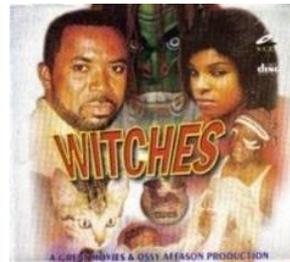
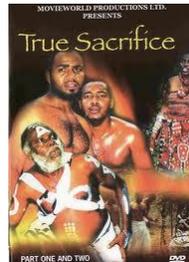
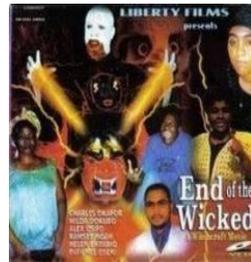
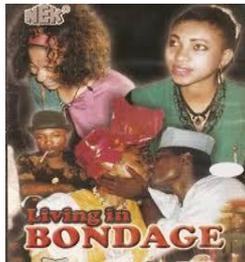




**WHRIN**  
THE WITCHCRAFT & HUMAN RIGHTS  
INFORMATION NETWORK

Awareness.  
Understanding.  
Solutions.

# Exploring the Role of Nollywood in the Muti Murders of Persons with Albinism



A Report to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
For the 24<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council on the Attacks and Discrimination  
Against People With Albinism (PWA)

16<sup>th</sup> August 2013

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## 1. Organisational Background

The Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network (WHRIN) was established in 2012 in response to the widespread violations of human rights that take place around the world due to beliefs in witchcraft and spirit possession. Our work aims to raise awareness and understanding of these issues, so that solutions may be developed, in order to prevent further abuses from taking place. WHRIN does this by carrying out the following:

- **Training** – Enabling frontline practitioners to gain the skills and confidence needed to work on cases of human rights abuses that take place due to beliefs in witchcraft and spirit possession.
- **Information** - Providing an up-to-date information service and on-line resource centre with relevant NGO, UN and academic reports, press coverage and videos.
- **Research** - Encouraging and supporting practitioners around the world to carry out research in order to help find solutions and prevent further human rights abuses from taking place.
- **Networking** - Promoting networks and information exchange between key individuals and organisations.
- **Advocacy** – Providing a platform for advocacy campaigns run by local NGOs and community groups and linking such groups with an international audience via social media.

The organisation is currently run by a small group of volunteers<sup>1</sup> who are based in Lancaster, UK. We have a growing number of member organisations who share our vision of a world where all people can live freely without fear of their rights being abused due to the belief in witchcraft.

One of the members of WHRIN is Under the Same Sun (UTSS), who have been at the forefront of the fight to put a stop to the killings of persons with albinism in Africa, and, who have produced a great deal of research in this field. It is not the intention of this report to duplicate the evidence already submitted by UTSS to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Rather, WHRIN wishes to focus on an area that we feel has received little attention to date and one that we have expertise in through previous work carried out in West Africa.

## 2. Abstract

The murders of Persons with Albinism (PWA) for their body parts and their wider discrimination have received significant attention in recent years. However, to date, very little attention and analysis has taken place of the role that popular culture plays in shaping the beliefs systems that drive these horrific human rights abuses.

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<sup>1</sup> WHRIN would particularly like to thank Emma Williams, David Hughes and Samantha Spence for their work here

The following report concerns the violations of the human rights of PWA that take place throughout Africa and, in particular, the impact that the Nigerian film industry – Nollywood – plays in promoting the superstitious beliefs that may lead to such abuses taking place. The purpose of this report is to explore the belief systems behind these abuses and provide clarity of some of the terminology, place these abuses within a wider human rights framework and explore the role that Nollywood movies may play in spreading these beliefs and abuses throughout Africa; and finally to make recommendations on actions which can be taken by key stakeholders to further prevent these types of human rights abuses.

### **3. Understanding Terminology**

The misuse and misunderstanding of terminology is a significant challenge faced by practitioners working on the issues contained within this report. As such, we will attempt to clarify WHRIN’s position on some key terminology below:

**Persons With Albinism (PWA)** - WHRIN supports Under the Same Sun’s call<sup>2</sup> for the abandonment of the use of the term “albino” and support their call for greater dignity for persons with albinism by using the term “Person with Albinism (PWA)” throughout this report and all future communications.

