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Music and (re-)translating unity and reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda

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This article focuses on the ability of a historically important musical instrument in the East African country of Rwanda, the *inanga*, to contribute to the (re-)translation of issues related to unity and reconciliation efforts after the genocide of 1994. By concentrating on the transmission of tradition from Kirusu Thomas to Sophie Nzayisenga, from father to daughter, I underscore the significant changes in cultural contexts for historical and contemporary *inanga* performance while also positioning the instrument within the dominant cultural metaphors of 'blockage' and 'flow'. Throughout the article, I draw on *inanga* song texts to demonstrate the role of the *inanga* as cultural translator.

Musiek en die (her-)vertaling van eenheid en versoening in post-menseslagting Rwanda

Hierdie artikel fokus op die potensiaal van 'n geskiedkundig belangrike musiekinstrument in die Oos-Afrikaland van Rwanda, die *inanga*, om by te dra tot die (her-)vertaling van vraagstukke wat verband hou met pogings tot eenheid en versoening na die menseslagting van 1994. Deur my konsentrasie op die oordrag van tradisie van Kirusu Thomas na Sophie Nzayisenga, van pa na dogter, beklemtoon ek die betekenisvolle veranderinge in kulturele kontekste vir historiese en hedendaagse *inanga*-uitvoering, terwyl ek terselfdertyd die instrument binne die heersende kultuurmetafore van 'blokkasie' en 'vloei' posisioneer. In die artikel word *inanga* liedtekste deurgaans gebruik om die rol van die *inanga* as medium vir kulturele vertaling te demonstreer.

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SUN MODIA
BLOEMFONTEIN

After traveling several hours from Rwanda's capital city of Kigali to the country's Southern Province by taxi, bus, bicycle, and foot, I arrive with my recording equipment at the remote village of Akarere in the Nyanza District and am greeted by Mushabizi Vianey, brother of the famed elderly *inanga* player, Kirusu Thomas.¹ After my welcome to the village, Mushabizi brings out his *inanga*, an 11-string chordophone trough zither and begins to play in the shade of a large lemon tree. Another musician playing the *ikembe* lamellaphone ('thumb piano') soon sits down alongside him on the bench. After an hour or so of music-making, an extremely feeble man with a cane makes his way down the precariously steep path to the village from the main road. A young boy follows him with an *inanga* balanced precariously on his head. All music comes to a halt as the *muzee* (elder) enters Mushabizi's home compound. I greet Kirusu Thomas, the *muzee*, and thank him for making the effort to join us.

During the course of my visit to Akarere village, Kirusu recounts his experience of playing the *inanga* for the *mwami* (king) to calm him at night, recalling the specific songs and tales he used to sing. In response to my questions, he tells me that he does not know how old he is, but recalls that he has played his *inanga* for kings, presidents, and *muzungu* (foreign) researchers. After resting for a few minutes, Kirusu asks someone to fetch his *inanga*, decorated with repairs stapled into the wood. He tunes the through-strung *inanga* by stretching the strings back and forth until he achieves a tuning with which he is comfortable. Rather than extoling the virtues of a political leader or praising the *mwami*, he softly sings about local post-genocide reconciliation efforts in the surrounding rural districts. Kirusu's voice at first appears frail and his playing tender compared to the strength of younger *inanga* players, but the potency of his lyrics and significance of his presence compel everyone in the village to pay attention and stop what they are doing to listen to *Amahoro meza* ['Real peace']:

1 Many of the ideas in this article were first presented in a paper given at Syracuse University as part of the "Music and Conflict" symposium. In addition, several sections that detail the contexts of musical performances were presented in preliminary form in a booklet accompanying a self-produced documentary film entitled *Inanga: a song of survival in a daughter's Rwanda* (2011).

Taste real peace, peace comes with opportunities

This is the type of peace we praise in Rwanda

If you need that peace, you have to give it

That is how peace will prosper

The ones who represent peace the most are the ones who promote communion

Among the most useful things we need to achieve is sustainable peace

Those who are united in communion have to decide that it is their duty

To have a united vision to resolve the problems that concern us

To meet another without fear, without halting your steps towards another

As someone who fears going to another's house

The ones who bring bad spirits, jealousy, conflict, troubles, and violent arguments

Those who value communion should place importance on communication

To support one another, aid one another

Good marketplaces give loans to one another

Support goes both ways, things coming in should then go out

Real peace fights against poverty and hunger so that the wealth of a country increases

It is real peace.

