



Transmission, Preservation and Meaning-making of Traditional Musical Heritage in the Rwandan Diaspora in Belgium (2023)

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EIMAS
EUROPEAN INTERDISCIPLINARY
MASTER AFRICAN STUDIES
Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree

The research investigated the **transmission, preservation, and meaning-making** of **traditional Rwandan music and dances among the Rwandan diaspora in Brussels, Belgium**. It involved interviews with first-generation and “new-generation” dancers and musicians, namely the amatorero **ASBL INYANGE**, the **ASBL IREBERO**, and the **Ballet MAHORO**, to understand home-diaspora dynamics; the inter-generational transmission preservation of this musical heritage; the ways in which it is performed; and how it shapes a shared cultural heritage.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study sought to respond to the lack of general scholarly research on traditional Rwandan music and, more specifically, Rwandan diaspora studies beyond the focuses of the existing literature almost entirely centred on the contentious political dynamics underpinning Rwanda’s past and present history.

SUBJECTS OF THE STUDY

ASBL INYANGE

Founded in 1994 by Rwandan women in Belgium to raise funds and donations for Rwandan refugees and displaced people. It is the largest amatorero in Belgium, with members from six years old to older generations.

ASBL IREBERO

Founded in 2012, comprises about 12 members who are professional dancers and musicians, with previous roles in the Rwandan National Ballet, Urukerereza and represents Rwanda in Belgium and in other European nations.

BALLET MAHORO

Established in the 2010s by young first and second generations Rwandan descendants. It is demographically the youngest amatorero and currently counts 30 members from subsequent generations.

FINDINGS

- The **amatorero** become spaces where the Rwandan diaspora ignite a **“homing desire”** (Brah 1996) driven by the imperative of preserving **collective cultural memory**. Unlike other African diasporic music revivals, which have been often co-opted by “non natives/non descendants”, the amatorero appear **culturally exclusive, reproducing familial ties** – the family is often the first and most important point of contact with these musical customs.
- The preservation of authenticity of these traditional dances results in different **evolutions** and **re-adaptations due to the commodification of these arts**. IREBERO’s aesthetic aligns with the one exhibited by amatorero in present-day Rwanda; MAHORO depicts the multifaceted Pan-African nature of their roots, while INYANGE focuses on preserving intergenerational heritage through storytelling with a “rural, village flair”. Moreover, these **diasporic realities reveal differences in performance dynamics compared to present-day Rwandan dance groups** (see Plancke’s research with Inganzo Ngari- 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018).
- **Young Rwandan descendants** in this study appear to play a **conservative role** in the preservation of these musical traditional practices, contrary to the assertion spread in diaspora studies that attachment weakens in subsequent generations. Knowledge and understanding of **the Kinyarwanda language** also plays a significant role, serving as a **bridge to embrace their Rwandan identity more authentically** and compensates in some ways for feelings of inadequacy with their hybrid “identities”.



Ballet INYANGE performing intore at private event (2022)

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