

My first journey to where my father called home...

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March 27, 2022

We left Kabala around 8am for Bambukoro village my father's ancestral hometown. I had been a few times to Kabala but never to my dad's village. The road is dusty, but relatively passable thanks to our uncle Dr. Kaifala Marah who had facilitated the grading of the road few years back. Green forest abuts the road on either side with the constant spectacles of the onslaught on the flora by the scramble for timber. The journey lasted slightly under an hour. We arrived at Bambukoro, the place whose tales I had had a mental encyclopaedia on. Our great-great-grand father Sorie-Sengbe (after whom I am named) was the founder of the village. I was shown his great swath of plantation which has stood for more than hundred years. My father used to tell us how we would accompany his grandpa Sorie-Sengbe to this plantation, a story which one of my uncles confirms, adding that he was perhaps the grandchild who most enjoyed the fruits of the plantation being his grandfather's chaperon.

The village was nothing like I'd imagined—the homestead most of which were mud-constructed had signs of modern aspirations suppressed by poverty. Shortly after my elder brother-Emmanuel and I had arrived, our uncle Dr. Saio Sorie Marrah's arrival was greeted by a throng of kids who swarmed his vehicle, chanting his initials "SS" "SS". Our uncle remarks that that his initials are the very first alphabet that the kids learn. He proceeded to show us around the village, the mosque is perched on the navel of the village represents the dominant faith. We were introduced to more than a score of our kinfolds with most of them expressing their delight at our coming in Kuranko which we only deciphered from the expressions on their faces. A vehicle rumples with dents on its body frame stood on the side of the margins of the main road that winds through the village. It was nothing but a carcass beaten into scrap in our eyes. But it was one of the vehicles dedicated to the plunder of the forest. It seemed disused but we were told it carried out its duty lifting logs of timber that beats the imagination. There's a small clinic in our village which by the services it renders to the neighbouring villages has become like a referral hospital. The descendants of the village have begun an ambitious project to build a healthcare centre adjacent to the clinic. it is a long way off but the end would provide immense healthcare utility to the village and its environs. Our last stop was at the senior secondary school— we entered their SSS1 class being taught by Mr. Mansaray without the frills of learning as I at least knew them in Freetown. Emmanuel and I had an opportunity to motivate the kids to persevere despite the limitations. Later in the day, I

had a great consultation with the principal and some of the teachers (volunteers) of the junior secondary school. Raised by both parents who were teachers, I did not cringe at some of the conditions they labour under to pass on knowledge to the kids—my parents at some point of their career underwent similar upheavals. We made our commitments to the school as we believe that would have been the preference of our teacher-parents.

The main business started around 11am under a circle of several mango trees. The men sat on the long benches to form a circumference. The women huddled on the fringes. My uncle “SS” and I spoke about our society was structured around order and how the roles are gendered. Many years ago, I wrote a poem for my mother and some part of the poem reads “fathers are superior but mothers supreme”. It was a meeting to pray for the soul of our late father to commemorate the traditional fortieth day of passing . My father was catholic and so we made it clear that it was not an oblation ceremony rather it was to memorialise his death in his village by offering prayers and to share his personal clothing with his family. The emcee of the meeting spoke in Koranko without any interpretation. There was no need for one—our kinsfolks and other folks from the nearby villages, invited to the prayer sessions were all Koranko. Interpretations are for strangers, we are not—we are expected to comprehend. When it was Dr. Kaifala Marah’s turn to introduce us—the children of their late brother, uncle, grandfather etc., he spoke in Koranko too and beckoned to us when we wanted us to come forward. Uncle SS explained about our father’s teaching-circumstances which prevented him from bringing his children to the village. We were given opportunity to say a few words, Obviously we did that in the Krio language. Language is more than just about communication, it is about identity. To colonise a people’s mindset is to colonise their language. I spoke about identity and the need for familial bond. I got a rousing applause when I said that our father did not raise us in his village but he raised his village in us. Before the meeting broke off for the Friday prayers, a lingering rift between the leading brothers of the family was resolved in public. Emmanuel and I spoke about how the decision to observe the 40th day ceremony became a silver bullet.

On my way back, my mind drifted a lot to my dad’s life and how he would have been pleased with us. He was part of the kith and kin of his family even though he struck a fine balance between his traditional beliefs and knowledge acquired from western learning. Around 5am on 27th December last year, my late mother’s birthday and the day I celebrated a significant accomplishment, I read a two-page letter of appreciation to my dad who was bed-ridden at the time, reminding him of all the sacrifices and love he’d showed us. We both cried. My dad was my symbol of activism, his fearlessness I can only aspire to. He was kind, tolerant and uncompromising. His respect and great admiration came from his dedication to work, integrity of purpose and devotion to truth.

How a young man who left Bambukoro village around the age of fourteen, went to Kono to start class one at seventeen and end up in Freetown as a teacher for over four decades. His boys, all accomplished in their fields, return to where his life started and are fascinated by how dreams regardless of where they are hatched would come full circle to where they were begotten.