Kirusu's style and melodic devices are immediately familiar to me from my working with Sophie, his young daughter. As I document his approach to the *inanga*, it becomes clear that he has passed along his specific style, his 'touch' on the instrument to his daughter. Rather than playing in an older, historical style, he chose instead to introduce himself through his more contemporary efforts to highlight unity and reconciliation efforts.

1. Blockage and flow

Historical, political, and socio-economic factors all contributed significantly to the period leading up to the Rwandan genocide. In order to understand and position the changes of style and approach adopted by Kirusu Thomas's adaptations, I now introduce a focus on the contributions of the social schism of the 1994 genocide that attain contemporary inanga performance practice. Anthropologist

Christopher Taylor (2002) poses specific questions that contributed to a repositioning and 're-translation' of Rwandan expressive culture in post-genocide contexts, specifically the traditional *inanga* musical instrument, a trough zither once prevalent in the traditional soundscape of the royal Tutsi court. Why, Taylor posits, was the violence that occurred in Rwanda in 1994 perpetrated in particular corporeal and physical ways; for example, the severing of external body parts (breasts, genitals, tendons), the hasty construction of roadblocks, and bodies stuffed in latrines? This type of violence, Taylor suggests, was culture-specific and symbolic of cultural patterning deep in the Rwandan psyche. According to Taylor, Rwandan conceptualizations of the body are frequently structured in terms of a binary root metaphor: (orderly) flow and (disorderly) blockage (cf Laban 2002). Taylor opens his article, "The cultural face of terror in the Rwandan genocide" (2002), with the assertion that health and well-being depend on proper bodily flow. In traditional healing practices in Rwanda, blockages were understood as obstructing flow within the body and needed to be removed in order for flow to be re-established. According to Alexander Laban Hinton (2002: 20), "[t]his root metaphor is analogically linked to a variety of other conceptual domains, ranging from topography to myth".

Traditional court systems in Rwanda - within which music played a central role - were historically understood as transmitters of knowledge and power, or as Hinton (2002: 20) suggests, conduits "through which substances of fertility and nourishment would flow out to their subjects". Within the historically dominant Tutsi courts, the *mwamis* or kings were charged with nourishing their subjects and protecting them from potential enemies ("obstructing beings" according to Hinton). While the end of the court system through the abolition of the Tutsi monarchy (Mamdani 2001) in 1961, coupled with the atrocities of the 1994 genocide itself, might be understood as blocking the flow of cultural memory, the *inanga* musical instrument has both adapted to contemporary mandates of governmental initiatives and maintained its roots in the deep historical modes of storytelling. In this way, the *inanga* now functions as a tool or, if I may be forgiven, an *instrument* for (re-)translating Rwandan culture in a dramatically different context. In addition, the pathways that connect neighbours in rural village networks can be understood as blocked when the

interpersonal obligations of everyday life are not fulfilled. Inhibited social interactions are yet another blocked flow that occurred within Rwandan culture during the genocide:

In a variety of domains, then, blockage signified the antithesis of order, an obstruction that had to be removed to ensure the flow of personal and communal wellbeing (Hinton 2002: 20).

Thus, in Rwanda, there were two seemingly contradictory elements that drew on deep historical memory. First, the conceptualisation of blockage in the form of obstructing beings (enemies, invaders, outsiders) and, secondly, the ability and power to promote and manufacture culturally proper social flow:

