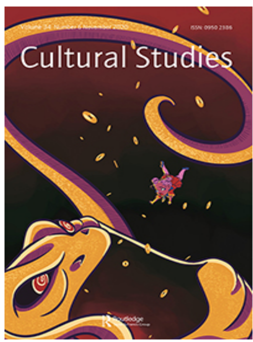

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Rwandan music-makers negotiate shared cultural identities after genocide: the case of Orchestre Impala's revival

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ABSTRACT

In the sensitive post-genocide cultural landscape of Rwanda, this research considers the significance of the recent revival of a musical group that was first popular in the pre-genocide Habyarimana era. Orchestre Impala was perhaps the most popular musical group of the late 1970s and 1980s, and its revival represents something of a novelty in Rwanda's national cultural politics. Perhaps, we suggest, this may reflect a certain 'normalization' of culture, and a sense of continuity in Rwanda. Drawing on personal contacts with musicians, supporters, and observers, we conducted informal interviews, and analysed lyrics of songs still sung, those left behind and those newly created. What emerged was a careful and conscious process of selective recovery of past songs, and the creation of new songs, unified by their association with a genre known as *igisope*, a term explained in the article. Song texts, translated from the Kinyarwanda, are analysed as a form of historical commentary on the times that Orchestre Impala musicians survived and now find themselves in. We found that Orchestre Impala has been revived with great caution and sensitivity for the post-genocide context in Rwanda. Its popularity draws on shared social imaginaries across generations of Rwandans, and the band's revival seems to signal improved possibilities in future for coming to terms with Rwanda's pre-genocide past. We tentatively propose that revival of Orchestre Impala both reflects and helps to generate elements of cultural continuity in Rwandans' musical landscape. The demands of surviving commercially as a band, implies that political praise-songs remain part of Orchestre Impala's song repertoire today as during the Habyarimana era.

KEYWORDS Popular music; *igisope*; Rwanda; cultural revival; Orchestre Impala; negotiating

> '… music is constitutive of social agency in the sense of appropriating wider social, cultural and political conditions to the individual – the process of reconnecting personal and social change' (Sutherland and DeNora 2011, p. 83).

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Introduction

No art form can be neutral or apolitical after genocide. The prosecution at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda of popular musician, Simon Bikindi, seemed to show this, since his song lyrics urged no mercy for Tutsi, prior to and during the Rwanda genocide (Snyder 2006, McCoy 2009). In contrast to 'hate music', the 'social healing' potential of music in Rwanda has so far received relatively little scholarly attention. However, an interesting body of work on music and reconciliation in Rwanda has recently started to emerge. This study hopes to contribute to this rethinking of music in a post-genocide society like Rwanda (Barz 2012, Swanson 2014, Mwambari 2019) There has been some work on theatre as a medium of reconciliation (Kalisa 2006) and on the role of Rwandan radio soaps in promoting social cohesion (Hintjens and Bayisenge 2011). A few studies have explored music's potential as a means for conflict transformation elsewhere in East Africa (for example Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2002). As the opening quotation conveys, musicality connects isolated human beings emotionally, through a shared and embodied sociocultural experience (Molna-Szakacs and Overy 2011). This study examines Rwandan popular music and is intended to be exploratory. The aim is to consider how musicality can contribute to is termed 'positive peace' in a way that promotes social justice for the most marginalized in society (Galtung 1969).

In this article, we focus specifically on the revival of Orchestre Impala, a band that was very popular during the Habyarimana era, from 1973 until 1989 or so, when the group disbanded. We consider elements of cultural expression that have survived almost intact for forty years or more and continued to evolve since after the genocide.

We show how some songs in the band's repertoire were left behind, being out of tune (as it were) with social norms, laws and mores in post-genocide Rwanda. The band's relaunch was an unusual and notable cultural event, and potentially of importance as a musical event that was: 'embedded in a pervasive socio-centric worldview that focuses on persons not as individuals per se, but as integral parts of communities … the interface between the spiritual realm, the individual and the group' (Monteiro and Wall 2011, pp. 238–239). Just as musical forms need to show sensitivity to: ' … the embodiment of certain values and ideas' including ideas of 'national belonging, leadership and the contemporary political zeitgeist' (Berthomé and Houseman 2010, p. 62), so too music and lyrics reflect this zeitgeist. For some, song lyrics can be treated as akin to 'journalism', as a form of historical documentation among others. Mano suggests that:

> ' … popular musicians, music performance and lyrics at times complement and even more effectively express what journalists fail to communicate … in contexts

> where public communication spaces are constrained, censorship is high or where political communication is monopolized by a few people' (Mano 2007, p. 62).

To test this proposition, we present the lyrics of several Orchestre Impala songs in the second half of the article and explore to what extent, once relaunched, the band aimed to communicate social realities as a form of 'journalism'. It may be that what is quite characteristic of popular music lyrics in the Zimbabwean context does not apply in Rwanda, however. The lyrics that have survived seem less to record events or news, than to express timeless qualities about love, life and the everyday (Mano 2007, see also Zimunya 1993). Nonetheless, song lyrics are worth looking at closely since they spring from – and also reveal – shared understandings of the social and moral world; of culture (Mano 2007). In Rwanda, as elsewhere: 'It is due to this common cultural context rooted in shared experiences that a song … acquires its social agency' and that it ' … resonates with the political impulses and anxieties' of the time (Nyairo and Ogude 2005, p. 239).

What shapes the cultural context in Rwanda first and foremost is the shadow cast by genocide, and priority of 'Never Again', embodied in law under the ruling party. The regime under which Orchestre Impala originally flourished is now indelibly associated with genocide, so that at first sight, revival of this popular band from the Habyarimana era of the 1970s and 1980s seems a contradiction, or at least an unlikely occurrence in post-genocide Rwanda. We show how this revival arose from the desire for cultural continuity. This revival required some thoughtful justification and negotiation if it was to be considered acceptable and legitimate in the new Rwanda.

Once the most popular band in Rwanda, in 2012 Orchestre Impala was revived in a new form in 2012 and once again became a creative force on the local musical scene. In one sense, this may appear rather banal; popular bands come and go all the time. In the Rwandan context, however, the careful and highly selective acts of cultural revival involved, merit closer attention, given the sensitivity of a post-genocide cultural scene. How the musicians negotiated this delicate task, and what motivated the revival, are two intriguing questions that have guided this research.

Known as *igisope* (the origin and symbolism of term are explained more fully in a later section of this article), Orchestre Impala's style of music was eclipsed and marginalized for some years before the band was relaunched. Such musical styles were closely associated with a tainted past of Hutu domination prior to the genocide. In spite of such negative associations, the band's revival did not meet with any perceptible resistance or disapproval from either the authorities or the public. This led us to posit that the revival could be taken as a sign of shared cultural identities emerging around historical memories for at least some of those who went through genocide. Traces of pre-genocide Rwandan cultural life are revived through the band's presence, and perhaps

we hoped this meant that Rwandans have started to come to terms with memories of the past. By engaging in cultural renewal, could this revival even potentially contribute to reconciliation, social peace and healing in Rwanda?

Supported by a small Aegis Trust[1] grant, we set out to speak to band members and supporters, engaging in informal interviews, observation and conversations through Skype as well as face-to-face. Within our networks and contacts with the band in the past, we started to piece together the story of how the band collapsed in the late 1980s, and how its revival came about in 2012. What emerged clearly was that those relaunching Orchestre Impala wished to avoid any negative associations with the divisive ideologies of the past. By demonstrating their commitment to the New Rwanda, they hoped to manage a smooth transition. In a modest way, we aim to fill a gap in the literature on Rwandan popular musical forms of the 1970s-1980s. In a nutshell, we propose to illustrate our key finding, starting with theorizing music and shared identities, before explaining about *igisope* music and the band's history, and then looking at some selected lyrics. Overall, we consider the revival a potentially powerful instrument for bringing Rwandans together, mending hurts and creating shared bodily experiences that transcend time (Urbain 2008, 2016).

Why Orchestre Impala?

Orchestre Impala was originally formed at around the time of the coup that brought Juvenal Habyarimana to power as President, in 1973. In 1974, the MRND (*Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement* or Revolutionary National Movement for Development) was formed, and remained a single party under President Habyarimana until multi-party reforms were imposed on Rwanda early in the 1990s. Orchestre Impala fell apart around 1989 before genocide ideology really took hold of the MRND and other political parties' 'Hutu power' wings.

According to Brent Swanson's (who completed a doctoral study on another Rwandan musician who worked explicitly for peace, Jean-Paul Samputu), by the 1980s, Orchestre Impala was the most popular band in Rwanda (Swanson 2014, p. 95). Audiences were attracted by the band's: 'unique and eclectic style [combining] … elements of traditional Rwandan music … a bit of [Zairean] Rumba and other genres of African music' (*New Times*, November 14, 2012). A hybrid of folk music, Kinyarwanda poetry, Congolese rhythms and lyrics, their music was well adapted to the mood of ceremonial occasions and the everyday rituals of many Rwandans.

