An Explorative Study on Children as Victim-Targets for the Harvesting and Removal of Body Parts for the use in Traditional African Medicine

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Abstract
As post-apartheid South Africa seeks to forge for itself an identity as a modern, industrializing nation with a constitution embodying the most progressive and enlightened principles of liberal democracy, muti killings are often presented as a wayward throwback to a dark and savage past. The South African media continues to bring to the fore stories of witchcraft as experienced by many communities, both urban and rural. Nearly all the stories reported in the media describe occurrences where children have been killed and their bodies mutilated for purposes of producing muti. This paper aimed to uncover some of the reasons why young boys and girls are mostly targeted for muti murder. A qualitative research approach was adopted with the use of a systematic review of literature, mainly focusing on muti murder. The present study fills the lacuna by stating the reasons why children are targeted for muti murder: Overall, the findings obtained indicated that all human body parts are powerful. However, the body parts (genitalia) of young boys and girls are regarded as particularly potent as the screaming of a child while his body parts are being chopped off is believed to awaken magical powers.

Keywords: Muti murder; children; systematic review; tradition

Introduction
Child protection as a concept and practice has gained a lot of attention and importance in the last two decades. It is reflected both in the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Many countries all over the world including those in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have made significant strides towards domestication of the UNCRC and MDGs through enactment of policies, programmes and services that foster child protection. However, in the last ten years, there have been a rise in reported cases of children as victim-targets for the harvesting and removal of their body parts for the use in traditional African medicine which contravenes the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights [1]. Muti murder refers to murder in which body parts are removed from a live victim for the sole purpose of using the victim’s body parts medicinally [2] for harmful traditional practice [3]. The term muti (muti in IsiXhosa transliterations) derives from the IsiZulu word “umuthi”, with the root –thi, which means or signifies “tree” and is usually translated in English as medicine or poison, with the inoffensive “herbs” used in equivocal instances” [4,5].

This paper posits that children’s body parts are removed for the use in muti, for myriad purposes including ritual and ‘traditional’ practices such as cleansing, witchcraft, protection from evil spirits, strengthening the effectiveness of traditional medicine, healing infertility, increasing and preserving wealth, securing marital-sexual relationships and assets [3]. The definition of muti murder adopted by this paper shares a lot in common with the definition adopted by the Technical Working Group (TWG) (2013) on Child Sacrifice. This TWG combines both child sacrifice and mutilation of children. It states that: “child Sacrifice and the mutilation of children is the harmful practice of removing a child’s body parts, blood or tissue while the child is alive. These body parts, blood or tissue are worn, buried, concealed or consumed in the belief they will benefit an individual, family or community. This practice often results in the death of the Child”.

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The suitability for use is generally linked to beliefs regarding the virility, the purity (due to young age), health and youthful condition of a targeted child. According to Minaar [5], perpetrators target children of both genders. This scholar further elucidates that young girls, particularly the pre-menstruating age group who are also assumed to be virgins are often regarded as suitable targets by the perpetrators. The genitalia of young boys and virgin girls are especially highly prized on account of being ‘uncontaminated’ by sexual contact – and therefore having more potent medicinal properties [6]. As a point of exodus, Minaar [5] argues that such targeted murders are an assault on the right to life of young persons.

Contextualisation of Muthi murder

South Africa like any other multicultural society faces a lot of challenges when its different cultures, Western and African traditional, have to co-exist, with one of the most significant challenges being the tension between the modern world and traditionalism [7]. This in turn has heightened the number of muti rituals since 2010. According to Altered Dimensions (2013) “the phenomenon is widely acknowledged to occur in Southern Africa where it is estimated that from 50%-90% of the population believe in magic and witchcraft”. The term muthi (muti in IsiXhosa transliterations) derives from the isiZulu word “umuthi”, with the root –thi, which means or signifies “tree” and is usually translated in English as medicine or poison, with the inoffensive “herbs” used in equivocal instances [4,5].

