

“Everyone’s Different –Respect for Minorities”

Episode 01: Zambia’s Pale-Skinned Star

Author: Adrian Kriesch (HA Afrika) – 4945

Editor: Katrin Ogunsade

Clips: John Chiti (LbE Prod.)

Characters

<i>Narrator</i>	male	about 30	english
<i>John Chiti</i>	male	27	english
<i>Herbert Kirchesch</i>	male	around 50	german
<i>Jonathan Muswi</i>	male	34	nyanja
<i>Lista Motokwa</i>	female	around 30	english

Intro

Hello and welcome to the first episode of our new “Learning by Ear” series “Everyone’s Different – Respect for Minorities”. Throughout this series we’ll be introducing you to various groups and minorities in Africa. They’re people like you and me, but some of them might look different, think differently from the majority of the society, or have different ideas about life, which can often mean that they encounter discrimination. Nonetheless, they continue to fight for their rights. Today we’re talking about people with albinism. This is a condition in which a lack of pigment causes people to have very pale skin. And this makes them conspicuous, especially in Africa. Often they’re also the target of violence, or even murder, because of wrong beliefs and misconceptions. We’re going to meet one young man who was discriminated against throughout his childhood because he looked different to other people. But now he’s a star - and very famous in his country.

1. SFX: John's Song from CD

2. O-Ton John Chiti (eng) O1

“My name is John Chiti. I am an albino, living in Lusaka, Zambia. I am a musician and also the founder and director of the Albino Foundation of Zambia.”

3. SFX: John singing a song in the studio

4. Narration

John Chiti is passionate about music. This is immediately obvious when you see him standing, eyes closed, in front of the microphone in his little studio. His new release is another love song - they go down especially well here in Zambia. It was a love song that shot him to fame in 2008. Back then John had just moved from his home village to the capital. Soon after his arrival a producer discovered his talent as a singer, and his very first song was a hit. For the first time in his life John's skin colour was actually an advantage.

5. O-Ton John Chiti (eng)

“Some people came to my show, straight to where I was singing. They said: ‘It’s really him singing!’ They thought there was someone in the background and I was just miming. I challenge them! They look at me and my albinism and they say: wow!”

6. Narration

Praise and encouragement are things John did not often receive when he was growing up. His father left the family after John was born. He wouldn’t accept that his son wasn’t black. He thought John’s mother must have had an affair, otherwise the baby would have been black, like everyone else in the family. He didn’t know that albinos are often born to non-albino parents. The parents may have normal skin, but they can nonetheless be carriers of genes that can result in one of their children having albinism, as the German doctor Herbert Kirchesch explains:

7. O-Ton Kirchesch (deu)

“It happens when a person is conceived. The genes a child receives from its parents are assigned completely randomly. It’s a bit like a throw of the dice. That’s why everybody’s different. Everyone is a little different to everyone else. With albinism, pigment is missing in the genes. The

person's skin, hair and eyes either lack pigment altogether, or the pigment that is there is not of good quality.”

8. Narration

For albinos the main consequence is that they suffer from two major health problems. Because it lacks pigment, their skin is pale and burns very easily in the sun. Many albinos in Africa die of skin cancer, because they have no access to sun creams or medication. In addition, many albinos have very bad eyesight and can scarcely see anything at a distance. Their eyes often flicker back and forth because they're trying to focus on a fixed point. So in school it's very important that they sit close to the blackboard.

In addition to their health problems, in most African countries albinos are also the objects of prejudice. There's a long list of superstitions - from a belief that albinos never die to the idea that albino hair can cure illness. John Chiti can only shake his head at such stories and lies. Not one of all the many rumours about albinos has ever been proven. Albino children in particular suffer from discrimination and from the effects of these prejudices, says John, recalling his own childhood.

9. O-Ton John Chiti (eng) O4

“I started feeling that I was not a normal person. I was different. And the moment I started feeling like that I started asking myself questions. Why? Why am I different from other people? Why are people laughing at me? Why do people spit on their shadows when they see me? With all these questions you let yourself down. You start thinking: I am not a normal person, I am not loved, I am not a good person. I will look down on myself. Even when I could do something, I still brought myself down by saying: I am an albino, I can't do this.”

10. Narration

But in spite of all the setbacks, John never gave up. Quite the opposite.