#### **What is witchcraft?**

There is no universally accepted definition of witchcraft and the term means different things to different people in different places. Primarily<sup>3</sup> witchcraft can be seen as a negative, malevolent force, which is used by people – witches – in the spirit realm to bring about harm in the physical realm. It is the art of doing evil by means of spiritual powers.

#### **What is juju?**

Juju is a West African term for the use of black magic. That is, magic that is used for a negative end. Belief in the power of juju is deeply held by the majority of people in this region.

#### **What is muti?**

Muti is a word used in Southern Africa to refer to magic that enables people to gain power or wealth. It literally translates to “medicine”. The most extreme form uses human body parts and people may be killed to provide them.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.underthesamesun.com/sites/default/files/WHY-WE-PREFER-THE-TERM-PERSON-WITH-ALBINISM.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> However, there are some people, primarily in Europe and the United States, who call themselves 'witches'. Such people follow a constructed neo-pagan religion, usually called Wicca, which is not witchcraft in the sense that the majority mean it.

## What is Nollywood?

The Nigerian video feature film industry is, sometimes, colloquially known as Nollywood, having been derived as a play on Hollywood in the same manner as Bollywood from Bombay, India.

## 4. Introduction

In the last decade, hundreds of PWA have been killed in muti murders.<sup>4</sup> PWA are targeted for their body parts in many African states, including: Tanzania, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya.<sup>5</sup> Here, belief in witchcraft is widespread, with people from all sections of society sharing this belief regardless of their level of education, socio-economic group or ethnic origin.<sup>6</sup>

In such countries, many citizens are being deceived into believing that PWA bring bad luck to communities and possess an innate magical power.<sup>7</sup> Evidence exists to suggest that Nollywood movies play a role in promoting similar such superstitious beliefs.<sup>8</sup>

A black market for the body parts of PWA, which can be sold for thousands of dollars, has arisen due to witchdoctors using them in potions they sell to bring people prosperity. The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent have stated a complete set of body parts – four limbs, genitals, tongue and nose – can make the equivalent of \$75,000.<sup>9</sup> Poverty levels remain high in all of the countries where muti murders of PWA takes place and, as such, this remains a lucrative trade.

As is the case with witchcraft accusations against women, the elderly and children, muti murders of PWA appear to follow patterns of poverty, misfortune, tension and conflict in societies.<sup>10</sup> Attacks may originate from tense social relations, where no effective or social alternative exists to release or explain such tension. Lack of access to basic resources, education and basic health services correlate with such human rights abuses. These spiritual explanations act as a way of justifying life's misfortunes, hence, maintaining social order. It is, predominantly, the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in society who are accused of witchcraft, because they are either least able to defend themselves from attack and are,

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.underthesamesun.com/sites/default/files/UTSS%20report%20to%20UN%20-%20REPORT\\_0.pdf](http://www.underthesamesun.com/sites/default/files/UTSS%20report%20to%20UN%20-%20REPORT_0.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Cases have also been recorded in Swaziland, Nigeria, Malawi, Zambia, Chad, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Sierra Leone.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/142640/witchcraft-believers-sub-saharan-africa-rate-lives-worse.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> Ademowo, A. (2010) Poverty, Witchcraft and Witch-Killing in Africa. In, A. Ademowo, G. Foxcroft and T. Oladipo (eds) *Suffereth Not A Witch To Live: Discourse on Child-Witch Hunting in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Muffty prints Concepts.

<sup>8</sup> SSN Report to Federal Government - [http://www.ssncef.org/witchcraft\\_accusation.pdf](http://www.ssncef.org/witchcraft_accusation.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (2009) <http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/general/177800-Albinos-Report-EN.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.academia.edu/992748/ALBINO\\_KILLINGS\\_IN\\_TANZANIA\\_Witchcraft\\_and\\_Racism](http://www.academia.edu/992748/ALBINO_KILLINGS_IN_TANZANIA_Witchcraft_and_Racism)

therefore, easy targets. Furthermore, as they are considered of little value to society, they consequently become a burden to it in times of hardship.<sup>11</sup>

The most common response from human rights activists and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working on these issues has been to call for more legislation and for perpetrators of human rights abuses, against people accused of witchcraft, to be arrested and prosecuted. However, focusing on this approach alone appears to be flawed, in that there exists no evidence to suggest that such interventions bring about greater protection and a reduction in the numbers of accusations of witchcraft.<sup>12</sup>

Ultimately, it is WHRIN's view that legislation and prosecutions alone neither reduce the belief in witchcraft nor acts as a significant deterrent as the capacities of lawyers, judges and the police in most of the countries where such abuses take place remains very low. The fact that most such practitioners, along with the wider community, believe in the power of witchcraft, juju and muti remains the primary obstacle in realising the rights of PWA.