According to Petrus [8] the South African Police Services (SAPS) refers to muti murder as “occult-related crime”. In the “SAPS Objectives of the Investigation and Prevention of Occult-Related Crime by the General Detectives” [8], “occult-related crime is defined as ... any human conduct that constitutes any legally recognized crime, the modus operandi of which relates to ...any belief ...in the occult, witchcraft, Satanism ...Included in the scope of occult-related crime are ritual muti/medicine murders...” [9]. Ashforth [4] further annotates that “witches seeking to cause harm work with muthi as poison while healing seeking wellbeing work with muthi as medicine”. Ncala [10] argues that though directed towards health and wellbeing, a general condition of bodily health, spiritual ease, and social harmony referred to as impilo (in isiZulu) the muthi of healers also brings death. This scholar further propagates that “when a healer sets out to cure a person affiliated by witchcraft, he or she will typically promise that their muthi will return the evil forces deployed by the witch to their source, thereby killing the witch” [10]. Such violence is legitimated in the name of self-defense [4].

The rising motive for the use of human body parts is according to Scholtz et al. [11] the belief and acknowledgement that they are more powerful than “the usual ingredients or methods used by the traditional healer as they contain the person’s life essence” [10]. The usual, day-to-day ingredients often include, but are not limited to; “roots, herbs, other plant material, animal parts and seawater” [11]. “Many also find uses for a range of industrial chemicals such as mercury, chromium, potassium permanganate, copper sulphate, and other colourful metal salts, a practice that has contributed to making South Africa, a toxicologist’s goldmine” [4]. This scholar argues that “the reliance on old recipes to alleviate misfortune is never enough since many misfortunes that are caused or still remain to be caused are new, calling for new and improved recipes” [4]. Thus, the use of human body parts becomes part of a quest for a much stronger concoction [11]. The purpose for the use of muthi, specifically muthi combined with human body parts is according to Labuschagne [2], usually “to improve an individual’s or a community’s circumstances and is usually advocated by a traditional healer after having been consulted by a client, and a third party carries out the actual murder”.

Muthi murder in Africa

Bvunabandi [12] propagates that the divine (and Yahweh) influenced the emergence of human sacrifice as depicted in the biblical text. Cultural individuals honoured the deities by offering them something to eat in exchange for potency. The latter is supported by Anderson who annotates that the ritual by Africans of idolizing and or appeasing the ancestors by brewing traditional sorghum beer possibly arose as a result of such a philosophy of the viewpoint elucidated above. Masoga [13] further elucidates that “it is plausible that as the quest for power to outshine one another heightened, a more complex method of acquiring potency arose”. Monning [14] maintains that “there are strong indications that some tribes still use human ingredients in the traditional rain-medicine which is used in the ancestral rites for rain”. As a point of exodus, Munthali [15] maintains that the challenge posed by the traumatic muthi murder and its phenomenon is a comprehensive problem, and in South Africa a national issue. Below is a discussion of muti killing practised in the subsequent African countries: Botswana, Nigeria, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe [13].

Botswana

In a study conducted by Shumba in 2013 titled “Heartless … Zim Man’s Heart ripped out in Botswana Ritual Murder,” findings on ritual murder confirmed that the phenomenon is rampant in Botswana. Shumba argues that machete-wielding thugs killed a Bulawayo man and then ripped out his heart in a suspected ritual killing. This scholar further describes that “the dismembered remains of the victim, identified as Edmore Rundogo, were found in Maun, about 500km from Botswana’s second city of Francistown” [16].

Nigeria

Given the extra muti-mysticism often aligned to the power of the organs of people with albinism (PWA), muti killings specific to PWA is higher in Nigeria. People living with albinism have thus
become victims of ritual killings in which their body parts are sold to witchdoctors across this country [17,18]. The killing of people with albinism is fuelled by the belief that their body parts could be used for potions that will make one wealthy and prolong one’s life [18]. Conventional estimates in the past decade show general mutilation-related killings of 30 persons per year in Nigeria.

