Journalism and human rights standards in Africa: reportage of violence against persons with albinism in Malawian newspapers

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ABSTRACT: Malawi has experienced a boom in radio and television stations, newspapers, online media, and a democratic dispensation has been put in place, but reporting of human rights abuses in the country is unsatisfactory. One of the most pressing issues at the moment in the country is the killing, maiming, abduction and disappearance of persons with albinism. Persons with albinism face discrimination and stigma based on false beliefs. A content analysis of Malawian newspaper articles on the attacks on persons with albinism suggests that reporting is largely specific, reactive and superficial. The articles from the Times Media Group and Nation Publications Limited published between 2016 and 2018, seem not to aim at demystifying the issue of albinism as a mere disability, and the press portray persons with albinism as helpless victims of voodoo. There is hardly any framing of articles to show positive contributions or normalcy of persons with albinism. The Malawian newspapers should highlight their achievements and portray them as more than mere victims. Additionally, there is a role for investigative journalism to help in tracking buyers of body parts of persons with albinism. Better reporting of violations would ultimately help raise human rights standards in Malawi and Africa as a whole.

TITRE ET RÉSUMÉ EN FRANCAIS:

Journalisme et normes des droits de l'homme en Afrique: le reportage sur les violences à l'égard des albinos dans les journaux au Malawi

RÉSUMÉ: Au Malawi, les stations de radio et de télévision, les journaux et les médias en ligne connaissent un essor considérable dans un environnement de libéralisation mais le reportage sur les violations des droits de l'homme dans le pays n'est pas satisfaisant. L'assassinat, la mutilation, l'enlèvement et la disparition de personnes atteintes d'albinisme sont l'un des problèmes les plus urgents dans le pays. Les personnes atteintes d'albinisme font face à la discrimination et à la stigmatisation fondées sur de fausses croyances. Une analyse du contenu d'articles de journaux au Malawi sur les attaques contre des personnes atteintes d'albinisme suggère que le reportage est en grande partie spécifique, réactif et superficiel. Les articles du *Daily Times* and the *Nation* publiés entre 2016 et 2018 ne semblent pas viser à démystifier le problème de l'albinisme en tant que simple handicap, et la presse dépeint les personnes atteintes d'albinisme comme des victimes impuissantes de la superstition. Il n'existe guère un effort dans la rédaction d'articles montrant des contributions positives ou la normalité des personnes atteintes d'albinisme. Les journaux au Malawi devraient mettre l'accès sur leurs réalisations et les décrire davantage comme de simples victimes. En outre, le journalisme d'investigation a un rôle à jouer dans le suivi des acheteurs de parties du corps de personnes atteintes d'albinisme. Un meilleur reportage des violations aiderait en fin de compte à relever les normes des droits de l'homme au Malawi et en Afrique en général.

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1 BACKGROUND: THE MEDIA IN MALAWI

The media in Malawi have boomed in the 25 years of multi-party democracy following the fall of founding father Kamuzu Banda. In 1994, Banda, whose 30 year reign was marked by abuse of human rights and lack of rule of law, lost a watershed election to opposition opponent Bakili Muluzi.[1] Under Kamuzu Banda's rule there was a single daily newspaper, *The Daily Times*, a solitary weekly called *Malawi News* and a lone radio station, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation.[2] There was no television station.[3] The existing media houses were propaganda tools that helped maintain the status quo.[4]

With newly found freedoms and rights entrenched in the 1994 Constitution designed to reflect the democratic dispensation, alternative newspapers and radio stations flourished. Television stations however started operating in Malawi only a few years later in 1999.[5] As of 2019 there are two established print media houses, namely the Times Media Group and the Nation Publications Limited. The Times Media Group publishes *The Daily Times*, *Malawi News* and *Sunday Times*. It also operates Times Television and Times Radio, and an online news site. The Nation Publications Limited publishes *The Nation*, a daily; the *Weekend Nation* which appears on Saturdays, and *Nation on Sunday*. The firm also has an online news site. Furthermore there are 27 licensed local television stations and 60 licensed FM radio stations in Malawi.[6]

1 JK van Donge 'Kamuzu's legacy: the democratization of Malawi: or searching for the rules of the game in African politics' (1995) 94 *African Affairs* 239.