## **5. Belief Systems Behind the Abuses**

### **Money Magic**

The belief that is the primary contributory factor in the muti murders of PWA is that the body parts of PWA contained special magical powers that can be used in order to create good fortune by enabling:

- People to gain greater wealth and prosperity
- Political elites to gain power via winning local and/or national elections
- Fishermen to catch more fish
- Miners to source greater wealth via striking more gold or other valuable minerals

Differing body parts of PWA are used in a variety of ways in order to create such fortune. For example, the hair of PWA may be woven into fishing nets or arms, legs, skin, eyes, genitals, and blood may be used in other forms of magic.

### **The Power of the Witchdoctor**

The key player in supplying the magic is the witchdoctor, who is often a powerful community leader, revered by many for his perceived supernatural powers and ability to carry out magic. Such practitioners have commercial interests in promoting both the notion that PWA carry certain supernatural powers and also that

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<sup>11</sup> <http://a4id.org/sites/default/files/Using%20the%20law%20to%20tackle%20accusations%20of%20witchcraft-%20HelpAge%20International's%20position.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> As above

their body parts can be used in their charms, potions and incantations in order to bring about the desired outcome for the customer. The witchdoctor will incorporate different parts of the body of the PWA into his work in order to bring about the desired change for the purchaser.

In addition to this, witchdoctors may also charge for other services such as the provision of explanation for an individual's misfortune or fortune and are able to, allegedly, identify both the human and supernatural causes for virtually any circumstance or conundrum.

### **The Mystification of PWA**

As is the case with witchcraft accusations, where disabilities and illnesses are often seen as signs of witchcraft, PWA exhibit physical ailments that make them differ from other supposedly "normal" people around them. They are seen throughout many countries as mythical, mystical human beings who contain a variety of magical powers. Whilst such beliefs are likely to have been endemic within society for many years, recent beliefs seem to have arisen that suggest that they may be fluid and may be crafted by other factors. For example, a recent phenomenon suggests that the belief that having sex with a PWA can cure HIV/AIDS has been noted in a number of countries.<sup>13</sup>

Other more traditional beliefs suggest that PWA:

- Are ghosts who administer curses<sup>14</sup>
- Will bring ill fortune if you come into contact with them
- Never die<sup>15</sup>
- Have albinism as the result of a curse put on the family<sup>16</sup>

Whilst all of these differing beliefs highlight the mystification of the PWA, for the purpose of this report, the primary belief that we are concerned with, is the one that a charm or potion made by a witchdoctor from the body parts of a PWA will bring the purchaser greater wealth, power and/or success.

## **6. The Power of Nollywood**

### **Background**

In 2009 UNESCO issued its statement that 'Nigeria surpasses Hollywood as the world's second largest film producer' with Nigeria's moviemakers, commonly

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.underthesamesun.com/sites/default/files/UTSS%20report%20to%20UN%20-%20REPORT\\_0.pdf](http://www.underthesamesun.com/sites/default/files/UTSS%20report%20to%20UN%20-%20REPORT_0.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/arts-and-life/life/saving-fellow-albinos-from-killings-in-africa-87755027.html?device=mobile&c=y>

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/sowc2013/perspective\\_hosea.html](http://www.unicef.org/sowc2013/perspective_hosea.html)

<sup>16</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7327989.stm>

known as Nollywood, coming out with 872 productions – all in video format – while the United States produced 485 major films.<sup>17</sup>

There are a number of factors, which have contributed to the great success of Nollywood in recent years, such as low production costs and the huge popularity of watching Nollywood movies in home settings, largely due to almost a complete lack of cinemas. The popularity of satellite networks, such as DSTV, which are broadcast throughout Africa and, in particular, channels such as Africa Magic are of importance here. Indeed, if you go into an average Nigerian household in the evening there is a very good chance that people will be huddled round either watching a cheap (often pirated) copy of a Nollywood movie or watching one on Africa Magic. The fact that around half of all such movies are made in English, significantly contributes to their wide appeal and may explain Nigeria's success in exporting its films to other African countries and around the world.

