

On Our Skin

written by

Somto Ihezue

Phone: 08108170463
E-mail: somtoihezue@gmail.com

EXT. BRIGHT SECONDARY SCHOOL - MORNING

The EDUCATIONAL TASKFORCE officials are burning books and educational materials considered "inappropriate" in front of the school. Several works of literature that navigate topics like gender equality, feminism, atheism, sexuality, gender identity, human rights, race, and disability, are dumped into the fire. Other officials are checking the students' bags for inappropriate books and materials. There are fliers and posters on the school wall with illustrations on the kind of books students should not own or read. NDUKA (M, 15) is wearing a blue and white school uniform. He stands on a queue along with other students.

TASKFORCE OFFICER 1
(Points to Nduka.)
You, step forward!

Nduka steps forward and his bag is searched by the officer. The officer does not find anything incriminating and motions for Nduka to go inside.

TASKFORCE OFFICER 1 (CONT'D)
Next!

Another student, OGECHI (F, 15), walks up, and when her bag is searched, the officer retrieves a book titled "**CAGED OCEAN DUB**" by **DARE SEGUN FALOWO**.

OGECHI
That- that is not mine.

The TaskForce Officer hands the book to his subordinate who proceeds to dump it in the fire.

OGECHI (CONT'D)
(Crying.)
I don't know how that got inside my bag!

TASKFORCE OFFICER
(Turns to Ogechi.)
Quiet! Remain behind after school today for your punishment. Now, get in!

EXT. BRIGHT SECONDARY SCHOOL COMPOUND - AFTERNOON

The school dismissal bell rings. Nduka leaves for home and catches sights of Ogechi and other offenders cutting grass in the school field. They are exhausted, sweat trailing down their body and soaking their school uniforms. A taskforce officer supervises them. He glares in Nduka's direction and the boy takes off and hurries on home.

INT. FAITHFUL ADORATION MINISTRIES - MORNING

A sermon is ongoing. Nduka is sitting next to his mother, ANIELE (F, 35). PASTOR MUJOJO (M, 47) is on the pulpit preaching about the evils of subversive texts. The small congregation hangs on the pastor's every word.

PASTOR MUJOJO

Worldly empires prioritize ethics
and principles that oppose God's
will, and Scripture tells us to
resist conforming to this pattern!

The pastor bangs his fist on the lectern, and the congregation all gesture and murmur in agreement.

PASTOR MUJOJO (CONT'D)

All the books are now filled with
immorality imported from the west
and shoved down our children's
throat, and they expect us to fold
our hands and accept it. We will
not!

Murmured agreements come from the congregation once again.

PASTOR MUJOJO (CONT'D)

I applaud what is happening in our
schools today. These people are
targeting our children and it is
our duty to make sure their plans
never take root.

From the corner of his eyes, Nduka can see his UNCLE NNAMDI (M, 45) glaring at him and his mother. Nduka shifts uneasily in his sit.

ANIELE

(Whispers.)

What is it?

NDUKA

Nothing. Nothing.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Nduka is reading a book titled "SHIGIDI AND THE BRASS HEAD OF OBALUFON" by WOLE TALABI. His mother is reading a queer poetry collection titled "IN GORGEOUS DISPLAY" by UGOCHUKWU DAMIAN. A knock comes on the door.

ANIELE

Who is it?

There is no response.

ANIELE (CONT'D)

(Heading to the door)

Who is there?

Still, no response comes. Aniele opens the door to find Uncle Nnamdi standing there.

ANIELE (CONT'D)

Oh Nnamdi, we were not expecting-

Nnamdi does not let her finish. He barges into the house, shoving Aniele aside. He keenly scans the living room, before his eyes drop to Nduka and the book in the boy's hand. Nnamdi snatches the book from Nduka. The cover of the book has a picture of a Yoruba Brass Head. Nnamdi turns to Aniele.

UNCLE NNAMDI

So this is what you are teaching
this boy? Idolatry!

He angrily flaps the book in Aniele's face.

ANIELE

Nnamdi, it's just a novel. Your
brother bought this book as a
birthday present to Nduka before
his passing.

Aniele steps forward, and tries to reach for the book. Nnamdi moves it away from her reach.

ANIELE (CONT'D)

(Almost pleading.)

You know how much your brother
loved books.

Nnamdi stares down at the book for a while, his fingers digging into the cover.

UNCLE NNAMDI

I do, and I will tell you what I
would have told him were he still
alive. Idolatrous and immoral books

—

He rips a handful of pages from the book as he speaks. Aniele screams rushing at him. Nnamdi tosses her aside like a rag doll.

UNCLE NNAMDI (CONT'D)

Idolatrous and immoral books are
not welcomed in this family!