Commercially successful, the dance music style incorporated Rwandan rhythms and lyrics and popular Congolese zouk and highlife elements. The band's music was – and still is – played at New Year, at state ceremonial gatherings, and at family events, as well as on the radio. At home and abroad, almost all Rwandans knew – and many still know – most of Orchestre Impala's musical

repertoire (New Times 2018). Prior to 1989, the band performed around the country and even overseas; Orchestre Impala was one of a handful of Rwandan bands to record and sell albums commercially before the genocide.

Before we celebrate the popularity of Orchestre Impala, it needs to be noted that popular music in Rwanda long ago lost its innocence. Prior to and during the genocide, the songs of Simon Bikindi embodied Hutu power ideology, and the singer called on Hutu to be ruthless to Tutsi Rwandans (Snyder 2006). In 2008 Bikindi was sentenced at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, in Arusha in the now well-known 'media trial'. He was not sentenced for the hateful lyrics of his songs, however, but for a speech made during the genocide, where he explicitly incited Hutus to kill Tutsis. Yet his notoriety as a musician who sang the musical equivalent of 'hate speech' led to his being tried in Arusha in the first place (McCoy 2009, Urbain 2016). Given this context, it can be understood why for many Rwandans, pre-1994 music might be equated with a threatening and hostile past, and with the ideology that led up to the collective crime of genocide. For those returning to Rwanda from the diaspora after decades in exile, Rwandan popular music from before the genocide did not necessarily resonate with or have the positive association it had for 'old timers', for whom the appeal of this music cut across many differences, from those who were genocide survivors to those suspected or convicted of crimes of genocide (Saarikallio 2012, p. 482). Nostalgia for the 'old days' was more or less taboo after 1994, and for some years, formal cultural revival seemed unlikely.

As a set of hybrid musical forms, old time music by Rwandan bands can be compared to 'oldies' on the radio. Given the extremely traumatic memories of genocide that come between the present and the pre-genocide past, however, cultural revival of old-time popular music could be highly problematic. Nostalgic feelings connected with this kind of music has been transmitted in part through the radio, partly through YouTube videos, and by bands playing live in bars and hotels.[2] When played live, *igisope* music involves improvisation for specific settings and audiences (Ighile 2012, p. 104). For Rwandans living in Rwanda before 1994, much of the popular music from the pre-genocide era – the Hutu power political songs excepted – recalls earlier, happier times, before war, and before Hutu power ideology was geared towards a 'final solution'. For these Rwandans, 'old time' music creates: ' … experiences of ease, relaxation, a heightened sense of awareness and feelings of unity' with others, and immersion in a common Rwandan musical history (Saarikallio 2012, p. 482).

Musicality and shared cultural identities in Rwanda

It can be noted that music is about more than audiences and performance; making popular music involves transmitting, and influencing, some of our

'deepest values' (Trehub, Becker and Morley 2015: np). Peace studies use the term 'value creation' to mean ' … the capacity to find meaning, to enhance one's own existence and contribute to the well-being of others, under any circumstance' (Ikeda 2001, p. 100 cited in Urbain 2016, p. 3). This would include at the margins of a society beset by legacies of past violence, war and genocide, like Rwanda. Pruitt suggests that 'positive' peace is a: ' … type of peace [that] requires a shift in 'cultural norms'' (Pruitt 2011, p. 209). It is sometimes proposed that participation in the arts can support this process of 'value creation. For psychologists, music and the arts enable common identification beyond what speech can achieve. The focus here is on music's capacity to promote peaceful outcomes, and to express resistance to oppression, however, defined. In various contexts:

> 'The use of expressive arts therapy as a way of healing from … trauma … has been recognized by researchers and therapists. Right now, various therapeutic groups and therapists are using the expressive arts, including the visual arts, dance, drama, and music. They are all working together with the common goal of helping the victims of trauma cope with their feelings of fear, anger, and anxiety' (Al-Ajarma 2010, p. 34).

This quotation refers to the Palestinian context but might as well apply to Rwanda today. By combining insights from peace and conflict studies, musicology, cultural and media studies, feminism and development studies, we explore how popular music helps forge new relationships, whilst disempowering appeals to division and violence. In post-war and post-genocide settings, however, the growing appeal of the arts for those seeking positive outcomes and social healing is well-known (McDonald, Kreutz and Mitchell 2012; Swallow 2002). Yet this hope should not lead to naïve, over-optimistic expectations as to what the arts on their own, or music, can achieve in terms of peacebuilding (see Jeremic 2018; Zelizer 2003). As David Mwambari comments:

> … as seductive as the notion may be, the mythol-ogy of a therapeutic art transcending political division and palliating the traumatized has certainly not been the universal experience in Rwanda (Mwambari 2019, p. 13).

Most studies of popular music tend to focus on audience perceptions and reception (Lesaffre et al. 2017 Tsioulakis and Hytönen-Ng 2017,). The social dimensions of music involve negotiating the meaning of past events and cultural forms in the present time. As Louise Gray explains: ' … one of the great powers of music is that it creates and binds communities of interest. It can sing, in a common language, of shared experiences, aspirations and dreams; it can memorialise the past and honor the dead' (Gray 2009, p. 78). This study focuses instead on meanings, and on song lyrics. This is based on the premise that lyrics can convey wider cultural and moral landscapes (Connell and Gibson 2003: 71).

Musical expression and lyrics not only convey meaning; they enable people to construct shared meanings among themselves and identify with one another through common experiences of listening to and playing music (Saarikallio 2012, pp. 482–484). This can explain why: 'the arts have been used for centuries to communicate the human experience in ways that have sometimes nurtured peace and other times fostered violence' (Shank and Schirch 2008, p. 218). Seeking to bridge the worlds of musical theory and musical practice, reflects on the importance of contextualizing any claims that music, as a tool, can 'achieve' this or that outcome. As he acknowledges: ' … the insight is that context largely determines what is written, painted, sculpted, sung or performed … the opposite of conventional wisdom which maintains that creation emerges out of some interior emotion, from an upwelling of passion or feeling' (Byrne 2013, p. 15). The context arises from the wider settings in which musicians grow up, meet and perform and elicit emotional responses from their audiences.

Methodologies and meaning: lyrics and narratives

Gaining insights from those most closely involved in the revival of Orchestre Impala, proved to be a matter of revisiting existing contacts in our social networks. By seeking out those willing to have informal interviews, we started to construct a picture of the events and personal decisions that led to the band's revival, and some insights into the consequences of this revival. In total, we spoke with contacts in Brussels, Kigali and London. This included face-to-face conversations and semi-structured interviews, Skype interviews, one group interview and e-mail correspondence. Through these conversations, we were able to speak to band members, musical producers, and a historian of genocide, between 2014 and 2015. All those we spoke to were either involved with the band in the 1970s and 1980s or were involved in its relaunch in 2012. This included interviews with the two last surviving members of the original band, both still in the current line-up (in early 2020). The much younger man who was instrumental in the relaunch in 2012, had steered these two older, original band members through a complex process, and we interviewed him as well. Before starting this study, we were both aware of Orchestre Impala and similar bands since the 1980s, including others like Les Huit Anges. We do not claim to be impartial, therefore; each of us more like an: 'active participant in the research process, influencing and being influenced by the expanding horizons of musical understanding' (O'Connell 2011, p. 113). We were fortunate that most of those we spoke to were already in our social networks. Given relations of trust were already established, we preferred to conduct informal, semi-structured or even unstructured interviews, to more formal, structured questions.

During the research process, what became clear was how: '(i)n such an investigative context, understanding becomes a form of self-understanding' (O'Connell 2011, p. 113). Our interviewees' trust in us enabled us to gain deeper insights into how the band members and those associated with the band viewed their recent musical production, their older songs, and the wider social and cultural implications of the revival of the band.

The interviews and informal discussions also proved vital to gathering data on hybrid forms of musical and cultural identities being negotiated by young and old in Rwanda today. It can be noted that we spoke only with men, asking them to talk about their experience of the revival. Combined with analysis of song lyrics, their insights form the basis of this study, and provide clues about the wider significance of Orchestre Impala's revival in contemporary Rwanda. Additional primary material was gathered from comments sections of websites and weblogs hosting Orchestre Impala songs. Since song lyrics were not copyrighted, we were spared the task of seeking permission to use them. We were able to film an Orchestre Impala concert in May 2015, with permission. There are other, similar recordings of recent Orchestre Impala concerts to be found on YouTube. All this gave us some rich insights into the band's repertoire, their live concerts and the audience, which songs they sing, and which they do not sing, when they perform.