2 J Lwanda 'Paper tigers: the rise and fall of independent media in Malawi: 1961-2001' (2002) 55 *The Society of Malawi Journa*l 5.

3 Lwanda (n 2) 7.

4 Lwanda (n 2) 5-6.

5 Lwanda (n 2) 17.

6 Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (2019) 'List of broadcasting licencees and validity period of their licences'.

The media houses carry largely local content and some of their reportage concerns human rights or democracy issues. Radio stations' phone-in programmes are popular with listeners on these topics. Newspapers have reserved spaces for readers who contribute content in terms of photographs and stories on a wide range of issues including human rights. The allotted spaces go under the banner citizen journalism.

Concerning ownership and bias, both the Nation Publications Limited and Times Media Group are privately ran and are deemed to be independent in their reportage. As such they are supposed to play a critical role in promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Indeed, the media houses have occasionally fallen foul of the authorities following critical stories. The Times Media Group was shut down in 2018 for allegedly failing to square its tax bill.[7] The publisher claimed that the shut-down was a witch hunting following negative reporting about the government.[8] The Nation Publications Limited was at one point barred from carrying government adverts and civil servants were told not to buy or read the company's papers after an outburst against it by former president Bingu wa Mutharika.[9] Radio and television stations are mainly privately operated. The exception is the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation whose radio and television stations are seen as biased in favour of whichever party is in government.[10]

2 ATTACKS ON PERSONS WITH ALBINISM

Although persons with albinism in Malawi have suffered various abuses for years, violence against them became more pronounced five years ago.[11] In 2014, people with albinism in Malawi started to experience greater abuses of their rights.[12] Children and adults were targeted in abductions, killings, maimings and disappearances. Previously such atrocities were recorded in Mozambique and Tanzania.[13] In Malawi some sections of the society wrongly believe that persons with albinism have special powers that enable them to defy death.[14] In Tanzania the

7 P Kumbani 'MRA seals Times Media Group' 1 June 2018 https://mwnation.com/mra-seals-times-media-group/ (accessed 27 July 2019).

8 L Mughogho 'MRA trashes political interference claims in their action against Times' 2 June 2018 https://malawi24.com/2018/06/02/mra-trashes-political-interference-claims-in-their-action-against-times/ (accessed 25 September 2019).

9 Nyasa Times 'Don't read the Nation, DPP warns civil servants' 12 March 2012 https://www.nyasatimes.com/dont-read-the-nation-dpp-warns-civil-servants/ (accessed 27 July 2019).

10 L Chitsulo 'Report faults MBC on bias' 7 June 2019 https://mwnation.com/report-faults-mbc-on-bias/ (accessed 27 July 2019).

11 Malawi Government *National action plan for persons with albinism in Malawi 2018-2022* (2018) 12.

12 'UN condemns attacks on albinos' *The Daily Times* 5 April 2018 3.

13 J Chavula 'The muted side of albino killings' 5 January 2016 http://mwnation.com/the-muted-side-of-albino-killings/ (accessed 26 September 2019).

superstition is similar and persons with albinism are viewed as 'ghosts' and it is believed in some quarters that they do not die.[15] Such false beliefs have spurred attacks on persons with albinism.

Some criminals who attack people with albinism on the African continent hold the belief that their body parts have special powers,[16] and that they bring wealth or good luck when mixed with other charms in voodoo rituals. As a result, people with albinism are being hunted like animals for their body parts in many African countries.

In Tanzania, where the attacks started earlier, over 80 people have been killed.[17] In the same country, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported that body parts are coveted by witchdoctors and can fetch up to $75, 000.[18] Overall, the United Nations estimates that since 2006, 600 attacks have taken place in 28 African countries.[19] Tanzania has the highest recorded number of attacks.

In Malawi, about 25 people with albinism including young children have been killed since 2014.[20] Many more have been maimed, disappeared or forced into hiding. The population of persons with albinism in Malawi is said to be around 135, 000, according to the 2018 National Population and Housing Census.[21] The number is a significant rise from a previous estimate which put it at 17, 000. [22] In Malawi 72 per cent of the victims are children and 28 per cent adults.[23] The attacks also include desecration of graves to loot bones of the deceased.