In Hutu nationalist discourse, Tutsis were frequently portrayed as the ultimate blocking beings – contaminating foreign ‘invaders from Ethiopia’ who were inherently malevolent and obstructed the social flows of the Hutu nation. Motivated by an ideology of hate and their own self-implicating understandings of blockage and flow, Hutu perpetrators displayed a tendency to carry out their brutal deeds in terms of this cultural idiom. Thus, thousands of obstructing Tutsis were dumped in rivers – a signifier of flow in Rwandan cosmology – and thereby expunged from the body politic’s symbolic organs of elimination. This analogy between Tutsis and excrement was expressed in another manifestation of violence, the stuffing of Tutsi bodies into latrines (Hinton 2002: 20). Locating the deeply situated cultural heritage of obstruction and blockage as a force inhibiting flow within Rwandan contexts allows us to position the contemporary soundscape of *inanga* musical performances as a translating cultural force, and perhaps more significantly as a ‘re-’translating force in which the musical sounds of an historically important musical instrument communicate both historical and contemporary issues of identity. In the ensuing sections, I highlight the efforts and contributions of the *inanga* to national unity and reconciliation efforts that actively address these culturally significant issues of blockage and flow. To do so, I highlight a select group of song texts and contexts (Hinton 2002: 20).

2. The *inanga*

The *inanga* is an 11-string chordophone, a musical instrument found in the East African country of Rwanda. Frequently used to accompany narrative, storytelling, or epic historical recounts, the *inanga* now regularly supports important governmental functions and non-governmental celebrations. At one time, the *inanga* was played in the royal court to soothe the *mwami*, the king of the Tutsi people. It is

interesting to note that, in the past, the instrument was also played to incite war, thus participating in the production of soundscapes of both peace and war. Despite its culturally specific and ethnic-based roots, the *inanga* remains a rich symbol of contemporary Rwandan cultural unity communicating equally to both Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups. It is part of the contemporary everyday soundscape of Rwanda, despite the omnipresence of the sounds of electric guitars and keyboards and the popular hits of artists such as Meddy, Diplomat, Miss Jojo, and The Ben. The acoustic, plucked through-strung *inanga* now functions as a musical badge of identity for members of all Rwandan ethnic groups (Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa). The musical instrument continues to accompany the strong, historically situated lyrics of players trained in a centuries-old tradition while simultaneously introducing newer, frequently vetted socially responsible lyrics that address important national issues such as unity and reconciliation. More than a simple 'trough zither', the *inanga* now contributes significantly to the emergent identity of a country still recovering from the horrendous genocide experienced in 1994, while "I", a humble postgraduate student at Brown University, lived just across the border in neighbouring Tanzania and heard about bodies surfacing in Lake Victoria as they floated down through tributaries, often blocking water sources. At the time, I remember feeling helpless and without hope. Ultimately, I was shocked and horrified to learn of the role of the *inanga* in the production of specific hate campaigns that led to the genocide and on the airwaves, contributing to violence, destruction, and annihilation. With its prior royal court associations, the *inanga* could have easily disappeared from historical memory in the ensuing decades. That it remains a part of the contemporary Rwanda soundscape - and in a significant way - is a lesson about the endurance of special aspects of material and expressive culture.

The recordings featured on both the *Inanga* documentary film and audio-recording that I produced in 2011 were made over the course of two summers (2009 and 2010) in an attempt to document the role of the *inanga* musical instrument prior to and after the Rwandan genocide. In conjunction with local Rwandan musician Théogène Niwenshuti, I made my way through the Rwandan countryside for several months at a time from the northern volcanic region to the western Congolese border areas, up the Nyanza mountainous regions

and down to the Southern district surrounding Butare and in the lush central areas surrounding the capital city of Kigali. Recording traditional musicians, dancers, and singers along the way convinced me that a resurgence of musical activity, especially drawing on local, traditional sensibilities, was in fact re-stabilising a post-genocide culture in addition to contributing to governmental mandates related to unity and reconciliation that not only prescribed what issues I could focus on, but with whom. More importantly, the deliberate goal of glancing back in time and positioning the *inanga* within the historical lineage of blockage and flow is intended to support the importance of foci on expressive culture in the production, maintenance, and destruction of tradition.