This study did not seek to provide original data about how Rwandan audiences respond to the cultural revival involved in relaunching Orchestre Impala. Our concern is less with 'music hearing', at this stage, than with 'music-making' and negotiating cultural revival in the specific context of post-genocide Rwanda. As Begbie reminds us:

> Music is enacted, practiced, usually in tandem with other actions whose range is virtually limitless: entertainment, healing, courtship, identifying a group, celebrating a victory, and so on. The two most basic practices we might call simply 'music-making' … and 'music hearing' (Begbie 2017, p. 14).

Through dialogue with Rwandan musicians closely involved – and with those who knew the band in the past, as well as today – we were able to reconstruct choices made by the music-makers and identify some consequences of these choices.

The questions we ask are: Why did the band stop playing together during the late 1980s? Why did the band get back together again around 2012? More specifically, we ask how the relaunch of Orchestre Impala was decided on, and how its relaunch was negotiated. To be able to answer these questions, we explore the key phases in Orchestre Impala's recent history, including its birth and cultural production under the MRND2 to the late 1980s; its subsequent eclipse in the 1990s prior to the genocide of 1994, resulting in band members' deaths and dispersal; and finally, its recent, and carefully crafted, revival since 2012.

The band's song lyrics are then examined to show how they have been adapted to the new political dispensation in Rwanda. Some content analysis of song texts from the pre-genocide and contemporary Orchestre Impala repertoires helps identify specific cultural elements that have been retained, adapted or left behind. By analysing different kinds of song lyrics, we show that today, Orchestre Impala songs fall into three broad categories:

(i) Songs no longer be played in concerts or on the radio, which deal with aspects of the 'unacceptable past', or are now seen as irrelevant;
(ii) Songs that remain popular, a part of shared Rwandan popular culture, and are fully integrated into 'new Rwandan' cultural forms.
(iii) Songs composed around and associated with the revival of Orchestre Impala from 2012 onwards, including praise-songs for the present government.

In the last case, we show how contemporary praise songs for the new Rwanda share several features with Orchestre Impala political praise-songs of the Habyarimana era. Political sensitivity is required in dealing with shared cultural identities of Rwandans today, and the toxic legacies of genocide need frank acknowledgement. The negative associations of almost every cultural form and idea of the Habyarimana era, in the present, is not that surprising. Yet more than twenty years after the genocide against Tutsis, it may be time to re-evaluate the musical heritage of Rwandans, including from the Habyarimana era. It may now even become possible to acknowledge some of the powerfully integrative capacity of what is known as *igisope* popular music from the 1970s and 1980s, much of which was as far from Simon Bikindi's divisive lyrics as possible (Rieder and Elbert 2013). We treat the lyrics as a form of testimony to changing socio-cultural realities in Rwanda. First, however, we will explain the significance of the Kinyarwandan term, *igisope*.

Reinventing a musical idiom: *igisope*

Before looking at the story of Orchestre Impala in more detail, and at themes raised in informal interviews, as well as examining song lyrics, we briefly explore the significance of the term *igisope*, used to refer to music typical of Orchestre Impala and some other pre-genocide music bands. Strangely, the word *igisope* in Kinyarwanda refers to the acronym of a petrol company, SOPECYA (Société de Pétrole de Cyangugu), which traded petroleum and related products inside Rwanda before, during and after the genocide. How did a petrol station come to be associated with a kind of music? We now account for some of these puzzling connections.

The story is told that SOPECYA, formerly based in Cyangugu, in South West Rwanda, opened a new branch in Kigali in the early 1990s, shortly after the

war began, before the genocide. The owner of SOPECYA bought a 'strategic' plot in the capital, located near a major bend in the road leading to the city centre, an area known as le Plateau. Viateur Ruvunabagabo was a primary school pupil then. He remembered living next to the plot sold to SOPECYA, where a petrol station was opened. Later this became a garage, where cars were repaired. A bar and bus stop were added, and the venue became a convenient stopping-off and meeting point in Kigali. The expression: 'Duhurire kuri Sopecya' ('Let's meet at SOPECYA') became a catchphrase for Rwandans meeting in the capital (Skype Interview with Viateur Ruvunabagabo, former resident neighbour of SOPECYA/SOPETRAD, 3 August 2014).

The garage and petrol station stayed open throughout the war, and even during the genocide, as well as for a short while thereafter. As people returned to Kigali, searching for relatives and familiar faces from the past, they would arrange to meet 'at SOPECYA'. Amidst the devastation, people met, picking up the pieces of their lives (Skype Interview with Viateur Ruvunabagabo, former resident neighbour of SOPECYA/SOPETRAD, 3 August 2014). Those who returned from exile, were often curious about the significance of SOPECYA, which has remained a popular meeting place.

In this way, SOPECYA becomes both a visible and verbal marker, dividing those who had known and lived in Rwanda before the genocide, and those who had not, and who returning from exile were finding their way. Rwandans familiar with the Habyarimana era understood at once that 'at SOPECYA' marked a fragile link with their shared past; it was a rare point of continuity in a world turned upside-down.

After 1994, the term *umu-sopecya* (*aba-sopecya* in plural) or 'the people of SOPECYA', became a spontaneous nickname for Rwandans who lived in Rwanda before the genocide, and had remained or returned. As time passed the name became *umusope* (*abasope* in plural). The petrol station changed its name to SOPETRAD, but the name *umusope* stuck for those who regularly met here (Skype Interview with Viateur Ruvunabagabo, former resident neighbour of SOPECYA/SOPETRAD, 3 August 2014).

The same terminology gave birth to the expression, *igisope*, a term that refers to a musical culture associated with the *abasope*. In the immediate aftermath of genocide, as remaining Rwandans tried to re-establish their lives, singers, guitarists and other musicians returned to Kigali. To earn money, they started performing live. Most had been members of bands and cultural groups which the genocide had destroyed. Seeking the conviviality of the pre-genocide musical scene, audiences soon flocked to hear the musicians who had played in Orchestre Impala and other similar pre-genocide bands. Among the first venues where *igisope* musicians performed after the genocide, was Hotel Panafrique in the city centre. Concerts there in the late 1990s attracted people from all walks of life. Bahizi, a cultural critic and musical expert in Rwanda, recalls that a few years after the genocide,

igisope concerts started to become very popular again (Skype Interview with Olivier Bahizi, Rwandan-Belgian journalist, and writer, 13 July 2014). He continues to comment:

> It was in many ways a nostalgic endeavour. Most of those who had danced and known pre-genocide bands were confused as new genres and music from the rest of Africa and the world were making inroads into the Rwandan music industry and changing public tastes. Kinyarwanda lyrics and Rwandan musical styles were being gradually replaced, with rap and reggae. Those singers and musicians who had belonged to bands such as [Orchestre] Impala and Nyampinga, and who were still alive, got together and started playing again from around 1999. When they played at Hotel Panafrique, they introduced what was then called *sakanyonsa* (from Skype Interview with Olivier Bahizi, Rwandan-Belgian journalist, and writer, 13 July 2014).[3]

Hotel Panafrique was soon too small for the growing audiences, and bands moved to larger venues, including Hotel Chez Lando, in downtown Kigali. *Igisope* spread to other hotels and smaller bars, mainly in Kigali. As the music industry in Rwanda started to re-emerge and take off, *igisope* players continued playing in local pubs and hotels, most of them as 'bands with no name'. Bahizi notes that their music was starting to be heard outside Rwanda and was especially popular with Rwandans in the Great Lakes region diaspora, especially in Belgium, home to the most active Rwandan diaspora in Western Europe. A significant achievement of *igisope* at this early stage after the genocide was to help Rwandan musicians, including some who had returned from exile, or had survived the genocide, to make a living. By being paid to play music, they could recover, as well as share memories, and experience moments of joyfulness.

According to Bahizi, *igisope* is not an established musical genre, but a mode of musical expression, and a style of performance (Skype Interview with Olivier Bahizi, Rwandan-Belgian journalist, and writer, 13 July 2014). Ideally, such performances express a sense of continuity with the past, without resorting to divisiveness or political propaganda. Ruvunabagabo and Bahizi's accounts related above, are not the only kinds of accounts, however. One member of Orchestre Impala, Munyanshoza, provides an even broader definition of *igisope* than Ruvunabagabo and Bahizi. He defines it simply as: 'songs that were played on Radio Rwanda before [the genocide]' (Interview with Munyanshoza, 18 March 2015). With the destruction of Rwandan society by war and genocide, the fashion for *igisop*e music resembled the affection felt by an older generation (and sometimes their children) for 'oldies', which form the basis for nostalgia of young and old alike. *Igisope* includes many popular songs played on the radio in Rwanda before the genocide, it is true, but the term remains fluid and difficult to define. It expresses something important, however, about the complex, ambiguous relationship between past and present popular musical forms in Rwanda.