Some of the perpetrators of the attacks on children are people close to the youngsters such as uncles, aunts and even parents.[24] In Malawi, an attack on a young boy in 2018 was carried out by his step father; the

14 Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs *Handbook for investigators, prosecutors and magistrates concerning offences against persons with albinism* (2016).

15 Under the Same Sun http://www.underthesamesun.com (accessed 15 September 2018).

16 G Gondwe 'Amnesty International faults government on albino killings' 7 June 2016 http://mwnation.com/amnesty-intl-faults-government-on-albino-killings/ (accessed 26 September 2019).

17 R Velton 'The silent killer of Africa's albinos' 25 April 2017 http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170425-the-silent-killer-of-africas-albinos (accessed 20 September 2018).

18 Velton (n 17).

19 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights *Regional action plan on albinism in Africa -2017 to 2021* (2017) 2.

20 'Albino case: 3 pathologists to craft autopsy report' Weekend Nation 23 February 2019 3.

21 M Masuku 'Persons with albinism count' 19 June 2019 https://mwnation.com/persons-with-albinism-count/ (accessed 26 September 2019).

22 Masuku (n 21).

23 Malawi Government (n 11).

24 R Mpaso 'Parents, guardians of missing albinos risk arrest' 9 May 2016' https://www.times.mw/parents-guardians-of-missing-albinos-risk-arrest/ (accessed 26 September 2019).

boy was given a poisonous substance to assist in his killing.[25] Some duty bearers in Malawi are believed to be behind the attacks.[26] Some implicated in the violence include a Roman Catholic cleric, a police officer and a medical worker.[27] The arrest of the three seemed to fuel speculations that some people in influential positions are involved in the abuses. At least one official of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was arrested in 2018 in connection with attacks on persons with albinism.[28]

In 2017 a ruling party legislator, Bon Kalindo, led a protest in the capital Lilongwe over the apparent inaction by government over the killings. The protest was unusual as at that time Kalindo belonged to the governing DPP. It is rare in a neo-patrimonial Malawi with a predominant subject-parochial political culture,[29] for parliamentarians to demonstrate against the policies of their own party. Politics in the country is dominated by party leaders who are often rich individuals and wield considerable power and influence over followers who are largely passive and obedient. Rather, party members or parliamentarians are more likely to toe the line of those at the top of the political hierarchy. Kalindo therefore showed unprecedented courage to protest against his own party, which was also in government at the time.

In some instances files for cases on suspects have disappeared from police stations.[30] The result has been suspicion of corruption and sweeping under the carpet possible revelations of influential people being connected to the abuses. The Malawian authorities have on their part been insisting that they are working hard to stop the violence against persons with albinism.

3 THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON PERSONS WITH ALBINISM

In 2018, the Malawi government launched its National Action Plan on Persons with Albinism to run up to 2022.[31] The Plan is wide-reaching and covers six thematic areas namely: education, awareness raising and training; internal security; investigative research, human rights monitoring and reporting, administration of justice and victim

25 O Khamula 'Police arrest mother, 4 others over the missing of albino boy' 11 July 2018 http://www.nyasatimes.com/police-arrest-mother-4-others-over-the-missing-of-albino-boy/ (accessed 20 September 2018).

26 L Mkandawire 'NGOs want albino inquiry' 4 January 2019 https://mwnation.com/ngos-want-albino-inquiry/ (accessed 26 September 2019).

27 'Priest arrested over albino killing' *The Nation* 17 April 2018 1.

28 Nyasa Times 'DPP governor, two others arrested over missing albino in Phalombe' 17 July 2018 http://www.nyasatimes.com/dpp-governor-two-others-arrested-over-missing-albino-in-phalombe/ (accessed 19 September 2018).

29 A Tostensen *Malawi: a political economic analysis* (2017) 19.

30 'Albino case files are missing-MP' *The Daily Times* 11 May 2018 5.

31 Malawi Government (n 11).

assistance, legislation, and empowerment of persons with albinism through the Association of Persons with Albinism in Malawi.

