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### **Author:**

Erika Dahlmanns – Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies, University of Bayreuth, Germany

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University of Hradec Králové  
Philosophical Faculty

# NEW COMMUNITY, OLD TRADITION: THE INTORE WARRIOR AS A SYMBOL OF THE NEW MAN. RWANDA'S ITORERO-POLICY OF SOCIETAL RECREATION

Erika Dahlmanns

**Abstract:** In Rwanda, the state-driven program, Itorero ry'Igihugu, revives an old military institution, Itorero, of the pre-colonial kingdom's Tutsi elite warriors, Intore [the chosen ones]. By building a new national community of "chosen people" through civic education and cultural adjustment trainings (promoting 'Rwandan values') the program aims at countering the impact of experienced collective violence and inner division to ensure the success of the national development plan, Vision 2020. Introduced as an endogenous instrument for post-genocide national rehabilitation, Itorero is currently the most far-reaching governmental program, and the first one aimed at profound societal transformation through a new interpretation of an old tradition. Its approach challenges globalized norms of peacebuilding and raises questions concerning debates on 'divided communities' and 'national reconciliation'. Drawing on field research as well as on the historical genesis and local meanings of the tradition, the paper provides insights into the program's image of man and into its own logic of social reconstruction beyond the normative views of peacebuilding.

**Keywords:** *rwanda, Social Reconstruction, Conflict, Conflict Transformation, Reconciliation, Nation-Building, Tradition, itorero, intore*

## Introduction

In the past twenty years, the use of »cultural traditions« has been central to Rwandan government policies promoting nation-building, national reconciliation, and development.<sup>1</sup> Introduced as an endogenous instrument for post-genocide national rehabilitation in 2007

1 So far research has concentrated on *Gacaca* (see Moolenaar 2005; Schilling 2005; Clark 2009) and *Ingando*-Camps (see Mgbako 2005; Dahlmanns 2007; Prudekova 2011), being the most popular examples.

and implemented country-wide since 2012, the state-driven nation-building and development program, *Itorero ry'Igihugu*, is currently the most far-reaching government program in Rwanda, and the first one aimed at profound societal transformation through a new interpretation of an old, originally military tradition. The program that targets the entire population revives an old military institution, *Itorero*, of the pre-colonial kingdom's Tutsi elite warriors, *Intore* ('the chosen ones'), whose spectacular war dances have survived as a relic of the old *Itorero* tradition in popular culture to the present day. By 'building new Rwandan citizens' (NURC 2009a: 27) and a new national community of 'chosen people' through civic education and cultural adjustment training (promoting a new guiding culture based on 'Rwandan values') the program aims at countering the impact of experienced collective violence and inner division to ensure the success of the national development plan, *Vision 2020*. *Itorero ry'Igihugu* challenges globalized norms of peacebuilding related political practice and raises a number of questions: What is it that renders the *Itorero* tradition attractive to the government? How could a new interpretation of an originally military tradition, once associated with the Tutsi elite, support an integration of all segments of the population into a nation, a shared sense of citizenship and belonging? How does it resonate with the government's aim to promote a peaceful, democratic and development promoting culture? What kind of community and citizenship is to be created through the program's culture-bound approach? And what is the culture-bound political logic of societal recreation all about?

Drawing on results of first-hand research in Rwanda<sup>2</sup> as well as on the historical genesis and local meanings of the *Itorero* tradition, I will, in this article, examine distinctive features of the program's culture-bound political reasoning and practice from an emic and historically grounded perspective.

Popular approaches predominately favour analysing 'non-western' policies that draw on local traditions taking normative theories of peacebuilding, transitional justice, etc. as points of departure,<sup>3</sup> thus inhibiting insights beyond our own normative conceptions. In spite

2 The research draws on material from empirical research on political imageries and practices of societal reconstruction in Rwanda (2006-2011) funded by Gerda Henkel Stiftung and BIGSAS.

3 Normative approaches have recently been criticized in the field of transitional justice studies (see e. g. Fletcher and van der Merwe 2013: 1-7; Hinton 2010).

of the growing academic interest in processes and policies of ‘national reconciliation’ and ‘home grown approaches’ dealing with the legacies of collective violence, however, empirical research on how tradition-inspired imageries and practices exactly shape national peace-building policies and reconfigurations of national orders remains scarce.<sup>4</sup> Itorero ry’Igihugu can be considered as the government’s innovative solution to its challenges of nation-building and development in a society characterized by diverging ethno-nationalist ideologies, experiences of collective violence and severe poverty of large parts of the population. But how does the Government draw on the old tradition to meet these objectives?

Ever since the military victory of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) brought an end to the war against the former government of Rwanda and the genocide against the Tutsi, the legacy of violence and the historically grown and politically instrumentalised diverging conceptions of collective identity, that defined Hutu and Tutsi as antagonists, constitute major challenges to the government’s nation-building effort (for the government’s perspective see Shyaka 2003). Whereas the RPF governments have succeeded in adverse conditions to consolidate “negative peace” and promote economic growth, their policy of national unity has considerably expanded into public and private spheres – this has been criticized e. g. by Straus and Waldorf (2011). The reworking of images of society, identity, culture and history are at the core of the government’s nation-building policy that with Itorero ry’Igihugu reached a new dimension. With the program’s reference to a military tradition and its encompassing nature Itorero ry’Igihugu does not only challenge ethnocentric perspectives on processes and policies of peace-building and societal reconstruction. Its analysis also becomes challenging against the background of a very different historical experience that bears the risk of leading the researcher into the trap of his or her own chrono- or ethnocentric perspective.

It seems, therefore, important to me to acknowledge the program’s effort to cope with the legacy of genocide and fight against extremist ideologies, for my own European and especially German historical background might lead to a misleading understanding of the program.

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4 For anthropological approaches to analyse processes of social reconstruction see e. g. Foblets and Truffin (2004). On the anthropology after mass violence see de Lame (2007: 4).

In Germany, slogans promoting heroism, patriotism, sacrifice for the nation and the glorification of a Germanic tradition served Nazism and genocide, whereas in the decades following the Nazi regime critical debates fostered a negative connotation of the former 'German virtues' as well as scepticism toward national orientations and mobilisation for the nation's sake. The process of coming to terms with the legacy of the past in Germany cultivated suspicion against ethics and education for the good of the nation<sup>5</sup> that also influenced German Peace and Conflict Studies (see Koppe 2010: 60). Whereas interrelations between war, heroism, sacrifice and crime – from a German perspective – seem apparent, they have not been discussed in the same way in neighbouring countries like Poland or France. There, the memory of the fight against Nazism and Genocide is a positive memory of fight, heroism and sacrifice, celebrated on the national Victory Day in many European countries. As a German anthropologist, I would give an embarrassingly perfect example of ethnocentrism by (inappropriately) judging the Polish or French as being militarists or fascists for celebrating the abolishment of Nazism with military parades and a heroic language. In Rwanda, the military victory of the RPF bringing an end to the genocide is celebrated as a heroic deed on Liberation Day every 4<sup>th</sup> of July. We should keep this specific context in mind when we try to appropriately understand Itorero's revitalization and the promoted vision of a heroic nation.