The possibility that *igisope* will come to be an established genre in its own right is manifest by how young Rwandan musicians have re-interpreted several old songs associated with the *igisope* genre. Their style, and even their music videos at times mimic the pre-genocide setting and expressions typical of *igisope*.[4] Orchestre Impala's legacy and the determination of its surviving former members were at the centre of the birth of *igisope*. As Brent Swanson argues, Orchestre Impala was:

> [the most] popular Rwandan group who combined Rwandan rhythms (mostly triple meter with accents on one in the first measure and one and two of the second measure) found throughout Rwanda with Congolese rumba […] The consensus among most musicians I have spoken with is that Orchestre Impala was one of the first bands to mix traditional rhythms with popular music (Swanson 2014, p. 95).

Associated with *igisope* was a new dance form, *sakanyonsa*, heavily influenced by the rhythms which Impala and other bands took over from Congolese 'highlife' or rumba. These are fused with traditional Rwandan dance rhythms of the: 'music that would accompany the *ukurambagiza* (couples courting dance) and *umushayayo* and *umushagiriro* dances … usually performed by women, with an emphasis on the elegance of gestures and movements and showing off the body' (Gansemans quoted in Swanson 2014, p. 236). The dance has 'a slow tempo and [is] danced with sliding steps' (Gansemans quoted in Swanson 2014, p. 237). The movement of the arms in slower Rwandan dances is intended to imitate the beauty of the *inyambo*, the royal court's long-horned cattle. As for Congolese rumba, this involves quick movements of the belly and hips, and is more up-tempo. *Sakanyonsa* combined traditional Rwandan dance-styles with Congolese rumba to produce a dance where the entire body moved, but with grace. In modernizing these songs, Orchestre Impala not only plays modern musical instrument to old melodies; it also, as previously mentioned, fuses the traditional popular forms with foreign influences, to create new types of dance, and therefore new forms of bodily expression in Rwandan culture.

Orchestre impala: from origins to revival

One of the two original co-founders of Orchestre Impala, Sebigeri, also known as Mimi La Rose, originally moved to Rwanda from Lubumbashi in today's DRC in 1974 (Interview with Sebigeri, Kigali, 5 July 2015a). He sought young people like himself, interested in playing music. He soon met Andre Sebanani in Kigali, who welcomed Sebigeri into his home, and they played guitar together. Shortly afterwards, other band members joined, including Jean Felix Gasasira (aka Soso Mado), and Jean Pierre Kalimunda (aka Kali wa Njenje). Their original name was Vox Pop, and things changed when they took part in a song-writing competition organized by the Habyarimana/MRND government. Their song

about land consolidation won – a theme still being pursued in agriculture today. Sebigeri recalls that:

> We became popular overnight and we were surprised. But the reason people liked us is because we introduced a new style. The Rwandan styles are usually calm and slow. But now we introduced new styles, warming up the Rwandan styles a bit, using the Zairian rhythms. I had come to Rwanda from Lubumbashi. Soso Mado, Kali wa Njenje, and Maitre Rubangi lived in Lubumbashi [before coming back home to Rwanda]. Only Sebanani, Gasigwa, Abdulatif aka Tubi Lando and Semu Jean Berchmas lived in Rwanda and had never left the country (Interview with Sebigeri, Sainte Famille, Kigali, 5 July 2015a).

The name Vox Pop was replaced with a more Kinyarwandan name, Impala, and in 1975 the band started recording songs at Radio Rwanda, coming to be known as Orchestre Impala. The full original line-up included seven musicians: Sebanani Andre (Pepe La Rose) Gasasira Jean Felix (Soso Mado), Sebigeri Paul (Mimi La Rose), Gasigwa Abdallatif (Toubi Lando), Rubangura Francois (Maitre Rubangi) Kalimunda Jean Pierre (Kali wa Njenje) and Ngenzi Fidele (Fidele le Jacard) (*New Times* 21 February 2013). Later 'the band recruited an eighth member called Semu Jean Berechimas (Semu wa Semu) who died a few years later' (*New Times* 5 November 2018).

By 1976, the band had made enough money for band members to buy themselves houses in Kigali and a minibus for touring the country. By the 1980s, Orchestre Impala was established as the most popular band in the country with a growing national and international reputation, through the Rwandan diaspora (Ighile 2012, p. 104). They recorded over 13 albums, and eventually in the 1980s travelled across the globe, giving concerts in other African countries, and in Canada, Germany, France and Belgium.

It is widely believed the band split when the October 1990 war started. In an interview, however, Mimi La Rose dates the split to earlier than that, in 1988 or 1989. At that time, Soso Mado, Kali wa Njenje and Maitre Rubangi left to start another band, called *Inyana ni iya mweru* (good manners come from good parenting) in the spirit of the times. Sebigeri stayed with Sebanani and the rest of the team and kept the original name, Orchestre Impala. According to Mimi La Rose, they continued playing their established repertoire. The same divisions cutting across Rwandan society, of 'race' and ideology, were dividing the band in two. As Mimi La Rose explained:

> From that time on, we hated each other, and the authorities tried to reconcile us, but it could not work. Semu had died from illness way before … Soso Mado died later. We started to have more problems in 1992 when some of us, such as Sebanani, were suspected to be *ibyitso* [the term given to Tutsi and moderate Hutu, who could be arrested and accused of being accomplices of the RPF]. Sebanani was killed during the genocide and others including me [Mimi La Rose] went into exile. What led the band to restart is that the ICTR [the International Criminal

> Tribunal for Rwanda, where Sebigeri worked as a driver after the genocide] closed its doors. This coincided with the fact that Munyanshoza, who happens to have a voice similar to Soso's, had come to see me [Mimi La Rose] with a suggestion to restart the band. Since we had nothing else to do and with the encouragement of Munyanshoza, we made a start to the band again (Interview with Sebigeri, Sainte Famille, Kigali, 5 July 2015a).

Munyanshoza agrees, stating: 'I am the one who brought the idea to relaunch Orchestre Impala' (Interview with Munyanshoza, Hotel Lemigo, Kigali, 18 March 2015). He continues at some length to explain the steps in this process of re-establishing the band:

> I went to see Sebigeri, one among the two of the seven founding members still alive. Five of the members are dead and two are still alive. I shared the idea. When I was young, I liked the band. And many Rwandans who lived in the country at the time liked the band. Also, the band's songs are still played today on the radio and the songs have aged well … We play at different pubs, at weddings, and some concerts organised up-country, the district of Rwamagana recently invited us to play there. There are songs we can no longer play. Those songs that praised Habyarimana and MRND have lost value. One is for example a song that goes like 'Let me praise President Habyarimana … .' Such a song cannot be played anymore. Many of those who were members of the MRND have betrayed the country (Interview with Munyanshoza, Hotel Lemigo, Kigali, 18 March 2015).

After the genocide, people sought ways to gather in the evenings and wanted to forget all they had experienced. Most *igisope* songs do not belong to any one band; they are songs played by many different groups of musicians. Their attraction lies precisely in their not being political. There is no reference to the horror and violence of the past. The songs, if they do create unity, do so not by demanding it, but by forgetting the divisions and polarization of the past.

Songs borrowed, old and new

Any Kinyarwanda songwriter, to be gifted, needs to align words so they are sung as they sound in non-musical, ordinary Kinyarwanda conversation. Tone should convey the precise meaning of a word, and mispronunciation of Kinyarwanda leaves listeners struggling to grasp the intended meanings of words and phrases. Imprecision in tonal delivery will tend to undermine audience reception. As Bryne aptly notes 'words imply that the music is about what the words say, literally, and nothing more. If done poorly, they can destroy the pleasant ambiguity that constitutes much of the reason we love music', and why we sing the lyrics of songs long after the radio is turned off, the concert over (Byrne 2013, p. 208).

After the genocide, there was a conscious effort to escape the stigmatized associations of *igisope*, especially given the attractions of Rwandan 'national' musical forms which were receiving official support. In this section of the

paper we present song lyrics, first those that straddle two eras, the pre-genocide past of Habyarimana's regime and the 2012 relaunch of Orchestre Impala. This small but significant group of songs appear 'timeless' enough in their themes and lyrics to have remained part of the daily cultural landscape of Rwanda, and of the Rwandan diaspora as well.

A second set of songs, which had to be abandoned as unsuitable or irrelevant, are then considered. During the golden years of Orchestre Impala, some songs were written to mark official occasions, including visits by heads of state, including Mobutu and the President of Burundi. Sometimes Orchestre Impala earned money from commissions, sometimes the band composed songs itself, in order to welcome Rwanda's allies. Thus, they sang songs celebrating friendly relations at that time (during the late 1970s and early 1980s) with the leaders of China and North Korea as well.