This article focuses on the role of media which is part of the aspect of awareness raising. The National Action Plan suggests positive media reporting, civic education and empowerment through knowledge for parents and guardians of children with albinism.[32] This is for the purpose of attitudinal and behavioural change. Therefore, the paper will focus on how the Times Media Group and Nation Publications Limited have reported on issues involving persons with albinism. The Times Media Group and Nation Publications Limited are the biggest and only established print media houses in Malawi. Smaller newspapers emerge during election times and disappear soon after the polls, as they seem to be established specifically for political purposes. Hence it was practical to only target the two media houses. The article discusses the role of investigative reporting especially in so far as it could contribute to promoting and protecting the rights of persons with albinism.

4 HUMAN RIGHTS AND JOURNALISM

It is widely postulated that human rights is not a stand-alone field, but is impacted upon by other sectors of society such as politics, law, sociology and even journalism. [33] The media have a role to play in the protection and promotion of human rights by exposing abuses and holding to account duty bearers.

Media organisations find human rights a news worthy topic because of the emergence of crises, ratification of international treaties as well as democratisation processes across the globe.[34] Nevertheless, the media do not ultimately cover all human rights issues as they select which stories to prioritise.[35] That selection process is influenced by various stakeholders such as politicians, non-governmental organisations and other media entities.[36] The media decide to highlight a particular issue and also are in a position to call for action to be taken.[37]

However, the reasons why the media do not cover all human rights stories go beyond lack of space, for example in newspapers.[38] Journalists may also fail to investigate human rights abuses because of the threat of lawsuits from targeted individuals or organisations.[39]

32 Malawi Government (n 11) 18.

33 E Daly 'Why we need journalism' 2 May 2014 https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/02/why-we-need-journalism (accessed 27 September 2019).

34 International Council on Human Rights Policy *Journalism, media and the challenge of human rights reporting (2002)* https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1551305 (accessed 11 July 2019) 16.

35 International Council on Human Rights Policy (n 34) 17.

36 International Council on Human Rights Policy (n 34) 15.

37 International Council on Human Rights Policy (n 34) 15.

38 International Council on Human Rights Policy (n 34) 116.

39 D Forbes *A watchdogs guide to investigative journalism* (2005) 52.

Other reasons could be existing links between media houses and the corporate world, which may threaten to withdraw advertisements or sponsorship.[40] Journalists miss certain angles of a human rights story because in some countries there is an overemphasis of civil and political rights at the expense of social and cultural rights.[41]

The way forward could be practising human rights journalism which exposes abuses by nature.[42] That genre of journalism is

> a diagnostic style of reporting which offers a critical reflection of the experiences and needs of the victims and perpetrators of (physical, cultural and structural) human rights violations. It attempts to understand the reasons for these violations in order to prevent further violations and to solve current ones in ways that would not produce more violence. Moreover, it is a journalism that challenges, rather than reinforces, the status quo of the dominant voices of global and national societies.[43]

Human rights journalism favours the vulnerable, truth, non-selective reporting and is proactive.[44]

The importance of journalism to human rights can therefore not be overemphasised. It is imperative for journalists to be mindful of the challenges that may induce them to practice selective reporting. Journalists therefore have to prioritise victims of abuses in the news agenda. In doing so reporters need to put truth and the vulnerable as priority areas in writing stories.

5 METHODOLOGY

This article reports on a content analysis analysing 124 newspaper articles published between January 2016 and June 2018 in Malawi. The newspapers targeted are those published by the two major media houses, the Nation Publications Limited and Times Media Group. This time frame was selected as it coincided with a resurgence of attacks on persons with albinism, and it was assumed that journalists would extensively write on the incidents. Furthermore, the stories were seen as a representative sample of how the Times Media Group and Nation Publications Limited cover stories on persons with albinism. Fifty-five of the articles were from the Nation Publication Limited and 69 were from the Times Media Group. The articles were purposively selected for the study in that they carried news concerning attacks on persons with albinism. Specific codes were devised to help analyse the newspapers. The coding sheet had predetermined variables that were presented in the articles.