Instead, he went on the offensive. In 2008 he founded the Albino Foundation of Zambia. The organisation tries to improve living conditions for albinos in Zambia. It now has some 500 members. The majority live in the capital, but John is planning to open more offices in other cities in order to do educational work there too.

Members meet regularly and hold discussions about albinism. In doing so, they're working to combat prejudice. The increasing number of reports about the murder of albinos shows how necessary and important this is. In Tanzania alone, more than 60 albinos were murdered between 2007 and 2011, mostly so that their body parts could be sold to witch doctors. Grisly crimes like these have also been committed in Zambia.

11. SFX Jonathan's house in Kanyama

12. Narration

We drive to Kanyama, a poor district of Lusaka, to meet Jonathan Muswi. The 34-year-old is sitting on a plastic chair in front of the house where he and his family lived until 2011 - the year his five-year-old daughter Prudence was murdered.

13. O-Ton Jonathan Muswi (Nyanja)

“Her mother had just gone out to the market, and Prudence was playing with friends. She was always a very quiet child. Whenever she argued with her friends, she went away to hide. When her mother came back from shopping she was gone. She was found dead an hour later, beside the school, in a bag.”

14. Narration

The police couldn't identify either a motive or a culprit, but Jonathan Muswi is convinced that she was killed because she was an albino. He thinks the murderer tried to take her dead body with him to sell, but that he had to flee and was forced to leave it behind. Jonathan cradles his little son in his arms. That day, he says, his whole life fell apart. He thinks about Prudence all the time; and he blames himself for what happened. Because he too felt prejudice when Prudence was born. She was the only albino in the family, and Jonathan didn't know why this should be. He, his wife and their four other children are all black. But soon afterwards he went to the Albino Foundation for advice, and got cream to protect her skin. He learned that Prudence was a child like any other.

15. O-Ton Jonathan Muswi (Nyanja) O5

“Albinos are good people. She was only five years old, but I could see that my daughter was a good person. I feel terrible when I hear all the falsehoods people believe about albinos. About how people trade in them. Every time I hear something like this, my heart breaks all over again.”

16. SFX: Silence

17. SFX: Fade-in Studio Atmo

18. Narration

7.05 pm on Sunday in the television studio of the broadcaster TV2. John Chiti is late again. The show has already been on the air for half an hour when the scheduled studio guest strolls through the door. A quick conversation with the producer and John goes straight into the interview, live on camera.

19. SFX: Atmo John on stage

20. Narration

They chat about gospel music, of which John is also a successful producer. The 27-year-old talks about his new songs, about gospel music and God. He never has to talk about albinism, because here John is accepted as a musician and is not reduced simply to the colour of his skin.

KW Anfang

After the interview Lista Motokwa, one of the presenters, tells us about the influence John has had on the people of Zambia.

21. O-Ton Lista Motokwa (eng)

“Because of people like John who have come out in the open talking about their situation, for people like me the perception has really changed. I accept albinos. Here it starts when you are growing up. In Africa, usually you are told albinos don’t die, and things like that. But I think the perception is changing slowly, and with a lot of projects and sensitization around we are seeing a better place for albinos.”

22. Narration

John stands next to Lista and nods. All he asks of other people is tolerance.

23. O-Ton John Chiti (eng)

“Albino persons are normal people and should be treated like any other person. If you challenge people to prove what they believe, none of them has stood up to say: ‘Me, I have proven that albinos don’t die.’

Sometimes I give my hair to friends and said: ‘Here is my hair, do whatever you want with it and let’s see if you do indeed get rich. None of them came back to me and said it worked!’

KW ENDE

24. SFX: Song in the studio (can be used as underlay throughout the outro - rights obtained)

25. Narration

At the end of the programme John goes up on stage again and grabs the microphone. ‘Better’ is the name of his new gospel song. No one in Zambia now, not in the studio or watching the programme on TV, says “Look, an albino!” They just say, “Wow - what a voice!”

OUTRO

And that's the end of today's story about albinism. Our author was Adrian Kriesch. If you'd like to listen to the other radio features in our series about respect for minorities, check out our website: dw.de/lbe. You're very welcome to leave your comments there, as well as on our Facebook page. Goodbye for now, and be sure to tune in again next time!