Leaving Ruins

Explorations of Present Pasts by Sammy Baloji, Freddy Tsimba, and Steve Bandoma

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translated from the French by Allen F. Roberts

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If art is where the greatest ruins are,
Our art is in those ruins we became
(Walcott 1962:13)[1]

Reference to the poetic work of Derek Walcott helps explain the particular attention of three Congolese artists directed to material and moral ruins that bear witness to traumatic experience. Walcott (1992) inscribes violence at the heart of Antillean heritage: "Decimation from the Arawak downwards is the blasted root of Antillean history." Since the Atlantic and East African slave trades and perhaps before, violence and its management have been at the heart of collective memories of societies of the present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The societies of Congo and of Walcott's Antilles share an ambiguous attitude toward the colonial/slave past. While history is written from others' perspectives, experience is inscribed in imagination and carried by heritage. Walcott rejects the distinction between imagination and collective memory, and when he writes that "every island is an effort of memory" (1992), he stresses the necessity of memory's permanent effects. Walcott only insists upon the (relative) absence of ruins to underscore the strange nature of history, "which looked over the shoulder of the engraver and, later, the photographer. History can alter the eye and the moving hand to conform a view of itself." As he would add, "the history of the world, by which of course we mean Europe, is a record of intertribal lacerations, of ethnic cleansings." Such a gaze has chosen ruins as evidence of the presence/absence of history.[2]

Walcott opposes art to history in a "process of the making of poetry, or what should be called not its 'making' but its remaking, the fragmented memory…. Art is this restoration of our shattered history." In his famous phrasing, "Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape." In place of the ruins and heroes designated by the gaze of history, he continues, "I see cabbage palms moving their fronds at sunrise, [and] I think they are reciting Perse…. At least islands not written about but writing themselves!" (Walcoltt 1998:78).[3] The voice of the poet "Perse," having preceded Walcott to the Nobel Prize in Literature, "make[s] out of these foresters and fishermen heraldic men!" (Walcott 1987:217). It is the artist, then, who reveals to the world the experience and patrimony ignored by history: "The past is the sculpture and the present the beads of dew or rain on the forehead of the past…. The process of poetry is one of excavation and of self-discovery." Seen from the ruins recognized by a local imaginary, "Caribbean literature is not evolving but already shaped. Its proportions are not to be measured by the traveler or the exile, but by its own citizenry and architecture."[4]

Baloji, Bandoma, and Tsimba—all three artists born after the independence of what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo—have only indirect understanding of the colonial past, and yet it is the past of their "modernity." They carry in their heritage its incorporated experience and question the history that does not belong to them because it was written from the gaze of elsewhere and refers to the generations of their fathers and grandfathers. The ruins that this gaze designates are not theirs, insofar as the last half-century has left no such experiences that might stand as ruins in future.[5] The vestiges of the DRC's Second Republic (1965–1990), during which their fathers were dismissed as nothing but "squatters" in their own land, are only sterile ghosts even as their fathers will never become ancestors. That is, their past is no longer relevant, and their memory,

1 Sammy Baloji
Ruins of the house near Lubumbashi where Lumumba was detained (2010)
Digital image
Photo: courtesy of the artist

2 Sammy Baloji
Untitled, from *Kolwezi* series (2013)
Digital image
Photo: courtesy of the artist

without pertinence to present-day life, obstructs any immediate future, for the Apocalypse is the horizon of collective attention now. In its shadow, imaginary escape to somewhere else can only be a destructive rage fed by exasperation with the nostalgia of the fathers. As Jacques Kimpozo wrote in the Kinshasa newspaper *Le Phare* of May 13, 2014, "kept at a distance from modern infrastructures (highways, hydroelectric dams, plants producing potable water, ports, airports, hospitals, schools, the market); technological progress in agriculture, animal husbandry, and fishing; new technologies of information and communication; job markets; the banking system; etc., [people] have only two pathways to escape what they consider 'hell': come to Kinshasa and increase the ranks of the unemployed, or cross borders."

And yet daily life is only chaotic when viewed from outside. To take control of one's becoming, one must recognize ruins as evidence of a past from which memory opens to a future. Like Walcott (1962:13), who refuses to take as his own "the ruins of sugar estates and abandoned forts," Baloji reconfigures the ruins of mining industries and photographic images bequeathed by the colonial gaze, Bandoma fragments images pretending to depict Kongo culture as found in art history books, and Tsimba draws up ruins of yesterday's communal living. As "the stripped man is driven back to that self-astonishing, elemental force, his mind, … art is this restoration of our shattered bodies" (Walcott 1962). Following steps as though they were Walcott's, Baloji and Tsimba not only replace old metaphors by new ones but their shared purpose is the reconstruction of the world by replacing what is missing in today's DRC (Ismond 2001).

COMING TO TERMS WITH RUINS BY CHOOSING ONE'S OWN

Sammy Baloji was born in Lubumbashi in 1978, and now composes photomontages that confront images from here and now—the ruins of modernity—with others from the time of the now-disavowed ancestors of local urban citizenry. The past that these images re-presents can be that of the days of colonial conquest, the time of migrant workers whose labor founded industrial modernity in the Congo, or the Second Republic when Mobutu Sese Seko was at his dictatorial height. Baloji's recent photomontages juxtapose indecent opulence with the lives in

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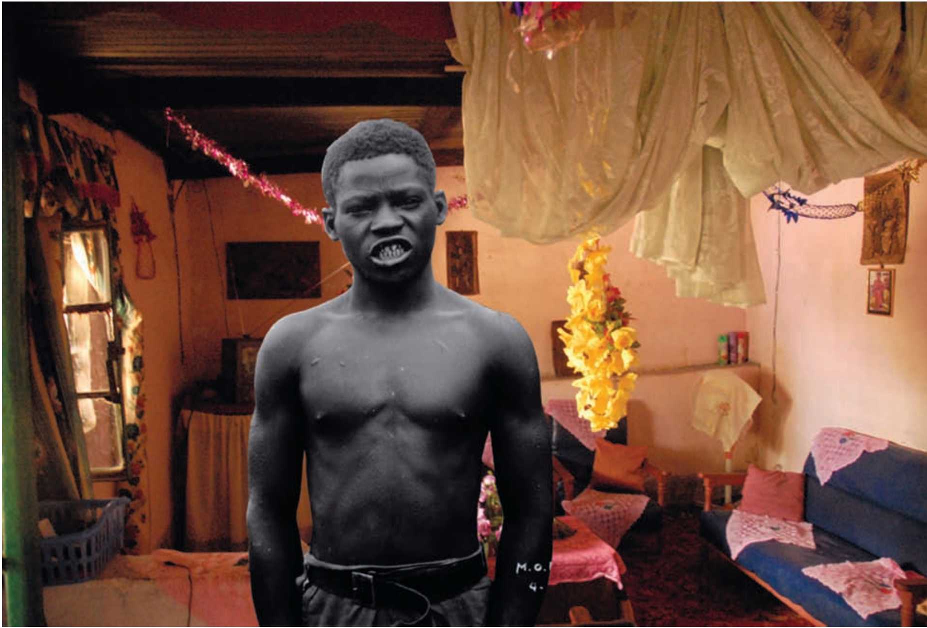

3 Sammy Baloji, Untitled (2009)
Digital image
Photo: courtesy of the artist

ruin of those who are the survivors of postcolonial modernity, as well as their descendants. His camera also matches a local present with calendar and advertisements images from China, as simulacra of the global (c.f. Baudrillard 1995).

Freddy Bienvenu Tsimba Mavambu, born in Kinshasa in 1967, creates sculptural assemblages from detritus abandoned in the roads of the capital or from empty cartridges collected on battlefields of recent civil strife.[6] He holds that the street has been his true school, that blacksmiths who taught him to forge and weld are his masters, and that it is his duty to give witness through his art to how life has been brutally extinguished.[7]

Born in Kinshasa in 1981, Steve Bandoma composes his hyperreality through assemblages of scraps of magazine illustrations, drawings, and advertisements that he tears up. He then superimposes the fragments, recomposes them, and so repairs a world that, lacking any sense, does not deserve to be seen as it is. Because there is no real, ruins of representation can only serve to create simulacra.[8]

SAMMY BALOJI: BRINGING FORTH ANOTHER TIME TO QUESTION THE PRESENT

Sammy Baloji's photomontages demonstrate the evolution of a process of displacement of that which is pending, to an ethical evaluation and an aesthetic of shared representations of actuality. To borrow a term from Michel de Certeau (1984), Baloji's works offer *propres*—that is, places of departure from which tactics can be imagined and the future imagined. The confrontation of images, most but not all photographic, offers Baloji the possibility to make visible the tragic consequences of rupture between presents and their pasts through the misappropriation of industrial modernity as patrimony. Built by a first generation of Congolese laborers and then left to successive generations, this patrimony has not been transmitted. The rupture that has resulted denies ancestral status to the fathers' generation. In the order of generational succession, salaried labor (*kazi* in Swahili) more than kinship has created social relations.[9] In identifying the evils that afflict society, Baloji works like a local healer (*nganga*) presenting the living with their responsibilities and indicating to them the path of their personal and collective "welfare." In the manner of his society—industrial, then postindustrial—of Katangan mining, Baloji delves into the imaginaries of precolonial cultures, of Christianity, and of a modernity originating in colonialism. Modern visual culture is the medium through which he approaches social modes of transmitting knowledge, evaluating social justice, and determining individual destinies. His artistic and technical means are derived from globalized culture, and he considers himself to be a contemporary artist without reference to particular culture or nation. Nonetheless, the realities captured by Baloji's camera, their ethical evaluation and the aesthetics through which he places them in his montages, are all local.