Another factor behind the huge success of Nollywood is that the majority of Nollywood movies have themes that deal with the moral dilemmas facing modern Africans today. Whilst some movies promote the Christian or Islamic faiths, and some movies are overtly evangelical,<sup>18</sup> many also focus on more superstitious beliefs and explore the role that such beliefs play in the daily lives of Africans.

### **Promoting the Belief in Witchcraft**

***“We are concerned that certain Nollywood films promote the belief in child witchcraft and that these popular films have immensely contributed to the increase in child witchcraft stigmatisation and resultant abuse, not only in Nigeria but also in other African countries such as the Tanzania, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo”- Stepping Stones Nigeria<sup>19</sup>***

One of the reoccurring themes in Nollywood movies revolves around the power of witchcraft and its omnipresence in African societies. Perhaps the most well know purveyor of witchcraft movies and books is the Nigerian Pentecostal Pastor – Lady Apostle Helen Ukpabio. Through her film company – Liberty Films - Ukpabio has produced a number of movies, which feature scenes of children becoming possessed by witchcraft and carrying out all manner of harm in the “witchcraft world”. Liberty films is part of the Liberty Gospel Ministries franchise,<sup>20</sup> which has over 200 churches in Nigeria and a growing number in other countries including Cameroon and Ghana. The most famous of Liberty Film's productions is 'End of The Wicked,' in which child actors are shown to eat human flesh and murder their parents. This film has been widely watched by communities throughout the Niger Delta region where Ukpabio hails from and has been linked to the widespread belief in child witches and

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30707#.Ug5Q3pl3uSo>

<sup>18</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinema\\_of\\_Nigeria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinema_of_Nigeria)

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.ssncef.org/witchcraft\\_accusation.pdf](http://www.ssncef.org/witchcraft_accusation.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Ukpabio has also published her views in several books. An example is 'Unveiling The Mysteries of Witchcraft', in which she states that: “If a child under the age of two screams in the night, cries and is always feverish with deteriorating health he or she is a servant of Satan”

subsequent horrific violations of their rights.<sup>21</sup> Amongst the strategies adopted by local and international NGOs has been a campaign to pressure the Nigerian Film and Video Censors board to “censor all movies found to be promoting the belief in child witches”.<sup>22</sup> In addition to this, the UK-based NGO – Stepping Stones Nigeria, has also produced its own Nollywood movie, the Fake Prophet, in order to fight such beliefs and exploitative practices.<sup>23</sup>

It is also of importance to note that such movies are often pirated and distributed across Africa. As such, it is difficult to map out exactly where they may be viewed. What is clear though is that, for many viewers, these movies further support beliefs in witchcraft that may already be endemic within society. The line between fact and fiction often becomes blurred when watching such movies with many viewers believing that the, often gruesome, scenes capture real-life actions of supposed witches. Whilst no empirical evidence exists to prove the link between the viewing of such movies and human rights abuses being carried out, WHRIN would argue that they do indeed play a role in promoting the belief in child witches and the subsequent violations of the rights of children accused of witchcraft. Should this indeed be the case then there appears to be every chance that such movies may impact on perceptions of other vulnerable groups in Africa, most especially PWA.

### **Promoting Belief in Juju and Muti**

***"The disturbing underlying message in most Nollywood movies is that one can get away with murder, in the name of witchcraft, to realise earthly needs"*** - The Kenya Films Censorship Board Chief Executive, David Pkosing.

The other key theme that many Nollywood movies explore is the power of juju to bring about change in the lives of the customer.<sup>24</sup> Indeed the Nollywood film that is credited to have invented Nollywood, *Living in Bondage*, was based on the use of juju for wealth creation. The movie chronicled a man who, through juju (specifically the ritual sacrifice of his wife) became wealthy. Similar such movies may also show how men and women go to the juju priest (sometimes also known as a witchdoctor), and get potions made out of all manner of ingredients, including human body parts. The potions are used in an attempt to earn the juju customer many desirable things such as luck, jobs, and above all, money. Most such potions are just referred to as such and there is, usually, no mention of its contents as making such knowledge public is believed to reduce the power of the juju.