One particular challenge to the RPF government's nation-building effort is the divided perspective among Rwandans, i. e., those who participated in the Liberation War and those were saved by the RPF celebrate the RPF's effort, as opposed to others, (some of them) responsible for participating in genocide, who perceive the RPF's victory as defeat. Against this background, one may speculate if or in how far the national remembrance of the military victory, celebrated on Liberation Day, and the memory of a heroic military tradition (transmitted with Itorero's revitalisation) relate to one another and may serve nation-re-building.

In Itorero ry'Igihugu, we observe the glorification of a military tradition in Africa, which on the one hand is to be transformed into a peaceful form to serve economic, social and moral development, yet

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5 For early critical contributions see Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno und Max Horkheimer.

on the other hand is continued by promoting ideals or virtues like heroism and sacrifice for the nation.

One issue I see regarding the programme's analysis in this regard might be a typically German problem, as Germans, for historic reasons, are indebted to overcome military heroism and collectivism, as negative aspects of German culture and obstacles to democracy. The challenge is also one specific to cultural anthropologists as we aim to contrast ethnocentric generalisations of our own values with and understanding of different ones "to grasp the native's point of view" (Malinowski [1922] 2003: 25), as Malinowski once expressed it in a now somewhat old-fashioned sounding manner. The following pages can be read as an attempt to deal with this dilemma, which can never be completely solved, but (at least) drawn attention to it.

After introducing into Government debates and narratives on the nation's state, its history and the Government's understandings of culture crucial to the introduction of the new program, I will provide background information on the program development and subsequently retrace the historical genesis of the Itorero tradition. By taking a look at its historical changes in its interplay with changing political contexts since colonial times I will reflect on the political relevance of the Itorero tradition, its continuity, and potential function as the symbolic expression of a collective self. Furthermore, I will try to understand why the spectacular dance performances of the Intore continued to exist as a popular element of national culture even after the abolishment of the Tutsi monarchy and in view of the marginalisation of the Tutsi court culture. At the centre of my considerations are the specifics of the tradition and explanations regarding its attractiveness to the present Government.

Against this historical background, I examine the Government's new interpretation of the old tradition, relevant to the programme's legitimation, the related definition of a new guiding culture (Leitkultur) and the program's image of a new Rwandan citizen, symbolised by the Intore warrior. Besides describing central structures, educational practices and contents of the program, I will take a look at the political symbolism of speeches, poems and collective performances at celebrations on Itorero ry'Igihugu Day. On this basis, I seek to examine

the culture-bound logic and practice of societal recreation and the Government's vision of a new nation.

## Development of the Program

How do Rwandans envisage their future? What kind of society do they want to become? How can they construct a united and inclusive Rwandan identity? What are the transformations needed to emerge from a deeply unsatisfactory social and economic situation? These are the main questions Rwanda Vision 2020 addresses. [...] Vision 2020 is to be achieved in a spirit of social cohesion and equity, underpinned by a capable state. Rwanda's ongoing development will have, at its core, the Nation's principal asset its people (Vision 2020, MINECOFIN 2011: 3-4).

At the Akagera Conference, held in February 2007, the Rwandan Government decided to setup a new kind of program as the basic findings of the government on the nation's developmental progress indicated that a loss of cultural values and a general lack of knowledge regarding national developmental goals constituted the major challenges for realising the country's development plan 'Vision 2020'.

Three ministries<sup>6</sup> were subsequently charged with the development of a 'culture-bound' program to counter the shortcomings diagnosed. By means of civic education and cultural adjustment training the program was to promote a collective 'mind-set change' through an orientation toward traditional values with the aim to foster development promoting attitudes in the population. The design of the program reflected the importance the government had attributed to traditional values for the nation's renewal articulated, for instance, in article 8 of the preamble of the national constitution (2003), which claims "to draw from our centuries-old history the positive values which characterized our ancestors that must be the basis for the existence and flourishing of our Nation." The first draft of the program, published by the newly set up Itorero Task Force of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) in 2007, made it clear that the attempt to revitalise the Itorero tradition was based on a specific understanding of

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6 These included the *Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture* and the *National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC)*.

culture linked to the government's understanding of national history. Based on the diagnosis that Rwanda had become a 'society without values' due to the cultural uprooting caused by colonization (also understood as a main cause of genocide) the Government justified the revitalization of traditional culture, i. e., the civilization of society, as an urgent ethical duty.<sup>7</sup> The Government wanted to counteract the serious impacts of the loss of culture, it thus caused the 'de-humanization' of Rwandan citizens inhibiting development potentials, in the sense of common wellbeing: "the main challenge is the lower mind-set level of Rwandans, which handicaps the achievement of government policies that would be useful to them. [...] values which used to characterize [the Rwandan culture] since years were lost whereas they helped Rwandans to be characterized by human nature, and helped the Rwandan society to develop. [...] the Government of Rwanda found it better to fetch from the Rwandan culture ways of practicability to solve problems [...] be it those that are economic, social and those related to governance. It is in this regard that the Cabinet meeting [...] approved the creation of the Itorero ry'Igihugu as a remedy to a quick mind-set change and development aiming at achieving the Vision 2020." (NURC 2009a: 6)

With this mission the program, which was considered a multifunctional development instrument, started off as a one-year pilot<sup>8</sup> following the parliamentary ratification on November 12, 2007 and presidential approval four days later. In December the National Dialogue Council<sup>9</sup> decided that in the future all citizens should go through the training program in order to "build new Rwandan citizens by helping them change their mind-set, behaviour and values which correlate with current trends." (NURC 2009a: 27) The objective to 'build' new Rwandan citizens underlined the program's all-encompassing claim.

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7 Interview with a Itorero Task Force official (2009); see also Government of Rwanda (1999); Ministry of Sports and Culture (2008); NURC (2011).

8 During that time the *Itorero Task Force of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission* developed with the organization PLANEF a policy paper, the Strategic Plan (NURC 2009a), with a general survey of structures, guide lines for program implementation and program philosophy. On the basis thereof a new plan (NURC 2009b) was developed by NURC (see MINALOC 2008).

9 Council members are the President, representatives of the Councils for Local Administration, Member of the Cabinet and Parliament.



From November 2007 till the end of 2012 more than three million Rwandans – around 27% of the total population of about eleven million people – should have passed the basic training to subsequently support as multipliers the training of the new Intore within the separate administrative structure the program set up parallel to the state administration for the purpose of decentralization.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst abroad – e.g. in Belgium, in Canada and the US – training for the Rwandan diaspora communities were organized by Rwandan embassies<sup>11</sup>, within the national territory, a Steering Committee with representatives from different government institutions under supervision of the Itorero Task Force at the NURC was charged with the implementation of Itorero ry'Igihugu from the end of 2008 until 2011. In 2011 the newly founded National Itorero Commission (NIC) took over this task and extended the program function to a National Service (Urugerero) for 18 - 35 year old adults including obligatory military and civil service<sup>12</sup> (NIC 2011: 4, 9-10, 14-15). As defined in article 47 of the constitution (2003) Itorero ry'Igihugu's objective is to instil a culture of voluntarism, general commitment to voluntary work for the benefit of the nation.<sup>13</sup>

Itorero ry'Igihugu is not only by name, but also by its basic structures, ideas and ideals oriented towards a specific interpretation of the pre-colonial Itorero tradition<sup>14</sup> the significance of which changed in the course of history.