Baloji's approach gives evidence to the transformation of realities and collective imaginaries of Katanga. Today well known, his *Likasi* and *Mémoire* series interrogate the consequences of a break with the past when social bonds were built more upon transmission of access to salaried employment than upon inscription within clan or ethnic ensembles organized through kinship. A decade after accomplishing these works, the social imaginary of Congolese people and the artistic undertakings of Sammy Baloji have abandoned the ruins of industries that have turned their backs on any such history. Having now become "antiquities," these vestiges of industrial patrimony accentuate the tragic character of the present and the failure of the fathers to pass on their achievement of social status through wage-earning employment.

Several works by Baloji return to the out-of-date status of personages of this earlier generation by superimposition of their portraits and photographs or drawings realized during the colonial period. Through analogy to the simulacrum of the "ethnographic type," imprisoning real persons in the conventions of an exoticizing gaze (Poole 1997), people of the generation of the fathers are further imprisoned by making of them museum

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4 *Colonie belge*, signed Kyungu wa K., c. 1989.
Collection MRAC Tervuren, Fonds B. Jewsiewicki, # 818
Photo: Bogumil Jewsiewicki

objects—indeed, artifacts. Baloji's photograph of the place where Lumumba was held just before his execution, taken in 2010 for Autographe ABP of London, is a culminating point (Fig. 1).[10] Upon a background of wooded savanna and next to the ruins of a house razed to the soil, an old man with grey hair stands before the viewer. Wearing an old suit too large for his wizened body, he struggles to recover the lost dignity of a well-dressed person, but dusty rubber boots in the place of shoes betray him. In his hand he holds a small reddish-yellow bottle of a popular carbonated drink. His placement in the image and the colors suggest an equivalence with the ruined building behind the man—that all that remains of the modernity promised by Lumumba are rubble topped by a crude cross of cement and shoddy commodities like the soda pop that the grizzled gentleman holds in his hand.

The gaze of Sammy Baloji follows the imaginary of ordinary Congolese. Without being able to find issue from the ruins of the past, they have recently turned toward a different present than their own. Pictures copied from tourist agency catalogs have joined those of illustrated calendars and notices for soccer teams in replacing the works of local painters that used to decorate the homes of salaried and other upwardly mobile Katangans (see Jewsiewicki 2013). These fragments of mass global culture, printed in China for the Congolese market, nourish dreams of escape toward places where modernity seems accessible (Fig. 2). This last while, Sammy Baloji has consecrated particular attention to such vehicles of an imaginary that snatches at a present that cannot be fully grasped, and their presence in his photomontages suggests the place held by archival images (Fig. 3).

Elsewhere, in a discussion of his *Mémoires* series, I have presented my understanding of Sammy Baloji's vision of domesticated industrial modernity in colonial contexts now lost to the postcolony.[11] For the workers and their families, industrial modernization has been replaced by trials and traumas. Yet these challenges have served as a springboard from which to regain dignity. As is manifest in urban painting from Katanga, social memory insists on the necessity of triumphing over death and humiliation if one is to domesticate modernity. Between 1910 and 1970, two generations of laborers built the mining industry and urban society of Katanga. Three pictorial representations organize the work of such memory—the great chimney and slag heap of the Union Minière du Haut Katanga (as the principle Katangan copper mine, located in Lubumbashi itself), the genre painting (Fabian 1974, Fabian and Szombati-Fabian 1980) called *Colonie belge* that depicts Congolese physical abuse at the hands of authorities (Fig. 4), and workers operating heavy equipment; and these give sense to the relationships of man and machine and among miners themselves when faced with new social and political hierarchies.[12] The dictum "work is hard, death is near" (*kazi nguvu, lufu karibu* in Katangan Swahili) underscores captions beneath images of miners. Work (*kazi*) and death (*lufu*) form a dyad. One labors at risk of one's life, but work mastered by man procures him a place in modernity. During the 1990s, the mining industry fell to ruins and modernity deserted Katanga. Deprived of salaried employment, society and the industrial landscape were thereafter haunted by the phantom of *kazi*. Even as the fathers no longer managed their machines, their sons were reduced to digging with pickaxes through the detritus of slag heaps to tear out a few kilograms of low-quality minerals, gaining a man enough to eat once a day, at most.

The camera and the computer explore these ruins to give evidence to such dire dramas. Baloji excavates the palimpsest of memories, looking for a new life to render the past able to engender a future. His eye is informed by Katangan experience, his camera seizes its realities. The intensity of Baloji's gaze brings global attention to particular local details. The universal surges from the world of contemporary media within a local frame of imagination to which earlier Katangan urban painting once gave access. To return to this new present some phantom of the salaried work that has deserted society, and to find in the ruins of modernity a different future, Sammy Baloji attaches archival images of the work of laborers in the past (Fig. 5–6). When he confronts their bodies with the ruins of machines, he confirms the convictions of his generation that the fathers are to blame for not transmitting modernity to them, for not honoring the memory of those who, brought to Katanga as the "slaves" of Europeans, made themselves into wage-earning miners. They, more than the whites with their technology and capital, constructed the modernity that they might have left to their sons. Having failed to pass on this boon to succeeding generations, these fathers have severed transmission of urban heritage. Baloji's photomontages (Grau 2004, Ades 1999, Zervigon 2012) give the grandfathers new presence and repair this rupture. After dis-

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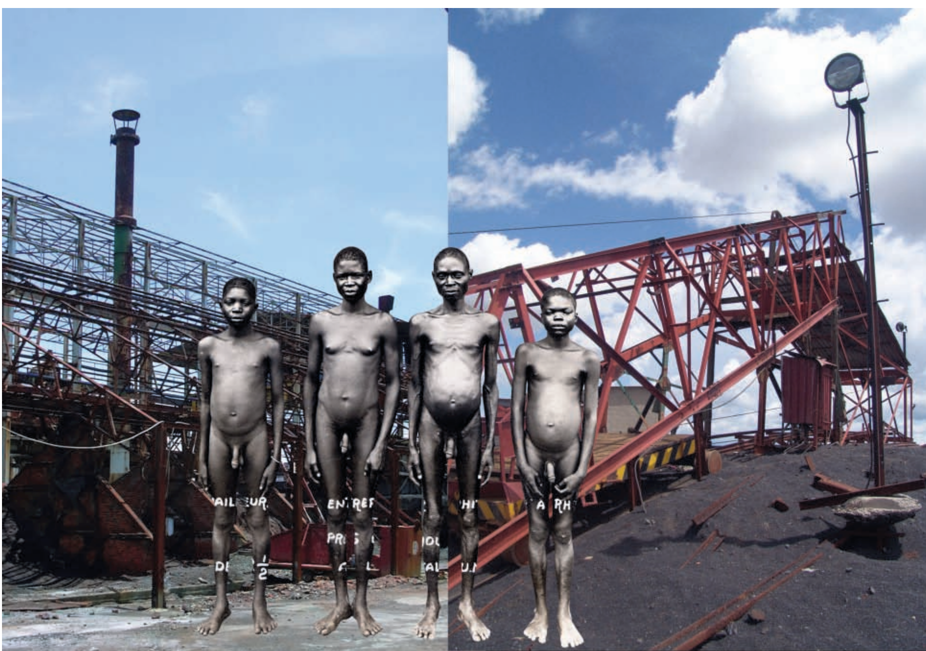
tinguishing between the "true" past and the present, the images propose the means to redress such loss.

Comparison between photographs of machines or abandoned buildings that no longer serve any functions and the nudes of Baloji's series "Bodies and Masks" helps us to understand his work as a portraitist of life at its most raw—naked life.[13] In central African performance arts, an active mask is always worn by a person, even when those attending the performance feign ignorance of this reality. Such a mask gives presence—and therefore (re)presents—a spirit or an ancestor that is otherwise absent. Sammy Baloji's photographic project takes an opposite tack. Baloji accentuates evidence by photographing what the eye sees rather than what social conventions might hold (Fig. 7). In this way, the naked body of a person wearing a mask imposes itself rather than being effaced. The nudity creates malaise for the spectator and emphasizes the effects of unveiling. When masks emerge in a performance, the energy of a mask and of the spirit to which it gives presence is made actual by the body of the person wearing it.[14] The portraits (masks) of machines or buildings that are no longer functional because they lack the work (*kazi*) of absent miners underscore the failure of modernity. A machine without a man using it to affect work is nothing but an abandoned mask (Fig. 4).[15] Portraits of masks of industrial ruins direct one's gaze to penetrate the surface of Baloji's photomontages, and lead the viewer to cross the strata of his palimpsests. The organization of these images through the aesthetic of an imaginary from the mining society of Katanga is immediately

5 Sammy Baloji
Worker, from *Mémoire* series (2006)
Digital image
Photo: courtesy of the artist

6 Sammy Baloji
Workers, from *Mémoire* series (2006)
Digital image
Photo: courtesy of the artist



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apparent to anyone familiar with the urban paintings of the same region (Jewsiewicki 2013). As he uses archival photographs, Baloji firmly positions himself in the historical mode of restituting the past, and he works with the factual, but the sense of each scene that he composes with people displaced from their time to Baloji's own can only be understood as a doubled representation (Fig. 3). Restitution of the meanings of experience, thanks to a framework of collective imaginaries, permits readings of what appearances signify socially. The work of memory between the frame of social imagination and the significance of appearances transforms the naked body into a social being.[16] Industrial landscapes portrayed as masks of modernity speak to an incapacity to assure the availability of *kazi*.

