, venerating the former and criminalizing the latter (Langwick, 2011). It is in this context that Kumbuka's insistence of the possibilities of albinism as *dawa* and their connections to an unseen world can be read as pluriversal. As I suggest, they offer a conceptual and methodological approach to social movements rooted in complexly entangled practices and their onto-epistemic presuppositions, rather than narrative tropes and bifurcated categories that reify Africa as ontologically other and occlude the possibilities that emerge in acknowledging their co-constitution.

Without implying the presence of "two sides," for there are additional instantiations of albinism that implicate unseen realms beyond what I address in this piece, I contrast Pentecostal genetics and albinism as *dawa* to show that the multiplicity and indeterminacy of albinism and its connections to unseen worlds actually provides clues to ameliorating violence and shoring up protections for a minoritized population that are eclipsed by the understandable proclivity to parse knowledge practices as categorically "legitimate" or not, "humanitarian" or not. Further, highlighting the presence of unseen worlds not only in "local" healing practices but across biomedicine and genetics, humanitarianism and development, and journalism and anthropology, enables a more robust conceptualization of agency and the relationship between cause and effect, in movements where preformed categories lose explanatory power. Beyond albinism specifically, I advocate for an approach to African social movements—particularly around marginalized groups (e.g., LGBTQ), genetically defined collectives (Tamarkin, 2020), and decolonial knowledge (e.g., #RhodesMustFall)—that centers epistemic unruliness across hybrid knowledge practices.

#NOTGHOSTS

The Kwimba seminar began with *chai*. As journalists, doctors, state social workers, and NGO representatives mingled at the front of the outdoor classroom, the parents of children with albinism sat in the back on long wooden benches. Behind them were the Kwimba district offices. Funded jointly by myriad government offices and initiatives and albinism NGOs and wealthy humanitarians, seminars tended to cohere around combating threats to people with albinism, whether others' beliefs or harmful ultraviolet rays that cause endemic levels of skin cancer.[8] This morning was particularly tender. It brought together families just months after two toddlers with albinism had been murdered in incidents seven weeks apart, one of whom—Pendo—had lived nearby.

While waiting for the seminar to commence, Tito asked us to shout out rumors we had heard about "people like him." Pili, a middle-aged woman with albinism and disability rights advocate, explained that people with albinism are called ghosts—figures who do not die but mysteriously vanish. She used the English-Swahili neologism *gosti*, a word unrecognizable to many unfamiliar with UA seminars. Others nodded, affirming they had heard of these suspicious disappearances. Edson, a college student and intern for an albinism NGO, spoke of the rejection he faced by his father's family: "They would say I'm a curse (*laana*) and my mother had sex with a ghost." Rather than *gosti*, he used *mzimu* (sing.), which connotes an ancestral spirit. In both instances, the implication was that people with albinism were believed to be nonhumans who engage unseen power. Within and beyond UA seminars, such anecdotes are worlded into narratives explaining violence. After Pendo's disappearance but before the Kwimba seminar, for instance, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, n.d) launched the campaign "People with Albinism: Not Ghosts, but Human Beings" in an effort to abate violence through rights-based modes of recognition.[9] For months, Africans with albinism and their supporters used the hashtag #NotGhosts across social media platforms to condemn such beliefs—from George Soros's Open Society Foundation to the Senegalese guitarist with albinism Maah Keita and from a middle-aged Azerbaijani man with albinism to a young Asian American woman in California with albinism, both showing solidarity on the newly established International Albinism Awareness Day.

#NotGhosts prefigures a mode of identity politics practiced through humanitarian NGOs that, like other movements for marked categories, deploys essentialized narratives to traverse disparate contexts and galvanize publics (Tamarkin, 2020). In this instance, the differences between *gosti*, which is almost exclusively uttered in the context of albinism to signal others' unreason, and *mzimu*, which has a long and variegated use among healers and born-again Christians, among others, became unimportant. What matters in UA seminars is the "social production of commensurability" through which ghost, *gosti*, and *mzimu* become #NotGhosts, which is metonymic of an outmoded cosmology that incorrectly values albinism (Pigg, 2001). It is not that Pili's and Edson's experiences bear no resemblance to an albinism-as-ghost form, but that they are entangled with and thus not prior to the representation of their beliefs by others, including scientists, missionaries, chiefs, healers, journalists, and anthropologists. In this way, their utterances do not constitute a generalizable discourse but rather emerge alongside totalizing narratives at much larger scales.

In its becoming, #NotGhosts condenses discordant engagements with unseen worlds, reifying "African beliefs" as a site of primordial otherness (Mbembe, 2001; Mudimbe, 1988) and precursor for violence that precedes and warrants the genetic carrier, whose status is chosen by God. After Pili's and Edson's comments, Dr. Mwita interjected to denounce ghosts as incapable of explaining albinism. As he spoke, he placed butcher paper atop an easel in preparation for a lesson in recessive inheritance. I interpreted his steadfastness to reflect narratives that tie ghosts to violence. As the UN #NotGhosts campaign avers, "because some believe that [people with albinism] are magical beings or ghosts, they mutilate or even kill them so their body parts can be used for witchcraft rituals" (OHCHR, n.d). Here the ghost engenders others' not knowing and intimates that violence can only be ameliorated through a different instantiation of albinism. What is more, the conflation of ghosts with magical beings and witchcraft rituals reveals its flexibility in indexing an unseen, broadly speaking and thus in contextualizing albinocide amid other discourses of "occult violence" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999).

By unseen, I am referring to palpably felt yet indeterminate realms that parallel visible worlds and come to be known through visible effects. Often referred to through translations like "the occult" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999), "the second world" (Newell, 2021), and "an invisible realm" (West, 2005), unseen realms are foremost uncertain, denoting what is unknown or knowable and thus encountered as spaces of unfinished possibility: in this sense, I understand unseen spaces not as idioms through which people grapple with rapidly changing worlds but as spaces that center indeterminacy across knowledge forms. Often marked by secrecy, pretense, and an "aesthetics of ambiguity" (Ferme, 2001, p. 9; see also Archambault, 2013, De Boeck, 2011; West, 2005), such realms mediate everyday engagements with everything from extractive industries and medical systems to electoral politics and humanitarian praxis. In the process, they emerge as asymmetrical spaces of contestation amid knowledge hierarchies: albinism stakeholders, for instance, use colonial-era legal statutes to advocate for further criminalizing non-godly engagements with the unseen. This struggle against "other" engagements with realms unseen has more recently manifested in transnational humanitarian efforts, most notably by the United Nations Human Rights Council, to collapse disparate instantiations of unseen realms into witchcraft, which is presented as a threat to human rights. Albinism cosmopolitics thus exists amid relations of ongoing coloniality where particular engagements with unseen power are discounted and where particular hybrid knowledge practices (i.e., Pentecostal genetics) claim exclusive rights to science and human rights at the expense of others (i.e., albinism as *dawa*). At stake in such struggles are not only the livelihoods of healers and their patient-clients and the agency of nonhumans like *mashetani* and *majini* but also questions of who may be included in movements to protect minoritized groups, enact truth claims, and shape political futures.