**Tanzania**

In 2007, a spate of killings of people with albinism in Northwest Tanzania drew international attention [19]. According to Schühle [19] “it is believed that the bones of people with albinism were a necessary ingredient in wealth-generating magic potions and thus provoked the killings which had no precedents in Tanzania or the local Sukuma culture”. As a result, it is re-counted that Tanzania proclaimed a ban on witchdoctors who are believed to have been targeting the country’s albinos population in mistaken beliefs that their body parts can bring wealth, luck and power [20,21]. It is still unknown whether Tanzania is winning the war against ritual killing of people with albinism or not. Nonetheless, “it has been revealed that the Tanzanian government ordered the arrest of more than 200 witchdoctors in its effort to put an end to murder of people with albinism” [20].

**Uganda**

In the East and Southern Africa regions, the numbers of child mutilations and or child sacrifice seem to be on the increase [22]. The most recent study of child sacrifice in Uganda showed that a child is mutilated every week [23]. The phenomenon of child sacrifice came to the limelight in the late 1990s when the first reports of the practice appeared in the media [23]. Child mutilation and sacrifice is not a myth but rather an emerging unfortunate reality in some communities in Uganda and other parts of Africa [23]. In Uganda, stories of child sacrifice have become common themes with almost all major newspapers [22]. Available reports suggest that in Uganda, albinos body parts appear to be particularly highly prized, because they can be used to make potions and magic charms – luck charms – that enhance wealth [24]. However, this brutal ritual happens against the backdrop of the report that people with albinism in Uganda have also recently demanded a seat in parliament for a representative [19].

**Zimbabwe**

The Zimbabwean society is no stranger to the occurrence of ritual killing which is shattering societies in other parts of Africa. Bukululi [22] reports “that villagers and pupils of Mhondoro-Mubaira are living in fear following a spate of suspected ritual killings that have taken place over the past few months”. Bukululi further elucidates that the attacks on pupils took place in Morowa village under Chief Nyanweda in December 2013. Another case of a “16-year-old Moreblessing Murove was fatally axed and her body parts were mutilated in another suspected case of ritual murder” [25]. This scholar also writes about “a 42-year-old Harare woman who is being interrogated on charges of ritual murder of a Grade 1 pupil in Norton”. Mokotso [25] re-affirms that “Chaitwa and Garande reportedly kidnapped and killed Perfect Hunyani, whose body parts were missing when the body was recovered.” Cases of ritual killing have also been heard as being practised among the Ngombe people of Zambia, who believe that a novice diviner must first kill a near relative before the basket will divine properly [26].

**South Africa**

South Africa holds the highest number of cases reported on muti murder [13]. Regrettably, “children are not excluded since they appear they are preferred as to make a better sacrifice on grounds of their innocence” [15]. While muti murders have occurred throughout history in South African culture, very little is known about them and little research exists on the phenomenon [27]. In a study conducted by Rannditsheni, et al. [28] on ritual murders in Vhembe District in South Africa, results that were yielded by the study proved that since the dawn of democracy in the country, about 117 cases of ritual murders have been reported as having taken place in the Vhembe District. Another disturbing phenomenon is that in most cases the murderers, although known, are not arrested, or are released shortly after arrest due to lack of evidence [28].

**Parties involved in Muthi murder**

According to Labuschagne [2] there are three parties involved in perpetrating the muthi murder crime, namely: the client, the witch and the murderer(s). In most instances, the client who approaches the witch is usually someone who wants to achieve a measure of personal gain. Motivations may include financial gain for a businessperson, fertility assistance for someone trying to conceive, power for a politician or protection for a criminal. Traditional healers involved in muthi murders are not included among mainstream traditional healers, and such practices are rejected by other healers. Borgeson and Kristen [29] further propagates that “they are often referred to as ‘secret sangomas’. While they are trained as traditional healers, they have chosen a path that involves harming others and are therefore referred to as “witches” by traditional healers”. These witches may be of either sex. Once this type of traditional healer is approached by the client, he or she then decides whether the request from the client will require herbs and roots, animal body parts, or human body parts [2]. The murderer is approached, usually by the traditional healer, to obtain the body parts. The murderer is carefully instructed on how to remove the body parts, and told that the victim must be alive when they are removed. The murderer will then take the body parts directly to the traditional healer. This is the only apparent role the murderer has.
Factors Influencing Modern Muthi Murder