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10 For the period 2009–2012 the number of participants indicated is 2 967 400 persons. To be added are 67 995 people trained from November 2007 till April 2008 and at least the same number for the following months until the official start of the program in 2009. Until 2012 each village (*Umudugudu*) should have a minimum of four trained people (NURC 2009a: 92, 101).

11 See [www.rwandandiaspora.gov.rw/index.php?id=49](http://www.rwandandiaspora.gov.rw/index.php?id=49) (04.10.2013).

12 The *National Service* includes a training period with a basic military course and can be done within a year according to personal qualifications and the general need in various sectors of society.

13 “All citizens have a duty to participate, through work, in the development of the country; to safeguard peace, democracy, social justice and equality and to participate in the defense of the motherland.” (Ibid.)

14 To preserve the memory of this tradition a Itorero documentary center is planned in Nkumba.

## Historical Transformations of the Itorero Tradition

Prior to the introduction of the Itorero ry'Igihugu program, little was left of the Itorero other than the folkloristic warrior dances, performed on the occasion of national holidays, at weddings and for tourism purposes. However, Itorero dates back to the times of the foundation of the Rwandan kingdom in the 17th century. According to Jan Vansina, at that time these troops (called Itorero) were protection forces at the courts of the African Great Lakes region. In Rwanda, they became of utmost importance for the early state- and nation-building when single troops were untied to build an army, at first under King Ndori around 1700. The development of an army supported the territorial expansion of what was to become the Rwandan kingdom and the creation of an administrative structure for its territory which favoured cultural homogenisation. The founding of the army, as well as its growth and professionalization, were, according to Vansina, essential to obtain administrative control over the country (Igihugu) and achieve social integration of the kingdom's population. The armies controlled whole territories, turning them into administrative units of the kingdom, putting the population – obligated to feed and support the soldiers – at the service of the army and the king. The Amatorero (plural of Itorero<sup>15</sup>) having names reflecting their esprit de corps and military mind-set, for instance “the Undefeated”. Here, the Intore (“chosen ones”) – most from influential families for higher military service elected Tutsi men – were trained to elite warriors that went to war for the king.<sup>16</sup> (Vansina 2004: 60-62)

In addition, the Intore y'Umwami (‘chosen ones of the king’) were imparted with knowledge on ancestral traditions and underwent socialization in the ways of the court. Here, the virtues of a military and courtly-pastoral tradition of the Tutsi elite – noble behaviour (Ikuy-abupfura/Ubupfura), fighting spirit and heroic courage (Ubutware), manfulness (Ubugabo), discipline and self-control (Itonde) – were

15 *Itorero* (radical *toor-*) can be derived from the verbs *gutora/gutoza* which means as much as exercise, accustom oneself, progressively learn or also making the first dance steps (Nkulikiyinka 2002: 171).

16 Vansina (2004) emphasizes the connection between the military and pastoral tradition of the Tutsi and presumes that formerly the organization of herds served as an example to building up the military apparatus. The armies responsible for the royal herds were called *Umutwe* (head) like in the pastoral tradition it was the usual designation for a number of flocks.

cultivated. As educational institutions and cultural centres, where poetry and traditional dances were trained, the Amatorero may – as Jan Vansina assumes – also have contributed to form a linguistically uniform national language, Kinyarwanda, as well as they may have favoured the population’s identification with the kingdom, whereby the latter seems plausible regarding the Intore. But apart from the institution’s potentially integrating effect, the military system also institutionalized distinctions between Hutu and Tutsi as a hierarchic relationship. The high-ranking Intore soldiers had servants and soldiers at their disposal which they called ‘Hutu’ (Vansina 2004: 135)<sup>17</sup>.<sup>18</sup> This military culture spread into other spheres of Rwandan society.

The military system promoted a military culture and a bellicose, heroic self-image displayed in artistic performances at the court that were to become central to the representation of the nation. According to Vansina, the Amatorero supported what he describes as an indoctrinating “exaltation of violence, imposture, and the right of the strongest that became the universal theme of all literary and choreographic artistic forms.” (Vansina 2004: 62) In military parades at the king’s court the Intore celebrated real or fictitious military conquests and victories with war dances (Umuhamirizo), songs and a bellicose poetry, demonstrated the power of the kingdom due to its excellent warriors.

In their sophisticated performances that were accompanied by the rhythm of drums, Intore presented their fighting skills and spirit with agile, elegant movements, aggressive postures and war cries displaying courage and military superiority. During these performances Intore, dressed in loincloth, carried a spear and a shield and wore wigs of long fair hair, reminiscent of a lion’s mane (similar to the king’s headdress and symbolizing the relationship with him), as well as sashes crossing the chest, awarded to warriors of those times for heroic deeds. In their choreographies Intore staged their competition as excellent warriors, competitively praising their talents with a bellicose self-praising poetry called *Ibyivugo* (in singular: *Icyivugo*).<sup>19</sup> Glorifications of one’s own

17 Vansina refers to oral traditions (*Ibitékerezo*) and documents of Peter Schumacher, Microfilm library Anthropos No. 28 A, Posieux, Freiburg 1958.

18 Regarding pre-colonial *Itorero* see Vansina 2004, 2001, 1961, as to *Itorero* in the 19th and 20th century Maquet (1961: 109pp); Bale (2002); Kagame (1963: 196).

19 The term *Icyivugo*, derived from the reflexive verb *kwivuga* (*talk of oneself, pride oneself or boast*) reveals that this genre is a form of self-congratulation. As to *Ibyivugo* see Kagame (1969: 15pp).

military courage, superiority and unscrupulous violence against the enemy were defining characteristics of this genre and remain so in performances to this day.

Expressions of respect and signs of appreciation towards the authorities indicate that these performances also were meant to draw the attention of the powerful.<sup>20</sup> These could award the status of a hero and important positions for military merits (Maquet 1961: 109) – the number of killed enemies –, yet also punish for defeats. The cultural anthropologist Jan Czekanowski, who travelled to the East-African Great Lakes region for the purpose of ethnographic research at the beginning of the 20th century, reported on how warriors returning from a lost battle against the Mutwa Chief Bassebia “in order to cover up their failure and not to be despised due to lacking trophies, [...] [killed] a number of peaceful peasants taking their heads and genitals, to allow a glorious entry of the troops into the capital” (Czekanowski 1917: 276). Military defeats could result in the death penalty (Ibid). Keeping the dependence on and orientation towards the ruler in mind, the question arises, whether the Intore’s performances could not also be regarded as expressions of an authoritarian political culture. Intore chosen by and at the same time existentially dependent on the king celebrated their heroic deeds for king and country, the successful fulfilment of a royal order as a personal victory, demonstrating at the same time the accordance of their individual aspirations with those of the ruler. In this respect the Intore’s performances could be viewed as testimonies of loyalty and thus also as a specific form of an African culture of praise (as to African praise songs see Vogels 2001: 503-504), unveiling not only opportune acclamations of the king but in the portrayal of acts of violence also an ultimately devoted commitment to king and fatherland. However, what real relation there was between the literary portrayal of violence and the violence actually perpetrated cannot be assessed retrospectively.