In Tanzania, where it is broadly understood that all bodies contain tremendous potential but an anomalous body (*mwili ajabu kabisa*) more so, albinocide is at times discussed relative to violence against other marked categories, notably elderly women accused of witchcraft (Mesaki, 2009), children skinned and sold for "ritual purposes" (Sanders, 2001), men with bald heads (*Mwananchi*, 2019), and others. Across academic and popular discourses, the commodification of body parts for use in an unseen realm is often understood in terms of a desire for instantaneous wealth.[10] As many have pointed out, such wealth has become possible since the ushering in of economic liberalization in the early 1990s, but the chances of obtaining it are fewer and farther between, while influxes of commodities have created a greater need to manage the politics of one's visibility (Tripp, 1997; Weiss, 1993). Without minimizing the importance of such structural transformations, many have suggested that attempts to locate forms of bodily violence amid political economic transitions, often under the rubric of "occult economies" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999), tend to treat engagements with unseen power as forms of metaphoric critique—as unreal beliefs projected onto real material conditions to make sense of the seemingly limitless forms of commodification under capitalism (Kapferer, 2002; Pederson, 2011). While agreeing with these critiques, my work suggests that aggregating myriad engagements with unseen powers into "the occult" prevents an understanding of multiple intersecting unseen realms like those evinced by Tito, Dr. Mwita, and Kumbuka, not to mention the particular significance of albino arms, for example. Approaches focused on "occult violence" additionally center processes of bodily violence, fetishization, and commodification within nonbiomedical engagements with unseen power and note the role of competition and secrecy in such processes without also heeding similar dynamics within different but partially connected medical systems (e.g., Sharp, 2000).[11]

One Sunday afternoon I explained the hashtag #NotGhosts to Kumbuka. He chuckled and responded that Wasukuma have always known people with albinism to be living "just like the rest of us." Kumbuka spent most of his time at his home outside Mwanza reading the newspaper, praying the rosary, and receiving visitors. From our first visit where he half-jokingly chided my limited knowledge of Kisukuma and asked what kind of sacrifice I would bring in exchange for his knowledge of dark power (*nguvu ya giza*), I saw Kumbuka as irreverent, incisive, and intimidating. He was pained by violence and had participated in myriad interventions, including drafting a statement with other Sukuma chiefs condemning violence (Kaphipa, 2009) and holding his own impromptu seminars, mostly in his neighborhood, where he explained that albino body parts lose their extraordinary powers if obtained violently. As he relayed to school children, bystanders, and nearby storekeepers, actions that go against God negate the power of albino bodies.

Rather than indict healers or instantiations of albinism as *dawa*, Kumbuka explained the rise of albinism-related violence as reverberating from structural changes in the early 1990s—most importantly, the advent of multiparty democracy and proliferation of private media, which fueled rumor, competition, and suspicion—as well as untoward influences from elsewhere, which he pejoratively summed up as "Nigeria, mostly." Like Tito and Dr. Mwita, he lamented the proliferation of forms of charlatanism. This meant acknowledging that many healers were likely con men (*watapeli*) who with neither inborn

abilities nor in-depth training lure gullible or desperate patient-consumers and that they were not singularly deceptive. Indeed, we often exchanged stories about con artists of all kinds—evangelical pastors who falsely claim to possess the power of the Holy Spirit; fake albinism activists who acquire donations on behalf of a nonexistent NGO, only to line their pockets; and journalists who operate undercover and pose as possible consumers of albino body parts in an effort to document a market they assume preexists them.

And yet Kumbuka did not insist on a singular unseen realm where only certain (godly) nonhumans are agentive, defying altogether the categories mobilized by stakeholders. In describing his work with healers, he used the Swahili notions of healing (*uganga*) and harming (*uchawi*), which exist relationally and situationally rather than diametrically and categorically. During the 1920s and 1930s in colonial Tanganyika when Kumbuka was a child, British officials sought to legislate engagements with unseen realms; in doing so, they approached healing and harming through their categories of medicine and witchcraft, respectively; that is, they attempted to make *uganga* commensurable with notions of medicine and *uchawi* with witchcraft (Langwick, 2011, p. 39). Their translations relegated forces unseeable and unknowable to them to the domain of belief, criminalizing engagements with the unseen (e.g., divination) in laws that many albinism organizers currently claim do not go far enough in curtailing healers' practices. Implicit in Kumbuka's narrations is a critique of the translations that condensed diverse healing practices into "traditional" medicine (Feierman, 1985) and hierarchized them against the standard of scientific authority (Prakash, 1999). His critiques emerge largely from stakeholders' mobilization of colonial formations of the unseen—from #NotGhosts, as well as from Pentecostal genetics—and suggest that rather than an exclusionary cosmopolitics rooted in partitioning certain hybrid knowledge forms from others, that anyone concerned with albinism might instead consider the mutual imbrication of practices that heal and harm.

THE GENES WE CARRY

If #NotGhosts served to create a relation to a particular unseen realm, the principles of genetic inheritance were deployed to sever that relation and offer a causal explanation of albinism rooted in science and a Christian God who chooses albinism. In doing so, Tito and Dr. Mwita aimed to move albinism from a presumed place of opaque nonknowledge, since the mechanisms of ghostly beings are not well known, into the domain of biomedicine, which is sometimes unseen but can become knowable, nonetheless. In our first session of the morning, Dr. Mwita, donning a white lab coat and gold-rimmed glasses, drew a series of capital and lowercase As to illustrate the principles of recessive inheritance (*urithi wa vinasaba*). Visually rendering the otherwise hidden status of the carrier through his illustrations, he aimed to convey to parents without albinism that they possessed some trace of the condition "on the inside" (Rapp, 1988, p. 149). Speaking slowly, he explained the possible combinations that two carriers ("Aa") could produce, dwelling on