Let us consider two of Baloji's photomontages. At the center of the first (Fig. 5) is a worker wearing a tattered, sleeveless shirt with light and dark stripes like that of the prisoner in the popular urban painting *Colonie belge*. With a double chain locked around his neck, he folds his muscled arms passively in front of him as he hauntingly stares at the viewer. His gaze is belligerent as well as tragic—a gaze one would expect from the hero of Luba/Lunda epics who has returned home (culture) after having overcome the most challenging forces of other worlds. Behind him is a desolation of abandoned buildings, flooded factory roads, masks of grimacing metal, and empty rails leading nowhere. No train, no one else in sight. This migrant worker, brought to the mines a slave of the Europeans and their machines, accuses his descendants of not knowing how to transmit the heritage of his tribulations. The chain signifying his bondage refers us back to urban paintings depicting the abuse of porters during colonial times, as well as to late nineteenth century caravans of enslaved Congolese heading into exile and oblivion (see Jewsiewicki 2013).

In a second montage (Fig. 6), we see four naked men in the foreground.[17] Such an image would be offensive to Congolese viewers, for the nudity of the men would recall humiliation like that of the prisoner in the *Colonie belge* painting, whose naked buttocks are being scourged in public through a punishment so common that it stood for the colony itself. Exposure of the nudity of an adult man is an insult to his dignity and profoundly demeaning. The colonial penalty of whipping was physically painful but above all mortifying because a man's pants were pulled down publicly. People remember this act of debasement by the State, especially because the spastic movements of the body after each stroke made it seem as though, in public view, he were fornicating with the Earth. It is impossible to know whether, in Congolese urban culture, this prescription of male nudity follows the Old Testament, where Ham—understood as the biblical ancestor of black people—was cursed for not having covered the naked body of his father, or rather follows pre-Christian principles.[18] The two works return us to the naked bearer of a mask in the *Corps et masques* series. Fragmented in découpage, the original caption remains visible on the four men's bodies. Such writing attests to the "authenticity" of the image even as it suggests the inscription by the State upon its "possessions." In the *Colonie belge* painting (Fig. 4), the man's jersey striped in yellow and black as well as the bleeding stripes of the whip left on his buttocks reproduce the colors of the Belgian flag, indicating to whom this man "belongs." Returning to Baloji's photomontage, on the right behind the men, one can perceive the ghost of a conveyor that used to carry the dross of the facility's immense smelters to the summit of the vast slag heap. To the left rise the entrails of an industrial building beside which a chimney emits no smoke or steam. The platform on the slag-

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7 Sammy Baloji
From *Corps et masque* series (2009)
Digital image
Photo: courtesy of the artist

conveyor to the right is striped in black and yellow, recalling the jersey of the prisoner of *Colonie belge*, while the iron scaffolding is painted red ochre like the color of dried blood, but also like central African laterite soil. Red ochre is also the color of the tarpaulins deployed in the mining industry that, when worn out, were transformed into siding and roofs for miner's dwellings. Red ochre is therefore the color of the daily work of this lost modernity, as well as the color of the earth within which riches are sought. The color serves as the background of images evoking studio photography that conferred the statute of modern persons to urban people throughout the twentieth century.

In his *Kolwezi* series (Baloji 2014), several portraits are realized with the "canvas" of red ochre tarp as their reference. The persons whose clothing is as miserable as their places in life adopt poses as though they were in a photographic studio. These postures and gazes captured by the camera defy the destitution the decor suggests. In the same series, Baloji sets a photo of urban Congolese homes whose roofs are made of red ochre tarp against a Chinese advertisement that decorated one of these habitations (Fig. 2). In this picture, one can see a sky-blue swimming pool in the middle of an impeccable green lawn. Is this the hell of the present versus the unattainable paradise of an elsewhere? Red ochre is also the color of the large entry door of trucks, with a smaller door beside it for passengers that is of the same hue. A star of five points surmounts this ensemble, seemingly giving but also preventing access to the installations of the Zhong Hang Mining Company of Kolwezi. Again, what lies behind these doors photographed by Baloji, hell or heaven?[19]

FREDDY TSIMBA: BRINGING (RE)BIRTH TO THE RUINS OF COMMUNAL LIVING

With a diploma in hand from the Fine Arts Academy of Kinshasa, Freddy Tsimba went to "the school of the road," as he puts it, for real life pulses there. He undertook a long apprenticeship with artisans of metal and fire who, according to Tsimba, possess and produce cultural continuities. He was born and raised in Kinshasa, and his parents are Kongo from Manyanga. Without questioning this social inscription, Tsimba feels especially close to his maternal grandmother, Kolo Nsunda, whose "cosmopolitan" experience and knowledge of the Congo he stressed. On the "official" web page of Freddy Tsimba (http://freddytsimba.wordpress.com/) under the rubric of "media: photos" his grandmother can be seen holding a great-grandchild (her *ndoyi*—namesake) in her arms as the only other person depicted. This virtual identification with his grandmother inscribes Tsimba in time and lineage. It is not without interest to note that he is the only one of the three artists under discussion here who claims generational continuity in such a clear-cut way. Nonetheless, he refers to the generations of his mother rather than to those of his father or maternal uncles. Let us note the strong presence in his creation of the woman/mother, less, it seems to me, because his ethnic milieu is matrilineal than because, preoccupied with human life, he celebrates its source.[20]

The organization of Tsimba's "Portraits" on his web page takes on a specific sense when confronted with the image/performance captured by video. In 2010, during an exhibition of African art at the Palace of Fine Arts in Brussels, Freddy Tsimba was followed by a videographer, as were others who had been invited. Looking at an *nkisi* figure and being surprised by it, he exclaimed, "That, that came from my village. Imagine!"[21] The sculptor seemed to be in the presence of a mirror held to his own work by a Kongo artifact created more than a century earlier. Tsimba was seeing a figurative *nkisi* having the form of human being for the first time, and in effect, for generations none like it had been made.[22] In Kinshasa, no art museum is presently open to the public. From his only visit to "the village," when he was six years old, Tsimba remembers a dance performance and being deathly afraid, in his childish way, of an enormous fish caught in the Congo River. Let us complete these anecdotal comments with remarks about the narrative structure of Tsimba's transformation from a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts to a sculptor who feels himself descended from masterful Kongo blacksmiths and who expresses human suffering by cutting and weaving together scrap metal using a blow torch (Fig. 8).

Two significant images come to his mind when Tsimba reflects upon his foundational moments: crossing a water course and the arrival of a messenger. Tsimba decided to become an artist following the intervention of a friend of one of his sisters. Having seen his drawings in the sand, the friend told Tsimba to do

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8 Freddy Tsimba, 2010, artist at work, 2010
Photo: Pascal Maitre, with permission

9 Freddy Tsimba
Sur l'autre rive de la vie (2010)
Metal installation, 600 cm x 200 cm x 200 cm
Photo: courtesy of the artist

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the same on paper. On the basis of the resulting work, he was admitted to the Fine Arts Academy. Later, having completed his apprenticeship with blacksmiths, Tsimba decided to collect spent ammunition cartridges in Kisangani, then a theater of armed combat. Telling of his trip, he emphasizes crossing the Congo River at Kisangani and then being imprisoned. He recovered his liberty when he melted the cartridges and cast a cooking pot from them, thereby transforming an instrument of death into something supporting life. Such stories that inscribe the choices of life or an artistic career in frames of social memory affirm that an exceptional destiny awaiting him would not put his social identity in question. Becoming an artist has not meant that Freddy Tsimba has ceased being a Kinois (inhabitant of Kinshasa), nor being Kongo, however.

In the Kongo imaginary, water is the place inhabited by the dead and other spirits. To cross the watery frontier between the world of the living and that of the dead signifies being blessed by wisdom held by the ancestors. They are the only ones who can simultaneously know the past, present, and future. Water and its crossing therefore occupy important places in Tsimba's work, such as his *Waiting for the Last Boat*, *To Leave Without Return* (a pirogue made of spoons and forks floating on water traced by munition cartridges and skulls in cast metal), or *The Other Side of Life* (Fig. 9). In the Protestant dogma that Tsimba follows, crossing the Red Sea constitutes the passage from enslavement to the Promised Land, and the messenger (as played by the friend of Tsimba's sister) indicates election by God as confirmed or destined. Family life in Kongo communities and Protestant faith have given Tsimba familiarity with two cultural memories. He draws inspiration from the aesthetic and techniques of Kongo healing as well as Protestant practice. From the eighteenth-century Kimpa Vita (of whom Tsimba has composed a sculpture) to Simon Kimbangu in 1921, numerous Christian prophets (*nguza*) have appeared in Kongo country to heal society and to take full possession of the modernity of each époque (Janzen 1979, 2013; Thornton 1998; Mboukou 2010). Freddy Tsimba is an artist rather than an *nguza* prophet, but like them, he creates objects of power permitting him to open a space of healing and recreate social order. His actions answer the articulation between Kongo cultural specificity and the Christian universalism of "*nguzism*" prophecy. No matter whether one of Tsimba's sculptures or an *nkisi*, the intensity of any so powerful an object has universal reach and import.