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20 The following extract may give an example: “Rutinduka [...] I killed you by thrusting my lance [...] He shed blood while the lance pierced his body, and I mutilated him before he drew his last breath [...]. The commander of the expedition, very emotionally: “Oh, you virtuosic javelin thrower”, he said, “You fill me with joy! Come closer and tell me about your glorious deeds!” “In Rugeyo”, I said, “I had killed a petty prince and vaunting my feat, armed with a successful bow, I provided another trophy to our drummer.” (Kagame 1969: 26-27, own translation from French.)

It is open to speculation whether the bellicose performances – similar to Zimmerman’s findings regarding representations of violence in antiquity (Zimmermann 2009:7) – had an identity-creating function and cultivated a collective self-image linked to a martial, violence glorifying tradition as the still popular saying “Urwanda ruratera, ntiruterwa!” [Rwanda attacks and will never be attacked!] , dating back to the 18th century, and other similar sayings suggest (Vansina 2004: 120). At any rate, the performances, stating ultimate commitment, excellence and competition, illustrated a meritocratic norm of Rwanda’s military that accepted only victory and tolerated no defeat – “Defeat is the only bad news.” (Des Forges 2011)

These staging’s presenting Rwanda as a victorious kingdom due to the ultimate endeavour of its warriors became a central trait of the performances representing the monarchy and subsequently Rwanda as a nation. Under King Kigeri Rwabugiri (1835-1895), a special company (Itorero) was first established, specializing in artistic performances (Nkulikiyinka 2002: 173pp)<sup>21</sup>. This likely marked the beginning of a professionalization in the artistic representation of Rwanda through the war dances of the Intore. At least, the performances of the newly established Royal Ballet maintained their importance for representing the nation (Nkulikiyinka 2002: 173-179, 205), while the traditional Itorero institution gradually lost its significance with the introduction of mission schools in the colonial era.

The instrumentalization of court culture for missionary purposes promoted a popularisation of its traditions. Missionaries adapting the term Intore and its local meaning for Christian converts – at first mostly ordinary Hutu and Twa – Intore ry’Imana [God’s chosen ones]<sup>22</sup>. Linking the Tutsi associated higher social status signified by the term with the converts was to enhance their status and at the same time implied an obligation to serve Imana or God (instead of the king as the term Intore ry’Umwami implied) and as his worldly institution the Church and its mission. Under the influence of colonial educational policy, citizens founded dance companies, also called Itorero, in which

21 The ensembles at first are said to have been exclusively Tutsi. An exception was the dance group *Ibirusha*, whose members were Hutu that were children of the magicians and the slaughter of the king’s court (Ibid.).

22 Interviews with Jean-Baptiste Nkulikiyinka 2010 and a missionary of the White Fathers in 2009. Still today churchgoers in mass are addressed as *Intore ry’Imana* (also see Mbonimana/Ntezimana 1990).

they imitated the Intore's war dances (see Nkulikiyinka 2002: 172-173). This may have contributed to a lessening of the Intore's exclusive association with Tutsi court culture, turning their dances into a shared cultural heritage in which the memory of the martial tradition was preserved as in the newly designed national symbols of the country.

It is remarkable in this connection that Rwanda's first national emblem which Belgium designed on the occasion of the 25-year jubilee of King Rudahigwa in 1957 shows headdress, spear and shield as worn by the Intore.<sup>23</sup> The same symbols were also used, together with the crown crane emblem, totem bird of the royal Abanyiginya clan, in the coat of arms of the royal house. The Royal Ballet started representing Rwanda on the international stage in colonial times – for the first time at the Colonial Exhibition on occasion of the 1958 World Exhibition in Brussels – establishing the Intore warrior dances as part of Rwanda's national symbolism.

Surprisingly these warrior dances continued to be performed after independence and the abolition of monarchy under the following Hutu governments, in spite of the marginalisation of court traditions, now stigmatised as culture of the former oppressors. The dances, however, were adapted to the new political context. The colours of the dancer's dressing were changed to the colours of the new national flag (reminding of the Hutu revolution as new founding myth).

Similarly, an attempt was made to exchange the traditional names of the dances and dance companies linked to the pastoral Tutsi tradition for names referring to the new political course, such as "Indepandansi" (recalling the recent independence from colonial rule) or other terms reflecting a new political self-image and the abolished Ubuhake-client system, where Tutsi chiefs had exploited Hutu, "Nangubuhake" ("I detest Ubuhake"). However, over time, these symbolic political dissociations failed to eradicate the traditional terminology (see Nkulikiyinka 2002: 178, 205).

The fact that the new national flag showed a hoe, linked to the agricultural tradition of the Hutu, as well as bow and arrow, could be seen as a sign of continued identification with the military tradition of the kingdom, otherwise rejected. Contrary to the virtue of nobility

23 The fascination the dance spectacles of the *Intore* exerted on Europeans may have been reason for the choice of the symbols.

formerly connected to the Tutsi elite warriors, heroism remained a central national value which now referred to the commitment to the fatherland in the sense of the 'Social Revolution'. In Hutu nationalism, the virtue of nobility, once central to the court's canon of values and likely an ongoing aspect of the self-image of 'noble' Tutsi in the diaspora,<sup>24</sup> took on a negative connotation. Nobility here was associated with an elitist attitude of Tutsi associated with the disdain for Hutu as 'uncivilized,' an image the media used in the 1990s to fuel hostility towards the Tutsi (see Chrétien 1995).

On national holidays during the Second Republic, the MRND (Mouvement Révolutionnaire National pour le Développement) government presented Rwanda in spectacular dance performances as a nation of industrious peasants promoting the country's development through their physically hard manual labour in the fields – said to have been little esteemed by Tutsi.<sup>25</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that the governments of the First and the Second Republic distanced themselves from the Tutsi court culture, a continuity of its tradition can be seen in the praise of the Head of State – which led Lemarchand to refer to the First Republic as a 'presidential Mwamiship' (presidential kingdom).<sup>26</sup>

The names of the music and dance companies (Itorero), so-called 'groupes choqué', praising the president in the MRND one-party state, as well as those of the party militia mobilised for the genocide against the Tutsi, had names resembling those of the former military Itorero troops<sup>27</sup> like Interahamwe ("Those who attack together") and Impuzamugabi ("Those who pursue a common objective"), symbolising a fighting spirit.

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24 A hint pointing at the continued importance of this virtue in the diaspora maybe the example of a praise song in the 1990s from RPF commander Fred Rwigyema, descendant of the royal Nyiginy clan, whose nobility is honored (see Higirow 2007: 78).

25 Photos from the archives of the Rwandan Ministry of Information (ORINFOR), Kigali. As to "Peasant Ideology" see Verwimp (1999); also see Nkulikiyinka (2002: 93).

26 In the performance culture of the First Republic, described by Lemarchand as 'presidential Mwamiship' (presidential Kingdom), as well as of the Second Republic Lemarchand at any rate viewed a continuity of court performance tradition and interpreted it as a sign of the continued authority-centred political culture (Lemarchand 1970: 269).

27 Interview with a former participant in 2009, female postal worker. Also see Des Forges (2002: 69). The government provided costumes for participants on which there were symbols of the party and similar to the *Intore* costumes - thus establishing a symbolic connection between "ruler" and "followers".