The research project for which I was granted national research clearance plainly outlines what questions I could ask about the genocide and what I could not, not to restrict my research, but to protect the people and communities with whom I was working. I soon found that, by seemingly moving away from the genocide and focusing on contemporary post-genocide issues, I was in fact able to approach key historical notions related to the genocide in a circuitous way. The politics of this seemingly prescriptive research stipulation was echoed in the exasperation felt by many of my research colleagues to the curious overemphasis of scholarly projects related to the genocide in Rwanda:

You American ethnomusicologists and film makers come to Rwanda and all you want to talk to us about is the genocide. The genocide this [...] the genocide that. We have suffered. We have suffered for so long. Now we need to recover. So, when we sing about unity and reconciliation, you people need to listen.²

During the summer of 2010, I returned to film and record the great *inanga* player Kirusu Thomas and document his life story. The fact that the musician had died two weeks prior to my return to Rwanda, which might have seemed initially to be a significant setback, turned out to afford me a significant opportunity to focus on generational inheritance of culture and history. My research agenda had never been to retell the horrors of the 100 days of mass slaughter of nearly 800.000 Tutsi and Hutu sympathisers. Rather, the objective of my

2 Théogène “Totto” Niwenshuti, personal communication, 2010.

documentation project was to listen carefully to the voices of recovery as an entire country worked to heal and to reconcile living together in a united and peaceful Rwanda. That such a 'simple' musical instrument as the *inanga* can be understood as contributing, even in a small way, to both blockage and flow of culture memory and cultural traditions is profound in the lived experience of contemporary Rwandans.

3. Brief history of Rwanda

Landlocked in East Africa, the Republic of Rwanda is bordered by Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The republic is mountainous with terraced farms covering the lush hills and valleys of the country. Rwanda became a German colony in 1890 after the Berlin Conference of 1885 when Africa was divided between dominant European nations. German occupation of Rwanda continued until 1916, when Belgian troops took control of the region following the First World War. A United Nations mandate in 1946 made Rwanda a trust territory of the Belgian League of Nations and the region was combined with Burundi. Thus, Rwanda-Urundi experienced administrative control by Europeans who were also occupying the Central African Congo region. After nearly a century of colonial rule, Rwanda became an independent nation in 1962.

Historically, the Rwanda region has been home to three ethnic groups, namely the Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa (at present, the Twa comprise a 1% minority in the region and are considered to be the region's original inhabitants).³ The Hutu and the Tutsi have long been categorised as distinct, yet they have long spoken the same language and share deep cultural traditions. The historic conflict between the Hutu and the Tutsi that led to the genocide of 1994 did not, however, always exist between the two communities. Before colonisation, the Hutu and the Tutsi are thought to have lived peacefully with group distinction only established by colonial occupation. The Tutsis – a defined elite 10% minority – owned cattle, while the majority of the Hutu worked as agricultural labourers. It was not until the later Belgian occupation and a mandate to carry authority-issued

3 The distinction of 'ethnicity' in this regard – especially between the Hutu and the Tutsi – has long been debated and problematised according to who is empowered to tell the story of the history of these ethnic groups.

identity cards in 1933 that the ethnic distinction became a racially determined barrier. Historically, the Tutsi people were thought to have a taller build and lighter skin than their Hutu neighbours, who were perceived as shorter with darker skin. The Belgian authority favoured the Tutsis, because their physical features were perceived as stereotypically more 'European' than the Hutus. Consequently, Belgian-issued identity cards frequently underscored appearance and resulted in cattle ownership and other forms of economic and educational privilege. The barrier between the Hutu and the Tutsi grew into a significant ethnic conflict, forcing many Tutsis into exile before the Hutu assumed authority of the region after Rwanda's colonial independence. As conflicts in the area became increasingly violent, there were 700,000 Tutsi living in exile by 1990. The Tutsi exiles established a movement called the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in neighbouring Uganda. In 1990, the RPF invaded Rwanda in an attempt to reclaim their homeland. The Tutsi attempted to strike an agreement with the Hutu President of Rwanda in order to reclaim political power. The invasion intensified the ethnic tension created by colonial rule to a breaking point. Violence continued until what many thought were 'official' peace agreements, known as the Arusha Accords, signed in 1993, which in theory ended the internal war begun with the RPF invasion. A peacekeeping mission – the United Nations Assistance Mission to Rwanda (UNAMIR) – was launched at that time to supervise the separation of government between the Hutu and the Tutsi in the region.