What Wyatt MacGaffey has written about *minkisi* (pl. of *nkisi* in the Kongo language) can be extended to the cultural genealogy of Tsimba's sculptures.[23] An *nganga*—that is, a healer and practitioner operating *minkisi*—uses a sculpture or other sort of container to hold ingredients derived from animals, minerals, and plants, as well as artifacts of human circumstances. In Congo, creating *nkisi* power objects is a widely spread cultural practice. For instance, closer to Sammy Baloji's home, relics of human experience (called *vizimba* by Tabwa) such as a fragment of a blind man's stick or a piece of bone from someone executed for homicide (even when only attempted) are essential to the most powerful *nkisi* bundles.[24] An *nkisi* is made and used to resolve particular problems and constitutes a field of incessant experimentation. Anything found not to work is abandoned, and something new is added or created in its place. While some *minkisi* have little importance beyond their direct purposes, others are famous, invested with potent powers, and are directed to maintaining law and order. Following Kongo thinking, when it acts, an *nkisi* is at the center of a theatrical ensemble of songs, dances, and norms of comportment. Memories of past actions of the sort are revived by social tensions, adding to the community's excitement. A great *nkisi nkondi* (MacGaffey and Janzen 1974, MacGaffey 1991) should be frightening. Through the accumulation of ingredients unknown to all but the *nganga* who composed the *nkisi*'s bundles, and by pieces of iron nailed into its body, such a figure intrigues and disquiets. The public knew when an important *nkisi* was created by an *nganga* following an extraordinary revelation. Through processes of fabrication, an *nkisi* is inhabited by spirits if they received proper recognition. Already in the nineteenth century, *minkisi* were understood by attentive observers to be archives of memory. With reference to the *nkisi nkondi* from the Wellcome Collection of the Fowler Museum at UCLA, Allen Roberts[25] considers such *minkisi* to be archives of peoples' intentions that give a full measure of *minkisi*'s capacity to reconnect people's past experiences with their expectations.

In commenting on the creation of his works, Freddy Tsimba states that they come "from a certain vision of existence—things with which one has lived, that one has used, that one has discarded and that are then recuperated to give them a new life."[26] Again, closer to Sammy Baloji's urban milieu in Katanga, Tabwa include in protective bundles ingredients referring to specific events. Many such ingredients are then combined in a bundle called "a little world" that anticipates and protects one from similar events, or their figurative extensions. For example, a piece of tree root upon which someone has tripped is used to prevent interruption of pur-

10 Freddy Tsimba
Drawing
Pencil on paper; 22 cm x 28 cm
Photo: Cédrick Nzolo Ngambu, with permission.

11 Freddy Tsimba
Au delà de l'espoir (2010)
Metal and wood; 250 cm x 120 cm x 180 cm
Photo: courtesy of the artist

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pose.[27] In an *nkisi*, each piece of metal from which a sculpture is formed conserves its identity and is witness to a past of which it is a ruin (see MacGaffey 2013). Each used cartridge carries a history, and the place where it was collected also possesses an identity. Together, such references offer evidence of the escape, injury, or death of someone, and gathered together, Tsimba asserts, cartridges reflect the indifference of those who fabricated and sold the munitions for profit without worrying about their eventual uses. Bearing the tragic histories of the Congo, Tsimba's sculptures formed from spent cartridges also refer to the suffering of individuals and offer opportunities to listen to the histories of each person living where they have been gathered. Similarly, the metal spoons and forks that are no longer useful because they are broken and are picked up in roadside detritus—with no municipal trash collection in Kinshasa—give witness to the hunger of those who no longer use them, Tsimba adds. In his installations, a bicycle that is beyond repair, part of a locally crafted wheelchair, a push-cart too broken for further use, all reflect an incapacity to protect broken lives. A soldier's old boots, picked up in the road, question the future of the man who once wore them. Is he dead, did he flee the army to join rebel forces, did he refuse to kill others and cast aside his uniform? As he speaks of his first installation in 1999 (Fig. 10), *Art and Peace,* which was prepared for one of the rare exhibitions organized in Kinshasa by a government agency, Tsimba explained the circumstances of acquiring each element of the composition and justified its place in the global economy of meaning.[28] His sculptures are often positioned in performative ensembles, and their dramatized histories call audience members to join the performance and so assume roles among the actors. As with *minkisi*, Tsimba's sculptures offer invisible knots of social relations, for each element is witness to a local person or event. At the same time, the media of modern art permit Tsimba to give

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12 Freddy Tsimba
Rape (2009)
Metal and fabric; 227 cm x 202 cm x 202 cm
Photo: courtesy of the artist

13 Freddy Tsimba
Paradoxe Conjugal (2010)
Metal; 250 cm x 126 xm x 100 cm
Photo: Cédrick Nzolo Ngambu, by permission

14 Freddy Tsimba
Untitled (2008)
Metal and wood; 108 cm x 80 cm x 93 cm
Photo: courtesy of the artist

universal reach to Kongo cultural particularities, and so to address himself to publics of world scale. "I exploit the expressions of people," Tsimba holds, that is, "what happens to them or to me, and I try to translate these in my works…. This reflects my vision of the world, or rather the evolution of the world as I would wish it—a world without suffering."[29] Several of the human figures that he calls "silhouettes" are headless, as beings without particular identities that can therefore stand for all humans.

In several versions of *Beyond Hope*, a female figure made from unusually large spent cartridges welded together with a blowtorch holds a child of cast metal on her knees, between her legs, or in her arms (Fig. 11). Two cultural memories contribute to these creations and inform their reception. They may make one think of the Michelangelo's *Pietà*, but they especially evoke the *phemba* (*pfemba*) figures of Mayombe people of the Kongo cultural complex. In this case, the infant of the sculpture represents the spirits of the mother's deceased children. For Mayombe, *phemba* figures perpetuate memories of the great social authority once held by women chiefs.[30] The motif of a woman and her child also appears in Kongo funerary sculptures realized in steatite, called *mintadi*, that were placed on graves until well into the twentieth century. With *phemba*, reference to the spirits of lost children and the authority of women is meant to awaken consciences and reestablish social order. As John Janzen (2013:137) has recently written, "the Kongo 'tradition of renewal' is often an appeal for the restoration of public morality and order." Visual references to the *Pietà* and to sharing the suffering of others further transport Tsimba's sculpture to the redemption of all humanity. Placed in a public context, these *phemba*/*Pietàs* demand a remaking of the world through their moral authority.

Nowadays in urban Congo, a woman is the principal support of the family, but also the first victim of warfare, as suggested by two of Tsimba's installations that have rape as their subject (Fig. 12). The works are particularly dramatic, and include not only pieces of cloth and the use of color but—unusual to Tsimba's oeuvre—construction of a frame supporting and containing the female figure and the soldier, identified by the bandoleer across his back. The man is otherwise naked, while the woman is draped with a piece of cloth—perhaps to preserve her dignity that this aggression would destroy?

In *Conjugal Paradox* (Fig. 13), a grand female figure that is naked and headless is made from worn-out cutlery soldered together. In her arms, lifted to the sky, she holds a human figure without a head, while at her feet is a basket of *chikwanga*—bundles of fermented and mashed manioc wrapped in leaves that are a common food of Kinshasa's poor. As a wandering vendor, she has replaced the man who can no longer support his urban family. As a school boy from Kinshasa described in his comment to me about a drawing he made in 2000, it is painful "to see people suffer in a land so rich in minerals and agriculture, seeing a mother who leaves early in the morning with her child to sell bread."

Another sculpture that has yet to be exhibited (Fig. 14) returns to the theme of the *phemba*/*Pietà*. The body of a naked, headless woman, again made from discarded silverware, holds between her spread legs a human youngster whose body is composed of used cartridges and whose face is a mask of cast metal. Across the woman's legs rests a pestle of the sort used to pound the grain of daily staples, while the mortar for this task is positioned against the legs of the child. To the right of the figure are two skulls (meant to be monkey, or human?) made from poured metal, as well as the casting of a locally crafted bomb that Tsimba brought to Kinshasa from Brazzaville. The way the woman's legs are spread and her body is posed suggests exposure of her genitals. For those who know urban Congolese culture, two challenges are announced by such nudity—insult and moral condemnation, but also the menace unleashed by the powers of sorcery. The message is clear: the days of this society are numbered, just as the fuse of the bomb awaits lighting. Women who nourish (clothed) give birth to soldier children (naked spent cartridges), while mortars pulverize the skulls of babies. This veritable great *nkisi* combines the dramatization of its combined elements and destructive forces ready for release. To oblige the *nkisi* to deploy all its powers, an *nganga* could insult the figure's spirit by exposing himself to it. To unclothe oneself in public is also the ultimate argument of a woman caught up in dispute. Taking off one's cloth is an aggressive gesture (see MacGaffey 2000:248, 106). During the June 2, 1966, public execution (in front of a gathering of about 300,000 people) of four politicians known today as the Pentecostal Martyrs in what was a foundational event of the Congo's Second Republic (see Ndaywel 1998:647), some women related to the victims are said to have removed their clothing

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(Gérard-Libois 1967:443) to gain the attention of then Colonel, later President Mobutu. Two decades earlier and several hundred kilometers to the west, the following scene took place: "As the brigadier wanted to flog her husband, the woman lifted her skirts…. The senior chief called upon the village chief to seclude this woman, saying that it was shameful to him and his village that she had shown her privates in public" (Smith 2013:609).

