



Part III: *Nankondo*

2018. Installation featuring a bathtub, water, a text projection (text by Demere Kitunga), and lit candles, dimensions variable.

**A whisper for *Nankondo*** - Demere Kitunga

*Nankondo* my great grandmother, I never met you, nor did your grandchildren. But this I know, if your spirit was released from your physical bondage as I believe it did, you must have joined the army of my ancestral spiritual guardians. Thus, I can rightfully commune with you as I do now. I am sure your spirit made its way home, for if spirits earn their release after departing from the bodies they are twinned with in life, where else would yours rather be than among your people; where you are still remembered by offspring of the only daughter you left behind, my grandmother *Demere*.

I don't have to tell you *Demere* is my namesake, I being the first daughter of her last born son. Unlike your daughter, I grew up wrapped in the care and guidance of my mother. In contrast, growing up without your motherly guidance your daughter's spirit withered, constantly hungry for news, any news that could help her make sense of what took you from her at such a tender age. She was ready to believe anything people told her, good or bad. In the process, she fed into fables created with evil intent. Don't take it the wrong way, she was only five when you were taken, poor thing. What they said to her then stuck to her, became her shame, gnawed at her heart and generated a loath for herself and the very memory of you. How cruel!

This adage that every cloud has a silver lining makes sense however, because the little I now know of you comes from a seed of doubt she planted in my mind, leading me in a quest to get to the bottom of whatever it was that made her think of herself and you the way she did. I

figured out that there must be a real story masked beneath the story they gave her as the reason for your abduction. I writing to you now about it so that in your spirit form you may cleanse us from its shame; release us from its guilt; and if you can find it in your heart to forgive us, then heal us from its pain; not the physical one, but its emotional and psychological pain that is leading us to self-loath and spiritual abyss. But I am writing to you not only about that...

I am also writing to you about the brutality of whatever social system it was that snatched people from their families at gun point, severing the bond between mothers and their children, forcing spirits to take flight from their shrines, and uprooting people from their ancestral lands. I am writing to you not only about that, but also about the cruelty with which it created an episteme and generated a corpus of knowledge and a spiritual realm that made it to look, feel and sound natural for a certain kind of people; my kind of people to languish in servitude for centuries to enrich another kind of people; for a promise of salvation in the thereafter. A system that has continued to pervert the collective psyche of the modern world like an insignia of a heretic world order built on a hierarchy of hues, belief systems and deity; with structures and relations changing only in name and tactics, so entrenched they refuse to relent no matter how much blood is spilt. I am not only writing to you about all that....

I am also writing to you about the grave silence with which those you left behind used as a way to cope with that inhuman episode in their cultural history. The manner in which they tried to distance themselves from it, hoping that distance would cleanse them from its stigma; and how deep they sunk into a spiritual chaos expressed in such madness no diviner seems capable to exorcize.

I am also writing to you because of what happened to the five years' old daughter you left behind amidst a cowed and defeated people; who made an effort to cope with the shame of their disrupted life by manufacturing myths that set them apart from those they sacrificed to the hungry monsters named *Valungwana*. These are the people who roamed the plains of *Asu* land and captured any woman, man and child that crossed paths with them alone and unarmed. As you may recall, your people resisted external affront by living on ragged mountain slopes, armed with poisonous arrows; venturing to the plains only to hunt and trade. The fable created for you is that you caused your own captivity. This may be unpleasant news to you I know, but I am compelled to tell you anyway that your daughter grew up believing you could have dodged your captors had you not been a woman of low morals. Why, because you refused to return home before your sugarcane beer is sold out; the beer brewed to raise money for beads for your only daughters first rite. You ventured to sell to the opulent *Valungwana* tradesmen who turned out to be your captors. This was in *Kimunyu*, a weekly market, twenty miles away from your home village where you and your mountain folks battered farm produce for manufactured goods. Like a rape victim blamed of enticing the rapists, you became a scapegoat and your daughter had to bear the brunt of collective shame as the only memory of having had a mother.

I want to tell you that, your daughter survived even if her spirit did not thrive. For a five years old made to doubt the moral integrity of her own mother; her peoples' *ngasu* and form of worship disparaged and the very sense of belonging as equal and rightful occupants of planet earth questioned, I would say she was resilient. You will be proud to know that she did not forsake her indigenous form of worship to the very end; even if conniving agents of the foreign spirits gave her an ablution and a baptismal by emersion in a bathtub one week before her demise. As a skunk stalking its pray, they pursued her to the very end. By then however, she was too far gone, only body and not her spirit partook in the ritual.

Since your departure, our form of worship has been suppressed and our way of being obliterated. Some of its oracles crossed over and have embraced the new forms; but without the cloak of rootedness they are leading their flock adrift.