4. Rwandan genocide

On 6 April 1994, while I was still living in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, the presidents of both Rwanda and Burundi were assassinated when their plane was shot down en route to the Kigali airport after it had left my home city of Dar es Salaam; the genocide that ensued in Rwanda was instantaneous. Within an hour, a culture of terror gripped the country and the Hutu majority began a killing spree of any and all Tutsi people. Over the next 100 days, an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate or sympathetic Hutus were slaughtered. The Interahamwe, a Hutu paramilitary group, was the main institutional source for planning and executing the murder spree throughout the country,

although much of the Hutu-led government in Rwanda was implicated in organising, inciting, and funding the genocide. Although acts of cruelty too numerous to mention were committed, no country came to aid. UNAMIR withdrew as the world watched, initially deeming the genocide a 'civil war' that did not necessitate the involvement of foreign authority. The RPF, led by Paul Kagame (Rwanda's current president), fought their way through Rwanda, ultimately ending the genocide in July 1994. Only 15% of the Tutsi minority population remained after the genocide.

The perpetrators of the genocide fled in numbers greater than 1,7 million to neighbouring Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo) to the west. Harboring both victims and perpetrators, refugee camps were established along all borders of Rwanda. Hutu militia began attacking from camps in Zaire, creating a conflict zone and a threatening military presence along Rwanda's western border. The Tutsi rebels founded an initial government with Pasteur Bizimungu as president and Paul Kagame as vice president. Bizimungu, a Hutu, was specifically elected to support national unity; he remained in power until his resignation in 2000. Paul Kagame subsequently became president of Rwanda and spent a significant amount of his early time as president promoting reconciliation and cracking down on crime. Since his initial term, Rwanda has contributed to vast improvements in economic, social and political areas.

Despite the success of Kagame's governmental initiatives, an impossible dilemma remained in Rwanda after the genocide. The country had an overwhelming number of criminals responsible for the genocide and few resources to attempt imprisoning offenders. The majority of the chief perpetrators responsible for planning and funding the genocide had already fled the country, leaving jails in Rwanda overcrowded with those publicly accused of perpetrating genocide crimes. It was estimated that the process to try all accused criminals would take over 100 years. In 2001, Rwanda revived the local, traditional Gacaca court system originally created to settle disputes within small communities. The grass roots Gacaca system elects judges from respective communities to attend and adjudicate in order to try the accused from a locally informed perspective. With the intention to expedite a crippled court system, normal terms for crimes began to reduce drastically, and many genocide offenders were released

from prison upon submission of a confession. Consequently, tens of thousands of prisoners have been released in Rwanda since 1993.

5. Post-genocide unity and reconciliation efforts in Rwanda

In many ways, the music of *Inanga*, both the documentary film and the audio-recording, documents contemporary efforts to address the effects, the deep cultural wounds produced by the slaughter of nearly one million Tutsi-identified people by fellow Rwandans in the early 1990s.⁴ For institutional guidance on the documentation project, I first sought council and research clearance from the Commission on National Unity and Reconciliation and the Ministry of Culture, both located in Rwanda's capital, Kigali. The National University of Rwanda's research division in Butare granted additional research clearance.

In 1998, the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) was established as a semi-autonomous national institution, now provided for by the National Constitution, with the aim of eradicating the devastating consequences of the policies of discrimination and exclusion that had characterised the successive repressive regimes of Rwanda. Although the issues of unity and reconciliation were first raised in the Arusha Peace Accord of 1993, the massacres and genocide of 1994 raised these issues of national concerns. Since its establishment, the NURC has provided a platform where Rwandans of all social conditions can improve the problems of the young republic, especially those related to unity and reconciliation. It is within these cultural institutions that contemporary music-making has been intentionally inserted into the political soundscape of the nation. Traditional musicians are often tapped by such institutions due to their ability to communicate a sense of hope and reconciliation at both national and grass roots levels.