Space does not permit me to pursue the detailed analysis of objects discussed above, but let us notice that the aesthetic effects aim to produce a moral questioning leading to political processes that would interrogate relations of power. From the start, such an artistic approach reassembles fragments of the real, fragments of human lives carrying their own histories. Let us recall that each piece of metal driven into the body of an *nkisi ntadi*[31] is evidence of an action undertaken at the request of someone and holds a particular history/memory in the community. A wish, a curse, a request addressed to the ancestors, all were pronounced as shards of metal were hammered into the *nkisi*'s body, and any given piece of metal could be withdrawn to reverse an awaited outcome. Such practices must be in mind when questioning Tsimba's use of recycled materials as "ruins." Kongo cultural memory influences the totality of his oeuvre, but in Roman Catholicism, as well as many other religions, practice of votive objects must also be brought to mind, especially in the Kongo region, where Christian cultural elements already had spread widely in seventeenth century. As in the case of the prohibition of the public nudity of a man, it is impossible to separate moral and religious foundations of such practice.

In Tsimba's *The Guardians of Memory*, two masks or faces made of cast metal are attached to busts made from spent cartridges. In their disposition, the cartridge shells evoke the "nails" of an *nkisi ntadi*. The composition leads one to think of the figures of couples representing the children of a priest who has initiated them to the Lemba Society.[32] These *minkisi* reflecting alliances were created north of the Congo River from at least the seventeenth century, where Lemba is still active. If such works are rare, the representation of a couple decorates bracelets (*nlunga*) that are much more widely spread and worn by Lemba adepts their whole lives. Lemba is also found in the Atlantic diaspora, and its importance to preservation of Kongo therapeutic knowledge accentuates the impression of commonalities between the sculpture of Tsimba and the Lemba couple.

Freddy Tsimba sometimes takes as his point of departure an event in society, a problem for which resolution is the condition of survival, or sometimes his own personal experience for which he feels there is universal import. The choice of what has happened reveals a disequilibrium, an injustice, and then imposes a search for solutions. Tsimba assigns himself the task of fabricating means of healing.[33] *The Refugees of Makolobo*, *Center Closed, Dream Open*, or again, *Centre fermé, Rêve ouvert* (Fig. 15), are all part of this project. Tsimba thereby renders in the present the massacre of Makobolo on Christmas Eve 1999, or how he was once briefly detained by authorities at the Brussels airport of Zaventem.[34]

Before shifting our attention away from the sculpture of Freddy Tsimba, let us say a few words about his *House of Machetes* (Fig. 16). This installation marks the beginning of his search to create a work capable of addressing itself to everyone, no matter the cultural context, but based upon the ways that an *nkisi* is composed and set into action. Constructing *House of Machetes* activates a profound link between the artist's personal memory (he speaks of the first machete he saw as a child, which was made in China), global commercial networks (he went to China to purchase machetes for this project and so "withdraw them from commerce"), and the contradictory Congolese uses of machetes in the past and now, to clear a field but also to hack someone to death. The symbolism of the number of machetes used is significant, for Tsimba sometimes says one thousand, as a number that recalls the millennialism common to life in Kinshasa, and sometimes 999—three nines, each the number of months of a pregnancy. The form of the construction is also important, for "the house," as Tsimba has written (2012:45), "is intimacy, security, procreation. But here the house has become a pathway, it is the violence of the everyday."

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15 Freddy Tsimba
Centre fermé, Rêve ouvert (2013)
Metal and plastic bags installation; 18 figures, dimensions variable
Photo: Cédrick Nzolo Ngambu, by permission

House of Machetes was assembled in Kinshasa to the knowledge and view of passersby. Welding the machetes, one to another, rendered them inoffensive and became a kind of ritual process. The completed work was transported to and exhibited in the public marketplace. The choice of this location evokes the ancient roles of the market, for the most important moment of the four-day Kongo week was the market placed under the protection of a powerful chief and of a great *nkisi,* guaranteeing peace and respect for the agreements and alliances realized there. Public reactions to *House of Machetes* when it was erected at the Liberty Market in the Masina Commune of Kinshasa make one think of the comportments of those awaiting for an *nkisi* to take action. The initial surprise and discomfort aroused by something holding spiritual powers gives way to a sense of the presence of the spirit. Such feelings seem to seize the body of a young man. The spirit leads him to swear that the machete will never again serve to kill, that the "house" will be respected, and peace preserved.[35]

STEVE BANDOMA: HYPERREALITIES OF COLLAGE

Tsimba (born in 1967) and Baloji (born in 1978) both came into a world during periods of DRC's Second Republic (1965–1990) that offered some expectation of (potential) stability. In contrast, Bandoma, born in 1981, spent his early years in uncertain times of interminable, wrenching change. As opposed to the modest social milieux of Tsimba, whose father was a functionary of the state, and of Baloji, whose father is a Protestant pastor and former financial director of a local Congolese enterprise, Bandoma is the son of a politician who has several times served as a minister in Congolese governments of transition. Tsimba's parents are of Kongo ethnicity, as is Bandoma's mother, while his father is Mungala and Gbaka. All three families are Protestants, which is a minority faith in the Congo. Tsimba grew up speaking the Kongo language as well as Lingala, and the young Baloji spoke Swahili even though Tshiluba of Kasai Province is the ethnicity and language of his parents. In Bandoma's family home, Lingala and French are spoken. His mother holds a secondary-school diploma and has a professional career, while his father has studied in Europe.

Baloji and Tsimba—even if the latter holds a degree in Fine Arts—explain that their training has been through apprenticeship of the sort that characterizes urban painters and photographers in the DRC. Bandoma, on the other hand, stresses his formal education at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kinshasa and then in both South Africa and Europe, where he has studied multimedia contemporary arts. If Baloji and Tsimba emphasize their relationships with Congolese urban culture, Bandoma forefronts his experience in artistic collectives of Kinshasa and Cape Town. In his maternal family, an uncle and several sisters produce world music, his mother has recently begun painting, and all now live in France. Western popular culture has been very present in Bandoma's home, and the young man had a television set in his room, a desktop computer by the time he was fourteen, and shortly thereafter access to the Internet. Iglesias was his favorite vocalist, and *Tintin* and the Bible his favorite things to read.

Nevertheless, alone among the three artists, Bandoma remembers having been fascinated by a popular painting of Mami Wata hanging in his home and by seeing other works from the repertoire of urban arts—*Colonie belge* and *Inkale* among them.[36] Already at the Academy of Fine Arts of Kinshasa, Bandoma's painting was "surrealist but in reality a collage that didn't know it," as he says.[37] Given the "academism" of this institution, his interest in collage must have been inspired by the urban culture of Kinshasa as an assemblage never ceasing to change. Bandoma recalls that his first

16 Freddy Tsimba
Maison machette (2012)
Metal, wood, and straw; 272 cm x 450 cm x 352 cm
Photo: Cédrick Nzolo Ngambu, by permission

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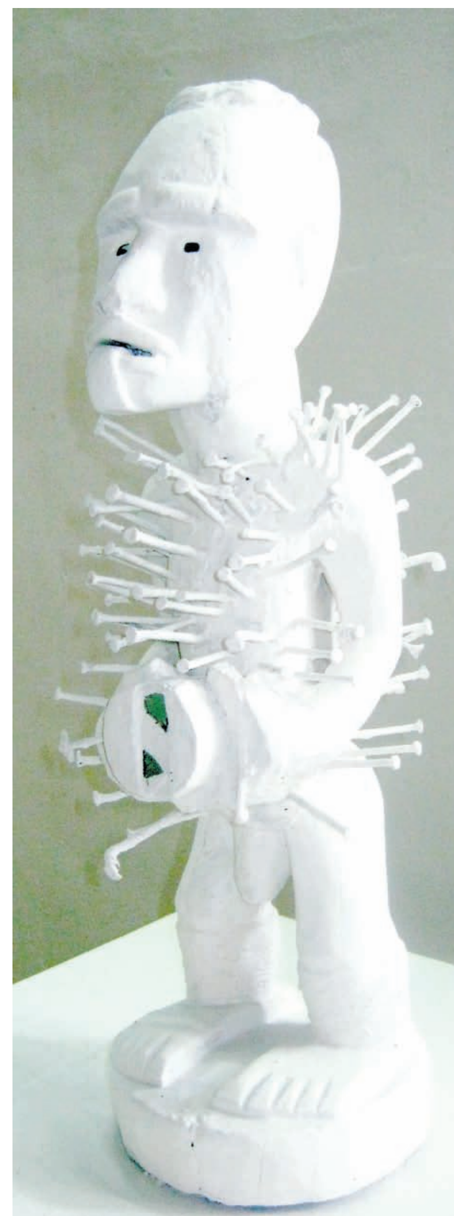
encounter with precolonial African art (which he still calls "*art nègre*")[38] through pictures in the textbooks used in his art history and humanities classes that fascinated him. He made several visits to his parents' villages, but he only remembers that his maternal grandfather told him he had once slept in a bed belonging to Simon Kimbangu and predicted that Bandoma would become an artist. Bandoma's knowledge of Kongo culture mostly comes from books, by his own admission.[39]

In short, Steve Bandoma comes from a different generation and, through his parents, from a different social class than either Baloji or Tsimba. He does not seem to have shared with them the social experiences of the 1990s and 2000s. In contrast to them, from childhood Bandoma's relationship to the society of Kinshasa, and the DRC more broadly, has been mediated by television, French popular music, and the Internet. In the footsteps of the modern prophet Simon Kimbangu, his maternal family was more interested in the modern world than village "tradition." The same can be said of Bandoma's father. In this way, Bandoma's view of the Congo is refracted by a global prism, and the tools he has found there have served to recompose images of Kongo culture initially encountered through "*art nègre*" as simulacra.

