

This man carries a whistle to blow for help, in case he's attacked for his blood or limbs.

He's one of thousands of albinos in Tanzania who live in constant

feared

WORDS **SORREL NEUSS**
PHOTOS **FRANCK VOGEL**

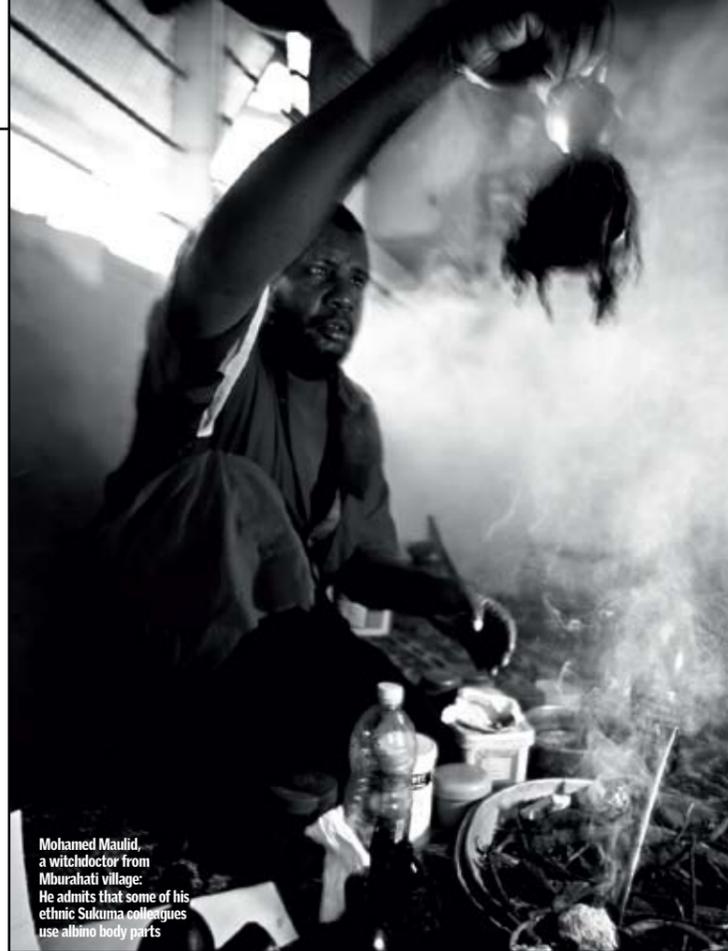
It's two years since three men, armed with machetes, burst into 10-year-old Bibiana Mbushi's house, then hacked off her right leg and two of her fingers. She's petrified it'll happen again. Shy and withdrawn, Bibiana touches her prosthetic leg with her mutilated hand and shields her eyes from the sun with the other as she avoids having to talk by staring out of the classroom window. The other pupils at her school near Mwanza, Tanzania, have dark skin and black hair, but Bibiana is

fair, blonde, and has dark blue eyes. She's albino and she was attacked for her 'white gold'.

Around 17,000 people in Tanzania have albinism, a genetic disorder that hampers the production of the pigment melanin, which protects the skin from UV light. People with albinism are more likely to develop skin cancer, and many in Tanzania die by age 30. But now they have more than just the sun to be frightened of. Since 2007, around 60 albinos – known as *zeru zeru*, or 'ghosts' – have been hunted down →



Bibiana at her desk at school. Three men cut off her leg and three fingers in 2008



Mohamed Maulid, a witchdoctor from Mburahati village. He admits that some of his ethnic Sukuma colleagues use albino body parts

by witchdoctors, who make potions out of their blood, arms, legs, genitalia, ears, noses and tongues. Believing that albino body parts possess supernatural powers, greedy businessmen and politicians pay vast sums for these grim concoctions, convinced they'll bring them riches, love or good luck. A whole albino body is worth around \$70,000 (£45,000), and this new trade in body parts is so lucrative, it's rapidly spreading to neighbouring Congo, Burundi and Kenya.

