

The Darkest Shade of White:

An in depth look into the lives of Tanzania's persecuted albinos





In Tanzania, the albinos bodies are worth more than gold. Witchdoctors use their appendages including noses, genitals, tongues, fingers, hands, and ears to supposedly bring their clients good luck in politics, business, or even mining. At least 76 albinos have been murdered in Tanzania since 2000. In early 2015, 200 people were arrested as part of a crackdown on the criminal element that hunts the albinos. But with body parts selling for \$500 and entire bodies fetching \$75,000, the fight to end albino persecution will be difficult in a country where the average monthly salary is less than 40 US dollars.



Meeting with the albino children from the Under The Same Sun organization is no small feat. Tension is particularly high at this time as the Tanzanian general election is right around the corner. Voters will elect the President, members of Parliament and local government officials.



Baraka and Emmanuel are laughing at the WWF wrestlers on TV, playing on the computer, drawing doodles, or chatting with each other. Then, I notice some sleeves hanging loosely on some torsos, some missing fingers on a few small hands. Tongues, arms, everything and anything – all fair game in savage attacks.



Emmanuel Festo, 14, concentrates on his drawing. This is not an easy task for him as he survived a machete attack that left his arm hacked off above the elbow. The fingers of his remaining right hand were chopped off as well. Despite his handicap and poor eyesight (a common ailment for albinos), Emmanuel is a very talented artist.



Emmanuel Festo can hardly speak as his tongue was damaged in the attack and four of his teeth were knocked out. I ask him what he wants to be when he grows up. “*Prime Minister,*” he responds with difficulty. “*I want to serve my country.*”



Bakara Cosmas, a 6-year-old boy who is constantly smiling, has one of the most horrific stories. 17 suspects were arrested in connection with the mutilation of his hand including his father and his younger brother. They hacked off his limb and sold it to witchdoctors for \$5,000.





Pendo Serengema, a girl of 16, has a similar story. She survived an attack in her home. One man held her down, a second used a machete to hack off her arm, and a third stood guard to prevent any rescue attempt.

"It was the second machete blow that separated my right arm just below the elbow," she recounts.

Her injuries were treated at a hospital 100 kilometers from her village. All of these children come from remote areas. Police have arrested a neighboring witchdoctor who earned 350 euros for her arm.

Mwigulu Matonange, 11, recalls the day his left arm was hacked off by a machete:

“I watched them wrap my arm in dirty cloths and disappear into the bushes...”





Mariam Stafford. At 32 years old, Mariam is also an albino and a second mother to them. She survived a machete attack in 2008 during which she lost both of her hands. That day, Mariam also lost the life of her unborn child :

« On October 7th, 2008, while I was sleeping at home, some people attacked me in the middle of the night. They broke down the door to my house and tried to cut off both my hands. They successfully made off with my right hand and left the other severely damaged. I stayed there, bleeding the whole night.

It wasn't until the next day that I made it to a hospital. The doctors couldn't manage to save my left hand so they had to remove it completely. Now I don't have either of my hands.

I was in the hospital for five months. After I healed up, they asked me if I wanted to go back to my village but I knew I would no longer be safe there.”



Mariam's sister, Jenipher, also has albinism. She stayed in the forest for two weeks after Mariam was attacked for fear that she was next. Shortly thereafter she was placed under the protection of Under The Same Sun in Dar Es Salaam. She is the only one in the house not to have been attacked.



Adam Robert, 14, was attacked with a machete. He was left with multiple wounds including three severed fingers. Adam survived and told police that his father, stepmother, older brother, and another male relative were involved in this criminal act. Neighbors confirmed his testimony and all the perpetrators were arrested.

"I can never go home to my family," he says.



Kabula survived a machete attack in 2010:

«I was sleeping next to my mother. Three people came into our room, demanding my mother give them money. My mother told them that she did not have any money so they started beating me. They held my hand out and cut it at least three times. The next day I went to the hospital. They were caught. The day we went to court for the case, they denied that they had done anything. But when I got there and accused them, they admitted to doing it. That was in 2014. I don't know if they have been given a punishment yet.»



«My dream is to be a lawyer so that I can protect people with albinism, those who have been attacked, and those who are in danger. I want them to be in a safe place so they can get their rights. »



Kabula says it with so much determination. In a soft voice, she tells me of the cruel things her father used to tell her mother:

“This is not a human being. It is like a dog. Because she is white, she cannot walk in the sun or see very far. So keep her inside her room. Don’t make her go to school. What will she make of her future anyways? She has nothing in her mind.”



Mariam did not join on this last trip to the States as she already received prosthetic limbs in Washington, D.C. a few years ago. But she has already outgrown them in the time that has since passed. She hopes the generosity of the UTSS will allow her to get new ones that fit better so she can hug all the children in her new family.

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