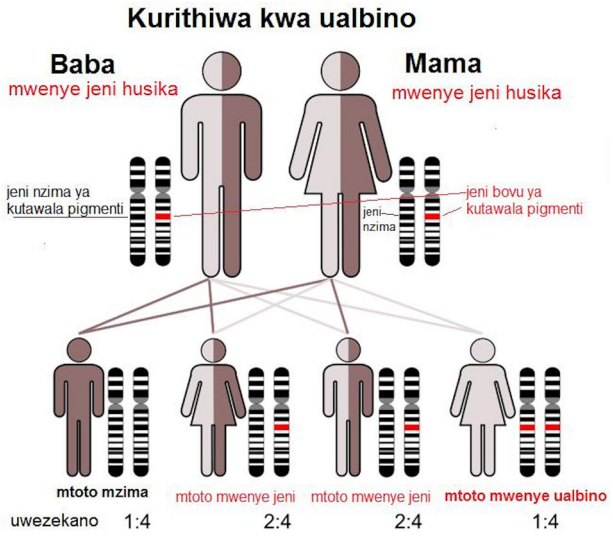

FIGURE 3 A Swahili-language inheritance chart explains how two carriers may or may not produce a child with albinism. Here, mutant genes are expressed as *-bovu* (defective, rotten, or unhealthy), while those without a mutation are described with the adjective *-zima* (whole, healthy, or well). (Armin Kübelbeck/CC BY 3.0) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

the 25 percent chance of albinism and the 50 percent chance of an invisible carrier (see Figure 3).

In this scenario, Dr. Mwita served as a genetic counselor, offering literacy on risk and responsibility by translating biomedical knowledge into idioms that might resonate with the parents before him (Rapp, 1988; Taussig, 2009). In the process, he instantiated albinism as an object of biomedical intervention by also translating "the albino gene" and its phenotypic characteristics—an underdeveloped optic nerve, nystagmus (rapid eye movements), and light skin and hair—into the category "albinism" (Berg & Mol, 1998; Good, 1994). This was not a process of mediating between medically plural systems, since despite the albinism-as-ghostly formulation, "other" formulations of albinism do not appear in any kind of unified way and emerge, for instance, through events like Kumbuka's neighborhood seminars. Rather, literacy here meant conveying a nonsecular biomedical epistemology where bodies are bounded artifacts of nature that can be known, quantified, and intervened upon and, simultaneously, subjected to God's power (Latour, 1993; Pigg, 2001). His goal was for parents to understand what albinism "really" was and to adopt a particularly Pentecostalist orientation to an unseen realm—positions often embraced by parents and children who had been unsure of albinism's connection to an unseen realm and were seeking explanations of alterity.

Working against the figure of the ghost, Dr. Mwita positioned the knowledge that one might be a carrier for albinism as the result of knowable forces that illuminate rather than conceal the nature of difference. The ability of albinism to render visible seemingly inscrutable truths is critical to its oversignification. When a child with albinism is born, it renders knowable the carrier status of the parents and makes possible a form of actionable knowledge via statistics and probability—ostensibly,

decisions about whether to have more children. This controlled kind of knowing is the result of epistemic shifts in 19th-century Europe in which determinism gave way to "the autonomous laws of chance" (Hacking, 1990, p. vii). Moving away from albinism-as-ghost and toward albinism-as-carrier, UA seminars "tame chance" by bringing the fact of albinism under the control of genetic inheritance and the laws of probability. In this way, the carrier served to invalidate the ghost and, by extension, a non-Pentecostal unseen.

Yet without the presence of a child and in a context where genetic testing is not widely available, the status of the carrier remains unseen. Biomedical discourse uses *occult* as an adjective to describe a range of subclinical phenomena—from viruses and cancers to ulcers and autoimmune diseases—where detectable signs and symptoms are not manifest. In this context, *occult* is tinged not with an aura of nonreason and shadowy belief (Kapferer, 2002) but rather of belonging to a concealed realm that might one day be made manifest through the enlightening knowledge practices of doctors and scientists.[12] By contrast, anthropologists have deployed *the occult* to describe phenomena in an invisible, nonscientific realm most often related to witchcraft, sorcery, or magic that obscures the nature of things. Despite activists' delineations between biomedical processes of illumination—illustrated through the carrier, and occult processes of concealment—illustrated through the ghost, I see the ghost and the carrier as co-constitutive, emergent through entangled histories and shared epistemes. Even so, UA seminars deploy the former as a "cultural" way of understanding the latter, in the process effecting an unseen realm where more-than-human actors are valued according to their godliness.

Insisting on the ghost and the carrier as oppositional, rather than co-constitutive, UA stakeholders aimed to partition knowledge-making practices surrounding albinism and cultivate epistemic subjectivities. Their motives thus differed from advocacy groups that form on the basis of genetic similarity and articulate claims for citizenship, membership, and belonging (Heath et al., 2004). By linking the "belief in ghosts" to violence committed against seminar participants and their children, stakeholders suggest that risk and responsibility come not so much in deciding to have another child but in how they think about difference. In other words, believing in ghosts as either an explanation for the origins of albinism—as Edson noted when he recalled how his mother was alleged to have had sex with a *mzimu*, or as an explanation of the extraordinary capacities of albino bodies—as Pendo relayed when she spoke of her purported ability to disappear like a gosti, allows for the possibility of violence. In this instance, then, knowledge of albinism necessitates a Pentecostal genetics that enlightens others.

When explaining to parents their carrier status, Dr. Mwita was adamant that albinism could never be explained by witchcraft or any non-godly being who occupies an unseen realm. But his reliance on the parlance of genetics, particularly on notions of chance (*nasibu*), dissatisfied many parents who wanted to know why, for example, they had seven children all with albinism or why two parents with albinism had a "Black" child—the latter of which raised questions of infidelity and medical miracles. A frequent question was why a particular child did or did not have albinism. While this could have pointed to the coexistence of "natural" and "social" explanations (Feierman, 2000), or how scientific explanations of misfortune are not mutually exclusive with others (Evans-Pritchard, 1937; Wilson, 1951), Dr. Mwita answered swiftly, offering a theory of causality beyond probability and chance: "Genetics is God's will."

A born-again Christian, Dr. Mwita did not dispute the reality of more-than-human actors that animate an invisible realm (Newell, 2007). He did, however, invoke a distinctly Pentecostal genetics wherein a benevolent God chooses mutations and where the satanic power of non-godly nonhumans work in an unseen realm but cannot make albinism. Rather than assume biomedicine as constitutive of secular modernity in which science and religion are bifurcated under the "modern constitution" (Latour, 1993), Pentecostal albinism advocacy encompasses a range of nonsecular practices where God's intentionality is required to explain biomedical practices and technologies (Roberts, 2012).[13] Ethnographies of nonsecular biomedicine move beyond likening biomedical practices to ritual, divination, or forms of righteous belief (Good, 1994; Lock, 1998). Instead, they focus on how health and medicine are made through material practices and the immaterial power of "gods, God, and godlessness" (Roberts, 2012, 2016; Whitmarsh & Roberts, 2016). Yet Pentecostal genetics suggests that a nonsecular medical anthropology that levels all nonhuman actors to the same plane—that equates a benevolent God who explains the carrier with a satanic demon that explains the ghost—does not go far enough in specifying which entities can act. Critical to stakeholders' position is a theory of agency that is simultaneously nonmodern and exclusionary.

