

A REVIEW OF RASAQ MALIK'S 'NO HOME IN THIS LAND'—BY ABDULWAHEED OLANIYI

For not less than four years now, the country that claims to be the giant of Africa—Nigeria—has been battling with demonic terrors by insurgents, which has given the nation and its people different sobriquets. Many have died, stranded, abducted. Some are neither dead nor alive as their captors remain silent to tell the world about their live status. The feat of any terror is their feast. Especially in North-East Nigeria, everyone lives a horrendous life. The land is alien to the natives. The country is a precarious domicile for the peace loving citizens. Where is the home in this land? Perhaps to elucidate the plights of a common man in the northern part of the country, Rasaq Malik describes the predicaments of people in the North- East, in his chapbook, 'NO HOME IN THIS LAND,' lamenting the acrimonious experience people go through every time as a result of the bugbear Boko Haram insurgents plant in the land.

The intractable menace of Boko Haram insurgents has defiled the peace of the land, resulting to the loss of millions of lives, loss of properties, hopelessness of people due to fear of danger around them: fear to worship in religious places; fear to nurse children; fear of parents to know whether their children in BH captivities are dead or alive, fear that gives them sorrows every day. Sorrows that stir the hope to die in the land where peace is being chased away. These and more are the messages Rasaq Malik is passing in his chapbook, shortlisted for Brunel International Prize for Poetry, 2017. The poet paints the picture of how women and children immortalize the names of their relatives with the flow of tears in their cheeks. The poets puts himself in their shoes and presents to the world the plight of Nigerian soldiers, dying in the course of protecting their country, Nigeria. Rasaq also reveals the horrible experiences people in IDPs face every day as they are mourning their loved ones with hunger, tears, sexual violence they experience. The poet foregrounds the plights of women and children especially in some places like Gwoza, Attagara, Kano, Kaduna, refugee camp in Rann et cetera. He, therefore, dedicates the chapbook:

*“For the woman cupping the candle light that flickers in a room  
In Aleppo, for her children who curl their bodies in bed...,  
For missing bodies, unrecovered bodies, drowned bodies,  
Mangled bodies,  
Dismembered bodies,  
bodies buried in a mass grave after an air attacking Borno.”*

The poet reveals that women and children suffer mostly during war or attack by the insurgents. He laments the pains many of them pass through: children turn orphans while women become widows. Besides, many women are also abducted. Apart from the fact that some die, abducted, those who claim to be alive are homeless, living like strangers in the land

of their birth. This is evident in one of the poems titled, **Counting Losses**, where the poet laments the sorrows of victims of terror thus:

*“My mother begins with the night we waited for a bus to ferry us  
To the refugee camp, the number of children orphaned by  
War, their mothers widowed by the blast, the people abandoned  
To carry the agony of homelessness like across.”*

Apart from the fact that women and children suffer during war, the plight of soldiers fighting insurgents is even awful. The poet says that the colossal loss of many Nigerian soldiers in the fight against Boko Haram will not be forgotten in the history. Rasaq stresses that Nigeria will remember them as victors. Consequently, he writes an elegy for Abu Ali. **An Elegy For Abu Ali** represents the praise that soldiers in North-East, Nigeria deserves. The poet emphasizes that Abu Ali fought gallantly and conquered in some place places like Monguno, Mallam Fatori, Gwoza etc. *“...Your country will remember you as a veteran soldier mowed by the rapid bokoharam/ bombs, as one out of countless soldiers who trudged/ the hazy paths of war....*

According to the poet, there is no peace in the land of terror. He reveals, through his some poems, that there is no chance to worship God peaceful in North- East, Nigeria, where insurgents ravage home and religious centres to dust. The persona of the poems, **How we Survive** and **How to Worship Allah**, shows that people worship their Lords amidst fear.

*...Sometimes we plead to them never to  
leave home for distant places, for fields  
pregnant with mines, for streets paved  
with bullets. Sometimes we lead our  
children to empty houses to sleep, to  
mosques faraway  
from towns, to places where we watch  
them sleep with ease. Sometimes we hide  
in the dark as gunshots raid the serenity of  
the night,  
as gasoline burns the air...*

The persona further reveals, through the tone of the poem that anyone could be the victim of the insurgent in the North- East. He further unveils that people sleep with one eye closed.

The poems in the chapbook, **NO HOME IN THIS LAND**, are written in free verse, plain English that is accessible to a common man on the street—perhaps the poet deliberately chooses this style to make everyone understands his message. Then the

poems are well arranged according to their thematic relatedness. However, readers might be confused—in getting the scope of the poet's focus in lamenting the pains of victims of insurgent—as he mentions some places outside Nigeria where similar occurrence is happening, such as Syria.

Nevertheless, the chapbook deserves such accolade it has been given. Such book that reveals the pains of vulnerable ones in the society deserves to be rewarded more than this in the future. Rasaq follows the thread of the early writers in Nigeria, such as Wole Soyinka, Niyi Osundare, Christopher Okigbo etc., ensuring that the land is cleansed through the ink of their pens. Good poets are meant to be rewarded.