

CHINEYE OCHEM

OUR LAND

IS REFUGED



OUR LAND IS RED

CHINEYE OCHEM

All rights reserved; no part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher and the author.

This digital edition published by Harmony Publishing in 2018

Plot 1 Emmanuel Anabor Street, off Mopo road, Akakaiye, United Estate, Sangotedo, Lekki-Epe Expressway, Lagos, Nigeria

Tel: +2347032212481

Email: [publish@harmonypublishing.com.ng](mailto:publish@harmonypublishing.com.ng)

Copyright © Chineye Ochem

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

ISBN 978-0-46375-293-7

*Our land is red*

*And we can no longer keep silent*

***A fictional piece based on the tragic happenings in Northern Nigeria.***

# DEDICATION



To Leah Sharibu, the Dapchi girls, the Chibok girls, their family members and loved ones.

To John Chibok, whose father was brutally murdered by the terrorists, and whose cousins were among the kidnapped Chibok girls.

To the victims of the bombings and herdsmen attacks.

To their family members and loved ones who will carry this loss with them through their life time,

To Oby Ezekwesili, Aisha Yesufu, and the members of the Bring Back Our Girls Movement, who remind us daily that our girls are still out there.

To Nigerians, in this time of continuous loss and tragedy.

To a New Nigeria, where there is peace and security, where the lives of the citizens matter, and our girls are not snatched from their families in their prime and where the lives of animals do not trump that of its citizens.

*our land is red*

*filled with the blood of its citizens*

*how long will we continue in silence,*

*waking daily to the massacre of our families?*

*two hundred today, five hundred tomorrow*

*children, parents and even the unborn*

*how long will we continue to pray*

*feeling helpless, hopeless and depressed?*

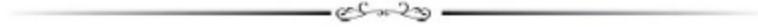
*our grasses and farmlands, formerly green*

*are now watered with the blood of their owners*

*our land is red*

*and we can no longer keep silent.*

# CONTENTS



[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Epilogue](#)

# CHAPTER 1

---

Gloria dropped the book she had been reading all day, as she yawned and stretched herself out on the bed. She had been lost in the pages of a novel, a world totally different from her reality, one she could not imagine, not even in her dreams. A perfect world. It had been impossible to drop the book since she picked it up in the morning. The only pauses had been to eat, drink some water and use the rest room. Lying on her bed, getting lost in an interesting novel is always the highlight of her holidays. As an only child, she has learnt to overcome loneliness and find company in the amazing worlds of different writers' imaginations.

Her parents are a little strict, especially when it comes to hanging out with fellow villagers. They have always told her how they believe that she is destined for much more and that associating with those 'wayward girls and miscreant boys' in the village would only derail her from her very bright future.

Her mother always says:

“Gloria, don't you know your future is very bright? You are a very intelligent girl and you are meant for much more than this village. Don't associate with these wayward, good-for-nothing girls around, oh! All they think about is sex and money. And all these stupid boys really have nothing to offer. Most of them are thieves, robbing people on the streets at night, all so they can flash little cash and get the attention of innocent girls like you. My dear, they just get the girls pregnant and abandon them. You must not fall into their trap. You will be successful and leave this village, and eventually come and take us to big cities like Kano, Abuja and even Lagos.”

Her parents really believe in her. Sometimes it scares her that she might fail them and crush all their dreams.

Her mother, Esther Yaya, is a trader. She has a small stall in the village market where she sells most of the produce from her husband's farm. Very hardworking and industrious, she wakes up as early as 4am every day, including Saturdays and Sundays, public holidays and even on Christmas day. When she was much younger, she always thought that once she became a woman like her mother, she would no longer sleep so much. She thought sleeping was one of the things she would outgrow, because women like her mother were always awake and about. When she would be dozing off at nights, her mother would still be up and about the house and it was still her mother that always woke her up in the mornings. . .

“Gloriaaaaa!” Her mum's voice bellowed from the kitchen, totally cutting her off her day-dreaming.

“Yes, mummy?” She responded, lazily shifting on her bed.

“Come and take your food, or are you planning not to eat dinner this night?” Her mother asked.

“I'm coming, mummy” She replied, reluctantly getting off her bed to go pick up her dinner in the kitchen. Gloria loved to eat in her room, on her bed, a bad habit her mother indulged sometimes when her father was not home.

“Is Daddy back yet?” She asked her mother, trying to decide where to go with her plate of rice.