4 The documentary film is available for free streaming at <www.globalmusicarchive.org/>

6. Music and the *inanga* in Rwanda

Historical musical traditions in Rwanda are thought to have been primarily vocal. Dynastical praise songs (*urugera*), wrestling songs (*amusare*), hunting songs (*amabigi*), war songs (*indirimbo z'ingabo*), pastoral songs (*amabambo*), and choral songs (*ibibozo*) comprise the majority of these inherited traditional song genres.⁵ A number of local instruments continue to be played in rural contexts, including a variety of drums (*ingoma*), aerophones (*ummwirongi* and *urusengo*), lamellaphone (*ikembe*), chordophones (*inigiri*, *umuchiri* and *imango*), and the great *inanga* trough zither (*cithare* in French). The one-string *umuduri* chordophone is thought to have been relatively recently introduced to Rwanda, at least since the turn of the twentieth century (Kanimba & Mesas 2003: 69). Rwandan music after colonisation was heavily influenced by European musical sensibilities as well as later Muslim and African American musical traditions. Since the 1960s, however, traditional music began reasserting itself by being infused into Christian liturgical practice and as a response to the formation of *ballets*, national dance troupes were formed in order to present local music and dance traditions to both local and international audiences.

Before the founding of the Republic until the end of the royal Tutsi dynasty in 1961, music in Rwanda was dominated by court traditions that included a long tradition of musical and poetic performances involving the *inanga*. It should be noted, however, that from the onset music performed on the *inanga* was distinct from the traditions of the Hutu and the Twa peoples co-existing with the Tutsi. The musical repertoire of *inanga*, the “queen of all Rwandan musical instruments” according to Sibomana Atanase, underwent significant expansion during the reigns of Rwabugiri and Musinga, Tutsi *mwamis* (kings) from 1860-1931 (*cf* Gansemans 1990). After the fall of the Tutsi dynasty, the historic *inanga* repertoire all but fell out of existence, save for the efforts of a few players formerly associated with the court. The *inanga* entered a transitional period leading up to the genocide. It was played by both Hutu and Tutsi performers alike, yet the songs performed on the *inanga* maintained textual links directly back to the monarchical heritage as a Tutsi-defined musical instrument. In contemporary post-genocide Rwanda, the *inanga*

5 *Cf* Kanimba & Mesas (2003) for more information on these traditions.

contributes significantly to a pan-Rwandan soundscape that is neither Hutu nor Tutsi.

The *inanga* is typically constructed of a single piece of blond hard wood with a series of ten or eleven notches on each end of the nearly four-foot long instrument. At present, the instrument is through-strung with manufactured string or cord, while animal tendons or wound fibres were typically used in the past. Smaller versions of the instrument are still found with eight or fewer strings, although larger stringed versions are more typically representative. The tuning system applied to individual instruments varies according to the preferences and vocal range of the performer, although all examples recorded for this collection rely primarily on a pentatonic tuning system, typically with an anhemitonic ambitus - the strings are tuned so that there are no semitones in the complete scale created by the pitch set grouping.

As a scholar of African musical cultures, I have long embraced the presence of change and adaptation. After all, “modernity happened!” as Tanzanian composer and choir director Gideon Mdegella once told me (*cf* Barz 2004). No, my real research began several years ago when I first confronted the efforts of the great elder *inanga* player Kirusu Thomas to make meaning out of the recent genocide and the national promotion of efforts to bring unity and reconciliation to his country. It surprised me that he would pick up his *inanga* and sing through his reactions and play through his responses. Kirusu’s untimely death at a critical point in my project opened many doors and opportunities, as I mentioned earlier, none as significant as a shift in focus towards Kirusu’s daughter, the *inanga* player Sophie Nzayisenga. With a new focus on the transmission of tradition, from one generation to another, “the sound of survival in a daughter’s Rwanda” is not only documented and preserved; it is lovingly displayed as a gift of cultural resilience as demonstrated in the lyrics of Sophie’s ‘*Twiyegeranye*’ [‘Let’s come together’]:

Hey Rwandans, all of you who are who still alive
Let us come close together and talk about equality
Me, I sing the praises of reconciliation
Our equality will be the beginning and source of overflowing peace

Peace will bring the better life we have always dreamed of

Remembering our unity helps us attain reconciliation
Reconciliation in Rwanda reminds us where we come from