He rips at the book again and again until it is nothing but a pile of torn paper on the floor. Aniele is in a corner, her quivering hands covering her mouth. Nduka sits transfixed to a spot. He has not moved from that spot since the altercation began. Uncle Nnamdi is not done. He sights the poetry collection on the sofa and picks it up. The book cover display the naked silhouette of a black boy.

UNCLE NNAMDI (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ!

Nnamdi proceeds to rip the collection to shreds as well. This time, he does it with more vim.

UNCLE NNAMDI (CONT'D)

Aniele, I am warning you!

Nnamdi wags a stern finger at Aniele.

UNCLE NNAMDI (CONT'D)

Be very careful what you show this
boy! I am warning you for the last
time!

Nnamdi leaves the house, heavily banging the door as he exists. Aniele and Nduka are still in a state of shock. Slowly, Aniele kneels to the shreds of paper on the floor. She begins to gather them.

INT. NDUKA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Nduka stands in front of a mirror staring at his body. His fingers fidget against each other.

ANIELE (O.S.)

Nduka, you better hurry or you'll
be late for school!

NDUKA

Yes ma!

ANIELE

Your food is getting cold and you
know you don't like when *mkpuru*
forms in your pap!

Nduka tiptoes to the door and gently bolts it. He goes back to stand in front of the mirror and looks at the string of words that snails along his belly.

NDUKA

(Reading slowly)

**The Resistance Will No Longer Be
Written In Books, It Will Be
Written On Our Skin.**

Nduka runs his hand along the words. It tingles.

ANIELE (O.S.)

Nduka! You're going to be late!

Aniele can be heard banging on Nduka's bedroom door.

NDUKA

I'm already done, Mama.

Nduka hurriedly puts on and buttons his school shirt before scampering out of the bedroom.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Nduka wolfs down the now cold pap and akara before dashing out of the house.

EXT. BRIGHT SECONDARY SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

The EDUCATIONAL TASKFORCE officials are burning books considered "inappropriate" in front of the school, as always. Some officials are checking the students bags for inappropriate books. There are fliers and posters on the school wall with illustrations on the kind of books students should not own or read.

TASKFORCE OFFICER 2

(He points to Nduka)

You, step—

Nduka does not wait for him to finish the statement. He unzips his bag while staring the officer in the face. The officer gives the bag a cursory look.

TASKFORCE OFFICER 2 (CONT'D)

Next person!

As Nduka walks down the school hallway, OKEY (M, 16), a known bully, screams from behind him.

OKEY

Look, she has words on her skin!

Everyone turns around to where the voice had come from. Okey was pointing at DIOLA (F, 14). The girl was trying to cover her arm. A taskforce officer walks up and seizes her arm, revealing the string of words on her skin: **The Resistance Will No Longer Be Written In Ink, But In Our Blood.** The taskforce quickly whisk the girl away as she screams. Her screams pierce through the school hallway. Nduka covers his ears and scurries off to his classroom.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Nduka is home from school. He is still hesitant about telling his mother about the words on his skin. As they do everyday, his mother takes out a book from inside her cupboard where she hides them, and they both read it together. She started hiding the books after the incident with Uncle Nnamdi. This time they are reading a romantic short story in a speculative fiction collection titled, **"Africa Risen"**.

NDUKA

(Closes the book.)

I don't like this story. It's so sad.

ANIELE

It is.

NDUKA

They died and never got to know they were both in love with each other.

ANIELE

That is why when you love someone, make sure you tell them while you still can.

Nduka goes quiet. He seems to be lost in thought. His mouth slightly opens and closes like he wants to say something but is struggling to find the words.

NDUKA
(Head bowed.)
I- I like someone in my class.

ANIELE
Oh, is that so?

Nduka nods shyly. Aniele lifts his chin with her fingers.

ANIELE (CONT'D)
Then you should tell them.

INT. BRIGHT SECONDARY SCHOOL RESTROOM - NEXT DAY

MRS ADEBISI (F, 37) is teaching mathematical sets to Nduka and his classmates. There are drawings of venn diagrams on the black board. Nduka is sitted in the front row. He writes on a piece of paper, "**I like you, Anyi**". He traces the words over and over again until the paper starts to tear. Mrs Adebisi notices his inattentiveness, and intercepts the paper. She looks at the words written on it. Her face contorts with concern. She looks at a scared Nduka, and then at ANYI (M, 15) who is sitting in the back unaware of what is unfolding. Mrs Adebisi folds the paper into her breast pocket.

MRS ADEBISI
Tell your mother I would like to
speak with her after school
tomorrow.

Nduka nods, and wipes the tears brimming in his eyes.

INT. MRS ADEBISI'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Inaudible conversation ensues between Mrs Adebisi and Aniele.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Nduka is sitting on a bench outside the Mrs Adebisi's office. He has a direct line of sight into the office. He watches the two women as they converse. Mrs Adebisi has a worried look plastered across her face, while Aniele looks angry. Mrs Adebisi hands Aniele the sheet of paper. The discussion goes on and on, but after a while, Aniele gets up and barges out of the office. She grabs a confused Nduka and drags him out of the school premises.

