

TRAIL OF SACRIFICE



Abubakar Gimba

In simple but spellbinding narrative, *Trail of Sacrifice* exposes the decay and administrative painlessness in the political and educational systems of the imaginary nation of Kokania. The author deftly cuts through the corruption and greed of ordinary citizens and leaders alike; the apathy of citizens towards government arising from the disconnection between the government and the governed; the mutual suspicion and racial prejudice, which lie at root of the underdevelopment of Kokania.

But *Trial of Sacrifice* is also a gospel of love to the youths-calling them to a higher life of discipline, faith, cooperation and selflessness for the development of their land.

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Chapter One

He was half awake. He felt comfortable on his bed and was not giving a thought to ever getting up. Outside, perfect silence reigned. Or at least the distant hooting of cars did not seem to disturb his trend of thought. The hootings came at long irregular intervals, indicating that the new day was yet to be born.

"Sadiku."

He heard his name being called, but could not immediately identify the caller.

"Sadiku," the voice called again.

"Hmn," he replied, recognising the caller as his friend, Masi.

"Get up, they have come," Masi murmured in a drowsy voice.

Sadiku felt reluctant to get up. He was exhausted from his long journey. And the prospects of the equally distant journey awaiting him endeared him to the comfortable bed. He looked at his watch: five-thirty. He and his friends were supposed to be en route by six. He got up and sat on the edge of the bed. The room was still dark despite the bright moonlight outside. He groped for the switch and put on the light. He noticed that Masi was already up and sitting with his head buried in his left hand. He looked as if he had all the problems of the world on his shoulders.

"Are you still sleeping?" Sadiku asked.

"Not at all. I am just thinking."

"What about?"

"Oh, nothing."

"But you can't think about nothing."

"Forget about whatever I might be thinking about. Just pack your things. You have less than thirty minutes. And make sure you don't forget anything."

"No, I wouldn't do that."

And as he proceeded to pack, there were knocks on the door. It was Mosabat, followed closely by his friend, Sonsu. Sadiku was to go with them as far as Treetown, the capital of Makuya State. There, he would leave for Nayiba, capital of Kumaga State, while Mosabat would continue his journey to Dualcity, Teku State capital.

Sadiku and Mosabat had been friends at the university.

"Are you set?" asked Mosabat, half smiling. When he entered the room he appeared as if he was cold. As he stood by the door, he still had his

hands inside the pocket of his jacket.

"For all intent and purposes, yes," replied Sadiku.

Masi lifted Sadiku's bag and made for the door.

"Is this all you are carrying?" Mosabat asked.

"Yes," replied Sadiku.

"Then we won't have many problems."

They left the room and made for the car. Everything was now set. Masi began saying goodbye to everybody. And to Sadiku, he gave a warm, friendly handshake. At moments like this, words alone don't express feelings. He could only muster a few words: "I know and trust you can take care of yourself. Preserve yourself."

And with these words he began to move away waving both hands to all. And their car moved off.

It was past six o'clock. The town was still half awake. Except for taxis, few cars were on the road. By a quarter after six, they were outside the town for the long journey ahead: a journey conceived two years earlier, but which, at that time, appeared so remote in the future that Sadiku thought it would never happen. It had been a dream, something more apparent than real. Now, that reality was concretising itself, and he was in motion. A painful realisation of being caught in something inescapable dawned on him. He threw his head backwards, leaned against his seat and closed his eyes to the present. The journey to the other side of his mother country had begun: a response to the calling voice of the nation reverberating through time past into the present....

* * *

When the ruling military government unfolded the plan of a national service, Sadiku's first reaction had been no more than indifference. National Objectives Fulfilment Brigade (N.O.F.B.), it was called. The whole thing appeared revolutionary, yet bogus, militarist, but soulless, and above all, exotic in the mind of Sadiku. And as laudable as he thought the scheme's objectives of fostering and forging national unity and discipline were, his adrenalin level was unaltered. His actual participation in the scheme was still remote – two academic years away. Sadiku was unconcerned.

However, the reactions of the various university campuses in the country were mixed and rather ill-defined. Some students saw the whole scheme as a response to their erstwhile call for something of that nature in the interest of the nation. Some could not make any sense of it. A great majority

simply remained silent, waiting for further details, which never came. The government was working too slowly on the issue. The students had become increasingly curious about the scheme. The situation was neither improved nor the charged atmosphere on the campus defused when the military government began releasing details in bits and pieces. This provided a fertile ground for the growth of rumour. An information vacuum was created by the government; and situational analysts amongst students did not hesitate to fill it with their speculations.

The analysts argued, rather convincingly, that the scheme was rather manipulative in design and deceitful in purpose. The military leadership, they contended, was not happy at the increasing criticisms against their regime being mounted by the university students. Indeed, the students had been very vocal in decrying corruption in high places and the retrogressive thread of the government into a cocoon of inaction or actions that were at odds with the interest of their country. The government's intention, the analysts said, was to stifle the incipient opposition to their reign and nip it in the bud. The scheme, therefore, was to brainwash the students, after which they would be thrown into any remote part of the country, into the wilderness, so to speak, where they would not be heard of for one year. During these twelve months, "discipline" would have been inculcated into them. The purpose of achieving national unity then, the analysts claimed, was nothing more than a theatrical robe, with which to deceive the nation.

Some undergraduates saw the scheme rather differently. They saw it in the divisive myopic political lenses of their country. For various reasons, therefore, opposition grew against the N.O.F.B. scheme. And despite this dangerous direction in campus reasoning across the country, the government did nothing. Still details did not come. Rumours spread like wildfire. Explosion was in the air. But the story that produced the spark was over the pay the participants in the scheme were to receive. According to the story, which went to all the country's campuses in less than thirty-six hours, each serving graduate of the N.O.F.B. was to receive just about one half of his legitimate income.

"Chicken feed!" complained a final-year Economics student during a group discussion on the eve of a big rally on the issue. "I certainly do not subscribe to this type of compulsory savings that is being forced down our throats. What are these people up to? The whole thing is neither here nor there. The more-than-fifty percent of our legitimate earnings which is being taken from us will not produce any effect on the rate of inflation in the country. I don't know the economics expert who sold them the idea that