Personal benefits

Traditional African beliefs hold the assumption that, in society there is only a certain amount of luck or good fortune [29]. Thus, it is believed that if another person is prosperous, then that individual has attained an extra portion of luck, often through the intervention of ancestors or with the involvement of the supernatural. It is also traditionally believed that hindrances or misfortunes, such as drought or illness, are signs that the natural and the social order are imbalanced and has been disturbed [5]. According to Borgeson and Kristen [29] “one means of obtaining this extra portion of luck or restoring the natural order is the use of strong muthi”. These potions are made more powerful by the use of human parts, such as the hands, ears, nose, lips, eyes and genitals [30]. The strength of the medicine to be used is further enhanced if the victim is still alive when the parts are removed [5]. Guided by the client’s aim, the traditional healer or which will determine which specific body parts are most required.

Power

Many references have been made to political connections to muthi murder. Perhaps the most noteworthy comes from a traditional ruler King Mswati III of Swaziland. “During election times, we tend to lose our grandmothers, grandfathers and young children. They just disappear. But I want to warn you all that you should not resort to ritual murder;” [31]. A BBC correspondent stationed in Mbabane, Swaziland stated that ritual murders increase during election time. Further north into Africa, Igwe [1] reports that in Gabon “Ritual crime is driven by the irrational belief in the potency and efficacy of ritual sacrifice, and in the unchallenged cultural narrative that attributes political and financial success to mythical and occult powers.

A similar warning was also issued in Liberia in 2005 when, “Liberia’s interim leader Gyude Bryant has warned any aspiring presidential candidates tempted to boost their chances by carrying out human sacrifices that they will be executed if caught”. The political connection has also been confirmed by Mukwevho [32] who also refers to the spate of ritual murders in Venda during the political upheavals in the 90’s.

Money economy and unemployment

Unemployment rates in many countries, specifically in South Africa are high and it has been suggested that wealthy persons might hire poor people to commit muthi murder [5]. Thus, muthi murder becomes a source of income for many [30]. Parts of the human body are used to secure certain advances. Unemployment and the love for money have been identified as the root of most muthi murders [30]. This scholar further maintains that people believe that if they use human flesh they could strengthen their fortunes. This is confirmed by Tanzanian Police, referring to body parts of albino’s. In a conducted in the Mutale and Thohoyandou areas of Venda, Mushvhanamadi [4] accounts that “the 20 suspects of ritual murder that appeared in the Thohoyandou high Court in Venda, 8 were traditional healers, 5 were labourers and 7 were unemployed”. Therefore, one can argue that the latter provides some backing for the notion that muthi murders are in some instances perpetrated for the sake of money. As a point of exodus, Realofse [30] adds that labourers and unemployed people may be enticed to perform the murders to earn some money.