In the course of history the Intore's dances became a cultural heritage hardly associated with the old Tutsi tradition. Whilst the image of the Intore warrior turned into a national icon, the pre-colonial Itorero institution fell into oblivion.<sup>28</sup> Its government-initiated revitalization through the Itorero ry'Igihugu program is justified precisely with this loss and interestingly does not refer to the Tutsi origin of the tradition. However, until 2010 the Ministry of Culture (MINESPOC) pointed to this very origin in a (meanwhile no longer accessible to the public) description of national culture on its home page, emphasizing the political function of the art of praise of the Intore during the Tutsi kingdom and its change according to the 'ethnic orientation' of subsequent governments: "the tall, splendidly adorned all-male Tutsi Intore dancers, characterized by coordinated drilling dances reflecting the warrior tradition of the Tutsi [...] were attractions for travellers. [...] Much of Rwanda's traditional cultural heritage revolved around dances, praise songs, and dynastic poems designed to enhance the legitimacy of the Tutsi kingship. Since independence in 1962 another set of traditions has emerged, emphasizing a different cultural stream, identified with a Hutu heritage. Regional dances, including the celebrated hoe dance of the north, are given pride of place in the country's cultural repertoire."<sup>29</sup>

### **What Relevance Does the Tradition Have for the Present?**

Does the Government with the help of the Itorero ry'Igihugu program – oriented less towards the vivid aspects of the old tradition than towards the pre-colonial institution – now aim at re-shaping the nation by revitalizing the pre-colonial Tutsi tradition and at integrating all Rwandans, Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, in this formerly exclusive elite culture whilst possibly reviving or continuing an authoritarian military tradition? Would not a revitalization of a Tutsi associated tradition as point of reference for a new, integrative sense of national identity contradict the policy of national unity and reconciliation? A forced emphasis of a Tutsi tradition could be perceived as a provoking demonstration of Tutsi superiority.

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28 The Rwandans I interviewed did not see any connection between the dances and Tutsi tradition.

29 The text was on the home page of the Ministry of Culture until beginning of 2010 under <http://www.minispoc.gov.rw/>, (latest update 08/2008).



As a symbolic trap (Kaufman 2006), this could – contrary to Government interests – reinforce the demonization of the Tutsi and thus jeopardize the new political order. A re-introduction of a Tutsi tradition connoted a national guiding culture (Leitkultur) could, from an ideological perspective – given the RPF’s origin in the Tutsi diaspora and against the backdrop of the RPF’s seizure of power – be proof of the once much-vaunted doomsday scenario of the (re)conquest of power by ‘the Tutsi’ to establish a Tutsi empire by subjugating the Hutu (see Chrétien 1995, Des Forges 2002: 108-112). Against the backdrop of the idea of a Tutsi-imposed stigmatisation of the Hutu as uncivilized people, the Government’s ambition for cultural and social readjustment by reviving the old values of the kingdom might trigger the critical impact on the process of national integration.

The Government’s recourse to the pre-colonial Itorero raises further questions: Would not the orientation towards an authoritarian, violence-glorifying tradition hamper the Government’s promotion of a democratic culture of peace which the Government precisely views to be its central task in the process of coming to terms with the consequences of the genocide? How does the Government meet the difficulties that may arise from the revitalization of the old tradition?

What renders the Itorero tradition attractive to the Government? When looking at the historical development of the tradition it is eventually remarkable that notwithstanding the marginalisation of the court tradition the Intore’s dances after independence remained part of the national performance culture. Along with the fact that these elite culture dances had become a shared cultural heritage no longer exclusively associated with the Tutsi, both the fact that the dances had become well-established conventions of the political mis-en-scene and their particular quality of impressively evidencing national strength and pride may explain their preservation. It may also be that the Intore’s performances – as a culture of praise – were inherited as part of a traditionally authoritarian political culture. At any rate, these performances seem to reflect and (through the psychologically effective embodiment of a heroic attitude) potentially foster a social or political ideal or norm in an entertaining, aesthetically attractive form. The aesthetic attractiveness and the ensuing popularity of the dance spectacles, which are cheerful, entertaining and in Rwanda most popular events, may explain their preservation

and be the reason why the present Government draws on the Itorero tradition. Its attractiveness and the potentially mobilizing force may account for the specific psychological impact of the heroic self-image, Intore warriors represent.

Although it remains speculative whether the Intore's dances have any psychological impact or relevance in this sense, some reflections on the cultural psycho-logic of the figure may provide further insights. A mobilising power of the figure could lie not only in its function as a socially defined role model, but equally in its potential to appeal to the need for self-enhancement which the social psychologist Herbert Kelman (1997) identified as central to creating bonds between the individual and the social group mobilising people's commitment to the in-group cause. The awareness of being "chosen" for a higher mission may increase self-esteem and motivate participants to meet role expectations – i. e., benefitting the nation through recognised heroic deeds. In the self-enhancement growing from the awareness to be called for a higher mission lies a mobilising power exploited in former times by the king and later by Christian missionaries to achieve their goals. Does the present Government also use these potentials? How does the Itorero ry'Igihugu program exactly relate to the Itorero tradition to create a new societal order and meet its development objectives?

### **The Re-interpretation of the Itorero Tradition: The Itorero ry'Igihugu Program**

The Itorero is note [sic!] a new creation but an endogen opportunity which will help Rwandans to rebuild a patriotism culture based on values of excellence, integrity, equity, heroism and nobility. (NURC 2009b: 25)

Itorero ry'Igihugu is a programme for all and its objective is to make every Rwandan Intore. (NURC 2009a: 18)

What is meant when the Government describes Itorero as an endogenous opportunity to rebuild a patriotic culture defining as its objective to make every Rwandan Intore? How does the Government draw on the old tradition to achieve its objectives? The Government's description of the pre-colonial Itorero institution and the tradition's history, laying the conceptual and legitimizing foundation for the program, provides

deeper insights. It is remarkable that the program's historical narrative links the pre-colonial and the modern Itorero, following the logic of the Government's interpretation of history. The approach suggests a return to a Golden Age-like original state of the nation said to have been gradually destroyed (by the destruction of traditional values) since colonial times. Here, the relevance of the old Itorero as Rwanda's educational institution imparting common Rwandan values, the exchange on issues of national interest and collaboration to achieve national objectives, are emphasized. The very characteristics that led to the Itorero's destruction as any institution during colonialism reveal its fundamental importance to the existence and well-being of the nation today. Against this backdrop a revitalization, a "new edition" of Itorero is demanded: "Itorero was the school of that time [...] intended to impart Rwandan values. [...] Yet during colonization this cultural center [...] was destroyed and its destruction allowed [...] anti-values to emerge ending up in genocide. [...] We need to reestablish this forum, a common national vision, in order to [...] agree on values and anti-values. An Intore is someone who has a vision, respects values and prohibits anti-values. This is what we want to create. We want Intore for Rwanda."<sup>30</sup> The use of a modern terminology in describing the old Itorero (by referring to "national programs", "courses and debates on national values") seems to mirror present-day political paradigms: "Itorero ry'Igihugu was [...] the channel through which the nation could convey several courses regarding national culture (language, patriotism, social relations, sports, dancing and songs, defense of the nation [...]). The participants were encouraged to discuss different national programs and values [...] could develop their judgment, psychology, work and mutual aid, life and collaboration with others." (NURC 2009a: 11) In the programme's descriptions the Itorero's military function is moved to the background. Remarkably, the link to the Tutsi origin of the tradition goes unmentioned in the programme's strategic plan and was even denied by the Itorero Task Force staff.<sup>31</sup>

30 Interview with Government officials of the *Itorero Task Force*, February 2009/Audio, author's own translation from French.