This particular instantiation of an unseen realm reflects a Pentecostal orientation of breaking with what they see as a traditional African past of consulting healers, honoring ancestral ties, and performing sacrifices (*tambiko*) in their honor (Meyer, 1998). In many Pentecostal communities albinism advocacy has become a key facet of this rupture. Embracing genetics is not only a sign of stakeholders' modern subjectivity but of their fight against the satanic forces that unleash upon all bodies forms of malady (Langwick, 2011) and facilitate the commodification of people with albinism and their parts (see Figure 4). By the same token, unlike the benevolent power of the Holy Spirit, the power that traditional healers harness, regardless of whether they are aided by *mizimu* (pl., "ancestors") or human body parts, is satanic (Engelke, 2010). This means that, to the exclusion of Kumbuka's narrations wherein commodification and violence happen at the hands of biomedical knowledge forms, too, UA organizers see no benign or legitimate instantiation of albinism or of albino body parts that is nonbiomedical and non-Pentecostal. Instead, as they argue, protecting minorities and effecting social change require a singular enactment of the unseen, to the exclusion of "other" knowledge forms.

Beyond a particular constellation of the unseen, Pentecostal genetics is a boundary-making practice of revealing who *really* has albinism and is thus entitled to forms of recognition and protection and who *really* supports albinism rights by correctly reifying the condition.[14] As a hybrid knowledge form that, neither modern nor Indigenous, embraces only the "tenacious

FIGURE 4 At a Pentecostal church outside of Mwanza, a pastor and student with albinism preach the gospel. In Tanzania, albinism activism has been heralded by Pentecostals as a means of transforming how others understand the nature of unseen realms. Mwanza, June 2015. (Jane L. Saffitz)

assumptions" of biomedicine that accord with a Pentecostal subjectivity, Pentecostal genetics reveals the inseparability of instantiations of albinism from theories of unseen power and proffers a way to combat violence and stigma through stable identity categories and totalizing ways of knowing (Hasu, 2009, p. 70; see also Gordon, 1988). At the same time, its mobilization of colonial formations of an unseen rooted in Manichean notions of God and Satan and good and evil and its backing by a robust humanitarian apparatus that tightly controls narratives about albino-related violence has, as I argue, counterproductively narrowed theories of agency and activism. The result is the exclusion of knowledge forms that center entanglement and complicity without relying on preformed categories and, as such, may be better equipped to remedy violence.

"SCIENCE IN THE BUSH"

A core dimension of Pentecostal practice in Africa has been its positioning as a counteractant to "dark power" (Ashforth, 2005; Newell, 2007). Like many born-agains (*walokole*), evangelical albinism stakeholders disavow all healing as satanic and allege healers to themselves be witches. Among the friends and family with whom I lived, most of whom are Pentecostal, we often debated the acceptability of using nonbiomedical *dawa* and whether visiting a healer was ever justified. At Bible study one evening, my confidant and research assistant Kazima raised this issue. Most in the circle agreed that *dawa* made from herbs (*za mitishamba*) was acceptable, so long as knowledge of its efficacy was not rooted in a healer's consultation with nongodly powers. This determination to deem certain forms of herbalism acceptable reflects colonial histories of elevating herbalism to a protoscience (Langwick, 2011, p. 40) and criminalizing other engagements with an invisible realm. Kazima and the congregants of his church recognized no distinction between healing (*uganga*) and harming (*uchawi*), declaring any form of healing that engages an invisible realm to be solely the latter.

Not surprisingly, Kumbuka was miffed by how Pentecostals disparaged him and the healers he historically worked so closely with. But he was more angered by the rejection of healing (*uganga*) altogether and resulting singular instantiation of *the* unseen. I often visited Kumbuka with Kazima who, also Sukuma, was all too aware of the tensions between Pentecostalism and traditional healing. The eldest son of a healer in rural Sengerema, Kazima had been chosen by his father to inherit the practice. But when he was born again during his years in university, he experienced a rupture, particularly with his father. Despite his father converting to Catholicism in the hope it would appease his son, Kazima accused his father of harboring false beliefs (*imani potofu*) and worshipping idols. Kumbuka's Catholicism, Kazima's Pentecostalism, and my agnosticism clear from early in our time together, our conversations frequently delved into heated but friendly debates about forms of unseen power.

Once during lunch, I relayed to Kumbuka my preliminary thoughts about Pentecostal genetics and the Kwimba seminar. Having participated in a similar series of UA seminars organized by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) that cohered around genetic understandings of difference, he nodded and, in a gravelly voice, agreed that people with albinism were created by God. I caught Kazima's smile from the corner of my eyes as he jotted down Kumbuka's words. It faded quickly when Kumbuka suggested that the miraculous powers of their bodies also came from God. This is why they must be

used only after a natural death (*kifo cha kawaida*), he explained, adding a bit of his own "seminar material" into what he took from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) event. "Getting body parts [for use in *dawa*] requires an approach that honors God's intentions." Kazima fell silent, as Kumbuka went on to discuss the various uses of albino body parts and upend Pentecostal genetics altogether.

"That's witchcraft," Kazima blurted out after we left. "Any use of body parts is witchcraft, not healing!" He spoke and walked with urgency as we approached the bus stand, as if to signal our need to get away. Struggling to keep up, I provocatively but in all sincerity reminded him that biomedical practitioners also fetishize body parts and began to describe the opacity that surrounds global markets for organs where body parts assume a power that supersedes the bodies in which they once resided. As we boarded a minibus and waited for it to fill, I lowered my voice but continued to detail histories of commodifying albino body parts by Enlightenment scientists (Curran, 2009)—whereby people were only parts and knowledge of obtaining and retooling them, mostly through organ transfer, was specialized and murky (Sharp, 2000). Drawing on Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2001), I pointed out that transplant organs are a kind of sacrifice too, even if framed as a gift. Knowing my tendency to probe the boundaries Pentecostals configured, Kazima retorted, "[Transplant] doctors are not witches—you know that!"