Finally, there are new songs, released after 2012, among which we focus on The Liberation Song, a praise-song for the new Rwanda and the RPF. Here we note certain clear resemblances to earlier praise-songs, written to support the developmental goals of the Habyarimana government in another era. Recovering 'positive' cultural elements from the repertoire of Orchestre Impala's past music seems to be possible. In large part this is because the band was never directly associated with Hutu power ideology or any ideology of targeting Tutsi Rwandans for discrimination or violence. By reviving Orchestre Impala, and by attending their concerts, some Rwandans decided it was time to recover some elements of Rwandan musical history from the post-independence, pre-genocide era. That they were able to achieve this feat of cultural revival and reinvention, suggests that popular music has started to recuperate and to integrate, the best of pre-genocide and post-genocide, as well as pre-colonial and post-colonial, Rwandan and hybrid musical culture. This suggests to us in some ways, an organized effort to normalize 'positive' continuities between past social relations among Rwandans and the new Rwandan present, thus contributing in some modest way to present-day healing and reconciliation among Rwandans.

Songs that stood the test of time to become igisope

The most enduring legacy of Orchestre Impala are songs about love, personal ties, the beauty of Rwanda, and festive seasons such as national holidays and the new year. The popularity of these songs, which lack the personalized political themes of most praise-songs, led Rwandans to coin a saying according to which '*ntibyabuza Impala gucuranga*'. This can be translated as 'nothing will ever prevent Impala from playing music'. This popular phrase is still used in Rwanda today, when people want to suggest that even apparently insurmountable challenges, can be overcome. It is also used to express the hope

that someone facing obstacles will eventually succeed, just as inevitably as Orchestre Impala will continue to play their music!

Bonane [*Bonne Année*, i.e. Happy New Year] is one Orchestre Impala song that has rallied and still rallies Rwandans and other peoples in the Great Lakes Region as they celebrate the New Year. Composed during the Habyarimana era, this song is still sung today just as it was then, and is a timeless favourite in family parties, in public places whenever it comes to celebrating the arrival of the new year and passing of the old. The lyrics are celebratory, with some relatively innocuous praise of an unnamed regime's policies. The careful choice of wording helped ensure this particular song could remain popular long after the old Republic had disappeared, with the result that *Bonane* is a fully integrated part of contemporary Rwandan *igisope*. The lyrics show the inclusive appeal of the song:

Song Title: *Bonane* (Happy New Year).

> This year is coming to its end and the next is ushered in.
>
> Let us be happy and celebrate.
>
> Let's thank God Almighty for keeping us alive to see this day.
>
> We are privileged to be enjoying life.
>
> As for those who have not been so lucky, it is not their fault.
>
> No one refuses to keep his/her life.
>
> For those of us that God still keeps alive,
>
> let's move forward and celebrate.
>
> Old men and old women take your sticks for support and dance,
>
> and wish long life to the younger generations. Happy New Year eh eh eh! Happy New Year to all people in Rwanda.
>
> Let all of us young people sing. May this New Year bring us all we wish for, in happiness, Happy New Year!
>
> To all the people of Rwanda, may this New Year give us the resolve to keep going forward;
>
> Happy New Year. To all people of Rwanda, Happy New Year.
>
> Stay the course as you modernise your living conditions, so that we develop. Happy New Year![5]

The lyrics recount a narrative that invokes a shared celebration that cuts across religious, political and identity divides, uniting young and old, and even the dead and the living. Another song that became a national

common ‘cultural good’ is *Genda Rwanda Uri Nziza* [‘You are Beautiful Rwanda’]. The lyrics are largely depoliticized and thus manage to be timeless, mainly through a poetic description of Rwanda’s physical beauty and charm, almost as if Rwanda were a beautiful woman. The video of this song has been produced in a new style, since the 2012 revival of Orchestre Impala, as if to ensure the song is no longer as closely associated with other videos of less politically appropriate songs, presumably uploaded by Impala fans, including those in exile. The lyrics of ‘You are Beautiful Rwanda’ follow, and show how suited the song was to become part of the new repertoire of Impala, and be brought into the new millennium:

Song Title: *Genda Rwanda Uri Nziza* (‘You are Beautiful Rwanda’)

> (Chorus) Oh, Rwanda you are beautiful. Oh, you breathe peace.
>
> The wonders that decorate you Rwanda are too numerous to count.
>
> You have hills that I look at and conclude your beauty is what attracts tourists.
>
> Your volcanoes, eh, eh, Gahinga, Sabyinyo, and Muhabura.
>
> Kalisimbi is the greatest, and many others, are the culmination of your wonders, Rwanda.
>
> Lake Kivu comes first; it contains the beautiful waters you share with sailors to tame their thirst.
>
> (Chorus refrain) You also have a beautiful Park of Akagera that amazes visitors.
>
> Oh, Rwanda, The Creator decorated you.
>
> We, your children will always work to develop you so that your visitors find you smiling, Rwanda. (Chorus refrain).[6]

The kind of timeless and impersonal themes of the *Bonane*, Happy New Year song and of *Genda Rwanda Uri Nziza*, ‘You are Beautiful Rwanda’, ensure both are very likely to remain popular, in terms of narrative content and thus also in their musical associations for most Rwandans. These songs are the relatively strong core of Orchestre Impala’s revival, and repertoire.

Songs left behind

Quite a number of songs written for special competitions, for high-level diplomatic visits or other similar public occasions have been abandoned by the revived Orchestre Impala. Some songs written by Impala were commissioned for political occasions where high-level visitors attended; they served primarily as praise-songs. Among the many examples of this, three are briefly considered in this sub-section. The first is about the then President of Burundi; the second about President Mobutu Seso Seko, then President of Zaire (now Democratic Republic of

Congo – DRC). The third is about Rwanda's strong diplomatic ties and friendship with North Korea. Extracts from the songs' lyrics are presented briefly and discussed, before reflecting on the common features that led them to be left out of the Orchestre Impala repertoire after the band was revived in 2012.

Song Title: *Perezida Bagaza Jean Baptiste* (Praise song to former President Jean Baptiste Bagaza of Burundi)

> Bagaza, you are the president [of the republic] of Burundi.
>
> You are the source of the development your country has achieved.
>
> [We wish you] to stay the course so that the friendly relationship between our two countries can last.
>
> Your visit to Rwanda shows [us] that this relationship is without a stain.
>
> This relationship should prosper and we support it.
>
> As a [Kinyarwanda] saying goes 'the basket travels to those who will return it back' [i.e generosity is best practiced when reciprocated].
>
> Please feel at home during your visit. It is true that [another Kinyarwanda saying] 'she/he who goes home is always welcome'.
>
> And, even if you will get there before we do, when you go back to Burundi, please extend our warmest greetings to our Burundian brothers.[7]

At the time this was written, the praise song to Jean Baptiste Bagaza soon became very popular. Burundi is Rwanda's closest neighbour, and at that time was hosting a considerable number of Rwandan refugees who could neither return to Rwanda nor obtain Burundian citizenship. What is perhaps surprising is that the song, under the circumstances, failed to make any mention of the growing presence of Rwandan refugees at that time, and their predicament in Burundi. However, in the interests of friendship between the two countries, no mention at all is made of their situation, even in passing. Nor is any mention made of Burundian refugees who sought safety inside Rwanda at that time and had at some periods numbered several tens of thousands. This absence of any reference to the plight of refugees from the two countries in their neighbouring countries means that it has become almost impossible to play this particular song today, in the setting of post-1994 Rwanda, acutely influenced by the return migration of Rwandans from Burundi, Uganda and elsewhere in the region, to their home country, Rwanda. This particular song seems to have played right into the hands of those who persecuted Tutsi inside Rwanda, and playing this particular praise song today inside Rwanda would revive conflicting and painful memories among those who had been in exile in Burundi (or elsewhere) during the 1980s era.

There would also be complaints that the song praises someone whom many considered a dictator, a President who ignored the plight of innocent refugees. For those in post-genocide Rwanda and the diaspora who still remember the Habyarimana era in positive terms, of course, this song can still bring back positive associations, since it praises the Bagaza regime for good relations with neighbouring Rwanda and other countries in the region, and for avoiding war at a turbulent time. The song may therefore remind some Rwandans of a more peaceful past in the Great Lakes region, when war was in abeyance. They would be willing to overlook the painful situation of Rwandan Tutsi exiles in Burundi at the time. In this way, the elements of musical production are selected with the boundary in mind of what forms of cultural expression are acceptable and unacceptable in today's Rwanda. It is interesting how a song that looks relatively innocent and innocuous cannot be played today, because to do so would unavoidably polarize Rwandans along identity and regional lines. As Bushnell suggests, 'the musical concept of modulation allows us to conceive the borderline as a constellation of identities and cultures, each not losing its individuality in hybridity, but maintaining its uniqueness to function in varying environments' (Bushnell 2007, p. 184). This borderline explains why the song has been left out of Orchestre Impala's renewed musical repertoire. Various Orchestre Impala audiences, including those of younger Rwandans, who have grown up since the genocide, are diversely aware of the kinds of narratives they want to hear and those they prefer to ignore. Two more praise songs will be considered in this section, as further examples of songs that Orchestre Impala was obliged to leave behind.