The analysis involved finding out what the stories were about, how persons with albinism were represented in the stories, if the persons with albinism were quoted as primary sources or not, and the use of the

40 Konrad Adenauer Stiftung *Handbook to investigative journalism* (undated) 8-15.

41 International Council on Human Rights Policy (n 34) 19.

42 IS Shaw *Human rights journalism: advances in reporting distant humanitarian interventions* (2012) 109.

43 Shaw (n 42) 107.

44 Shaw (n 42) 109.

word 'albino' in the headlines of the story as that term is not considered respectful or humanising.[45]

The framing theory underpinned the study to look at how stories on persons with albinism were presented by journalists. The framing theory suggests that the way a text is presented to the audience influences the choices people make on ways to process that information.[46] Frames are abstractions that work to organise, or structure message and it is indicated that they influence the way audiences perceive news items.[47] Framing involves selecting some aspects of reality and giving them prominence over others.[48] A frame is an indication to what the source thinks is important in information being relayed to audiences.[49] Therefore, the theory helps make conclusions on how journalists at the Nation Publications Limited and Times Media Group saw as important as they wrote articles on issues concerning abuses against persons with albinism. Furthermore, the theory helps in finding out how the journalists were trying to influence the readers of the papers that their media houses publish.

6 REPORTING OF ATTACKS ON PERSONS WITH ALBINISM IN THE TIMES MEDIA GROUP

In the Times Media Group, the articles were predominantly hard news in that they reported events in a brief manner that was not deeply analytical or critical. In other words, it was presenting facts on what had happened. While 84 per cent of the articles were hard news, 12 per cent displayed an in-depth look at issues surrounding persons with albinism. Four per cent of the articles were opinion pieces or editorials representing the personal views of the editor.

Looking at the headlines of the stories, the majority of them (94 per cent) used the term 'albino', while 6 per cent did not.[50] These few headlines had wording that did not have to refer to persons with albinism such as; 'Government irks rights activists' or 'Bishops speak on priest's arrest'. Within the article the usage of the word 'albino' had a different frequency. While 68 per cent of the stories did not use the term, only 32 per cent of them used it.

45 Under the Same Sun 'Albino versus person with albinism' https://www.underthesamesun.com/sites/default/files/WHY%20WE%20PREFER%20THE%20TERM%20PERSON%20WITH%20ALBINISM.pdf (accessed 30 July 2019).

46 Masscommtheory.com 'Framing theory' https://masscommtheory.com/theory-overviews/framing-theory/ (accessed 18 June 2019).

47 A Ardèvol-Abreu 'Framing theory in communication research in Spain. Origins, development and current situation' (2015) 70 *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* 424.

48 Ardèvol-Abreu (n 47) 424.

49 D Chong & JN Druckman 'A theory of framing and opinion formation in competitive elite environments' (2007) 57 *Journal of Communication* 100.

50 Under the Same Sun (n 45).

On the use of persons with albinism as sources of news, 16 per cent of the articles used them as primary and prominent sources. While 19 per cent of the articles used persons with albinism as secondary and non-prominent sources. The majority of the stories (65 per cent) quoted other sources and not persons with albinism.

As far as topics or themes in the stories are concerned, the analysis indicated that the Times Media Group reported most general issues or events concerning persons with albinism, with a percentage of 17. These included general public declarations or marches to highlight abuses. The second most reported issue (14 per cent) was condemnation of violence against persons with albinism. The least reported topics were on the arts as a form of fighting against abuses, appeals for assistance, achievements or rights issues, each with a percentage of less than one.

Regarding whether the stories cited various rights, freedoms or human rights instruments, only 17 per cent of the articles did that, and 83 per cent failed to do so. Mostly the articles mentioned the right to life and right to education. The documents mentioned were largely local in nature, referring to the Malawi Constitution and hardly any international treaties. Only two stories were framed in a manner that was seen as tackling stigma surrounding persons with albinism and helping in overcoming such a vice. That represented a meagre 3 per cent, with 97 per cent of the stories being written in a manner that did not fight against stigma.

Another variable concerned how the newspapers portrayed persons with albinism as either helpless victims needing 'salvation' from the society, or victors over circumstances and being achievers. The Times Media Group stories mainly portrayed persons with albinism as helpless victims (60 per cent), and only 1 per cent of the stories portrayed them in a positive manner. The remaining 39 per cent of the articles were neutral in nature.