31 Interviews in 2009 and 2011. This contrasts with the results of a Government research done in 2008 in co-operation with the Dutch NGO *La Benevolencija* and the German NGO *Ziviler Friedensdienst (ZFD)* in the project "*Memos Learning from History*", in which memories of old *Intore*, identifying themselves as Tutsi, about the former *Itorero* were documented. The Strategic Plan of *Itorero ry'Igihugu* refers to this research as a source of historical knowledge about *Itorero* (NURC 2009a: 11). The interviewed recalled *Itorero* as a Tutsi elite institution and state their self-

Pre-colonial Itorero is explicitly presented as a non-exclusive, integrative non-segregating institution for all Rwandans and as such a source of national strength: “In Itorero, there was no discrimination or segregation; and this was the weapon that helped Rwandans to expand and develop their country.” (NURC 2009a: 11) Instead of a hierarchic relationship between Hutu and Tutsi, formerly characterizing the military system, brotherhood, and equality among Intore are emphasized, describing a fair meritocratic principle according to which only high achievers were rewarded and promoted in their careers irrespective of origin: “Itorero was not segregative, that is why even captured foreigners could have access to it and, if they behaved fairly, could be rewarded like others. It wasn’t for all Intore to get cows or hills, only the good-performers could get them.” (NURC 2009a: 11) Against this background, a performance-based hierarchy among Intore as established in the Itorero ry’Igihugu program, is legitimized. The description of the traditional Itorero affirms the institution’s significance for the recruitment of national leaders after proven qualification. (NURC 2009a: 11) It further implies the Intore’s obedience, the obligation to loyalty and the team leaders’ authorization to flexibly adapt the course of instruction and mobilize the Intore according to current requirements – an issue apparently relevant to ‘command structures’ within the Itorero ry’Igihugu program: “Several occupations of Itorero were planned by the Itorero trainer, it was up to him to know what to begin by in the morning and the way of managing the whole day, he could put an emphasis in such quickly needed action depending on time.” (NURC 2009a: 11)

The new Itorero ry’Igihugu is to be a place where Rwandans meet and are empowered to efficiently contribute to bringing about a social and economic revolution in their own sphere of influence based on Rwandan values: “Itorero ry’Igihugu is a [...] cultural centre which mentors

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image as Tutsi of the higher class (also see Adamczyk 2008). The documentary film of ZFD based on the project, showing Interviews with the old *Intore*, could not be made available by the Government, who actually has the film, nor by ZFD. ZFD stated, there were difficulties with the Government regarding the release of the film. Excerpts from the film were used by ZFD for a peace education film “*Kuvuga Neza*”. It introduces the former elite culture as a point of reference for a new culture of peace. The Government (NURC) produced two films about the *Itorero ry’Igihugu* program available, which, however, do not refer to the eye-witness reports, the *Memos* project documented: “*Urugendo Rw’Intore*” (“The journey of the Intore”), released in February 2008 and “*Itorero Isonga*”, not dated, a summary of program activities.

Rwandan citizens on civic education [...] enabling them to embark on an economic and social revolution. [...] where all Rwandans meet and are mentored on having objectives and vision in their ways of working and life [...] are taught the national objectives and the ways to achieve them by using the Rwandan culture.” (NURC 2009a: 6-7) Promoting the program as a multifunctional tool for national well-being and development, the Government affirms the extraordinary comprehensive scope of the program as it is not only to bring about attitude and behavioral change in the population, but also political transformation regarding governance in accordance with globalized norms of political practice: “Itorero ry’Igihugu comes to contribute in solving problems related to mind-set, ill behavior [...] [it] couldn’t be considered as normal programs of training and mobilizing because it aims at mentoring a Rwandan citizen a positive change maker. [...] is a concern for all citizens in all sectors of life, [...] a pillar to help other national policies to accomplish their mission. [...] a great pillar for good governance and democracy as it will help Rwandans and Leaders to learn more and behave fairly.” (NURC 2009a: 14) Itorero ry’Igihugu, the government contends, will help Rwanda turn into a well-to-do, morally just and internationally well-respected country: “Itorero ry’Igihugu will help to promote unity and mutual help in a Rwandan society that is characterized by a culture built on values that make Rwanda a respected, a valuable country, with dignity in the international arena, a great nation for its citizens and visitors, and a continuously progressive country, comfortable for all.” (NURC 2009a: 6-7, 14) Itorero ry’Igihugu thus aims to educate Rwandans on common values, visions and a patriotic attitude implying dignity and heroism: “The vision [...] is [...] to have Rwandans: - With a shared mindset and values to promote their unity and patriotism [...] - Characterized by [...] pride to develop their country” (NURC 2009a: 16) “to: a) Mentor Intore suitable for the country [...] c) Praise dignity (ishema) and heroic aspects (ibigwi) of Rwanda and Rwandans” (NURC 2009a: 16) Thus a “culture of volunteerism” is to be established, symbolized by the Intore as the image of an ideal citizen, encouraging altruistic service to the nation – “selfless service to the Nation” (NIC 2011: 4).

## The Intore Warrior: Symbol of the New Citizen

As symbolic figure the Intore warrior represents an ideal image of a human, central to the Government's philosophy of societal recreation, which on the one hand ensues from the aristocratic court and military tradition and on the other hand from newly defined ideal features referring to modern, development promoting orientations. Intore are seen as distinct from other parts of society for their refined intellectual and moral qualities, always acting in conformity with the nation's interests, giving proof of their strong sense of responsibility towards the fatherland, as persons by their education united in brotherhood striving for the fulfilment of duties and excellence: "Intore and normal person were different. The one who adhered to Itorerero was knowledgeable [...] intelligent [...] A good Intore had to protect himself against neglecting others [...] Intore were very good friends and unified [...] friendship continued even after Itorerero due to courses [...] encouraging them to brotherhood." (NURC 2009a: 12) The newly defined national values such as unity, patriotism, integrity, commitment, reliability as well as modesty are among the values the Intore represents. Heroism (Ubutware) and nobility (Ubutwura) are considered the Intore's outstanding virtues, inclusive of the aforementioned values and being central to the Ubutwura, the Intore's specific character. (NURC 2009a: 16; NIC 2011: 20)

Yet what exactly is understood here by nobility and heroism? Remarkably, the meaning of nobility, which under Hutu-nationalism was related to a negative Tutsi stereotype, now is attributed a new, clearly contrary significance. Whilst nobility under Hutu-nationalism connoted idle arrogance, listlessness, laziness and the exploitation of the Hutu by the Tutsi, it now signifies ethical behaviour: "A noble person is a person with good behaviour, credible and faithful. Ubutwura or nobility goes with having true love, a heart with care and pity, generous without vanity [...] Nobility is not selfish and violent. A noble person will not abandon you on a journey, will not reveal a secret, is not greedy, and cares about your orphans. A noble person is kind, welcoming, does not misbehave, is punctual, organized, transparent, and is humble and lives in peace with others." (NURC 2009a: 16)