For Kumbuka, non-godly nonhumans are morally neutral, and healers are powerful, ambivalent figures to be feared and respected since their knowledge can be harnessed in myriad ways. A few times Kumbuka uttered some version of the commonly known but rarely spoken refrain: being a healer requires that one have "some witch inside." His words not only revealed the clandestine nature of healing (*uganga*) and harming (*uchawi*), where knowing too much is tantamount to admitting one's involvement (Ashforth, 2005); they also betray the messy, entangled relations between practices that evince multiple unseen realms. When Kazima and I returned to Kumbuka's house weeks later, a bag of mangoes in tow, we reentered the same debate where this time Kumbuka, perhaps channeling my words in the minibus, reminded us of the dark side of biomedical practice in Sukumaland, where histories of commodification and experimentation led to proliferating rumors about the possibilities of bodies and the ambivalent powers of doctors.[15] Effecting a symmetrical relationship between biomedical doctors and healers, Kumbuka, looking mostly at Kazima, proceeded by likening the power of the healer to that of a wrench—a device with the power to tighten or untighten. What matters is how it is used, he explained. One is a healer (*mganga*) when they are tightening and a witch (*mchawi*) when they are untightening. In this instantiation of unseen power, albinism holds possibility as *dawa*.

What I find significant about the differences that emerged between Kazima and Kumbuka is neither the conflict between Christian and Indigenous moral formations (Robbins, 2004) nor those between Pentecostal ruptures and "other," especially Catholic, practices (Stroeken, 2017). Rather, I am inspired by multiple entangled knowledge practices through which albinism becomes a site of cosmopolitical contestation. It is the unfinishedness of albinism that allows Pentecostal stakeholders to instantiate "it" as a tool for fighting satanic forces and ushering the biomedicalization of Tanzania in evangelical terms and that allows Kumbuka to assert a different set of possibilities, where *uganga* (healing), at times with body parts for collective good, need not be made legible as "witchcraft" or a "belief in ghosts."

Kumbuka's insistence on the extraordinary power of albino body parts and the possibilities of their ethical use in *dawa* did not foreclose the fact that albinism emerged through genetic mutations chosen by a Christian God. Even so, he refused the boundary-making practices that Pentecostals erected between what they saw as the future-oriented knowledge practices of Christianity and biomedicine, on the one hand, and the outmoded and satanic unseen, on the other (Engelke, 2010, p. 184). What compelled him, rather, was a sense that albinism stakeholders were laying claim to science, advocacy, and faith and reducing him to a mere fetishist. While on his porch that afternoon, Kumbuka asked Kazima and I how healers first learned of the miraculous powers of albino bodies. After asking us for definitions of science that felt like a test we were doomed to fail, I fumbled clumsily for the Swahili words to describe a set of methodological commitments, while Kazima spoke of formal classroom education. "We learned through indication," Kumbuka said in English in an uncharacteristically booming voice. Looking straight at Kazima, he continued, "Testing doesn't require books or a laboratory. Science happens in the bush."

I see Kumbuka's provocations as a response to Pentecostal genetics as a knowledge practice that forecloses "other" instantiations of an unseen. By reclaiming science and faith as contiguous with forms of healing that do not comprise a cohesive system and emerge among a diffuse network of experts who, like biomedical practitioners, share and also conceal information in practices where the differences between helping and harming are not always clear, he insists not only on the multiplicity of albinism but on the mutual entanglement of hybrid knowledge practices that have in various ways given rise to violence. In many ways echoing Dr. Jeff Luande's suggestion that prior organizing made albinism "visible to the wrong people," Kumbuka assigned himself the role of stakeholder in a movement for albinism rights, in the process asserting a place for ontological and epistemic openness. In this way, I take his claims as a call to decolonize singular enactments of an unseen that hierarchize, parse, and border knowledge practices and am left with his understanding of healing (*uganga*) and harming (*uchawi*) not as oppositional or clearly defined categories but as occupying a space of mutual determination across practices that include humanitarianism and genetics.

UN/SEEING CLEARLY

In the months before and after the Kwimba seminar, virtually everyone could feel the tension that emerged from the unsolved abductions of two young children with albinism, as speculations about their whereabouts were the topic of conversation at bus stops and newsstands, in church, and among neighbors. In Dar es Salaam, a reformed criminal published an op-ed in *Jamhuri*,

a reputable private weekly newspaper, admitting to the murder of a woman with albinism 10 years prior. He explained that he was motivated to confess not only because he never received the reward he was promised by unnamed politicians but also because the deaths of these children and his newfound Christian faith led him to feel remorse. Isaac Mwaura, a Kenyan member of Parliament, announced that Kenya would tighten its border with Tanzania to protect its people with albinism. The state promised yet another task force to investigate violence. Across northwest Tanzania, in a desperate attempt to do something, police arrested over 200 healers for violating aspects of the 2009 Witchcraft Act, most often divining, and detained them for days before eventually letting them go. Additionally, in parts of Mwanza and Geita, vigilantes were rumored to have burned the homes of dozens of healers suspected of trafficking rumors of the powers of albino body parts.

Moreover, a nationally televised debate among albinism stakeholders, from NGO employees and human rights attorneys to journalists and representatives from traditional healer organizations, descended into yelling when the chair of a national association of traditional healers suggested that albinism-related violence was not caused by healers writ large but only by a small number of witches who gave the rest a bad name. This range of cacophonous voices suggests a multiplicity of positions that cannot be reduced to "sides," since Pentecostal genetics is but one instantiation of albinism amid others and Kumbuka's formation of albinism as *dawa* is also not generalizable. Take, for instance, the position of the disability rights attorney with albinism, Abdallah Possi, currently Tanzania's ambassador to Germany, who does not abide the Pentecostal demand to criminalize traditional healing and enact a singular unseen realm but rather advocates for adjudicating its legitimate and illegitimate forms. Juxtaposing Pentecostal genetics and its insistence on a singular unseen realm with Kumbuka's formation of albinism as *dawa* thus offers a glimpse into the multiple competing voices surrounding instantiations of albinism—and the overlapping unseen realms they evince—even as some are eclipsed by exclusionary knowledge practices that aim to "cancel difference" (de la Cadena, 2010).