Body parts and their uses

Literature indicates that usually the genitalia and certain other body parts are removed but, any other body part can possibly be used, depending on the muthi required by the client or traditional healer (Table 1). The stomach may be slit open from the sternum down to the hip region, and it is not uncommon for the head to be removed. Scholtz et al. [19] states that “…the body parts may be wrapped in specifically colored material, with red and white being associated with “good” medicine, and blue and black being associated with “evil” medicine”. Similarly, Borgeson and Kristen [29] propagates that sometimes body parts are placed inside plastic bags, newspaper or even inside coffee tins. The body is often not buried and left near running water. Nel et. al. [33] states that the body is characteristically not hidden or buried because the discovery of the body contributes to the effectiveness of the medicine. In a few reported incidents, the victim of such muthi-motivated attacks survived after certain body parts, such as breasts or the scrotum were removed [2]. This finding accentuates the difference between muthi attacks and ritual/sacrificial murders. The goal of the ritual/sacrificial murder is the death of the individual; in muthi attacks, the goal is to obtain body parts. Borgeson and Kristen [29] accentuates that it must be clearly indicated that the people or the witches that advocate muthi murders, do not all work from the same “textbook”. This scholar propagates that “…these beliefs are passed down from one generation to another by word of mouth and in secrecy”. Thus, the finer details, such as the basis for determining which body parts are used for what purposes and the process involved in the removal of the body parts may differ from traditional healer to traditional healer and from region to region. No hard and fast assumption can be made about which missing body parts will be significant in any given murder. It has, however, been said that for every human body part, there is an animal equivalent to and that true traditional healers would use the animal equivalent; only witches would use the human body parts. Because human body parts are believed to that the animal equivalent, they speed up the process or help ensure that the user achieves his or her aims. The subsequent table provides a description of some of the typical body parts uses:
Theoretical framework

This paper is led by two main theoretical perspectives: Cultural Storage Units [34] and Ritualisation regarded rituals as cultural storages with both expressive and creative functions. This Anthropologist defined ritual as “prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to myths, beings and powers.” He viewed rituals as storage units constituted by symbols that are packed with cultural information. Each symbol can be regarded as a multifaceted mnemonic, with each facet corresponding to a specific cluster of values, norms, beliefs sentiments, social roles and relationships within the cultural systems of the community. Turner saw rituals (along with political and legal-judicial processes) as mere compensations, or redressive mechanisms for the tensions produced in the secular order [22]. Turner believed that the expressive element of ritualisation is a response to the demands placed upon an individual, a group of individuals or a community by the social environment. Bulukuki [22] argues that the creativity function is embedded in the various innovations that are entailed in the response to a given threat. This scholar further propagate that ritual sacrifice should be understood from the expressive and creative perspectives as social responses and/or coping mechanisms to the demands in the social environment. Sacrifice is one of the socially constructed responses to phenomenon perceived by individuals, groups or communities as grave and extra-ordinary [22].

Tuton on the other hand, argued that people are more likely to turn to ritualisation if they perceive that they are under persecution by a mysterious force leading to extreme undesirable social circumstances. Traditional African beliefs holds the assumption that, in society there is only a certain amount of luck or good fortune [29]. Thus, it is believed that if another person is prosperous, that individual has attained an extra portion of luck, often through the intervention of ancestors or with the involvement of the supernatural. It is also traditionally believed that hindrances or misfortunes, such as drought or illness, are signs that there is an imbalance in the social order, it has been disturbed [5]. According to Borgeson and Kristen [29] one means of obtaining this extra portion of luck or restoring the natural order is through the performance of rituals and the use of strong muthi. Muthi murders are often associated with this type of muthi as muthi made from human body parts is considered to be extremely powerful and strong.

When people go through calamities, they always ask the question “why me?” this often pushes them to draw on cultural bound resources such as rituals to deal with these perceived persecutions [29]. Rituals are used as cultural defences in response to issues that compromise social security, social order and wellbeing. As argued in this perspective, rituals have a healing and preventive function against perceived risk and vulnerability within specific cultural contexts [22].

Methodology

Research design refers to the researcher’s overall plan or blue print of how the research is to be conducted. This paper is concerned with children as victim-targets for the harvesting and removal of body parts for the use in traditional African medicine by

Table 1: Source: Kevin [29], Labuschagne [2] & Lyncaster [46].