As a core value of the new national code of ethics the new significance of nobility takes some of the sting out of the old Hutu-nationalist in-

terpretation. Nobility now is declared a virtue intrinsically linked to heroism (Ubutware). Heroes are those individuals who by ambition and purposefulness have proved to be successful in the permanent competition of life, reflecting an expressly meritocratic principle. The heroic commitment for the fatherland becomes a question of personal dignity (Ishema). It is said that one should rather die than show misconduct becoming a traitor to the country that way: “The whole life of a human being is a very hard struggle, like others that person is engaged in and must win. Nobility and heroism always go together, better to die instead of misbehaving, and better to die instead of being a traitor to the country. A person becomes a hero due to heroic actions done for his/her country.” (NURC 2009a: 16) The Intore, in his or her sphere of action, is regarded as a driving force of national development and a shining example to his fellow citizens. (NURC 2009b: 11; NURC 2009a: 23) Anyone living up to the principles of the programme, meeting the performance commitments (Imihugo) – contracts on agreed development goals –, shall be an Intore. (NURC 2009a: 15)

The Intore stand for a culture of moral, peace, performance and progress. The designation ‘chosen one’ emphasizes the belonging to a community of the elected implying election for higher tasks, potentially mobilizing forces that draw on the enhancement of self-esteem through group-affiliation and performance to the benefit of the nation (as to the psychology beyond see Kelman 1997). The community of the Intore is one based on a clear confession to Intore’s creed, on common ethical principles, a way of living as well as on a common vision.

## **Structures, Teaching Practices and Syllabuses**

The program participants, recruited via national administrative structures, are given identification numbers and partially equipped with uniforms when they start the introductory training (Gutoza). Sessions are tailored – as to time and content – to the different target groups<sup>32</sup> of different sizes, called Itorero. The training lasts from a couple of days to several weeks, they are held in public facilities all over the

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32 There are training for all age groups of a family, for professionals like journalists, artists, farmers, government officials, high school graduates, university graduates, etc. (see NURC 2009a: 18).

country. The educated elite meet in the Peace and Leadership Center in Nkumba near Ruhengeri, mostly isolated from the public.<sup>33</sup>

A regular school day starts with marching – called Chaka-Mchaka playing on the onomatopoeic denomination of a national Ugandan mobilization program – supplemented by military exercises for special target groups.<sup>34</sup> In addition the syllabus provides a Civic Education module, Character Building and a Community Service module (NIC 2011: 20).<sup>35</sup>

During the introductory courses participants are instructed on national history, government policy and the programme's tasks and structures. In the participatory part of the courses participants are asked to reflect in small groups on developmental issues in their living environment. By taking examples of their own world of experience, they identify attitudes which hamper or foster the realization of the developmental vision and the corresponding Rwandan values and taboos, and look for practicable solutions to development challenges in the specific context. (Interview with NURC officials in 2009; also see NURC 2009a: 22) The thus determined values (Indangaciro) and taboos (Kirazira) are intended to build and foster the new national code of ethics. Collective collaborative work (Good Will Actions) as practiced country-wide each month in the Umuganda called community work as well as celebrating together are to create a spirit of community and support the internalization of the lessons learned.

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33 As to the trainings see NURC (2009b), NURC (2009a), NIC (2011); Government film "*Urugendo Rw'Intore*" (2008). The Government organizes transport to training centers, provides for food and accommodation. Local people are asked to provide adequate logistical support. Financing is provided from the State Budget as well as grants from international organizations (Ibid).

34 For fear of a biased view of the program as a military means of mobilization this is avoided in public presentation. Interview with NURC official, May 2011.

35 In an article of 12.06.2011 in the pro-government journal *The New Times* online under the heading *Teen Times* a participant tells about the fears before start of the program for the sanitary situation, harsh education methods – for the punishment of rolling around in the dirt (*kwiviringita*) – and then about his own experiences in the *Itorero ry'Igihugu* Training with 50.000 high-school graduates. The participants are isolation for several weeks, who have to hand in their mobile phones during the training, the large military and police array to protect the trainees – it remains unclear what they should be protected against –, the common use of rubber boots, apart from monotonous food extensive care is taken of participants by the Government, the advantages, the sense and success of the program – as with regard to an increase in patriotism – are described. Also Rwanda and its leaders are praised.



Song and poetry contributions, partly composed by the participants themselves, incorporate references to the programme's curriculum. The government counts on the educational impact of Rwandans sayings (Imigani migufi), praise songs (Ibyivugo) and stories evidencing exemplary commitment, as well as on artistic traditions which the government (because of their familiarity and cheerful character) views a vehicle facilitating information transfer and involvement of the less educated, whilst, at the same time, maintaining a cultural tradition.<sup>36</sup>

In their graduating ceremony participants pledge to adhere to the program's Code of Conduct and sign the Imihugo called performance contracts, committing themselves to achieve defined developmental goals within a stipulated period of time. The Intore's performance is monitored through the program's administrative structure, which oversees the work of Itorero groups from all over the country. (NURC 2009a: 21-23, 26, 30; NIC 2011: 19) The Itorero ry'Igihugu's administration structure parallels governmental administration with a number of different levels, some bearing names from the precolonial military system. Corresponding to the 30 districts of the country, the program structures the national territory (and its population) into 30 large divisions called Umutwe (as the pre-colonial armies), which are comprised of 416 Urugerero named units. Mirroring the Imidugudu, the lowest administrative level in Rwanda, some 14,837 Ingando sections exist country-wide. Within this system, meetings on different levels are organized at regular intervals, providing the framework for a constant involvement of the population, a system for efficient knowledge management, for controlling and promoting development progress.

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36 Excerpt from the minutes of an interview with the former NURC director, Fatuma Ndagiza (27.2.2009), authors own translation from English: "We use [...] *Ingando* und *Itorero* to convey ideas, and in Rwandan culture especially songs, poems and stories are of central importance, because they reach people of different ages and different educational backgrounds. Since they are entertaining, they are less tiring than political discourses and support the successful conveyance of our messages. We use the potentials of these non-intellectual forms of instruction. Issues like reconciliation after genocide can be discussed more easily with the help of Rwandan artistic traditions. Since they are not dependent on the educational level these artistic traditions also allow less educated, yet artistically talented to actively participate. Different from the messages conveyed by the media, there is a special contact with the audience here. Information is passed here in a direct way and can thus be shared. Watching and listening creates at best a connection between narrator and the recipients within a community."

Based on the evaluations of the Intore's achievements according to the Imihigo contracts, participants receive categories of evaluations. The high-achievers receive the title of Indongozi, meaning 'leader' in the sense of an older wise person. The low performers and the under-achievers are called Ibigwari ('cowards' or 'weaklings'). Whilst the latter are being publicly humiliated and depreciated, the former are celebrated at a nightly ceremony (Inkera y'abahizi) and awarded in three categories: first, for merits in the social field, second for patriotic heroic action and good governance and third for exemplary individual achievements and contributions to the country's development. The country-wide best Intore are honored at the national level on Itorero ry'Igihugu Day<sup>37</sup> (NIC 2011: 15-16)<sup>38</sup>, yearly celebrated on November 16, marking the day of the introduction of the program.

Itorero ry'Igihugu thus establishes a meritocratic hierarchy of Intore, where the high performers would also be the morally strongest and best executives. An apparent conflict remains, however, between the program's meritocratic orientation and its emphasis on charity and solidarity, particularly when addressing involuntarily weak performers.