As I have attempted to show and as Chief Kumbuka and Dr. Luande each reminded, the particular moment surrounding albinism and broader politics it manifests cannot be understood through categories like violence and activism, science and witchcraft, rumor and fact. Nor can one rely on pure knowledge forms with single points of origin or easily traceable effects, since Pentecostal genetics and its reliance on ghosts and carriers, and albinism as *dawa* and its deployment of healing (*uganga*) and harming (*uchawi*), each mobilize hybrid configurations of science, religion, and unseen power that defy categorization as Indigenous or modern and emerge instead as palimpsestic layers across uneven historical genealogies and epistemic traditions. In this context, then, I suggest an approach to social movements that underscores the role of multiple unseen worlds in structuring conditions of possibility. Whether in movements to protect minoritized populations, such as those identifying as LGBTQ (Awondo et al., 2012; Nyeck & Epprecht, 2013), engaging in defiant disrobing (Diabate, 2020), seeking recognition as Indigenous peoples on the basis of genetic ancestry (Tamarkin, 2020), or in movements to decolonize science (Newell, 2021) or higher education (Nyamnjoh, 2016), one is forced to contend with a multiplicity of complexly entangled actors motivated by hybrid knowledge forms, each with their particular "modes of ordering" across realms inscrutable and manifest (Law, 1994).

Acknowledging both the multiplicity and indeterminacy of unseen realms constitutes a form of epistemic decoloniality insofar the focus moves from an understanding of a singular invisible dimension rooted in others' beliefs and toward an awareness of how multiple knowledge practices—from anthropology and journalism to genetics and humanitarianism—engage regimes of invisibility, secrecy, and concealment. By approaching unseen worlds as sites of cosmopolitical contestation where the agency of nonhumans and the possibilities that cohere in bodies are unfinished, I read social movements for their decolonial potential where what is at stake are *both* questions of the safety and security of people with albinism, on the one hand *and* the livelihoods of traditional healers, on the other. Mbembe (2021, p. 57), reading Ngugi wa Thiong'o, interprets decolonization as a process of seeing oneself more clearly. An emphatically future-oriented project existing in a present where some voices receive international backing while others are silenced, this might also be read not as a matter of parsing further or seeing better but of leaning into all that is unseen.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article was made possible by the friendship and collaboration I received from albinism rights activists, as well as from healers, extractive laborers, and chiefs. I am especially indebted to Alfredy Kapole, Elisha Maganga, Ester Rwela, Vicky Ntetema, and the late Josephat Torner. Richard Bulluma of the Bujora Cultural Center in Kisesa first introduced me to a number of Sukuma chiefs. I am grateful for the feedback I received from Brad Weiss, Cristiana Giordano, Don Donham, Ester Rwela, James Smith, Juma Kibela, and Meghan Donnelly. Aspects of this article were workshopped by the Society for the Anthropology for Religion at the 2018 meeting of the American Anthropological Association. Stacey Langwick provided invaluable feedback.

ORCID

Jane L. Saffitz https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6207-0862

ENDNOTES

[1] The exact number of violent acts is unknown. I sourced these statistics from Under the Same Sun (2013, p. 1), an NGO that works with the UN to document violence. While Tanzanian state officials refute these numbers and have attempted to limit their circulation, their National Bureau of Statistics does not publish statistics to the contrary.

[2] I conducted fieldwork primarily in Kiswahili with the occasional use of English or Kisukuma, the latter of which required a translator. All translations here are my own.

[3] More capacious than its usual translation as "medicine," *dawa* includes transformative substances like toothpaste and pesticides. I leave *dawa* untranslated to highlight that it cannot be contained within or made equivalent to Western notions of medicine.

[4] I gave all people pseudonyms, with the exception of Pendo and Yohana, who are publicly known. Because places and organizations are also publicly known, they have been left as is.

[5] Fortun (2001) criticizes the term *stakeholder* for implying homogeneous interests among diverse community members. While she prefers "enunciatory communities" to stress divergent views and a frequent lack of consensus, I use *stakeholder* to highlight the importance of consistency and cohesion in a global discourse about albinism-related violence. It also most closely approximates the Swahili word *wadai* used by my interlocuters, whereas *activist* (*mwanaharakati*) connotes antigovernment sentiment that some find uncomfortable.

[6] "Sukuma" is an ethnic category of decentralized chiefdoms. These were abolished in the 1960s in the interest of national unity, after which Kumbuka became a government official (he retained the status of chief). By describing his engagement with albinism, I do not wish to imply that using albino body parts is a "Sukuma practice," nor is there a discernible historical record of albinism-related violence. Rather, I see engagements with albinism as already entangled with and thus not prior to their representation by others, making any kind of clear genealogy of albinism prior to colonialism untenable.

[7] *Mashetani* (sing.: *shetani*), generally translated as evil demons or spirits, inhabit and "play" with bodies, often but not exclusively for destructive purposes and must be appeased by healers or exorcised by pastors. In some contexts invoked as distinctly Muslim nonhumans from the Swahili coast and in others as Christian Satan, *mashetani* has become a catchall for unscrupulous nonhumans, broadly conceived. *Majini* (sing.: *jini*) and *mapepo* (sing.: *pepo*), translated as "Islamic spirits," are nonhumans who healers often describe as godly in their ability to guide one's divination and point them in the direction of cure and who Pentecostal Christians describe as inherently unscrupulous and non-godly. The latter are invoked as a general term for nonhuman and, in some healing contexts, are invoked in relation to the literal translation (winds) as media through which nonhumans travel. Importantly, distinctions between these nonhumans are situational and relational and vary across geographic, religious, ethnic, and professional lines.

[8] Seminars have taken place across the mainland and in Zanzibar, in rural and urban areas, across classed, ethnic, and religious stratifications. They are, however, mostly concentrated in the Lake Zone where violence has been most acute; they tend to be Christian, though not exclusively evangelical and often target Sukuma speakers.

[9] The campaign celebrated the appointment of a special rapporteur on albinism and designation of people with albinism as a "special group."

[10] See, for example, this tabloid headline following the abductions of Pendo and Yohana: "Genge la wauaji albino lagundulika. Wanamiliki nyumba na magari ya kifahari. Waziri mstaafu, kigogo upinzani watejwa. Walianza vichwa vipara, kuchuna ngozi" (Gang of albino assailants discovered. They own luxury houses and cars. Retired minister, bigwig opposition leader mentioned. They started with bald heads and taking people's skin). What separates albinocide from other seemingly similar instances of violence is how albinism mediates broader debates about the nature of the unseen.

[11] For a similar argument regarding the visible signs of unseen forces across differently situated knowledge practices, see Fields and Fields (2022) on witchcraft and racecraft and Palmié (2007) on the "invisible essences" within witchcraft and genomics.

[12] I am grateful to Stacey Langwick for pointing this out.

[13] Many but not all people who identity as an architect or supporter of albinism rights are born again. There are secular and non-Christian albinism rights organizations, too; and while a prominent evangelical albinism NGO requires its staff to sign a contract averring that they will not frequent healers and will abide the distinctly Christian teachings in their programming, they employ a number of practicing Muslims with albinism.

[14] As Noah Tamarkin (2020) has shown in the case of Lemba in South Africa, claims around genetic essences are inseparable from broader debates about membership, belonging, and authenticity, even if they can also be sites where such ideas are upended.