7 REPORTING OF ATTACKS ON PERSONS WITH ALBINISM IN THE NATION PUBLICATIONS LIMITED

The findings concerning reporting in the Nation Publications Limited reflect that there are some similarities between the two media houses in the trends concerning all the variables. For example, in the Nation Publications Limited the articles were predominantly hard news (93 per cent) with a few features (7 per cent) and no editorial column. The headlines of all the stories used the term 'albino', despite this term being unacceptable to rights groups. The term was used inside 36 per cent of the stories, but 64 per cent did not contain the word.

When it comes to using persons with albinism as sources, 16 per cent of the stories used them as primary and prominent sources, while 13 per cent of the stories used persons with albinism as secondary and non-prominent sources. In other words, 71 per cent of the stories used other individuals as sources, meaning that persons with albinism were not quoted.

On the topics or themes of the stories published by the Nation Publications Limited, the analysis indicates that the most were written on the protection of persons with albinism (16 per cent) followed by condemnation on attacks (13 per cent). The least written about topics were on murder, appeal for help, fashion shows as a means of fighting abuses and indirect attacks on persons with albinism, with a percentage of less than one.

Looking at stories citing rights, freedom or human rights instruments, 27 per cent of the articles contain such reference and 73 per cent of them did not. Similar to the Times Media Group, the instruments cited were local, and the right to life and right to education were the dominant rights mentioned in the stories.

Concerning reportage to fight against stigma of persons with albinism, 98 per cent of the stories did not report in such a manner. A mere 2 per cent of the articles were written in a manner that took some position against stigmatisation of persons with albinism. The findings in this variable are very similar to those in the Times Media Group, with corresponding figures of 97 per cent and 3 per cent respectively.

With regard to portraying persons with albinism as helpless and needing a sort of salvation, or portraying them as victors over situation, the Nation Publications Limited did not have any article that was positive and showing progress in issues of persons with albinism. Forty-five per cent of the stories portrayed them as helpless victims, hence negative, while 55 per cent of the articles were neutral in nature. The analysis on the Nation Publications Limited and Times Media Group are given in table form below:

Table 1: Tabular depiction of reportage on persons with albinism (PWA) in Malawi's print media

	Nation Publications Limited (55 articles)	**Times Media Group (69 articles)**
Type of story	Hard news: 93% Features: 7%	Hard news: 84% Features: 12% Opinion: 4%
Topic or theme	Protection of PWA: 16% Condemnation: 13%	General issues: 17% Condemnation: 14%
'Albino' in headlines	100%	94%
'Albino' in story	36%	32%
Citing human rights	27%	17%
PWA used as sources	Primary sources: 16% Secondary sources: 13%	Primary sources:16% Secondary sources:17%
Portrayal of PWA	Negative (Victim): 45% Positive (Victor): 0%	Negative (Victim): 60% Positive (Victor): 1%
Framing to fight stigma	Yes: 2% No: 98%	Yes: 3% No: 97%

8 DISCUSSION

The International Council on Human Rights Policy claims that journalists confuse issues due to their inadequate understanding of the human rights stories they are covering.[51] The organisation states further that human rights stories are reported more, than being covered.[52] The Times Media Group and Nation Publications Limited both seem to frame their reportage of the attacks on persons with albinism as general events and not as serious human rights violations. This is seen in the low percentages of stories citing human rights violations. This could be termed as superficial reporting without deep analysis of the issues at hand or connecting them to human rights instruments.

The contributing factor to the shallow reportage or superficial integration of human rights in the stories of the two media houses could be due to the fact that the majority of stories in the two media houses are hard news, and not editorials or features. However, the journalists could in the background information have attempted to cite the rights and freedoms involved or conventions being contravened. That would have helped in not just reporting the story, but covering it in a more in-depth manner.