Many albinos live in constant fear. At the end of 2007 there were three living in Llungu village on the shores of Lake Victoria. But that year, 10-year old Rebecca Machungwa was killed, and a few months later, thugs came for Vumilia Makoye. Now, Yussuf Elias, 26, is the only one left. "I'm the next on the list," he says. "Since Vumilia's death, I always carry my whistle in my pocket... it's my only protection."

He isn't difficult to spot. At first glance, black African albinos look like white people and, at the beginning of the last century, albino children - thought to be proof of their mother's supposed affair with a white European man - were killed at birth. Although that seldom happens now, those

with the condition are still referred to as *mzungu*, 'colonial white man', and they're seen as a curse while alive and magical when dead.

Kill or cure

For centuries, witchdoctors have provided the only medicine locals trust, and according to the Traditional Healers' association, at least 30 per cent of the population use their services for treatment against cancer, AIDS or to find love or wealth. For years, fishermen who associate

Federation Of The Red Cross And Red Crescent, explains that while no-one knows why albinos are being attacked *now*, some witchdoctors in countries such as Nigeria and Uganda kill children and use their innocent blood to 'bless' businesses. "Similarly, albinos have been singled out by the colour of their skin and are used in the same way," he says.

Bibiana was attacked because of a deal her uncle made with witchdoctors. After Bibiana's parents died from AIDS, her aunt and uncle

"Men with AIDS have been known to rape albino women as a 'cure'"

white skin with riches have paid hairdressers for albino locks, which they weave into their nets in the belief it'll bring in a good catch, and men with AIDS have also been known to rape albino women as a 'cure'.

But *killing* for potions is a new phenomenon. Andrei Engstrand-Neacsu, an aid worker with the humanitarian organisation International

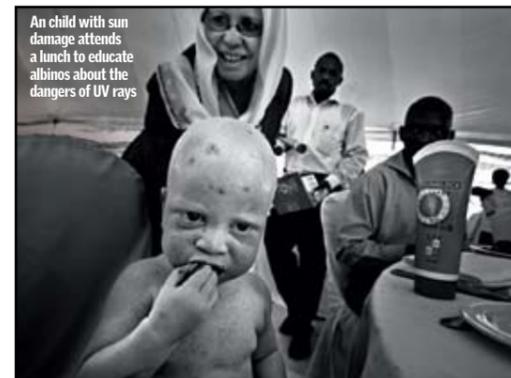
adopted her and her two siblings. Believing that Bibiana and her sister Tindi, who is also an albino, brought shame on the family, her uncle was keen to sell them. A leg, arm, or a cup of albino blood is worth \$2,000 (£1,300) apiece, which would take a farmer 10 years to earn, and destitute men are prepared to act on behalf of witchdoctors for a cut of the cash. In January →