[15] Kumbuka was not specific in his claims, but I later learned of experiments in Sukumaland, one of which, for instance, involved recruiting "volunteers" to be intentionally bitten by tsetse flies that were known to be carrying the parasites that cause sleeping sickness (Tilley, 2014).

REFERENCES

Archambault, Julie Soleil. 2013. "Cruising through Uncertainty: Cell Phones and the Politics of Display and Disguise in Inhambane, Mozambique." *American Ethnologist* 40(1): 88–101. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12007.

Ashforth, Adam. 2005. *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Awondo, Patrick, Peter Geschiere, and Graeme Reid. 2012. "Homophobic Africa? Toward a More Nuanced View." *African Studies Review* 55(3): 145–68. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0002020600007241.

Baker, Charlotte, Patricia Lund, Richard Nyathi, and Julie Taylor. 2010. "The Myths Surrounding People with Albinism in South Africa and Zimbabwe." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 22(2): 169–81. https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2010.491412.

Berg, Marc, and Annemarie Mol, eds. 1998. *Differences in Medicine: Unraveling Practices, Techniques, and Bodies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Blommaert, Jan. 2014. *State Ideology and Language in Tanzania*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Brocco, Giorgio. 2015. "Labeling Albinism: Language and Discourse Surrounding People with Albinism in Tanzania." *Disability and Society* 30(8): 1143–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2015.1075869.

Bryceson, Deborah Fahy, Jesper Bosse Jønsson, and Richard Sherrington. 2010. "Miners' Magic: Artisanal Mining, the Albino Fetish and Murder in Tanzania." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 48(3): 353–82. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X10000303.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff. 1999. "Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony." *American Ethnologist* 26(2): 279–303. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1999.26.2.279.

Curran, Andrew S. 2009. "Rethinking Race History: The Role of the Albino in the French Enlightenment Life Sciences." *History and Theory* 48(3): 151–79. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2009.00502.x.

De Boeck, Filip. 2011. "Inhabiting Ocular Ground: Kinshasa's Future in the Light of the Congo's Spectral Urban Politics." *Cultural Anthropology* 26(2): 263–86. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2011.01099.x.

de la Cadena, Marisol. 2010. "Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections Beyond 'Politics.'" *Cultural Anthropology* 25(2): 334–70. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01061.x.

Diabate, Naminata. 2020. *Naked Agency: Genital Cursing and Biopolitics in Africa*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Engelke, Matthew. 2010. "Past Pentecostalism: Notes on Rupture, Realignment, and Everyday Life in Pentecostal and African Independent Churches." *Africa* 80(2): 177–99. https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2010.0201.

Evans-Pritchard, Edward E. 1937. *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Fabian, Johannes. 1991. *Language and Colonial Power: The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo 1880–1938*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Feierman, Steven. 1985. "Struggles for Control: The Social Roots of Health and Healing in Modern Africa." *African Studies Review* 28(2/3): 73–147. https://doi.org/10.2307/524604.

Feierman, Steven. 2000. "Explanation and Uncertainty in the Medical World of Ghaambo." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 74(2): 317–44. https://doi.org/10.1353/bhm.2000.0070.

Ferme, Mariane C. 2001. *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fields, Barbara J., and Karen E. Fields. 2022. *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. London: Verso. First published 2012.

Fortun, Kim. 2001. *Advocacy after Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, and New Global Orders*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Franklin, Anita, Patricia Lund, Caroline Bradbury-Jones, and Julie Taylor. 2018. "Children with Albinism in African Regions: Their Rights to 'Being' and 'Doing.'" *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 18(2): 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12914-018-0144-8.

Good, Byron J. 1994. *Medicine, Rationality, and Experience: An Anthropological Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gordon, Deborah R. 1988. "Tenacious Assumptions in Western Medicine." In *Biomedicine Examined*, edited by Margaret Lock and Deborah Gordon, 19–56. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic.

Hacking, Ian. 1990. *The Taming of Chance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hasu, Päivi. 2009. "The Witch, the Zombie, and the Power of Jesus: A Trinity of Spiritual Warfare in Tanzanian Pentecostalism." *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 34(1): 70–83. https://doi.org/10.30676/jfas.v34i1.116496.

Heath, Deborah, Rayna Rapp, and Karen-Sue Taussig. 2004. "Genetic Citizenship." In *A Companion to the Anthropology of Politics*, edited by David Nugent and Joan Vincent, 152–67. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Hodžić, Saida. 2017. *The Twilight of Cutting: African Activism and Life after NGOs*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Imafidon, Elvis. 2019. "Some Epistemological Issues in the Othering of Persons with Albinism in Africa." In *Handbook of African Philosophy of Difference*, edited by Elvis Imafidon, 1–18. Geneva: Springer.

Jangu, Menan Hungwe. 2012. "Healing Environmental Harms: Social Change and Sukuma Traditional Medicine on Tanzania's Extractive Frontier." PhD diss., University of Michigan.

Kapferer, Bruce. 2002. "Introduction: Outside All Reason—Magic, Sorcery, and Epistemology in Anthropology." *Social Analysis* 46(3): 1–30. https://doi.org/10.3167/015597702782409310.

Kaphipa, Charles I. 2009. "Mauaji ya Albino." Bujora: Statement of Chairman of Chiefs Council, Tanzania.

Kohrman, Matthew. 2005. *Bodies of Difference: Experiences of Disability and Institutional Advocacy in the Making of Modern China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Langwick, Stacey A. 2011. *Bodies, Politics, and African Healing: The Matter of Maladies in Tanzania*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Latour, Bruno. 2004. *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Law, John. 1994. *Organizing Modernity: Social Ordering and Social Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lock, Margaret. 1998. "Breast Cancer: Reading the Omens." *Anthropology Today* 14(4): 7–16. https://doi.org/10.2307/2783351.

Luande, Jeff, Claudia I. Henschke, and Nassoro Mohammed. 1985. "The Tanzanian Human Albino Skin: Natural History." *Cancer* 55(8): 1823–28. https://acsjournals-onlinelibrary-wiley-com.denison.idm.oclc.org/doi/10.1002/1097-0142(19850415)55:8%3C1823::AID-CNCR2820550830%3E3.0.CO;2-X.

Mbembe, Achille. 2001. *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mbembe, Achille. 2015. "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive." Lecture delivered at the WITS Institute for Social and Economic Research, Johannesburg, April 30, 2015. https://wiser.wits.ac.za/sites/default/files/private/Achille%20Mbembe%20-%20Decolonizing%20Knowledge%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20the%20Archive.pdf.