The superficial integration of human rights in the reportage of attacks on persons with albinism could be a factor in why there is little or no framing of the articles to fight stigma surrounding persons with albinism. Framing stories in such a way is a deliberate task and requires an effort to research information that would achieve that goal. The scanty connection to human rights could also be a factor behind the portrayal of persons with albinism largely as helpless victims and not in a positive manner as persevering despite difficult circumstances. The journalists do not write stories focusing on normalcy and achievements in society of persons with albinism. Publishing such articles might help reduce stigmatisation and the spread of myths against persons with albinism. Establishing the link between shallow reporting of the stories and portrayal or framing of the stories is beyond the scope of this article, and so needs further investigation.

It is worth noting that both media houses overwhelmingly used the term 'albino' in the headlines of their stories. Within their articles there is also extensive use as over a third of the stories used the term which is offensive to persons with albinism. Reporters and perhaps editors at the Nation Publications Limited and Times Media Group seem unaware that the word 'albino' is unacceptable by advocacy groups, by using it within the headlines. However, with the published stories the use drops sharply indicating possible knowledge that it should be avoided. This is shown by the fact that the Nation Publications Limited had 100 per cent use of the offensive term 'albino' in their headlines while the Times Media Group used it 94 per cent of the times. However,

51 International Council on Human Rights Policy (n 34) 19.

52 International Council on Human Rights Policy (n 34) 116.

within the articles, the Nation Publications Limited usage of the word declined to 36 per cent while that of the Times Media Group fell to 32 per cent, The media houses could do well to find ways of entirely abstaining from using the term in their headlines and articles.

The scanty portrayal of persons with albinism in a positive manner as triumphant over circumstances or achievers is reflected in the little use of them as sources of news in the articles. About 60 per cent of the stories do not use persons with albinism at all as sources. This is a disservice to any effort to promote the status of the individuals as normal, achievers or productive members of the society. This is not to deny the threat persons with albinism face daily in Malawi and in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. But there seems to be an overemphasis on portraying them as helpless and hapless victims who cannot or do not contribute to national development. Using persons with albinism more as sources of news could help in efforts demystifying them as 'ghosts' or supernatural beings that do not suffer death.

By putting the spotlight more on the achievements and progress of people with albinism, the kind of topics or themes covered in the two media houses could probably change from the current scenario which is largely condemnation of attacks or protection measures. While it is imperative to report, expose and condemn the abuses, there is need for more balance. After the naming and shaming, there is need to help break the cycle of stigmatisation and what this article would term as 'mythisation' of persons with albinism. That could be achieved by journalists putting more focus on articles that are analytical, critical and challenging the status quo surrounding persons with albinism. Failure to do so helps perpetuate abuses.

Connecting the framing theory to findings of the study, it appears that the two media houses did not see destigmatisation as important nor did they try to influence a change of attitude among readers. The results indicate that what they saw as important was protecting persons with albinism and condemning the attacks.

The reportage in both the Times Media Group and Nation Publications Limited does not help in promoting the National Plan on Persons with Albinism in Malawi which runs from 2018 to 2022. As already discussed above, one of the thematic areas of the Plan concerns awareness and requires the media to write positive reports to help in attitude change among people regarding persons with albinism. The reportage in the two media houses largely focuses on negative elements and not on helping in eradicating stigmatisation. Journalists need to realign themselves and help in the implementation of the Plan.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

Could the solution to the conundrum be 'human rights journalism' that favours victims of abuses and challenges the status quo?[53] It could be

53 Shaw (n 42) 107.

quite a task for Malawian journalists to adopt the concept in a wholesale manner, either due to lack of capacity or adequate knowledge of human rights. A more thorough study has to be conducted to confirm knowledge levels of human rights instruments among journalists in Malawi. However, it could be a step forward to look at some aspects of human rights journalism such as its holistic problem-solving approach or its bias towards the vulnerable.

Moving forward, journalists in Malawi could write more in-depth and better stories concerning persons with albinism by having editors insist that every article should reflect the requisite rights, freedoms, local or international instruments. That would also help in giving visibility to the story as a rights issue. What that requires is easing access to human rights instruments in newsrooms. Again, this is another area of possible study as knowledge is not readily available on how easy it is to access human rights documents whether in hard copy or online in media houses in Malawi.

