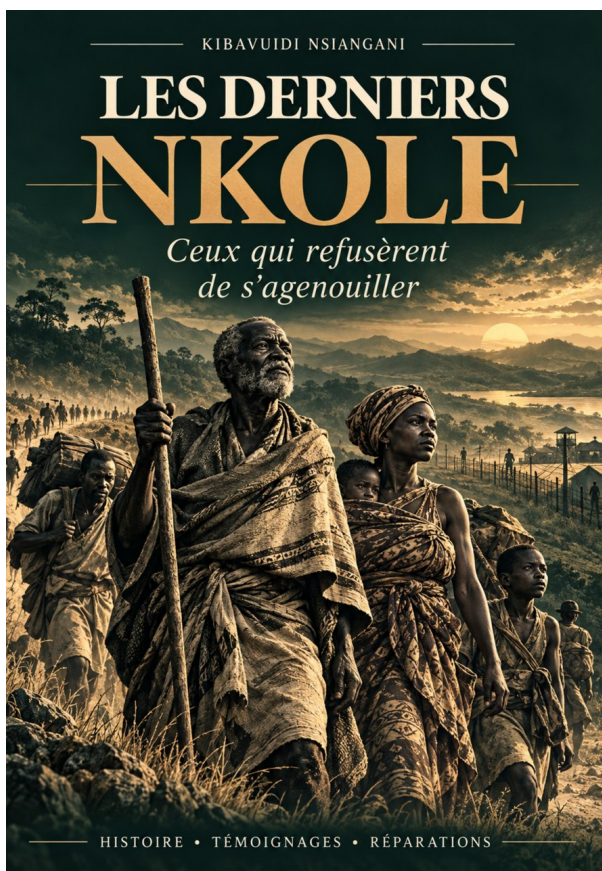




The Last of the Nkole

Free selections • Four ways into the book

Kibavuidi Nsiangani

Original French-edition cover reproduced for this English preview.

These passages are editorial English translations of selected passages in the author's French manuscript. They are excerpts, not an English final-edition master.

Chapter 1 • The Morning That Belonged to the Family

Before coercion came everything a person ought to have been free to do with the day. A morning might begin with a modest decision: resume unfinished work, consult a relative, return a tool, see what had grown, settle a debt, or prepare for a visit. Such decisions give time its shape. Even a difficult day still belongs to the person who sets its order and chooses the obligations to accept.

To grasp what the Nkole lost, we must return to this human scale. A woman is more than ‘the wife of a deportee’. She knows who is short of food, which children need an adult, what words may settle a dispute, and which harvest will fall short. Her work of keeping relationships alive is real work. It holds households together through shocks they could not weather alone. When the person who should have stood beside her disappears into a prison, society loses more than an administrative file. It loses countless everyday decisions and forms of support.

A child learns by watching. A child learns to judge the quality of workmanship, recognize a trustworthy neighbour, and hear disagreement without mistaking firmness for insult. Children may learn to count goods, name the land around them, and recount a journey accurately.

These skills are not passed on only in classrooms. Work, exchanges, meetings, evening gatherings, and journeys are also places of learning. This is why repressing a knowledgeable, enterprising, or respected adult could have consequences far beyond that one person.

Source: French manuscript, chapter 1, pp. 14-15; English editorial translation.

Chapter 3 • Mawete Lubaki Knew How to Create Work

For Mawete Lubaki, freedom was never an opinion detached from work. It could be tested in the ability to make something happen. At an age when the colonial system still hoped to train workers dependent on its institutions, he had already learned how to organize activities and build enterprises. This experience changes how we understand his later choices. He did not defend autonomy as a slogan. He knew how to put it into practice.

The administration might offer a position, an income, sometimes access to a bank or an official appointment. Entry into the system could be presented as personal success. Yet that success came at a price: someone dependent on a position may be tempted to remain silent when the institution harms those closest to them. The position becomes both a privilege and a means of control. Mawete's

refusal to be trapped in that bargain explains his willingness to step down in status. Poverty was not his ideal. He refused to let his security become a debt of obedience.

Much of the colonial violence directed at those deemed disobedient arose from this demand: it was not enough for them to work; they were expected to concede to others the right to direct their work. An independent Congolese enterprise might not immediately deprive a monopoly of spectacular sums. It introduced a more dangerous comparison: people could produce and trade without permission from the colonial authorities.

Source: French manuscript, chapter 3, pp. 25-26; English editorial translation.

Chapter 6 • He Was Ordered to Dance

To the man who gave it, the order may have seemed trivial. Dance. Bow the body. Remove one's clothes. Drink. Put on a spectacle for someone whose sole purpose was to prove that he could command it. This was neither a willing celebration nor useful work. Power had been stripped to its barest form: establish who decides how another person behaves, then watch that person comply. A Congolese body was to become visible proof of a hierarchy the colonizer wished to impose even on the most ordinary moments.

In the testimonies gathered by the author, refusing to dance before a colonizer could lead to severe abuse, sentencing, and threats of death. The family account of the author's grandfather speaks specifically of torture and a death sentence for such a refusal. This was no trivial misunderstanding between two personalities. A pointless command became a precise political test. If a person could be forced to ridicule their own body in public, much more might follow. And if that person said no, authority had to decide whether it could tolerate any limit on its power. The persecution of the Nkole shows what happened when the system intended to tolerate none.

Here dignity is no abstraction to discard when circumstances become hard. It is measured in the gestures one accepts or refuses. A person may be poor without agreeing to become an object of amusement; stand before a gun without conceding that the person holding it is right; know arrest is likely and still choose not to degrade themselves.

Source: French manuscript, chapter 6, pp. 67-69; English editorial translation.

Chapter 9 • Lowa, the Camp Where a Girl Was Born

Lowa was the name of a place before it became a name for suffering. People already lived there. Paths crossed it; rivers and land made up a world that owed nothing to the Belgian administration for its existence. Forced relegation imposed something new: families were brought there against their will and prevented from returning to their own territory. To understand their captivity, both truths must be held together. The place was not empty, and those deported there had not come as travelers. A lived landscape became, for them, a place of confinement.

Mama Matondo Nkazi Christine was born in Lowa in 1941. Her testimony is far more than a catalogue of mistreatment. She speaks of her parents, the use of Kikongo, children, strangers welcomed into the community, fields, meals, wonderful memories, and the adults' daily sadness. Her child's perspective preserves details that institutional history often erases. Her account reveals the difficulty of obtaining food, reliance on river transport to sell a harvest, shortages of everyday necessities, censored correspondence, and the prohibition of ordinary schooling. Above all, it shows how adults resisted allowing those restrictions to define their children.

Her account contains a decisive observation about life there: adults became parents to other people's children. The words

do not suggest that everyone lived in perfect harmony. They describe a practical answer to the vulnerability captivity had created. When the administration deprived a family of its land and familiar relationships, other adults took on their share of protection.

Source: French manuscript, chapter 9, pp. 115–116; English editorial translation.

You have met their lives. The full book follows what was taken from them—and what they refused to surrender.

French edition; English translation in progress · Kikongo, Lingala, and Swahili editions announced for 2027.

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“No one is born in a police register. One is born among the living.”

— From the book’s opening