EXT. LONELY STREET - AFTERNOON

Aniele and Nduka walk home in silence without saying a word to each other. Anieke walks briskly and Nduka tries to keep up. The boy's face has worry and anxiety written all over it.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Aniele drops her bag on the table and takes a sit on a sofa. Nduka stands with fidgeting fingers as he watches her. They both stay like that for a while.

ANIELE
Nna, sit down.

Nduka sits.

ANIELE (CONT'D)
(Heaves)
You are allowed to like whomever
you want.

That was all Aniele said.

INT. BRIGHT SECONDARY SCHOOL RESTROOM - NEXT DAY

Nduka rushes into the bathroom as the recess bell is heard going off. He turns on the tap to create an illusion that the toilet is in use, stands in front of the mirror, and unbuttons his shirt.

NDUKA
The Resistance Will No Longer Be
Written In Books, It Will Be
Written On...

ANYI (O.C.)
...Our Skin.

Nduka freezes as he hears the words and the sound of a door bolt clicking shut. He turns around to see Anyi standing beside the door and his heart skips a beat.

NDUKA
What are you doing here?

ANYI
This is a public restroom.

They both stare at each other for a while.

ANYI (CONT'D)

You should make sure you lock the door, Nduka. You know the officers will take you away if anyone sees you.

Anyi says and goes over to the sink. He shuts off the tap and removes his school shirt. Nduka comes closer to see the words that ran the whole length of Anyi's spine: **THE RESISTANCE WILL NOT BE TAKEN FROM US, FOR WE ARE THE RESISTANCE.**

ANYI (CONT'D)

I noticed them this morning. I tried to read them but I couldn't no matter how I twisted myself in front of the mirror. What does it say?

NDUKA

The resistance will no longer be taken away from us because we have become the resistance.

ANYI

Have you told anyone else about it?

Anyi puts his shirt back on.

NDUKA

No. I was going to tell my mother, but I don't want her to get in trouble because of me. Have you told anyone?

ANYI

(sternly)

We cannot tell anyone. Remember what happened to Diola.

NDUKA

What happened to her? I haven't seen her in school since that day.

ANYI

No one has seen her since that day.

There is fear rising in Anyi's voice.

ANYI (CONT'D)

Do you know where these words come from?

NDUKA

Mine is from a novel my father gave me as a gift before he died.

ANYI

I'm sorry about your father.

NDUKA

It's all right. It was a long time ago.

ANYI

Now let's get out of here before people notice we've been gone for so long.

Nduka and Anyi walk out of the bathroom. Okey is standing at the end of the hallway with a bunch of his friends.

OKEY

(laughing)

Weirdo!

ANYI

Ignore him.

It is too late. Anyi loses grip of Nduka's hand and Nduka is facing Okey and his friends.

NDUKA

My name is Nduka!

OKEY

I'll call you whatever I want to call you.

Okey thuds his balled fists against Nduka's chest. Nduka retaliates with a punch on Okey's jaw. By the time the task force come to separate the scuffle, Nduka's school shirt has been ripped into pieces and Okey's face looks like it has been pummeled by rocks.

TASKFORCE OFFICER 1

He has the words on his body. See it on his ribs!

The officers scoop Nduka off his feet and begin to take him away.

EXT. BRIGHT SECONDARY SCHOOL COMPOUND - AFTERNOON

Anyi runs after the task force officers. He catches up with them just before they get to the school gate.

ANYI

Wait, I also have the words on my body. Take me, too.

NDUKA

He's lying! Anyi tell them you're lying!

ANYI

I'm telling the truth.

Anyi removes his school shirt and turns his back for the officers to see.

ANYI (CONT'D)

The resistance will no longer be taken away from us because we have become the resistance.

All the teachers and students have gathered at the school gate at this point.

SIMI

I also have one!

Simi, the bespectacled girl who sits next to Nduka spreads her palms to reveal the words: **The resistance will scald your tongue until you spit it out.**

STUDENT 1

I have words too!

The student removes their sock to reveal the words on the sole of their feet: **The Resistance Is All Our Names.**

STUDENT 2

Me too!

The student lifts her braids to reveal the words on her neck: **The resistance is now. The resistance is here.**

STUDENT 3

Here, look at mine!

The student folds his trousers: **The resistance can never be stopped.**

STUDENT 4

I have words! I have words!

The girl shows them the words on her tongue: **The Resistance is our thundering voices.**

The task force stand stapled to the ground, not knowing what to do. The voices of the students grow louder, past the school gate, until they wrap around the whole town like gauze.

FADE OUT.