Song Title: Mobutu Sese Seko (Praise song for President Mobutu Sese Seko)

Mobutu Sese Seko, the Father of Zaire; you are welcome to our Rwanda.

We wish you to enjoy your stay among us.

The relationship between Rwanda and Zaire is an old one.

The entire world knows that we have a good relationship.

May peace prosper. *Mbote na yo*, *Mbote na yo na yo*.[8]

Song Title: *Umubano na Korea* (Praise song for President Habyarimana and Kim Il Sung of North Korea)

Rwanda's international relations are getting stronger.

Such relations have crossed the oceans to reach far aware shores.

Our relations are very good all over Asia and even stronger in Korea.

Korea, the country of Beloved (Bien Aimé) Comrade Kim Il Sung.

> It is a relationship that we have thanks to our beloved Militant Habyarimana Juvenal and his assistants.[9]
>
> The two leaders [of our respective countries, Rwandan and North Korea] thought it was necessary to support the youth in Rwanda towards development.
>
> Korea committed to build this beautiful building.
>
> The youth will gather here to acquire knowledge that will help them develop.
>
> Go forward [our youth] and do all you can so that this building is not another beautiful but useless building.[10]

Praise and celebration, including for dictators, are registers of emotion that Orchestre Impala included in its musical production during its heyday in the 1980s. These praise songs laud the positive relations between Rwanda and Burundi, or with the rulers of Zaire and North Korea. The lyrics now seem almost absurdly out-dated and the admiration misplaced. Both Mobutu and Kim Il Sung have become anti-heroes of the recent past, 'bad guys' of the international scene. The songs, like those they laud, seem relics of an era even more distant than that of Bagaza, since the Cold War references to 'militants', for instance, ended sharply in the 1980s. Airing such songs in the post-1994 period would not generate conflict within Rwanda – rather it would seem comical and ridiculous to sing the praises of two leaders who have almost been forgotten. The comical side of such propaganda songs can even appeal in an era with very different values.

For the band, both songs are also a reminder of a period in the not-too-distant past when the band's musicians had to raise funds, praising powerful political actors in order to be able to afford to continue to play the rest of their musical repertoire. These two songs have dated rapidly, and yet with internet and YouTube, it is impossible to hide such songs, or distance them entirely from the new Orchestre Impala. This musical baggage of partisan praise songs thus follows them around, through the search engines of google. Present members of the band can neither erase such videos from history, nor police the videos placed on social media by others. However, such songs would no longer be played in Rwanda today, or aired publicly on the radio. They, like the characters in them, have become irrelevant. Such songs do not polarize, like the praise song for Bagaza; they have simply lost any resonance they might once have had. Praise songs tended to have a short shelf-life. They were written with a particular event in mind, and now are barely remembered.

All musicians need to earn a living, and it is this that may account for their willingness to write praise-songs for their political masters, for specific causes and special occasions (Mwambari 2019). An entirely new song which is interesting in this respect is the *Kwibohora*, or Liberation song of the new Orchestre Impala. We now present that song's lyrics in full, showing that the song is

intended to mark the new Orchestre Impala's launch, and to set it off from the old Orchestre Impala. This illustrates well the dedication of those negotiating this act of cultural revival to the vision and values of a single Rwandan identity since the genocide.

The song is on YouTube and is a good example of a completely new set of lyrics, wrapped in a relatively familiar musical style by the band. This song is quite widely known and is a popular song at Orchestre Impala concerts. Despite this, compared with some of the older songs, the Liberation Song has been viewed by relatively few people, and does not rank highly in YouTube's search engine. It is still very much overshadowed by older, better-known Orchestre Impala songs, including several already mentioned; the New Year song and the Beautiful Rwanda song, for example.

In the Liberation Song video, one sees images of the band playing in front of a live audience, passing over Lake Kivu, and entertaining us in zebra suits. In this way, they are breaking some old associations with the 'diasporic' Orchestre Impala songs and videos. Those videos tend to hark back to an earlier time, including by portraying the old red, black and green flag with the 'R' in the middle, the now very much discredited flag of the pre-genocide regime. In the new video of *Genda Rwanda Uri Nziza*, also, the images are a mix of tourism-promoting shots of nature and animals, and images of people and progress in Rwanda, especially in infrastructure.[11] The new president appears, and tourists visit gorillas. The band is shown singing and relaxing in different beautiful natural settings in Rwanda.

When checked, there were more or less even distribution of thumbs down and thumbs up for the Liberation Song on YouTube, suggesting that audiences may feel the song is not only celebratory but also an example of politicized praise-singing. The Liberation Song is eminently danceable, however, and is popular at Orchestre Impala concerts in Rwanda today. The thumbs down may come largely from diasporic Rwandans who still hanker after the 'good old days', and may be hostile to the new Rwanda. The Liberation Song has a completely new narrative, new music and themes. They fit the new era, calling on Rwandans to be positive and forward-looking; this is a song that fits the mood of the times.

Despite the newness of this song, there remain some uncomfortable parallels between the Liberation Song and one or two developmental-oriented songs from the Habyarimana era. The role of technology in this new generation of songs is more visible in the videos, for example, and there is greater emphasis on material gain as central to national development than in the past. Yet as with all sponsored songs, the central themes are not the timeless ones of love, family, celebration and the power of beauty. Instead, specific achievements are highlighted and attributed to specific causes, especially to political leaders with vision and wisdom. The words suggest a treatise, an essay, rather than a poem, and the style is prose rather than

poetry, praise rather than personal joy. Often a specific set of recommended ideas are enunciated in the lyrics, rather than the timeless themes of love and beauty. Such praise songs tend to age quite rapidly. They tend to be less popular with the general public than songs of love and renewal. Yet musicians the world over still make music for political leaders, and through lack of economic independence, allow their songs to be used for political purposes. This is unlikely to change so long as they need to earn their living.

Song Title: *Kwibohora* (The Liberation of Rwanda)[12]13

My Rwandan brothers, young and adults, let us be proud of our nation.

It is capable of the greatest victories.

Let's praise the prowess of our courageous liberators who fought to end the genocide.

They rescued Rwanda from darkness and brought it back to light.

Let's be proud of our achievements during the liberation struggle, it's proof we have a clear vision of the future.

We regained unity among all Rwandans through the eradication of all forms of discrimination.

That is true liberation; strengthening good governance, national security and good diplomatic and international relations, increasing tourism.

That is true liberation; the development of public and private infrastructure in the different parts of the country.

Education for all, equal access to health care services, access to clean water, electricity and road infrastructure.

The end of thatched housing. That is true liberation!

Let's be proud of our achievements during the liberation struggle.

It's proof that we have a clear vision of the future.

The values of self-worth and self-reliance taught us to work for our own well-being.

That is true liberation! [Our achievements in the sectors of] justice, the fight against injustice, and the active participation of women in national life.

All that is true liberation!

The Policy of *Girainka munyarwanda, Gira amata* [one cow per family] means milk in the family and kwashiorkor has almost been eradicated among children.[13]

Let us be proud of our achievements during the liberation struggle, it is proof that we have a clear vision of the future.

Let us keep facing the challenges to develop our country, [keeping in mind that] we have overcome the most difficult [times].

Let us stay the course and defend *Ndi Umunyarwanda*.[14]

Eeeeh … we have liberated ourselves!!! (x3)

And [we are using] modern technology [to keep developing]!

It is interesting to compare these lyrics with another, earlier commissioned song. The Liberation Song is written with the Rwandan government in mind and is mainly an account of the regime's various developmental achievements in the context of post-genocide Rwanda, the new Rwanda. By comparing this with another earlier commissioned song, one that has now become taboo, we reflect on the price musical bands pay for political praise-songs. Orchestre Impala is still expected to heap praises on the achievements of the government in power. Times have changed, yet musicians must still eat, and politicians still seek praise.

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of MRND's existence, the following song was composed by Orchestre Impala in praise of the party and the President Juvenal Habyarimana:

Song Title: *Imyaka Icumi* (Praise song to MRND and President Habyarimana for 10th Anniversary of the coming to power of MRND).

Ten years of peace and development.

Those are years during with His Excellence Habyarimana

Juvenal [founded] and led the Second Republic.

This Supreme Commander is Godsent.

He saved us on July 5, 1973.

He rejected infighting among Rwandans and rescued Rwanda.

He resuscitated Rwanda from hell and brought it back to life.

He thought long and hard and gave us a vision.

Ever since then, until today, he has not failed us.

He named 1974 the year of agriculture and urged us to practice sustainable farming in order to satisfy our families' needs

And sell to the market our surplus production.

In 1975, he encouraged us again to increase agricultural production.