Whilst juju is a West African belief, it shares a number of great similarities with the belief in the power of muti, which is widespread within many of the countries in which the murders of PWA has become prevalent. The fact that some Nollywood

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.stepsstonesnigeria.org/witchcraft.html>

<sup>22</sup> [www.makeapact.org/documents/NFVCB.pd](http://www.makeapact.org/documents/NFVCB.pd)

<sup>23</sup> See trailer here - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBfZQqTh2Fw>

<sup>24</sup> <http://nollywood.codewit.com/nollywood-fashion-news/nollywood-overloaded-with-traditional-igbo-religion-0508065>

films promote such beliefs is, therefore, likely to lead to some of the human rights abuses that are witnessed today in these countries. Indeed according to Ikponwosa Ero – International Advocacy Director at Under the Same Sun: “There is likely to be a correlation between Nollywood and killings of persons with albinism (PWA). While I have not seen any studies on this correlation, it is reasonably foreseeable.<sup>25</sup> He is not alone in this belief. According to some reports,<sup>26</sup> a number of PWA in Tanzania fear the wave of killings targeting them is partly influenced by Nigerian movies. Although Nollywood movies are not solely to blame for the muti murders of PWA in Tanzania, recent police and media reports now link the murders to gruesome episodes in some of the Nigerian productions.<sup>27</sup>

## **Recommendations**

This brief report aims, simply, to act as an introduction to these issues and raise awareness in the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the wider International community of the potential links between the proliferation of Nollywood movies and the muti murders of PWA. It is hoped that it will act as springboard to further understanding of these issues being developed.

Whilst all state parties should be encouraged to enforce existing domestic and international laws and, in particular, clarify their position that the use of body parts in muti equates to murders, greater support for more efforts to focused at the community level is needed.

In particular, WHRIN would like to see action taken in the following areas in order to help prevent further human rights abuses taking place:

### **1. More Research**

We need to better understand the links between people watching Nollywood movies and the muti murders of PWA. In particular, research should look to answer the following questions:

- What percentage of Nollywood movies feature the themes of witchcraft and juju?
- Does watching these movies in countries, where muti murders of PWA have been recorded, encourage people to seek to use juju or muti?
- How many people use juju and muti and how many juju priests and witchdoctors use body parts in their practice?
- Is there any relationship between levels of education and depths of belief in the power of juju and muti?

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<sup>25</sup> Email communication 12<sup>th</sup> August 2013

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=1143997775&story\\_title=The-curse-that-is-Nollywood](http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=1143997775&story_title=The-curse-that-is-Nollywood)

<sup>27</sup> As above

The findings of any such research should be widely shared and publicised amongst the numerous stakeholders working on these issues, and, should form the starting point of greater academic focus on these important, yet overlooked, areas of human rights abuses and popular culture.

## **2. UN and International Governments to Pressure and Support the Nigerian Film and Videos Censor Board (NFVCB) to Regulate More Effectively**

More work needs to be done in order to assess the capacity of the NFVCB to properly regulate the Nollywood film industry. It appears that piracy is one of the primary challenges that the NFVCB may face here and their efforts to counter this should be supported by the UN and International governments.

At the same time, the NFVCB need to be pressured to take immediate and effective action to ban films that promote beliefs that lead to the abuses of the human rights of PWA and other vulnerable groups.

## **3. UNICEF Nigeria to Take a More Active Role**

UNICEF Nigeria can help play a key role by encouraging Nollywood filmmakers to develop a more socially responsible approach to producing movies and encouraging them to focus more on positive themes that uphold the rights of children with albinism. In particular, WHRIN recommends that UNICEF seek to arrange a regional meeting on this issue that looks to bring together academics, NGOs, activists, NFVCB and Nollywood film makers to see how these issues may be addressed. Ideally, funds would also be made available in order to encourage the production of several movies, which feature some prominent Nollywood actors and contain a clear denouncement of harmful juju practices.

## **4. Grassroots Public Enlightenment**

In particular more concerted effort needs to be made to:

- Demystify the condition of PWA – albinism – by using the scientific rational method to explain to people the causes of it<sup>28</sup>
- Support the use of street theatre, comedy and music to challenge the belief in muti and juju and explore the role that witchdoctors and juju priests play in society
- Use other popular media such as radio and TV to broadcast adverts to demystify perceptions of PWA and some of the common beliefs around them

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<sup>28</sup> <sup>28</sup> The work of the Asante Mariamu Foundation may be of particular interest here

