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Three Year Old Albino -- Victim of Witchcraft Sacrifice

Posted: 05/ 1/2012 4:00 pm

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That the small African albino boy's body is chopped off and parts are one by one removed while he screams in pain haunts me. I see his small limpid body as he is carried by three aggressive looking black African men at the airport in Nairobi on their way to Burkina Faso. I hear the men's loud, offensive language as the airline attendant asks for the missing passport -- they had three passports and none for the child. And I continue to wonder if I too might have joined in the inquiry of whether the boy was their child. And whether he was destined to a fate much worse than death? I was one of many at the airline counter, except I had the chance to look into the three-year-old's face and eyes. They were innocent, placid and cherubic. As he looked at me with his angelic eyes I thought of the hard life ahead of him: an albino in a continent of black people. But then I was in a hurry to catch another plane. And that rests as my excuse for not having done more -- or so I have tried to convince myself.

After I was airborne the tragedy that has manifested itself in the killings of large numbers of albinos in Tanzania and elsewhere in Africa began to dawn on my mind. I know that in Tanzania and some other African countries albinos and their albino body parts are regarded as possessing magic powers -- their use can help in magic cures. I had seen stories about mutilations of albinos; the hunting down of albinos and trafficking of albinos across borders. Albinos are an expensive commodity -- in a perverse topsy-turvy turning of the capitalist system. For me and many others I am sure all that had been news that existed at that strange level where I the reader reads, I the TV viewer views a story. I quickly get mad and just as quickly go on to other stories -- pleasant, sweet candy to take the bitterness out of the bitter ones, which I forget just as quickly. You see, I'm a news consumer, but one who pretends to have a deeper well of rage since I have some of my own complaints.

The image of the innocent looking little albino boy in the company of the three black Tarzans has played itself in my mind so often that, he is to me no longer a baby headed to a loving family, but a sacrifice at some altar of a cruel witchcraft ceremony. It is personal in that I saw the albino boy who was within my reach, and I could have saved him. I say this because I am now convinced that the three men's intentions were not noble and that my inaction was probably a result of my cowardice. Rejecting to think of the worst about the boy's situation, which would have in turn forced me to act and end up in some major trouble. Ours are such stark possibilities: trouble for me, and certain death for the child. Mine is a coward's usual retort: what could I have done? It is to my shame and eternal regret that I could but didn't save a young boy from only God knows what agony and suffering.

In Africa, we have watched [the decimation of rhinos](#) and other animals whose horns and other body parts are supposed to enhance men's -- especially men in Asian countries -- sexual potency. This is particularly true of Chinese and Korean men. And we in the West have, rightfully, been incensed and outraged by this practice which many governments and international organizations are trying to curb and ban.

The cruelty to and murder of African albinos has not been as widely publicized in our popular media. It should. There's nothing more abhorrent, nothing more evil than the use of a human soul to expiate some evil spirit; nothing worse than to inflict repeated, continuous pain to a child whose only sin is having been born with a minor genetic variation. Those who engage in such behavior should be outcasts from the human family; those who turn a blind eye to such practices should be made to pay a steep price, and those like me who because of my cowardice allow the murder of a child to take place should never rest easy all our lives. There's nothing more heinous than the betrayal of the trust a child places in the adult world. It is this that I regret so much. With these thoughts in mind I have written this essay in addition to calling and talking to everyone who will listen to me about this child. I feel amazingly impotent, so afraid that another human life was wasted for no good reason.

What is so true about this tragedy is that so few people know about the plight of Tanzanian and other African albinos. And those who know only pay lip service to it. The torture and murder of albinos is such a low priority item in the grand scheme of pain and suffering that calls attention to the world. I believe we are wrong not to be more forceful about rooting out the practice of torture and mutilation of albinos. They're not a commodity like copper and gold. They are human beings with human rights and the same rights and feelings as all of us. We must place ourselves and our families in the place of every one of these people. To think for a moment that our neighbors would come after us and cut off an arm or a leg or remove a heart from one of us for witchcraft should make all of us stop in amazement, fear and shame and pay attention. It unfortunately could happen to one of us as it most certainly happened to the three-year-old angelic boy I saw at the Nairobi airport as he was being transported to Ogadougou, in Burkina Faso.

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