Furthermore, through proper training on reporting human rights related stories, journalists' capacity could be enhanced. One tertiary institution, the Malawi Institute of Journalism, has a human rights module. But its focus is largely providing knowledge on the development and current status of human rights in Malawi and beyond. It does not zero in on how to write or effectively produce a human rights piece. There is therefore a need for journalism training institutions to shift attention to giving students or practicing journalists skills to that end.

Linked to the point of training is promotion of niche reporting. In the current set up of tertiary institutions offering journalism programmes in Malawi, there is little emphasis on specialised reporting courses. Initiatives to promote niche reporting could help in focusing on human rights and how to report the field. The challenge for such growth in portfolios of institutions is funding. To have such specialised modules, colleges and universities would need experts in the field to deliver lessons and other resources to facilitate the learning process. With countries such as Malawi perennially struggling economically, possible solutions could be networking with international funding organisations or institutions.

Investigative journalism has a role to play in fighting the abuses against persons with albinism. There are two issues that seem to complicate efforts in tackling the violence. The first is reported missing of case files of suspects, a fact that was disclosed in Parliament in 2018.[54] The other is failure to track down and bring to justice buyers of body parts.[55] Those arrested in connection with killings or maimings of persons with albinism in Malawi claim that the market is in Mozambique. But suspects in Mozambique claim the market is in Malawi. Investigative journalism should dig deeper, and try to expose secrets and issues that are of public interest.[56] Hence journalists could

54 *The Daily Times* (n 30) 5.

55 'The mysterious market of albino bones' *The Daily Times* 12 January 2017 33.

56 Forbes (n 39) 6.

probe and try to lay bare how case files can disappear, why and for whose benefit. Similarly, investigative reporting can be useful in helping track down the market for body parts.

The Malawian authorities seem to play down the existence of such markets. Police officials have in the past alleged that there are no buyers of body parts for persons with albinism.[57] Therefore there is an urgent need to establish the facts. A suspect who alleged to know who was behind the killings of persons with albinism in Malawi and the buyers died in police custody.[58] A post mortem report indicated that the suspect, Buleya Lule, had succumbed to torture in a police cell.[59]

Considering that the media has an important role to play in advancing certain agenda by framing stories in a particular manner, it is envisaged that human rights standards would improve in Malawi if the two publishers improve their coverage of pertinent issues. Promoting human rights standards at a national level could contribute to lifting these levels on a continental stage.

10 CONCLUSION

The main print media houses in Malawi, the Times Media Group and Nation Publications Limited, do not have in-depth reporting of issues to do with persons with albinism. The firms mainly do event-based reporting (hard news) and very few features that are critical and analytical. The published articles are not framed in a way that helps fight stigma and myths surrounding persons with albinism.

The majority of stories published by the Nation Publications Limited and Times Media Group do not use persons with albinism as sources. Furthermore, the portrayal of such individuals is negative and as helpless victims. The media houses extensively use the term 'albino', which is unacceptable to advocacy groups, and the majority of stories do not cite relevant rights, freedoms or human rights instruments. The reportage is contrary to the aspirations of the Malawian National Action Plan on Persons with Albinism which calls for positive portrayal to help in attitude change in communities.

The way forward could be the training of journalists to cover stories in an in-depth manner and not just report human rights issues superficially. Editors have a role to stress the reference of rights in human rights stories and providing easy access to human rights instruments. Training institutions need to have specialised modules on coverage of human rights. Linkages with international funding agencies could help make available resources for training institutions to have specialised courses on human rights.

57 'Puzzle in albino body tissue market' *The Daily Times* 10 January 2018 33.

58 S Chitete 'Police to probe Lule's death' 28 April 2019 https://mwnation.com/police-to-probe-lules-death/ (accessed 8 August 2019).

59 G Muheya 'Autopsy confirms Buleya Lule was killed: tortured in a Malawi police 17 April 2019' https://www.nyasatimes.com/autopsy-confirms-buleya-lule-was-killed-tortured-in-malawi-police-cell/ (accessed 8 August 2019).

Also, investigative journalism could help in finding out why case files of suspects of the abuses go missing in Malawi, and help establish the currently mysterious market for body parts. Better coverage of human rights issues is crucial to promoting rights in Malawi and across Africa.