Firstly, Bandoma shatters these images, transforming them into ruins through a brutal injection of global culture mostly borrowed from the visual universe of advertising. I do not believe that this is a matter of chance or a facility motivated by the imaginary of mass commodification; on the contrary, Steve Bandoma proceeds to violent confrontations of simulacra, notably Kongo culture taken uniquely as "art" versus mass consumption. His plan surely constitutes a search for the possibility of reversing points of view dominating his identity as an artist who is both Congolese and Kongo.[40]

Upon return from South Africa, Bandoma began composing thematic series of several dozen collages on paper. Constructed for the most part over the course of a year, they were eventually enriched by later additions. At the heart of each series, several collages bear the same title as a sort of subtheme, without necessarily being conceived to be presented together. While the title of a series is almost always in English, the names of subseries and additions are usually in French. In 2011, for example, in the series called *Vanity* we find several *Crucifixions*, and in *Lost Tribe*, subtitles are *Hommages aux ancêtres*, *Trésor oublié*, *Choc des cultures*, and the like. In 2012 he added *Mental Slavery* and *Identity*, but also *Le civilisé*. While previously each collage was an autonomous work no matter its references to a series, after 2012 certain ones were conceived to be displayed together. Bandoma seems to produce with an eye to exhibitions, but he sells individual pieces nonetheless. These ensembles share central visual elements: a dog with two heads inspired by a kind of Kongo *nkisi* (as in Bandoma's *Lucky Dog*); a human figure also reflecting an *nkisi* (*Pain*), sometimes in a series (*Lost Tribe*); someone donning a mask and wearing a jersey that recalls the prisoner in the urban painting *Colonie belge* (*Enculturation* in the *Lost Tribe* series). One finds the same approach in the series *Itch*, this time as constructed around an egg. If he draws in ink in *Baby-Boomer Progenitors*, in *Crash* the eggs are crushed and their shells are glued to the paper. Bandoma seems to be putting in question, not an artifact of representation but the materiality of everyday objects.



17 Steve Bandoma
Métamorphose (2012), from *Lost Tribe* series
Acrylic on wood; 70 cm x 20 cm x 20 cm
Photo: courtesy of the artist

It is impossible to know if, in executing these works, Bandoma is influenced by a cultural memory of Western reflection upon simulacra and representation of the real—as in Lewis Carroll, Jorge Louis Borges, or Oscar Wilde—or if he is inspired by the shocks of encountering simulacra of Kongo culture in "*art nègre*" that satisfy needs through advertising and contemporary Kinoise society—as a *hyperreality* in its own right. Following Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco, I understand this latter term to refer to representation of the real transformed, edited, and re-presented to the point that the simulacrum imposes itself in place of truth to the extent that the latter ceases to exist. The artifact constructed in this way has no further relationships to other sorts of reality, as Baudrillard (1995) has stressed.

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18 Steve Bandoma
Enculturation (2012), incorporating (l–r, top–bottom) Woyo/Kongo, Dan, Pende, Pende, Songye, Fan, and Chokwe masks
Collage on paper; each panel 100 cm x 37.5 cm
Photo: courtesy of the artist

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Recently, Bandoma has realized three-dimensional installations and several sculptures. He has entitled *Metamorphose* (in his *Lost Tribe* series) an *nkisi* presented like a museum artifact, although it is painted entirely white (Fig. 17). An installation on a great checkerboard unites commercial plush toys with figures inspired by precolonial Congolese arts is called *Qui perd gagne—He Who Loses Gains*. Things from one Congolese culture or another are represented across the images of "*art nègre*," as Bandoma strips any aura of "primitivism" from a museum artifact or an object from a collection by painting it white and suggesting an equivalence with playthings whose only value is that accorded to them by commerce. Such objects have no particular qualities other than their conversion to money, and if they refer to any power, it is uniquely this.

Techniques of collage link Bandoma to the patrimony of modernism, beginning with Braque and Picasso, permitting him to reexamine the relationship between painting and sculpture and so between representation in two and three dimensions.[41] In each medium that Bandoma mobilizes, he lends characteristics of another. In a collage, he incorporates constitutive elements of an *nkisi* and seeks the visual impressions of a three-dimensional object, photomontage, or collage.

Two ensembles of collages from 2012 lend themselves to analysis, *Enculturation* and *Acculturation,* which are composed of seven and three works, respectively. In the first of these, Bandoma has conceived the works together, while in the second each image is presented separately. Wearing a shirt of horizontal gray stripes, the personages depicted in his *Enculturation* polyptyque (Fig. 18) wear seven different masks. From left to right the masks are based upon Woyo/Kongo, Dan, Pende, and Pende again; and then below, the three from left to right are Songye, Fan, and Chokwe.[42] Another mask evokes Satan, and then comes a face with an Afro, followed by another with a twisted visage borrowed from Bandoma's collage *Mental Slavery*. On the chest of each figure is the logo of a modish designer or enterprise, with one the Nazi flag. With one exception, the personages have only one leg, and wears a man's or woman's shoe cut from a fashion magazine. The arms, either entire or in disintegration, end, again with a single exception, in separate hands, most of which are white, with one black and another that of a skeleton. These figures combine traits borrowed from the "*art nègre*" that Bandoma knows from catalogs and books, with a sense of the *sapeur* dandies of Kinshasa who construct themselves from appropriations of Western modes.[43] The appearance of these bodies recalls the flogged prisoner of the *Colonie belge* painting, but also the performers of Pende and other masquerades (c.f. Strother 1999). The conclusion that imposes itself is that a person is only an artifice constructed by bouts of borrowing, a simulacrum, a cuckoo's egg in a nest of reality.

In the collages called *Acculturation* (Fig. 19), a figure inspired by an *nkisi* from "*art nègre*" is limned in diluted sepia ink. Contrary to the impression of someone from the past or the personage of a souvenir suggested by the evanescent traits of the sepia tone, a blue eye and active arms emerging from the figure are altogether alive. Women's hands—European or perhaps Indian—emerge from the body and hold nails as though these have been removed from the "*nkisi*." Only a closed fist seems to be that of an African body. In the stomach of the figure, in the location where certain *minkisi* hold mirrors and medicinal bundles, a television screen is embedded that depicts the signal of needed adjustments. One is reminded of somewhat similar depictions by Trigo Piula called *Matema de 1984* and *Ta Télé*, (Vogel and Ebong 1991:176): "The painting is a warning, a moral lesson, a public statement. And the painter is a preacher exhorting his people to examine their values." Male genitals are clearly depicted in Bandoma's *Acculturation*, and the left hand holds a broken object and is raised in an *nkisi*'s gesture of power. Because "foreign" hands have removed the nails one might associated with an *nkisi*, there are no further memories of the operations and interventions of spirits or ancestors. The television screen and "foreign" hands suggest that these recollections have been replaced by mass global culture.

19 Steve Bandoma
Acculturation (2012)
Collage on paper; 105 cm x 75 cm
Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, Gainesville; Museum Purchase, funds provided by the David A. Cofrin Acquisition Endowment.
Photo: Randy Batista Photography, courtesy of the Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art

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Another suite of collages entitled *Mérites du roi Léopold II* in the *Crime* series presents a personage vaguely inspired by the contours of an *nkisi* but bearing the head of the Belgian monarch. In one version, his right foot is placed upon the head of Patrice Lumumba (Fig. 20), and in another arms hug the head of Mobutu Sese Seko. These heads are cut from printed images, evoking official portraits of a history book. Cut out from magazine illustrations or from printed advertisement, hands of European women emerge from "Leopold's" shoulders. Are these meant to evoke the nails driven into an *nkisi* to perpetuate memories of wishes and curses but now pushed out by those hands? Have these hands pulled out nails and local people's memories with them, to be replaced by dreams/nightmares borrowed from global culture? The figure, whose arms recall those an *nkisi*, bears a portable phone at the waist; in another collage it is replaced by a switchblade knife. These objects and the hands appear to be digitally copied from advertisements. Will the modern past of the Congo be restricted to its "father" Léopold, through his personal possession of the Congo Free State (1885–1908), and to his successors, Lumumba or Mobutu? Modernity would have been the heritage of Lumumba, while Mobutu was bequeathed Léopold's brutality. Veritable simulacra of the Congo, these two collages present themselves as true despite having no correspondence with reality, since the reality they pretend to re-present has never existed or exists no longer. In a review of *Kongo across the Waters,* Allen F. Roberts (2014:6) described Bandoma's *nkisi* figures as "updated so that what were once tangible entreaties and votives become collages of hands, wanting and grasping in response to today's consumerism and political demands."