| Body part      | Meaning                                                                 |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hands          | Used by business owners to improve their businesses. The hand emblematically beacons customers and takes money. |
| Genitalia      | Used by people with fertility problems since ‘luck’ is believed to reside in the genitals of man and women.       |
| Lips and tongue| Used to silence a critic or witness in a court case, the tongue is specifically used as it is believed to smooth the path to a girl’s heart. |
| Brains         | used to improve intelligence                                             |
| Body fat       | Used as a common ingredient. It is taken from stomach, or kidney area, it is considered to bring a great amount of luck. It is often a sample ingredient in muti. It is used to ensure a good harvest in Venda. |
| Head           | A human head may be buried on another person’s property to bring that person misfortune. It also protects members of one tribe from another tribe if the head is buried in enemy’s village. |
| skull          | A skull of a young and energetic person may be built into the foundation of a new structure to ensure good business. |
| Eyes           | The eyes of the victims symbolize vision and supposed to give far sightedness. |
| Breast         | A source of ‘mother luck’. If you want to attract woman for your business, you will use breast. Breast contains fat, which is considered very lucky. |
| Blood          | Used to give vitality, protection, and longevity                         |
| Throat         | The throat is considered a very important ingredient and may be collected by cutting the throat                        |
| Atlas bone     | Considered quite powerful since the belief is that the circulatory system and nervous system run through the atlas bone and it is the pivotal link between mind and body. |
| Urine          | Urine of a young boy is considered to bring luck                          |
| Sperm          | Considered to bring luck                                                 |
| Hands          | A victim’s hands or parts of hands are regarded as symbols of possession, of success or of illegal appropriation |
| Adams apple    | Also used to silence a witness intending to testify against a client.     |

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exploring available literature on this topic. Kumar [35] assert that 
an explorative study “is undertaken with the objectives of exploring 
an area where little is known, if some know they neglect what is 
considered to be right”. With the very little that is known in this area, 
in this paper; a non-empirical research design (systematic review) 
was employed to find new knowledge on the aforementioned 
research problem.

Gough, Oliver and Thomas [36] provides that systematic 
review is a form of research that identifies, describes, appraises 
and synthesises available research literature ‘using systematic 
and explicit accountable methods. Punch [37] points out that 
systematic review uses pre-specified protocols and formalised 
tools for searching, screening, coding, weighting and integrating 
literature. The pre-determined steps were followed in this paper 
as explained by Punch [37], namely; initiate review and specify 
aims, formulate review questions and decide on nature and method 
of review; develop inclusion/exclusion criteria search strategy 
for relevance and acceptability of literature to be reviewed; this 
included key variables, timeframe and publication types. In this 
paper, a Content analysis (CA) was adopted to sample documents 
on the phenomenon understudy. Bryman [38] explains that CA is 
an approach to the analysis of documents that seeks to quantify 
contents in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic 
and replicable manner.

Data was collected using qualitative documents (various books 
(i.e. journal articles, books, dissertations, thesis and conference 
papers on the subject matter), and electronic databases such as 
EBSCOhost Research Databases, ‘Free Full Pdf’ Google Scholar; 
Oxford University Press, South African Media (local newspapers) 
via Sabinet (i.e. Sabinet African ePublications), were collected in 
this study, combined with UKZN and UL library visits for suitable 
seminal books for this paper, for the internet search of literature 
on the existing evidence relevant to the objectives of this paper; 
while collecting and analysing data from. Bryman [38] seeks out 
studies relevant to the research questions and the search will be 
based on keywords. For data collection, Bryman [38] seeks out 
studies relevant to the research questions and the search will be 
based on keywords. Grounded on the latter, Matthews and Ross 
[39] elucidate that one can ask questions of documents in the same 
ways as one might ask questions of research participants. Welman, 
et al. [40] further define a population as the entire study of objects 
or people which is the focus of the research and about which 
the researcher wishes to make specific conclusions. Purposive 
Sampling was employed in this paper and Maree [41] argues that 
this type of sampling is done with a specific purpose in mind about 
specific people or events who are deliberately selected because 
they are likely to produce the most valuable data. However, it must 
be noted that the sample of this paper does not involve or deal with 
specific individuals but data obtained from printed mass media 
reports and academic writings related to the topic understudy. This 
paper does not deal with specific individuals. For this paper, the 
sample is not dealing with specific individuals but data primarily 
from printed mass media reports related to the research topic. As 
aforementioned, this paper employed a content analysis to sample 
documents. Flick [42] maintains that CA is a classical procedure for 
analysing textual material which can range from media products 
to interview data. Bryman [38] supports the latter and states that 
CA is a method that can be applied to many kinds of documents. 
Silverman [43] points out that CA involves establishing categories 
and counting number for, instance categories are used in an item 
of text. Thus, key words related to muthi murder and children as 
victims were analysed.

