

Name: *The Touch of the Drums & The Rhythm of Reconciliation*

Countries: *South Africa, Burundi, and Rwanda*

Artistic Medium: *Music*

Source:

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“Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts”

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Website consulted:

<http://www.brandeis.edu/programs/Slifka/vrc/papers/lena/lena1.html>

http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/BIF_Papers/Djanie.pdf

Abstract:

“We both believe, based on our experiences, in the creative and spiritual power of drumming, song and dance to transform individuals and communities, deal with trauma, and facilitate the process of reconciliation around the unity of rhythm.”

The research paper examines how to seek reconciliation through African drumming, music and song in divided communities. Her report especially focuses on how participation in drumming, music, dance and performances affect relationships, the development of trust and personal and communal healing in the Bujumbura district of Burundi (as well as areas in South Africa and Rwanda), which was among the hardest hit areas of the civil war. She participated in the Burundi peace festival as well. As one drummer, Donatien Manrakiza tells: “I can’t lie. Before, I was someone who didn’t want to be with others, I preferred the solitude. I was always sad without knowing why. But I’ve learned to be with others through the drumming...”



In Burundi especially the use of the drum, or the *ingoma*, was historically a symbol of power, as the king sat on drums, literally, as a sort of throne. They were believed to bring peace throughout the kingdom and this belief is still present today on an individual and communal level. In the past 40 years, drumming has taken on a more common and less

elite aspect. In the Bujumbura area alone there are about 20 drumming groups that perform at festivals, official and private functions. It has helped street children overcome their poverty in post conflict situations, as embodied in this quote:

“Drumming really changed me. Before I started to play, I was a delinquent, a thief. But today, the time that I used for stealing, I use it to play the drums. I stopped the thieving, the alcoholism, smoking – all this I stopped because I realized all these weaknesses don’t go together with the drum. I had tried without success before to abandon these things, but always without success. I wish for many more centers for children to learn drumming; this would diminish the bad behaviors like stealing and drugs.”

– Mashoc, 22, street child, member of Terre des Hommes drumming group, Bujumbura

The “space” created through drumming is one of the main aspects that promotes dialogue in drumming groups from Burundi to South Africa and this is mainly due to the adherence to traditional rules which do not usually allow for improvisation. However, due to the addition of other instruments such as bells and shakers allow each participant to add their own unique part to the rhythm.

The conclusions that are drawn at the end of the study are that drumming has a positive emotional and spiritual impact on drummers and observers and can play a unifying role.

Rituals have played a large role in post conflict societies to unite communities through reconciliation and these rituals, especially in South Africa and Burundi have involved drums as well as other forms of artistic expression.