In the manner of the protagonist of Borges's *The Circular Ruins* (1997), the present for Congolese corresponds to a circularity of representation. From Baloji to Bandoma, then, the circle is closed. For the former, the materiality of ruins of the past will permit transformation of the present as simulacra of life in the future. For the latter, the past is only simulacra, and indeed, has it ever existed? Its ruins are only representations.

20 Steve Bandoma
Mérites du roi Léopold II (2012), from *Crimes* series
Collage on paper; 105 cm x 75 cm
Photo: courtesy of the artist

FROM ART ONCE CALLED "WITCHCRAFT": MAKING OBJECTS OF POWER

> I went from being an artist who makes things,
> to an artist who makes things happen.
> Jeremy Deller (Thompson 2012:front matter)

In Congolese society, artists give themselves the task of mediation between local social theories and theories of art following Western tradition, so as to make visible and sensible that which otherwise remains obscure. Here one may recall a remark by David Gordon (2012:202) that "a theory of power that emerges from ancient history engages with colonial and neocolonial modernities, and insists on the visible inspirations of our actions." Despite their evident differences, these theories share an emphasis on objects possessing strong powers that are both visual and memorable. The capacities of such objects fabricated by specialists transcend time, space, and cultural contexts. As Wyatt MacGaffey (2013) has suggested, Kongo "theory" and art theory both enable us to see what otherwise we could not and to feel that we understand obscure creative drives. In a place and context, memory incorporated into an object counts even more, as does that activated by the object's diverse composing parts. Elsewhere, privileged reception is visual. Once detached from social context, the *lieu de mémoire* of an anthropomorphic *nkisi*—sometimes called a "fetish"—is thereafter an object of "*art nègre*."[44] The aesthetic aspects depend upon social efficacy, and the simulacrum is real, following the path taken by Steve Bandoma.

Baloji and Tsimba, each in his own way, proceed by the recomposition of shards of society, pieces of time and space, and fragments collected after the heat of battle. The artists select and use them to compose ruins of themselves that society can then appropriate. It is outward from the Congo, from an event, an experience, that they call out to and address the world. Their universal quality, whether ethical or aesthetic, rests upon the conviction that no human can remain indifferent to human suffering (c.f. Sontag 2002, Batchen et al. 2012). Echoing Hannah Arendt more than half a century ago, their attention to suffering

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is derived from their belief that the evil wrought by man constitutes the central problem of contemporary humanity. Their Protestant upbringing is certainly not foreign to the sentiment that recognizing evil is the path to redemption. They share with most Congolese the Christ-like conviction that their collective descent into hell will save humanity.[45] As with the great Mangaaka *nkisi* now in the collections of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (see MacGaffey 2013:176), the imposing presence of such works demands response from viewers. And as V.Y. Mudimbe (1991:278) has reflected, "the objective of [their] work is to gather together the art, the past, and the dreams of a community for a better future."

Bogumil Jewsiewicki taught at Lovanium University, DRC, and National University of Zaire from 1968 to 1976 before moving to Laval University, Québec, Canada. Before his retirement in 2009 he held the Laval University research chair in Comparative History of Memory. Since the early 1990s, he has worked on Congolese collective memory and urban culture, especially visual culture, and was named ASA Distinguished Africanist in 2006. He has curated exhibits of Congolese urban paintings and photography (1999 and 2010 at Museum for African Art, New York, and 2001, Museum fur Volkerkunde, Vienna). He recently summarized his research on Congo visual culture in "A Century of Painting in the Congo: Image, Memory, Experience, and Knowledge" in A Companion to Modern African Art*, ed. Gitti Salami and Monica Blackmun Visona (John Wiley, 2013). Bogumil.Koss@hist.ulaval.ca*

Notes

Without the assistance of Sammy Baloji, Steve Bandoma, and Freddy Tsimba, who answered my questions so graciously, and without the generous help of Bénédicte Meiers, Said Abbas Ahamed, Hein Vanhee, and Bambi Ceuppens, I would never have been able to assemble the necessary information to write the present paper. Susan Cooksey and Alioune Sow were kind enough to invite me to the University of Florida to present talks on Sammy Baloji's and Freddy Tsimba's work. Several colleagues generously read and commented upon an initial text from which the present paper is drawn, and thanks are extended to Jean-Loup Amselle, Johannes Fabian, Peter Geschiere, Wyatt MacGaffey, Allen F. Roberts, and Jan Vansina. Allen F. Roberts was not only so generous as to translate from French original but he also provided most insightful comments and rectifications for which I am very grateful. Needless to say, all remaining errors are mine.

1 Later, he wrote "Art is History's nostalgia" (Walcott 1992a:xlv, ii). It is pertinent to recall that Walcott is also a painter.

2 "The sigh of History rises over ruins, not over landscapes, and in the Antilles there are few ruins apart from the ruins of sugar estates and abandoned forts." Walcott's (1962:12) refusal of imposed heritage coincides with the rejection of history as disregard, borrowing Ann Stroler's (2009) term. As Walcott said in his 1992 Nobel address, "It is not that History is obliterated by this sunrise. It is there in Antillean geography, in the vegetation itself. The sea sighs with the drowned from the Middle Passage, the butchery of its aborigines, Carib and Arawak and Taino, bleeds in the scarlet of the immortal, and even the actions of surf on sand cannot erase the African memory, or the lances of cane as a green prison where indentured Asians, the ancestors of Felicity, are still serving time."

3 "Perse" refers to Aléxis Saint-Léger Léger, born in Guadeloupe and Nobel Laureate of Literature in 1960.

4 Walcott (2007:123) wonders "how to choose/ Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?" and convokes the Homeric tradition (*Omeros*) as well as the "sound like a rumour without any echo of History." As he states, "the intensity of the particular is what makes it general" Walcott (2001:135).

5 The sentiment of wanting to retreat from ruins is shared with other Congolese artists. As the choreographer/arts-activist Faustin Linyekula asserts, "There are people crazy enough to believe obstinately in the celebration of beauty, despite the somersaults of history, wars, revolutions, [and] regimes. To hope that the derisory nature of art can face up to the enormity of the hideousness of life. To dare dream that the independence of thought, free arbitration, and personal initiative can push against this pile of ruins" (Studios Kabako in Kisangani, homepage, http://www.kabako.org/, accessed March 10, 2014); for a discussion of Linyekula's work in the pages of this journal, see also Dupray 2013.

6 Tsimba describes the creation of his first sculpture in 1999 in these terms: "I paced around all of Kinshasa on foot, looking for materials. I collected discarded military boots that were in abundance, helmets with holes in them, shovels without handles, clocks without hands, and I returned to my workshop"; email communication, January 20, 2014.

7 Email exchange with Tsimba, January 21, 2013.

8 It is not possible to broach here the important question of the relationship between urban material culture, and especially urban painting, and the creations of these artists. Only Steve Bandoma, as will be discussed below, speaks explicitly of urban paintings displayed in his family house. Nonetheless, the influence of aesthetics is palpable in the photography of Sammy Baloji, and particularly in his series called *Mémoire*. The relationship to the past probably constitutes the major difference in the work of urban painters and the creations of the three artists discussed here. On the place of the past in Congolese urban culture, see Fabian 1978, 1996.

9 See Fabian 1973, Dibwe dia Mwembu and Jewsiewicki 2004. This interdependence between individual identity and the nature of the work he does is not specific to Congolese colonial modernity. In the Katanga mining region, these modalities are particular to the creation of a sort of workers' bourgeoisie constituted by salaried employees of grand enterprises (Dibwe dia Mwembu and Jewsiewicki 2004). As Martin Filler (2014:14) has recently written, "personal identity often derives more from professional pursuits than private maters, would be that we *are where we work*."

10 Sammy Baloji is presently creating a new series, untitled as of this writing, through the confrontation and cohabitation of photographs in the album of a European hunter of trophy animals who explored Kivu a century ago, and the press photos of Christian Mvano, a young journalist from Kivu. Congolese people appear in these new works like trophies of war caught between armies and armed factions, and MONUC (the United Nations Mission to the Congo). These forces occupy the mediating place of early explorers, to Baloji's thinking. This new initiative asks for its own detailed analysis impossible here.

11 Jewsiewicki 2010, 2010a, 2011. Baloji is an artist whose international status has been confirmed by several distinctions: the Prince Claus Award (2008), the Spiegel Prize (2012), a Rolex Art Initiative Protégé (2014–2015), and the 56th Venice Biennale (2015).