Discussion

Muti murders are sometimes referred to as ritual murders, 
which some academics criticize as a misleading term as they claim 
that there is nothing ritual about these murders. The criminal 
and hidden nature of muthi murder presents many challenges to 
empirical research, particularly collection of accurate statistics. 
The lack of official systems for recording muti murder cases further 
impedes compilation of the quantitative data required to make 
an accurate assessment of the problem in South Africa. Findings 
of this study confirm that crime statistics in South Africa only 
records muthi murder within the general category of murder. It 
then becomes a challenge to determine the extent of such crimes. 
Currently, it has been estimated as occurring between fifteen and 
three hundred times each year [29]. Perpetration of muthi murders 
encompasses three categories. In the first category, a person 
influenced by a strong belief in magic and witchcraft will consult 
a sangoma and pay a fee. In the second category, the sangoma will 
divine the problem and describe muthi which in serious cases may 
involves human parts.

In the account of the third category, the use of “syndicated” 
means that people are hired to commit the crime and deliver the 
body parts. Grounded on the latter, one can argue that the trend 
in these killings has changed and has transformed into a form of 
an organized crime. Dave-Odigie describes it in a way where the 
witchdoctor is the head of a group who directs the perpetrators 
“...with middle men that help... in a loosely organized form of 
criminal activity.” In fact if the perpetrators are considered namely 
a client, the medium and helpers and the fact that money change 
hands then, this is, according to the General Secretary of the United 
Nations, organized crime. He describes it as, “... any serious offence 
committed by a group of three or more people, with the aim of 
making money” [44]. According to this description of organized 
crime, certain types of muthi murder can definitely be classified as 
such.

In South Africa, there are also less well-organised local 
networks and family members who are perpetrators of this crime. 
Parents have been identified as being involved in muthi murder or
colluding with Sangomas. Findings of this study confirm general assumptions that poverty, periods of competition of resources as a result of economic inequality and conditions of power vacuum are primary factors for the escalating incidents of muthi murder and the general use of witchcraft in South Africa. There are many factors that complicate the estimates of muthi related murders. Majority of these murders occur in rural areas and many go unreported. The KwaZulu-Natal and the Limpopo province continue to have high incidents of muthi related crimes. However, this crime also occurs in urban areas such as in Inchanga, near Durban, Soweto, near Johannesburg and eMafakathini near Pietermaritzburg. High temperatures in South Africa, especially in the Limpopo province, bodies rapidly decompose, making it difficult to determine precisely what injuries were inflicted to the body. As a point of exodus, Borgeson and Kristen [29], states that some members of law enforcement may stick to more customary belief systems and as a consequence be reluctant to define a murder as being muthi murder for fear of retribution from the witch involved. Moreover, since high-ranking politicians, businesspeople and other civilian servants may have unlawfully participated in such dealings, some members of the police may be cautious about their involvement in such cases [45,46].

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the plausibility that contemporary South Africa is experiencing numerous incidents of muthi killings, in which people – especially young children – are killed for their body parts. One might have believed that in the 21st century and with the advent of democracy, witchcraft-related issues would be less prominent than they were in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Through Mass Media reports, there have been many reports of instances where harm has been caused to children for reasons associated with witchcraft. The study explored that this type of crime is experienced by many communities, both urban and rural. The paper argued that muti murder is practised by communities in African countries such as: Nigeria, Botswana, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and South Africa. The paper reported that some body parts are harvested while the child is still alive, and the victims tend to be selected because they fulfill the criteria required for the necessary body parts. Lastly, law enforcement officials where such murders have occurred may be reluctant to divulge certain information, out of fear for their own safety.

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