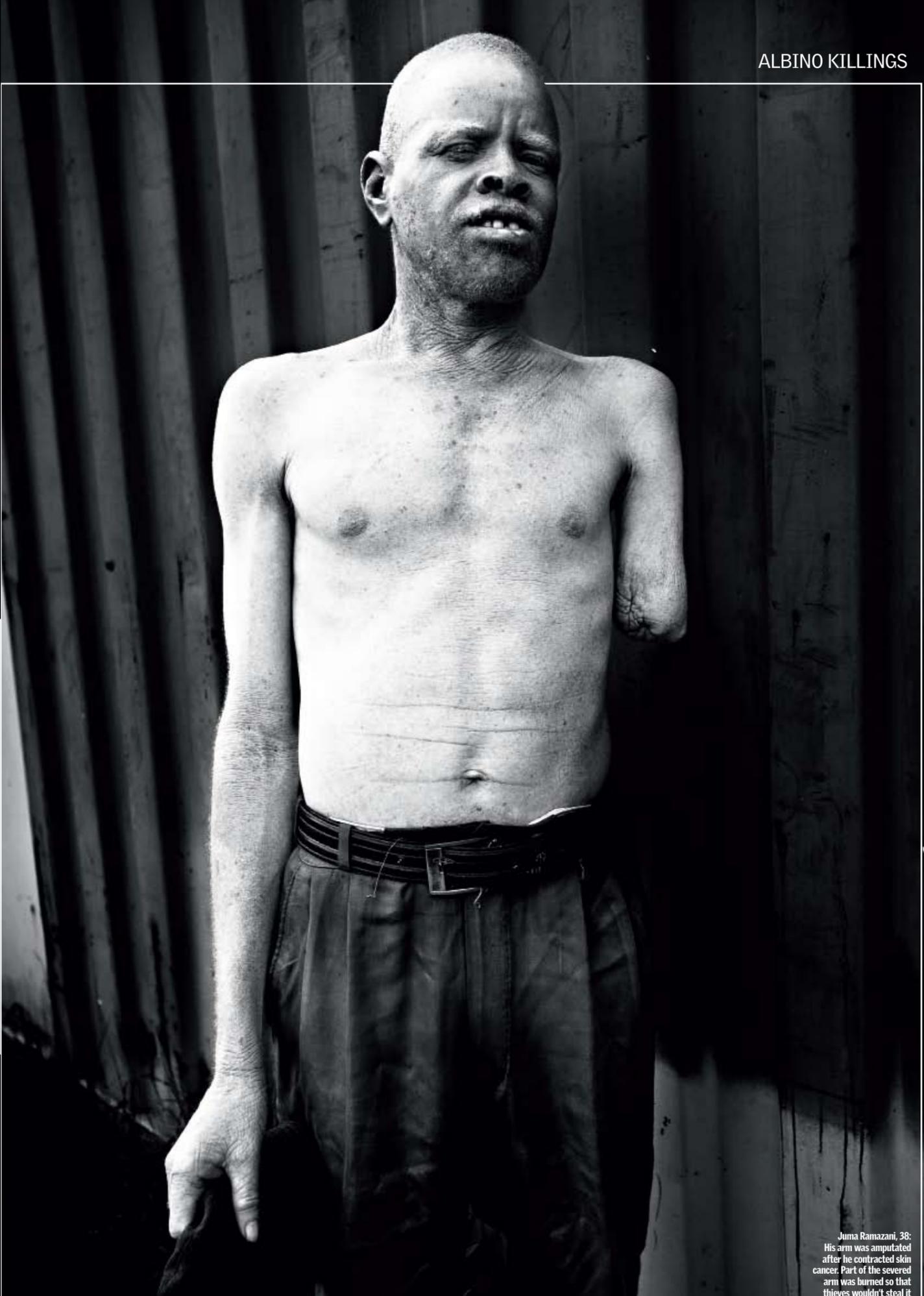
Some fishermen at Lake Victoria weave albino hair into their nets for a good catch



Witchdoctor Mohamed Maulid makes legal potions



An child with sun damage attends a lunch to educate albinos about the dangers of UV rays



Juma Ramazani, 38. His arm was amputated after he contracted skin cancer. Part of the severed arm was burned so that thieves wouldn't steal it



Ngeme Luhahula prays at her daughter's grave in Ilungu village

2008, Bibiana's attackers entered the house at bedtime and told the children they were policemen who needed to take something. Tindi escaped by hiding in the shadows, but the men lunged at Bibiana so quickly she couldn't get away. After mutilating her, the three men turned and walked out – one carrying her leg over his shoulder.

“Healers cut albino flesh into small pieces and mix it with ground bone”

The girl's stunned aunt, who wasn't in on her husband's agreement, rushed to a neighbour's house to call for help. Many Tanzanians don't have a phone and ambulances are scarce, so almost all albinos attacked in this way bled to death. But Bibiana was lucky, as the only ambulance at the nearby Geita hospital was free. The men who mutilated Bibiana are also lucky; while her uncle was caught by the police and is now in prison, the hitmen were never found, and the witchdoctor who hired them got their prize.

Brutal body-snatchers

It's difficult to know which healer was behind the attack. Photojournalist Franck Vogel, who took the pictures on these pages, visited

Mohamed Maulid, a witchdoctor from Mburahati village, about 30km from Dar-es-Salaam. Maulid admitted that some of his colleagues from the Sukuma tribe use albino body parts, but only in the Mwanza region, adding, “I'm not a Sukuma and I don't agree with them.” But Franck explains, “He would never tell me even if he

does use albino parts, and it would've been too dangerous for me to ask any more questions.”