Also, during this same year, he created the MRND.

1976 was the renewal of the MRND; the change in culture and attitudes.

Farming regained value and dignity.

And the practice of Umuganda was revived and prioritised.

Manual labour regained its importance and we understood that own development depends on our [hard] work.

In 1977, he urged us to work harder and eradicate thatched housing in order to embrace modern housing.

The use of modern tiling became popular and many other developmental projects became a reality thanks to roads we constructed by ourselves.

1978 became the year of animal husbandry.

We increased the production of meat and milk in order to advance our wellbeing.

It is also during this year we adopted a new constitution and went to presidential elections to reaffirm the foundations of our democracy.

In 1979 we modernised the school system to allow our children to access the knowledge much needed to meet modernity.

7th grade and 8th grades were added to the existing system to allow young people to acquire vocational training.

In 1980 we fought soil erosion.

We started to practice land consolidation by introducing terracing.

We planted trees and other plants that to help consolidate soil.

We improved fertilisation techniques in order to increase food production.

[19]81 was the year of clean water.

We needed to protect our health against diseases and infections occasioned by dirty water.

At the end of this year we elected members of our parliament.

Now they are busy making laws.

[19]82 Once again, we focused on fighting soil erosion

And we consolidated our achievements in early campaigns to take care of our land.

In [19]83 we planted more trees so that our forests can allow us to harvest without engaging in deforestation.

> Let us thank our father [of the nation] who has worked to bring peace and good relations during these ten years
>
> And now Rwanda is shining, and its sons and daughters are now confident they will achieve sustainable development while carrying on working with him [Habyarimana].

Whilst less subtle and more overtly propagandistic than the Kwibohora or Liberation Song, there are some surprising parallels between the two. Both celebrate the developmental and material goals and achievements of the regimes, often in surprisingly similar ways. Both are hymns in praise of certain kinds of modernity – with an emphasis on goals and achievements in health, education, clean water, food production and infrastructure. Even the campaign against thatch housing features in both songs. Such striking parallels also suggest that over time, similar pressures can be exercised both on musicians and on Rwandan citizens, by diametrically opposed sets of political elites.

The public prefers celebratory songs for parties and weddings and other kinds of public events. Yet political praise songs are likely to continue as part of the stock-in-trade of Orchestre Impala so long as the band's popularity ensures that politicians will be tempted to ask for music in honour of their (the politicians') supposed achievements in office. The range of emotions in such music is quite narrow and fits in with the generally celebratory and up-beat repertoire of Orchestre Impala, typical of much *igisope* music. Indeed, it is interesting to note how rarely mourning or grief arise as themes in Orchestre Impala's own *igisope* musical forms. As Sandoval notes more generally:

> 'The ability of songs to protest for reparations or to promote the end of conflict is similarly problematized by studies of music in violence. As Sugarman's, McCoy's, and others' works demonstrate, songs are just as easily manipulated as propaganda through state and media control' (Sandoval 2016, p. 10).

Both the Liberation Song, and the song for the MRND, were written at key turning points for each regime, the former Republic and the present one. In each case the commissioned song focuses uniquely on celebrating their sponsors' political influence and authority, their great achievements and the gratitude the Rwandan citizenry (and presumably the band) should feel for these great achievements. Between 1994 and 2012, during many years of April commemorations, the focus of some popular music in Rwanda shifted to include the trope of mourning and irrevocable loss, alongside themes of love, beauty and feats of political heroism. This mood of melancholy. In contemporary Rwandan musical production, therefore, pain is acknowledged as an essential feature of popular music in the post-genocide era. This produces a:

> … complexity [that] … mediates and underlies the distinctive, shared experience it affords: a collective, situated enactment of the poignant uncertainties

> and social challenges of irretrievable interpersonal loss (Berthomé and Houseman 2010, p. 60).

In contrast, the almost permanently happy, perhaps rather naïve and trusting tone, and the predominantly optimistic lyrics of Orchestre Impala, appear a little lost in time. This is a world away from the journalistic role of music in a setting of liberation, as Mano refers to in Zimbabwe (Mano 2007). Perhaps in some ways, *igisope* music as a genre has been left behind in the more open acknowledgement of suffering in much Rwandan contemporary popular music. Escapism may be part of Orchestre Impala's appeal, and one should be wary of this. This means it remains helpful to resist: 'an overly optimistic view of what music and art can achieve in conflict transformation situations', including in Rwanda, where popular musicians only rarely confront authority. The general view is that Kizito Mihigo was concerned with 'influencing discourses of commemoration and collective memory in Rwanda … for peace and reconciliation purposes' (Mwambari 2019, p. 6, see also Bergh and Sloboda 2010, p. 8; Grant 2018). Despite this, Mihigo,[15] whose music reverberates pain and suffering, was arrested on 'terrorism' charges in 2014, and convicted in 2015. Released in 2018, he was declared dead, found in his police cell, shortly before this article went to print. It was claimed he committed suicide.

In this context, it is not surprising that the musicians of Orchestre Impala have eschewed any explicitly political lyrics or themes (besides the Liberation song). Singing for and then against the government was apparent in the rise and fall of Kizito Mihigo (Mwambari 2019). Orchestre Impala songs have remained almost entirely divorced from themes of politics, and have not engaged either with the suffering and death of war and genocide. Kizito's music dealt with little else. Instead, Orchestre Impala songs tend to be celebratory, and about the banal everyday events of life. Their only song of mourning was for a band members, Semu, who died of illness before the genocide. Current band members are aware that their lyrics avoid explicit references to politics, to genocide, to suffering and to loss. Overall, their aim is to bring people together and entertain them, and precisely not to engage in 'journalism' around the political news of the day. Yet there is a risk that:

> not utilising music for peaceful purposes will leave it open to abuse by those who attempt to maintain boundaries between enemies, either by performing music that emerged during a conflict, by creating new music that commemorates a conflict or through music that highlight latent conflicts (Bergh and Sloboda 2010, p. 4).

When interviewed, Sebigeri indicated that the relaunched band plans to compose and produce songs in memory of band members who perished during the genocide (Interview with Sebigeri, Hotel Lemigo, Kigali, 18

March, 2015b). This would mark a new departure for Orchestre Impala, a further delicate act of negotiation in a sensitive cultural scene.

Renegotiating musical narratives for the Rwandan present

After the genocide, past popular musical forms appeared 'guilty by association', a reminder of the painful legacies of divisiveness and the traumas of war and genocide. As Urbain Olivier puts it, reviewing the work of McCoy on Simon Bikindi's songs:

> Creativity was used extensively to compose songs, record them and broadcast them, but only to divide people, to strengthen and unite members of one group against all others. Musicking was not used to bring out the best in oneself and others, but to galvanize one group to the detriment and for the destruction of another group of human beings (Urbain 2016, p. 16).

With this particular history in mind, forgetfulness can seem preferable to remembering cultural elements associated with a traumatic past (Buckley-Zistel 2006). Yet we suggest that even if painful and potentially divisive, creatively and selectively recovering cultural elements from the past is essential for Rwandans to move forward as a single society. The challenge lies in recovering the 'positive aspects' of Rwandan popular culture, negotiating a sense of historical continuity in Rwandan cultural life, whilst not minimizing responsibility of cultural agents for genocide ideology (Uvin and Mironko 2003, p. 229).

The potential for healing and recovery through musical expression and appreciation, including through dancing, singing and listening to music, is widely acknowledged (see for instance Shonekan 2015, p. 4). Popular musical forms can work to transcend social boundaries, and to reinforce divisions. Thus ' … if music does contribute to peacebuilding, this may be due to its ability to exploit features of our biological constitution … which transcend socio-cultural particularities' (Begbie 2017, p. 17), serving to consolidate new forms of exclusionary as well as inclusionary identification and solidarity.

Negotiating – or renegotiating – musical performance depends on careful adjustment, and requires abandoning songs that lack legitimacy, and are unrecoverable in the present. Through exercising such flexibility, the new Orchestre Impala was able to become almost as firmly embedded within the social norms of post-genocide Rwanda as in the Rwanda of the 1970s and 1980s. What attracts audiences is firstly the quality of storytelling, combined with a subtle command of Kinyarwanda tonality. This, inflected with soukous Congolese rhythms, produces music both for singing and for dancing to, and for popular occasions.

The political goals of the MRND, the person of President Habyarimana himself, and the social and cultural transformations that Rwanda was going through in the 1970s and 1980s inspired some of the early songs of

Orchestre Impala. These kinds of songs are also praise-songs, using mostly found text, or what David Byrne defines as 'noteworthy and memorable passages […], anecdotes, quotes from speeches, interviews and conversations' that music writers reinterpret to express their admiration of those in positions of authority (Byrne 2013, pp. 202, 203). Orchestre Impala enjoyed privileged access to MRND leaders by virtue of the band's widespread popularity among ordinary Rwandans. But what made the band attractive to Rwandan audiences was less the political messages than their musical syncretism and the lyrical skills of the lead singer. Orchestre Impala managed to write rhythmic music in Kinyarwanda, a deeply tonal language, and this marked the secret of its success.