Let us look back and remember where we come from
Let us abandon this deep sorrow we lived through

Come on, let us sit together in the Gacaca courts and debate what has
happened to us and use these words—unity and reconciliation
Without being suspicious of going into the houses of one another,
without halting our steps
Without avoiding being like someone afraid of visiting another
Helping to take care of one another is a traditional core value still
valued today
Let us come together with one vision
Me, I am singing the praises of reconciliation

Sitting in the front room of her small compound, Sophie discusses her role as a mother, a player of the *inanga*, teacher, and daughter of a famous *inanga* player. She readily admits to the changes she has introduced and the adaptations she has made to the historical performance tradition of “her ancestors”, but she frames her comments within the context of finding ways of maintaining the older traditions within contemporary Rwandan culture:

Before the genocide, the *inanga* might have been associated by some with the historic, royal Tutsi court of the Tutsi *mwami* [king]. Now, we are all Rwandans. No more Hutus and Tutsis. So, the *inanga* is of all Rwandans and for all Rwandans [...] My names are Sophie Nzayisenga. I play the *inanga*. I am a Rwandan woman.⁶

Sophie’s musical interventions are a direct response to growing up in post-genocide Rwanda, but raised by an influential musician of established pre-genocide musical traditions. Before leaving the elder Kirusu Thomas’s village for the first time in 2009, I noticed a young nine-year-old boy pick up one of the *inangas* stacked against a tree and silently strum its strings as if he knew the basic finger-picking patterns. I stopped packing up my equipment and asked the *muze* about the boy and whether any of the youth had been interested in picking up the *inanga* tradition. He smiled as he told me that Théogène is his brother’s youngest child who plays the *inanga* just like his uncle. When he asked if we would like to record the boy playing the same piece that he himself had recorded for me earlier in

6 Interview with author, 2010.

the day, I eagerly agreed. Young Théogène was surprised when asked to play, but he eagerly placed his uncle's *inanga* (which was bigger than he was) between his legs and began to play. The other musicians present in the village began to play along with the young boy, but his elderly father asked them to refrain so that we could focus on recording his young son's playing. Théogène not only demonstrates a strong plucking technique on the *inanga* and a clear, youthful singing voice, but perhaps more importantly he was clearly able to captivate and hold the attention of everyone in the village who halted their return to the fields to hear the young boy perform the direct lyrics of 'Shirimpumu' ['Take a deep breath, Rwanda']:

You must take a deep breath and feel at peace, our beautiful Rwanda
Let us give [Rwanda] ululations
You the cloth [cloth that holds babies on the mother's back] that holds us
Now that we have the time, let us give you beautiful gifts that come from what you gave us
Your heroes showed Rwandans a good path without fighting each other in war
They worked hard with courage, you gave us our culture
They gave us back our Rwandan strength
They opened up the path for progress, that progress needs a developed economy
Rwanda is now bound together by happiness
We elected our leaders, in the villages and sectors there is security
Our unity as Rwandans is characterized by tolerance
There is no discrimination among Rwandans
Let us love our country and contribute to its development
Let us fight for and promote security for all people and their possessions
We will shout for joy and there will no longer be gossip among Rwandans
There is a Rwandan proverb, 'Humanity grows when you physically leave your home to visit that of another' Rwandans have communion, we meet and talk, no one halts their steps or is afraid or suspicious
And all of these good things are a result of our Rwandan heroes
Let us stand together and build our country
Let us support our country and give it hope for the future
Where does intolerance among the descendants of Rwanda come from?
We can find its origin from people outside Rwanda
Poverty and racial and ethnic discrimination? In Africa this has become a permanent problem
If contemporary Rwanda cooperates with all of Africa and has relationships among peoples of Rwanda
Everything that holds us back will be overcome forever
Long live Rwandan unity! Long live Rwanda and its inhabitants
Let us have real peace that links unity and compassion so we can always live in Rwanda