Her mother looked at her with the corner of her eyes, without moving her face in her direction, barely glancing at her.

“Not yet. If you want to eat in your room, you had better do it fast before your father returns. I don't have power for *wahala* this evening, *abeg*”.

Gloria smiled. It amused her the way her mother always saw right through her. It's probably one of the reasons they were so close. She could hardly

keep anything from Mama Gloria, as she is popularly called in the village.

“Your father has gone for the village farmers meeting again. I wonder what they are always talking about. Do they really have to meet for hours every week? It’s almost as if they spend as much time talking as they spend on their farms working. Mtcheeeeeeeew.”

Gloria smiled. Her mother hated it when her father went for these meetings. Gloria wondered if it was because her father usually returned late from these meetings, or because on those days, he would eat very little and keep to himself for the rest of the night.

Jonathan Yaya was by nature a very lively man. His sense of humor was in a class of its own. Whenever he was home, he usually joked around with his ‘girls’ – as he fondly referred to his wife and daughter.

He would tell them stories about his childhood, his trips to some of the big cities like Lagos and Port Harcourt. He would talk about how crowded it was in Lagos, how the commuters were always in a hurry, how they had to chase the yellow public buses, which he said they called *danfo*, just to get from one part of Lagos to another.

Her father told them of one occasion in a place called Oshodi. He struggled to board one of the *danfos* with many other Lagosians – as he calls them in his funny judgmental way, wrinkling his face slightly in that way that usually makes her laugh. Immediately after boarding the bus, he checked his pocket and his phone and wallet had disappeared. He had had to trek the rest of the way home. That was the day, according to her father, he became a Lagosian.

“If your pocket hasn’t been picked on the streets of Lagos, you are not yet a true Lagosian” her father had said, concluding the story.

She had laughed so hard that evening, and gone to bed thinking about pick-pocketing on Lagos streets. That night, she dreamt about struggling to board a bus and a guy dipping his hand into her pocket and bringing it out immediately with a shriek, because the sharp razor blade in her pocket had cut deeply into his fingers.

## CHAPTER 2

---

Jonathan Yaya , Gloria’s father, likes to be called ‘John’. Whenever he meets anyone, immediately after introducing himself, he says, “Please, call me John.”

When asked why he preferred to be called John, in his usual playful way, he goes:

“I don’t know about my parents oh, but the name Jonathan sha, it just seems soooo. . .” and then he takes on that faraway lost look that gets everyone around roaring with laughter. He is someone you would call the life of the party.

Though a very jovial and playful man, John is very hardworking. He does not joke with his work on the farm and his responsibilities to his family. The farm, a hectare of land passed down through generations of the Yaya family and which he has inherited from his father, is the family’s primary source of livelihood.

He has been working on this farm for as long as he could remember. As the only son, with four sisters, he used to work on the farm with his father – as the men of the house; while his sisters stayed in the kitchen with their mother. His father would always say, “Jonathan, leave the kitchen for the women. Let us, the men of the house, go do the hard labour. After all, we are the ones with all the muscles; they are just the weaker vessels.”

His younger sister, Martha, always got angry at these remarks. Right from her childhood, she had always been interested in masculinity. She loved to dress

up in his jeans, shorts and shoes. She would sometimes put on his face caps. When he would try to take it from her, she would run around the compound with him hot on her heels.

She had always hated being in the kitchen. She hated having to stay back in the house whenever John and their father were off to the farm. She would try to sneak after them, and if caught and forced to stay back home, she would cry and cry until sometimes her father would finally indulge her, taking her to the farm along with them. John really loved Martha though. Of all his sisters, she was his favorite. Being the only boy in the house, she sometimes made him feel like he had a brother.

Most of the produce from the farm was usually sold in the market both in large quantities and retail quantities. The large quantities were often sold to traders from the big cities that would come to the villages to buy these crops at the lowest possible prices and then sell them in the cities at prices as high as they could go.

The traders are the ones that really make all the money from the farm produce, while the farmers that do all the work are usually ripped off. It's not like the farmers have lots of choices though, as they have to sell the crops quickly before they get spoilt and then, months of farming and harvesting would have amounted to nothing.

Notwithstanding, the farmers still try to get their crops' worth from the farmers, or at least, they do not make it that easy to be exploited.

“Ha ha John, come on! These tubers of yam are too expensive at N100 per tuber. How much do you think I will sell it when I get to the city? Don't you know that before we arrive Lagos, some of the tubers would have gotten spoilt?” The traders would say, trying to buy the yams at ridiculously cheap prices.