However, Franck knows what happened to Bibiana's severed leg and fingers. To make their valuable potions, healers cut albino flesh into small pieces, grind down the bones using stones, then pound the two into a paste. The liquid that oozes out is siphoned off and put into a tiny, perfume-bottle-sized bottle, which is used sparingly during ceremonies for paying customers, such as the owners of a gold mine in Ngasamo.

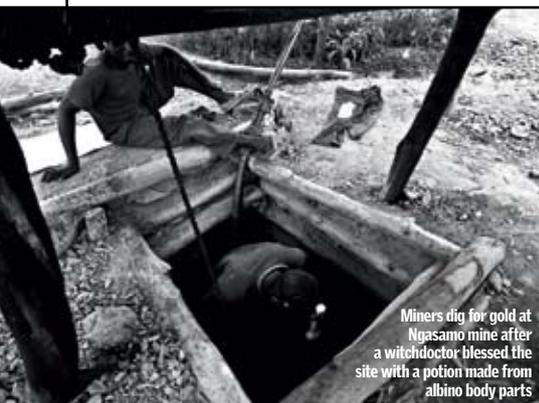
Derelict since WWII, when a flood killed 200 workers, Ngasamo mine was resurrected in the 1990s when local businessmen bought a portion of the land. Unsure where to dig, the new owners turned to a witchdoctor for help. After studying maps of the area and surveying the mine, the healer picked a spot, sprinkled a few drops of his macabre potion on the ground, chanted to the spirits, then told the businessmen where to mine. As well as receiving a healthy fee for his advice, the witchdoctor continues to get a share in the profits of the gold brought to the surface.

With a salary like this at stake, it's not surprising that healers will go to any lengths to get their hands on albino body parts, and several collude with grave-robbers to dig up cadavers. Ngeme Luhahula, from Llungu village, prays at her daughter Vumilia's resting place every day. Vumilia Makoye was 17 when two men entered the house in 2008, held Ngeme at the front door, and slit the teenager's throat, draining her blood,

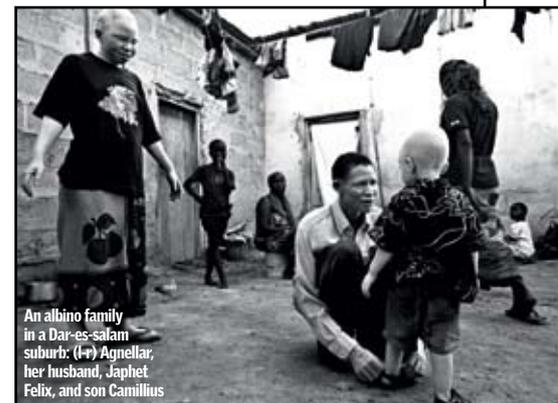
before slicing off her arms and legs. To make sure that the murderers didn't come back to take the rest of the body, Vumilia was buried where she died; beneath the earth floor of Ngeme's mud hut. The family demolished that house and built a new one next to it, but even though the government is supposed to seal albino graves with cement, Ngeme is still waiting.

Investigating corruption

The Tanzanian government has promised to crack down on albino murderers, the witchdoctors who hire them, traffickers, and grave-robbers. Those caught can face the death penalty and several people have been hanged for their involvement in the trade, but corruption makes it difficult to effectively uphold the law. Although President Jakaya Kikwete nominated an albino member of parliament in 2008 to raise the status of people who have the condition, and has organised secret polls to find killers, some high-ranking police officers are in on the trade, undermining his efforts. When former BBC investigative journalist Vicky Ntetema reported on the killings in 2008, she angered officials, and was forced to leave the country several times. The Minister For Interior Affairs said, “She's brought shame on the country. All that for dead albinos.”



Miners dig for gold at Ngasamo mine after a witchdoctor blessed the site with a potion made from albino body parts



An albino family in a Dar-es-salaam suburb: (l-r) Agnellar, her husband, Japhet Felix, and son Camillius