7. The *inanga* as cultural translator

Taylor concludes his study of the genocide in Rwanda (2002) by suggesting that the mass murders committed in 1994 were cultural violations motivated by local (mis-)understandings of blockage and flow. When Kirusu Thomas sings directly in ‘Amahoro meza’ [‘Real peace’] about the need to meet fellow villagers in his community “without fear” and “without halting your steps towards another”, he directly refers to the specific cultural blockage that occurred in many rural communities in his village network, inhibiting the direct flow of community interactions with his neighbours. He musically suggests that support among community members should be able to reciprocate in this way and that “things coming in should then go out”. For Kirusu, the violence of obstruction can only be improved by means of a new re-translation of the flow which once existed among his people. Similar to her father’s efforts, Sophie echoes her father in ‘Twiyegeranye’ [‘Let’s come together’], specifically about the need to attend the Gacaca traditional courts without fear of entering each other’s’ houses (thus without being blocked from entry), and “without halting our steps”. However, Sophie adds the additional element of peace and the potential for an “overflowing” resultant equality between Hutus and Tutsis. The third song text, quoted in this article, sung by the young boy, Muhire Théogène, is perhaps the most poignant in terms of music’s passionate ability to (re-)translate the historic conceptualisation of flow in contemporary Rwandan culture. Young Théogène mirrors the lyrical efforts of both Kirusu and Sophie by invoking an old Rwandan proverb, suggesting that humanity only grows when one is able to leave one’s home to visit that of another and when “no one halts their steps or is afraid or suspicious”. Heroes have historically unblocked, or “opened up” paths allowing for such progress, according to Théogène’s lyrics. He takes this blockage/flow metaphor one step further by concluding that all who have held Rwandans back and all things that have not allowed for proper flow will be “overcome forever” when his countrymen embrace and cooperate with one another.

8. Conclusion

I conclude by revealing a deliberate act of intervention. As a condition of the research clearance granted for the field research necessary to complete this project of musical (re-)translation, the RNURC requested that I offer something in return, my own “song of unity reconciliation”, if you will. I took this mandate seriously and consulted with several cultural specialists as to what form this musical contribution should take. Over time, I came to realise that, due to a presumed conflict between the pentatonic tuning system of the historical *inanga* and the tuning system used in Western popular music, there had not yet been an effort to bring the *inanga* into the popular recording studio. A few months earlier, I had produced a hip hop recording focused on AIDS and other socially conscious themes in Uganda (Barz 2010). Thus I began to develop a recording strategy that could facilitate the flow of *inanga* songs into contemporary musical cultures in Rwanda. In a small, dark recording studio in the predominantly Muslim area of Nyamirambo in Kigali, “Bizab the Brain” works as a recording engineer. On a challenge, Bizab reluctantly agreed to sample a riff from a field recording I made of the young Sophie playing *inanga* and bring in a few local MCs to the studio to rap about one of the main themes of the *Inanga* documentary: the transmission of the historic *inanga* musical tradition in contemporary Rwanda. According to Bizab the Brain’s initial reaction to the challenge:

It cannot be done. No one has ever sampled the *inanga* in Rwanda.
The beats are not the same - they won’t work. Do *not* have any hope
that anything will come from this!

After two intensive days in the studio, the track “Inanga Nyarwanda” emerged as a solid, captivating interpretation in a musical way not yet introduced in the Rwandan music industry. Rather than hiding or absorbing the sampled *inanga* riff, Bizab foregrounds the aggressive playing style of Sophie, highlighting both the rhythmic opportunities she affords the composition as well as positioning her playing within an aural framework for the track. Her dynamic approach on the *inanga* lends itself well to not getting buried in the many layers of sound Bizab uses in the composition. Both engineer and performer were highly pleased and impressed with their product. In fact, they could not stop smiling when they first played the final cut for me.

Both admitted that no one had yet successfully reconciled historical performance styles with popular performance styles in such a way that features the *inanga*. “This cut is going to be hot in Rwanda!” Bizab kept repeating. The MC spits his lyrics in an older rapping style at first and then, after a chorus sung in the pentatonic tuning of the *inanga*, he begins to spit in a newer rapping style now common in the Rwandan hip hop scene. He spits about the need to draw on his country’s older musical styles and embrace them in order to live in a unified Rwanda, a peaceful Rwanda, as Sophie’s *inanga* sample transcends the beat.

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