Or, they would use their famous lines, “See John, don't you know that people rarely eat *garri* again? Now, most Lagosians are only interested in taking wheat and semovita. You should be lucky we are even coming to buy these your cassava *sef*. What is the essence of being a farmer if you cannot sell

your crops *ehn*, John?”

He hated haggling with these traders, especially the ones from Lagos. They were the most stingy and greedy. They acted as though anyone not living in Lagos was a fool who would just believe any nonsense you tell them.

“Don’t mind these stupid Lagosians. Their love for money has overtaken their common sense and human compassion. They think say all of us na mumu, say we no go school, all because we decided not to be living that their stupid cat and mouse life in Lagos *abi*?” His friend, Sanni responded one day as John was complaining to him about his just concluded haggling session with one of his most deceptive Lagos traders.

“*Abi* oh, and they take our crops to Lagos and sell everything at very exorbitant prices. They make all the money, while we do all the work. *Mtcheeeew*.” John replied, hissing.

Sanni sighed. “My brother, no be small thing oh. This farmer’s life *sef* no easy at all. If I come this life again *ehn*, I no go even near this village at all. In fact, *na* America them go born me.”

John laughed. Sanni’s love for America was rivalled only by his hatred for Nigeria. Who could blame him though? He really had not had it easy in his 45 years on earth.

“You and this your America *sef*, na heaven? Jonathan said, teasing him.

“Gaskiya, my brother, America *na* heaven on earth oh.” Sanni replied, ready to go off into his daydreams of the perfect world somewhere out there, overseas. John and Sanni had been friends for a very long time. They lived several houses away from each other. Their fathers had been close friends, and their farms were just separated by stick-walls. Sanni was like the brother he never had.

## CHAPTER 3

---

“You girls have just a couple of months to your SSCE exams. The extra lessons will commence today, after school closes. To that end, everyone in this class is expected to wait behind after regular school hours. In addition to that, you all have to start preparing intensely for your exams. I expect everyone here to clear their papers in flying colours. My students do not write exams twice oh.”

It was the first day of resumption of the new term, the final term for Gloria and her classmates before the commencement of their WAEC exams. The Principal had come to address them in their class and had concluded his speech with the reminder that *his students do not write exams twice*.

That statement though, sounds more like a warning than a reminder. To Gloria, it sounded like the principal was giving them some kind of ultimatum, like he was saying, *if you fail your exams and have to rewrite them, I would disown you as though you did not pass through my school*. Perhaps, it was the seriousness on his face or the hardness in his voice when he made this statement towards the end of his speech that made it leave such an impression on her mind.

This statement, however, was not anywhere as scary to Gloria, as the thought of failing her parents.

“Gloria, you have to be serious and make your papers once and for all. You know we are not getting any younger. You cannot waste a whole year of your life in this village waiting to write another SSCE oh.” Her mother had said to her this morning before she left the house. Talk about pressure!

She understands though. Her parents are really not getting any younger. They had been married for about 10 years before they gave birth to her.

They told her how they had gone to see lots of doctors but were told that there was nothing wrong with them, and that they were in perfect health, and could conceive at any time. Years came and went by and still no conception. Once, her mum had been pregnant but had suffered a miscarriage few months into the pregnancy.

Her parents had been patient, praying regularly, and seeking God's face. After all, they believed that children came from God. Unlike most men she knew around, her dad had remained faithful to her mum, loving her, and remaining by her side through it all.

His family members on the other hand, not so much. They had started to mistreat and shun her mother in family gatherings, and even in public. They called her all sort of names, referring to her as a witch who was busy eating all her unborn children and had bewitched her husband – their son - trapping him in a childless marriage.

On some occasions, his sisters and mother had tried bringing young ladies to her father's house, trying to convince him to “at least get a child from a fruitful woman”.

“This your dry expired witch *wey* you carry put for house, *wey* no fit give you common *pikin*, not even one!” his mother would say.

“Mama please, stop insulting my wife. She is not a witch, and it is not her fault. Children come from God and He will give us one when the time is right.”

“Shut up! She don even put charm for your body, common sense you no get again. See fine fresh girl *wey* I carry come for you, she go give you better strong boys *wey* go dey help you for this your farm.” Mama would retort, trying to appeal to his sense of self-interest.

“Mama please stop. I did not ask for your help and intervention. I don't need