Mbembe, Achille. 2021. *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Mesaki, Simeon. 2009. "The Tragedy of Aging: Witch Killings and Poor Governance among the Sukuma." In *Dealing with Uncertainty in Contemporary African Lives*, edited by Liv Haram and C. Bawa Yamba, 72–90. Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

Meyer, Birgit. 1998. "'Make a Complete Break with the Past': Memory and Postcolonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28(3): 316–49. https://doi.org/10.2307/1581573.

Mignolo, Walter D., and Catherine E. Walsh. 2018. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Mudimbe, Valentin-Yves. 1988. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Mwananchi. 2019. "Mauaji ya ajabu yanavyoibuka na kupotea nchini" [Strange murders appear and disappear in the country]. February 17, 2019. https://www.mwananchi.co.tz/mw/habari/kitaifa/-mauaji-ya-ajabu-yanavyoibuka-na-kupotea-nchini-2954376.

Myhre, Knut Christian. 2017. "The Power of a Severed Arm: Life, Witchcraft, and Christianity in Kilimanjaro." In *Pentecostalism and Witchcraft: Spiritual Warfare in Africa and Melanesia*, edited by Knut Rio, Michelle McCarthy, and Ruy Blanes, 163–87. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Newell, Sasha. 2007. "Pentecostal Witchcraft: Neoliberal Possession and Demonic Discourse in Ivoirian Pentecostal Churches." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 37(4): 461–90. https://doi.org/10.1163/157006607X230517.

Newell, Sasha. 2021. "Decolonizing Science, Digitizing the Occult: Theory from the Virtual South." *African Studies Review* 64(1): 86–104. https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2020.87.

Nyamnjoh, Francis B. 2016. *#RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa*. Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research and Publishing; African Books Collective.

Nyeck, S. N., and Marc Epprecht, eds. 2013. *Sexual Diversity in Africa: Politics, Theory, and Citizenship*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Nyong'o, Lupita, dir. 2009. *In My Genes*. New York: Third World Newsreel. DVD.

OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights). n.d. "People with Albinism Face Multiple Forms of Discrimination Worldwide." Accessed November 10, 2022. https://albinism.ohchr.org/human-rights-dimension-of-albinism.html.

Palmié, Stephan. 2007. "Genomics, Divination, 'Racecraft.'" *American Ethnologist* 34(2): 205–22. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2007.34.2.205.

Pearson, Karl, Edward Nettleship, and Charles H. Usher. 1913. "A Monograph on Albinism in Man." Drapers' Company Research Memoirs. Biometric Series VI. London: Dulau.

Pederson, Morten Axel. 2011. *Not Quite Shamans: Spirit Worlds and Political Lives in Northern Mongolia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Pigg, Stacy Leigh. 2001. "Languages of Sex and AIDS in Nepal: Notes on the Social Production of Commensurability." *Cultural Anthropology* 16(4): 481–541. https://doi.org/10.1525/can.2001.16.4.481.

Prakash, Gyan. 1999. *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Rabinow, Paul. 1992. "Artificiality and Enlightenment: From Sociobiology to Biosociality." In *Incorporations*, edited by Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, 234–53. New York: Urzone.

Rapp, Rayna. 1988. "Chromosomes and Communication: The Discourse of Genetic Counseling." *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 2(2): 143–57. https://doi.org/10.1525/maq.1988.2.2.02a00040.

Robbins, Joel. 2004. "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33:117–43. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.32.061002.093421.

Roberts, Elizabeth F. S. 2012. *God's Laboratory: Assisted Reproduction in the Andes*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Roberts, Elizabeth F. S. 2016. "Gods, Germs, and Petri Dishes: Toward a Nonsecular Medical Anthropology." *Medical Anthropology* 35(3): 209–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/01459740.2015.1118100.

Sanders, Todd. 2001. "Save Our Skins: Structural Adjustment, Morality and the Occult in Tanzania." In *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, edited by Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders, 160–83. New York: Routledge.

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 2001. "Bodies for Sale—Whole or in Parts." *Body and Society* 7(2–3): 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X0100700201.

Sharp, Lesley A. 2000. "The Commodification of the Body and Its Parts." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29:287–328. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.29.1.287.

Stengers, Isabelle. 2005. "The Cosmopolitical Proposal." In *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, 994–1004. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Strathern, Marilyn. 2004. *Partial Connections*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira. First published 1991.

Stroeken, Koen. 2011. "Resident Violence: Miner Mwanga Magic as War-Technology Anthropology." In *War, Technology, Anthropology*, edited by Koen Stroeken, 120–34. New York: Berghahn.

Stroeken, Koen. 2017. "Witchcraft Simplex: Experiences of Globalized Pentecostalism in Central and Northwestern Tanzania." In *Pentecostalism and Witchcraft: Spiritual Warfare in Africa and Melanesia*, edited by Knut Rio, Michelle McCarthy, and Ruy Blanes, 257–78. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tamarkin, Noah. 2020. *Genetic Afterlives: Black Jewish Indigeneity in South Africa*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Taussig, Karen-Sue. 2009. *Ordinary Genomes: Science, Citizenship, and Genetic Identities*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Tilley, Helen. 2011. *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870–1950*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226803487.001.0001.

Tilley, Helen. 2014. "Conclusion: Experimentation in Colonial East Africa and Beyond." *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 47(3): 495–505.

Tripp, Aili Mari. 1997. *Changing the Rules: The Politics of Liberalization and the Urban Informal Economy in Tanzania*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Turnbull, David. 2000. *Masons, Tricksters and Cartographers: Comparative Studies in the Sociology of Scientific and Indigenous Knowledge*. London: Taylor and Francis.

Under the Same Sun. 2013. "History of Attacks against Persons with Albinism (PWA)." July 15, 2013. https://www.underthesamesun.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/History-of-Attacks-against-PWA.pdf.

Weiss, Brad. 1993. "'Buying Her Grave': Money, Movement and AIDS in Northwest Tanzania." *Africa* 63(1): 19–35. https://doi.org/10.2307/1161296.

West, Harry G. 2005. *Kupilikula: Governance and the Invisible Realm in Mozambique*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Whitmarsh, Ian, and Elizabeth F. S. Roberts. 2016. "Nonsecular Medical Anthropology." *Medical Anthropology* 35(3): 203–8. https://doi.org/10.1080/01459740.2015.1118099.

Wilson, Monica Hunter. 1951. "Witch Beliefs and Social Structure." *American Journal of Sociology* 56(4): 307–13.

How to cite this article: Saffitz, Jane L. 2023. Realms unseen. *American Ethnologist* 50: 582–594. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.13203