12 On urban painting and collective imagination in the Congo, see Jewsiewicki 2003, 2008, 2008a, 2013.

13 In Baloji and Couttenier (2014), Maarten Couttenier takes a similar angle regarding Baloji's photomontages of images of Katanga taken at the turn of the twentieth century during the "scientific expedition" led by Charles Lemaire.

14 I am indebted to Allen Roberts for helping me find a short but nevertheless acceptable formula making sense of a very complex and diverse situation. Concerning the process by which a mask gives witnesses to spirit presence, the nature of the relationship between the mask and the person wearing it is hotly debated by scholars.

15 It is not possible to develop here another perspective presented in a series of portraits by Baloji that depict Lusinga's skull. Reference may be made to the brilliant analysis of Allen Roberts (2013) and to the text of Lotte Arndt (2013). This latter considers two series by Baloji, *Aller et retour* and *Passages*. The first includes photographs of the skull of a chief from present-day North Katanga named Lusinga that was brought to Belgium by Émile Storms, a military officer working for King Leopold's International African Association who was responsible for Lusinga's assassination and decapitation. Lusinga's skull is now in the collections of the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural History. In Baloji's second series, photos of a collection of skulls, dating to the nineteenth century and conserved at the Guimet Museum of Lyon, are counterposed to images of the interior of the Fourvières Basilica, also in Lyon.

16 [Translator's Note: On "the work of memory" and the making of contemporary African histories, see Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe 1993.]

17 The original photograph was taken of mining recruits during a medical examination. Note the positioning of their bodies and that of the mask-bearer of Fig. 3.

18 For example, in Kongo culture, when a chief falls down, those with him fall to the ground as well, to avoid seeing his genitals. In a similar way, when a great *nkisi* sculpture of the sort that is anthropomorphic and bears great powers, falls to earth, so do those around it (MacGaffey 1991:136). From the 1970s to the 1990s, the *Colonie belge* painting was widely spread across urban Congo in a way that makes Kongo examples relevant even if the region is far away from Katanga.

19 This may seem a rhetorical question, which would contradict a piece in the Kinshasa newspaper *Le Phare* of May 14, 2014 that holds that the Congolese is "someone in eternal need, ready to seek happiness, even in hell." [Translator's Note: for an overview of recent Chinese business ventures in the Congo like the Zhong Hang Mining Company of Kolwezi as well as throughout Africa, see French 2015.]

20 Tsimba's obsession with life should not be surprising in an artist who is morally engaged in a society in which, in less than two decades, between five and six million Congolese have perished from civil wars and foreign interventions—roughly one citizen in six. Even though the western part of the country has been less involved in these conflicts than the East has been, Tsimba expresses national solidarity rather than

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a regional or ethnic one, without even saying that his mother was born in Bukavu in eastern Congo, where his maternal grandfather was stationed on the eve of Independence as a soldier in the *Force publique* (the colonial army).

21 From "Visionary Africa," a thirteen-minute BOZAR broadcast of 2010. Thanks to Kathleen Louw for sharing a copy of this with me when the video was no longer available via YouTube, and to Bambi Ceuppens for putting me in contact with Ms. Louw. Freddy Tsimba is far from the only artist to allude to ancient art. "I found in these ancient masterpieces emotional appeal and satisfaction," the Ghanaian sculptor Oku Ampofo declared in 1949 (cited in Vogel 1991:195). Instead, it is the spontaneous character of Tsimba's recognition that strikes one, and the fact of finding a face for this cultural memory that had always been there, despite being unknown.

22 [Translator's Note: For recent field research on "traditional" arts of Kongo people, see Martínez-Ruiz 2013.]

23 See MacGaffey 2013:176–77. We have thousands of pages of firsthand descriptions of *minkisi* in Kongo culture written in the Kongo language at the turn of the twentieth century by mission teachers who were themselves Kongo. Wyatt MacGaffey has made several magisterial analyses of these materials; see MacGaffey 1991, 1993, 2000, and MacGaffey and Janzen 1974.

24 Allen F. Roberts, personal communication.

25 Allen F. Roberts, personal communication.

26 Email exchange with the artist on January 20, 2014. Wyatt MacGaffey (2013) stresses that the sacred character of an *nkisi* is derived from its relationship with a particular event it evokes.

27 Allen F. Roberts, personal communication; c.f. Roberts 1996.

28 No photograph of the installation is known to exist, and only the artist's sketch remains (Tsimba 2012:43). The work of Freddy Tsimba is presented in the film *Mavambu* by Rosine Mbakam and Mirkjo Popovitch (2011). *Mavambu,* the plural of *divambu,* means "the point where roads branch from one another" in the Kongo language, and is Tsimba's second name.

29 Email exchange with artist, January 24, 2014.

30 *Phemba* figures have also inspired the Congolese sculptor from Brazzaville Trigo Piula; one, called *Matema* (1984), was published in Vogel and Ebong 1991:228. On the *phemba* genre of Mayombe sculpture, see Lehuard 1976, Janzen 1978.

31 *Minkisi* of differing form and function bear different names. Thompson (1983) describes Kongo *minkisi* in detail. Marie-Claude Dupré (1975) attempted an effort of classification based on Laman's third volume (Laman 1962). Nevertheless, MacGaffey (1991:6) considers that "It is a mistake to classify *minkisi* exactly, since no mechanism existed to produce or enforce taxonomic orthopraxy. … [O]ften enough the same name was applied to *minkisi* of differing form and function."

32 On Lemba, see Janzen 1982, Janzen and Janzen 1990.

33 As John Janzen (2013:136–37) has stated, "*minkisi* addressed dilemmas of civil collapse, epidemic disease, and population decline … to restore authority and ties to ancestors." And again, "major *minkisi* represented innovations, reinterpretations, in the tradition of drawing strength from society, the earth and the powers within them."

34 [Translator's Note: the massacre of Makobolo, a town near the city of Uvira along the shores of Lake Tanganyika in east-central DRC, was undertaken by Rwanda-inflenced rebels during the chaotic years of Laurant Kabila's rule as President of the Republic; see Fisher 1999.]

35 Building the *House of Machetes* and its exhibition were filmed as part of *Kinshasa mboka te* by Douglas Ntimasiemi and Raffi Aghekian (2013).

36 The synoptic volumes on Mami Wata edited by Henry Drewal (2008a, 2008b) give a sense of the richness of this theme; on Mami Wata in the DRC, or Mamba Mutu as she is sometimes known, see my text in this same collection (Jewsiewicki 2008a, 2008b) and another text coauthored with Sammy Baloji (Baloji and Jewsiewicki 2012).

37 Email exchange with the artist, February 10, 2014.

38 In the early twentieth century, "*art nègre*" was a common term to designate art objects brought from Africa, The more general term "primitive art" included art objects from the Pacific islands and both phrases were used by some through the twentieth century. A recent controversy related to the new art museum in Paris, Musée du quai Branly (Price 2007), demonstrated how difficult it is to get rid of terms like "primitive" while talking about non-European art. In French, the substantive and the adjective *nègre* can be both jocular and inflammatory, and the same is true for "primitive," although to a lesser extent.

39 [Translator's Note: Simon Kimbangu (1887–1951) was a Kongo prophet understood by his otherwise Protestant devotees to be a special messenger of Jesus Christ. He was persecuted by authorities of the Belgian Congo and died in prison after thirty years of incarceration. Such martyrdom only increased his popularity, and Kimbanguism now has several million followers and is recognized by the World Council of Churches. See one of the movement's websites, http://www.jccesk.com; c.f. M'Bokolo and Sabakinu 2014.]

40 Still, to follow Gilles Deleuze (1995:299), the simulacra of Bandoma's collages are "those systems in which different is related to different by means of difference itself. What is essential is that we find in these systems no prior identity, no internal resemblance."

41 For recent writing on collage, see Busch, Klanten, and Hellige 2013; McLeod and Kuenzli 2011; Klanten, Hellige, and Gallagher 2011; and Dogancay and Taylor 2008.

42 I wish to thank Mary Nooter Roberts and Allen F. Roberts for identification of originals. [Translator's Note: A polyptyque usually refers to an ensemble of early painted panels depicting Christian saints and scenes, such as that of the Carolingian church of St. Gernain in Neuillay; see www.le.ac.uk/hi/polyptyques/neuillay/site.html.]

43 [Translator's Note: *Sapeurs* are those who practice *le SAPE*, the acronym of La Société des Ambianceurs de des Personnes Élégantes, that rose in Congo/Brazzaville during the colonial period but that was reignited by hugely popular Kinshasa-based vocalists of the 1960s like Papa Wemba. See Gondola 1999.].

44 A *lieu de mémoire* is a place or realm of memory; see Nora 1996–1998; regarding art and memory in the Congo, see M.N. Roberts 1996.

45 Already in the 1970s, the "politician" Patrice Lumumba was portrayed in Katangan urban paintings as a Congolese Jesus Christ (see Jewsiewicki 1999). Since the 1990s, Christian churches have multiplied in which Lumumba is understood as a prophet who will assure the redemption of the world. As I have written elsewhere, such constructions offer a sense of suffering to ordinary Congolese, and preserve their dignity. Whether through Lumumba or Kimbangu (see M'Bokolo and Sabakinu 2014), they offer themselves in sacrifice to save humanity.

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