A second challenge for post-genocide Rwandan songwriters has been to align their storytelling with traditional themes around the beauty of nature and Rwanda's natural environment. This narrative is central to music and dance in the traditional courtly style of *umushayayo*, a genre that imitates the graceful movements of the *inyambo* cattle of the Rwandan royal court. There is also the *intwatwa* music and dance genre, where polyrhythmic and polyphonic dynamics are primarily intended to establish a harmonious relation between man and nature around him, through less courtly dance. These traditional genres are mainly concerned with expressing harmony, through the choreography of rhythm, sound and their often multi-layered messages.

In contrast with these traditional forms, post-colonial songs involve acquiring and integrating foreign musical and lyrical influences to create something new, something hybrid. In traditional song forms, composition is rooted in complexities of the world surrounding the composers and their audiences, and the beauty of music is measured by the intensity of feeling invoked by dances, related sounds, and the choreography involved. In contrast with the harmonious effect of traditional musical forms, post-colonial musical success generally relied on powerful messages which are well-crafted and robustly rooted in the everyday life of ordinary Rwandans. Texts are often punctuated with old sayings, proverbs and beautifully provocative images conveyed through words that remain melodically aligned with the rhythms.

Orchestre Impala became masters of storytelling, especially in their songs about love, social and cultural changes and events in post-colonial Rwanda. Most such songs have stood the test of time and remain popular to this day, among most Rwandans. Other songs in their repertoire, especially those commissioned by the government or which Orchestre Impala musicians felt obliged to compose so as to remain loyally supportive of the MRND, do not ring as true any longer. They often sound forced and artificial, with heavy use of the past and conditional tenses, laboriously used to formulate hypothetical messages of praise that not have been that convincing when they were first sung, and which today appear dated and insincere.

Conclusion

This study has analysed how surviving and new members of Orchestre Impala have managed to selectively revive and renew some past Rwandan musical forms into what is now popularly known as *igisope*. They have done this in spite of the challenging post-genocide environment in which the band's revival had to be negotiated. Amidst a shattered sense of cohesion, the band members, new and old, have been prepared to leave behind the previous repertoire that was discredited, because politically out-of-date or inappropriate. How Orchestre Impala members and associates managed to do this is the story we have sought to tell.

What would be interesting to examine in future, which we could not consider here in any depth, is how musicians and the music industry manage in an increasingly commercialized era. Viewed as a culture industry, expected to create jobs and boost incomes in Rwanda's creative sector, can commercial success be achieved, whilst remaining focused on peaceful outcomes? To genuinely work for peace, as Phillips suggests: 'artworks cannot just ardently 'demonstrate' for peace, but must also resist the subversive force of contemporary ideologies centred in commodification, control, and power' (Phillips 2004, p. 66; Khaleeli 2016). Today the 'creative industries', of which popular music forms an essential part, are increasingly viewed as potential investment opportunities, contributing to rapid economic growth in Rwanda as elsewhere. Once music feeds a growing cultural tourism industry, and the growing urban middle class of consumers, the commercialization of the arts and media in general are not far behind.

Orchestre Impala's revival may be of cultural significance beyond its commercial potential, however. We take it as one sign, among others, that Rwandans are coming to term with the country's painful past and engaging in acts of cultural reinvention. In 'everyday' interactions, *igisope*'s revivals offer the promise of recovery from past polarization. In a haunted present, the revival of Orchestre Impala needed to be cautiously managed, and the band members tackled this daunting task of revalorizing their music whilst letting go of parts of the pre-genocidal cultural heritage of Rwanda. This manoeuvre proved possible for Orchestre Impala, due to a combination of luck, foresight and their resistance to becoming a 'political band'.

We hope the study has contributed, however modestly, to clarifying the role of musicians in relation to practical peace-building goals, by finding out:

> … what can be done here and now, in our own communities; musicking can then be used as one of the many ways to engage and connect with our neighbors, and with people far and near, across all fault-lines (Urbain 2016, p. 17).

This, Orchestre Impala still seem to do. Much current theorizing expects a bit too much from music, however. Although music can elicit powerful collective emotional responses of identification from audiences, this has its risks and is

less unambiguously positive than it sounds. Bringing together can mean excluding others. For a more nuanced interpretation of the politics of musical expression in contemporary Rwanda, we suggest that apolitical music of the everyday is perhaps best able to contribute to a shared Rwandan cultural identity and shared experiences. We hope this study opens up possibilities for further research into the rich, continuously evolving musical landscape in Rwanda. In some modest way, we have tried to highlight how the cultural heritage of the past can be selectively recovered by creative artists, moving forwards. By selectively revisiting the repertoires of the past, we believe Orchestre Impala has contributed to shared emerging values based on common humanity and peace.

Of course, not all Rwandans, necessarily derive this: 'feeling of being included' in '… broader unities, including sub-culture, nationality', from Orchestre Impala's music; not every Rwandan will associate *igisope* music with Rwandan-ness (Saarikallio 2012, p. 482). Yet our study suggests that oldies do have appeal across generations, as live audiences of Orchestre Impala are notably on the young side. The band's hybrid aesthetics and musicality have appeal beyond a certain nostalgia for a bygone era, when those now in middle age, were young themselves. Such music is potentially significant as a means of connecting past generations to today's young Rwandans. Following the violent reorganizing of Rwandan society through war and genocide, it becomes a matter of some importance to be able to renegotiate and recuperate elements of past musical forms. Rooting out traces of genocide ideology within these popular cultural forms is of course essential for peaceful coexistence among Rwandans, and this too was part of the negotiation the musicians in Orchestre Impala had to engage in.

Notes

1. Aegis Trust run a Genocide Research Hub which provides grants to Rwandan scholars working on topics related to peace and recovery from genocide. The Aegis Trust general website is here: https://www.aegistrust.org/. The Genocide Research Hub can be seen here: http://www.genocideresearchhub.org.rw/. The first conference is also reported in the New Times, 29.07.2016 here: https://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/read/202165.
2. One example of a video made on the live act of the band, showing old records, cassettes and images of the band, can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CH5mKqTG7xY. This video has the merit of contrasting the old with the new, and shows contemporary footage of their regular performance at Hotel Lemigo in Kigali.
3. Sakanyonsa is a nonsense word coined by Orchestre Impala, to refer to a new dancing style. The word mimics the sound of Lingala as used in Congolese rumba music.
4. One example is this video by Kina Music Allstars, which jokingly shows the tensions between cultural habits of sharing drinks in the old Rwanda, and other

cultural habits now viewed as unhealthy and even illegal: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_goGYadk4I. Last accessed 5 October 2019.

5. For the original Kinyarwanda text of the New Year song, refer to the authors. The song can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Kx77yYT8tI.
6. For the original Kinyarwanda lyrics of Genda Rwanda uri nziza refer to the authors. The song can also be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oy-BnaLK6jY.
7. For the original Kinyarwanda text of Song for President Bagaza of Burundi refers to the authors. The song can be viewed here.
8. Mbote na yo means 'How are you' or 'hello' in Lingala, the language of Zaire. For the original Kinyrwanda Lyrics of the Mobutu praise song, refer to the authors. The very up-beat Mobutu praise song can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1J-lxV12Uo.
9. At that time, all Rwandans were members of the MRND. They used the French word *militant* or *militante* to address each other formally during public functions and in public spaces. This song can be viewed here.
10. For the original Kinyarwanda of the Praise Song for Korean leader, refer to the authors.
11. The new video is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgufcoJUhTg.
12. For original Kinyarwanda of Kwibohora, refer to the authors. This song can be found at the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeX2HdyoNQo.
13. The 'one cow per family' policy is associated with a zero-grazing policy, and taps into traditional cultural symbols associated with cattle in Rwandan society.
14. This refers to the policy of 'Rwandan-ness' as opposed to the previous politics of ethnic divisions under the pre-genocide regime.
15. The case of Kizito Mihigo is an interesting one. He was the official musician of Rwanda for many years, and commissioned to write official genocide commemoration and diaspora songs. In addition, he wrote his own popular songs, celebrating friendship with the Congolese, and mourning all deaths. For a report on the case, the audio on New York City Radio is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFkqyNBTx5A. The song that was reported to have got him into trouble with his former sponsors can be seen here with English subtitles: https://youtu.be/WcGC3eFuDAc. One can note the accusatory looks towards the end of the song, and the bitter irony in the words. This, indeed is musical lyrics as journalism, and could be the topic of further academic research in future, being a fascinating and puzzling case. After being released in 2019, Mihigo was rearrested in February 2020.

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