### **Itorero ry'Igihugu Day: Staging a New National Community<sup>39</sup>**

On Itorero ry'Igihugu Day thousands of awarded Intore from all over the country come together to celebrate the efforts of the new national community in the Amahoro stadium in the capital of Kigali. They wear uniforms in the national colours with the Itorero logo badge which has written on it "Unity is the fundament for peace" and display banners with the names of the Itorero administration districts such as 'Inganji' [the Conquerors or the Supremes], reminders of the old military tradition. These men and women parade through the stadium,

37 Prior to this day there is a *Itorero ry'Igihugu Week*, during which the program is the main issue in the media.

38 Interview with an official of the Itorero Task Force, February 2009. See also NURC (2009a: 11).

39 The following description is based on the Government film "Urugendo rw'Intore" (2008) – The journey of Intore –, documenting a. o. the Itorero ry'Igihugu Day 2007 in Kigali contents of which were translated from Knyarwanda into English (Urugendo rw'Intore 2010). The songs and poems quoted can also be found in documents provided by the NURC.

accompanied by the rhythm of whistles, songs, reciting government slogans, and the cheering of other Intore gathered in the stands. Some of them wear Intore costumes and traditional festive garments, carry baskets and calabashes (objects of high symbolic value in the Rwandan culture). Symbolic references as made through the performance of a man dressed up like the king, reminiscent of the parades at the king's court, evoking memories of the 'Golden Age' of the nation. Poems and songs of praise are performed in a traditional manner and performance pledges (Imihigo) are made before an audience including the president, his ministers and various government representatives. The Intore celebrate themselves as 'persistent fighters' and call all Rwandans to unite in order to rebuild the country and realize Vision 2020. Reciting government slogans, they call for the 'fight against corruption and clientelism,' and demand the eradication of the genocide ideology. In their songs they praise the decentralization of the state as a sustainable step towards democracy and express their determinedness to foster national unity, serve the country, and nurture prosperity for all as a result of their joint efforts: "Chosen people, yee! Go forward, yee! We will build it [...]! In the whole world [...] People, unity and reconciliation, good governance!" "Genocide ideology, let us uproot it with all its roots. All of you, have wealth! Let us struggle for it and work for it as Rwandese people!" They call upon Rwandans to learn the lessons from history – as taught in the program – and to support and believe in the new revolution: "Let us assimilate these lessons we received, let us increase our belief, these lessons are needed! History lessons, let us assimilate it, let us increase the belief, these lessons are needed! [...] Lesson on revolution, let us assimilate it, and let us increase the belief, these lessons are needed!"<sup>40</sup> Surprisingly, with a text and melody identical to the political song popular under Habyarimana (and possibly under Kayibanda) recounting the "[S]ocial Revolution" of Hutu in 1959, the singers celebrate themselves and their leader as revolutionary forces<sup>41</sup>: "We are promoters of revolution! Our President is a promotor of revolution!"<sup>42</sup>

40 "Ayo masomo twize tuyakamirike, twongere morali aya masomo arakenewe, Isomory'amateka turikamirike, twongere morali aya masommo arakenewe, Ref.: Ayo masomo twize tuyakamirike, twongere morali aya masomo arakenewe, Impinduramatwara, turikamirike." (Translated from Kinyarwanda, Urugendo Rw'Intore 2010)

41 Information from interviews with Rwandans in 2009 and 2011.

42 "*Turi abakangurambaga b'impinduramatwara! Perezida wacu ni umukangurambaga!*" (Translated from Kinyarwanda, Urugendo Rw'Intore 2010)

According to the African tradition of praise songs, the Intore thank and celebrate their political leaders and call for applause: “Leaders be praised, [...] for the courage and skillfulness with which you lead us! Let us praise our President! He leads us well! [...] He brought peace, let us thank him! He restored unity among Rwandese people, let us thank him! Where are the acclamations?!” Rwanda is praised as beautiful homeland, the heart of Africa, to be proudly presented to the world. Referring to the mythical origin of the old kingdom near the Muhazi Lake where Gihanga is said to have founded Rwanda (Gasabo), the singers proclaim: “Our beautiful Gasabo! Praising Rwanda is not an exaggeration: it is the heart of Africa, which is always smart [...]. The brand of beauty, which we present to the world!” (translated from Kinyarwanda, Urugendo rw’Intore 2010) The songs glorify Rwandan culture as a culture of solidarity and community and underline the Intore’s commitment to restore this genuine tradition: “We will bring back Rwandese culture so that it may not die and be lost, we will bring it back! [...] Old people will bring it back. The culture of evenings spent together, culture of assistance during marriage process, the culture of solidarity, the culture of assistance in case of danger we will bring it back!”<sup>43</sup>

Ibyivugo poetry is also adjusted to the new political context. It trivializes the importance of ethnic identification in a humoristic way, ridiculing the pride of one’s ethnic origin and demonstrating its uselessness by pointing out that ethnicity does not bring any economic benefit.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the following excerpt from an Ibyivugo poem also calls for peaceful co-operation, joint efforts to reconstruct Rwanda

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43 “Tuzawugarura umuco w’Abanarwanda utazavaho ucika, tukandagara, tuzawugarura! [...] Basaza bawgarura, umuco w’igitaramo, umuco wo gutarama, umuco wo gusabairana, muco wo gufatanya, umuco wo gutabarana. Tuzawugarura!” (Translated from Kinyarwanda, Urugendo Rw’Intore 2010)

44 A trainer of the program described the traditionally violent content of *Ibyivugo*, especially against the Hutu – a name also used for denominating and despising enemies of the kingdom (Vansina 2004: 135) – as inconsistent with Government policy and reported on modifications to the contents of the poems: “Today we have changed the contents of the Ibyivugo since we don’t want to re-open old wounds. Today they are about recent experiences and successes. We avoid offending and we avoid talking about ethnic groups, about having defeated or killed the others. How can I pride myself today if saying: “I killed that many Hutu!?” The contents of Ibyivugo are no longer violent like in the past!” (Interview, April 2009, own translation from French)

as the common home country, which appears as a focal point of a new, inclusive national identity:

“What is an ethnic group? I found that it is worth nothing! Let me give an example: If someone who finds it [the ethnic group] very useful can take his Tutsiness which he praises to go shopping with without money and they will give him salt, we will congratulate you! If you praise your Hutuness, bring it to [the bus company] Jaguar or to ATRACO Express. If you reach Kampala [the capital of Uganda] without ticket or paying, we will congratulate you! If you praise your Twaness, feel totally proud of it, bring it to the pitch and score goals by praising it, we will congratulate you! If all those things are null, there is no reason to praise them. Most important for us is tolerance, to be peaceful as Rwandese people, let us be tolerant, Rwandese people born in Rwanda, let us reconstruct our country as Rwandese people!” (Translated from Kinyarwanda, Urugendo rw’Intore 2010)

The “Poem of the Intore”, which could be regarded as a manifesto of »Intore-hood«, stylizes the Intore as morally and intellectually superior Rwandan citizens, contrasting them with the image of a »Non-Intore« as immoral people without valuable goals. »Non-Intore« are described as traitors to the nation and a threat to the people, doomed to failure for having turned away from Rwandan humanism (symbol of which is the mythical founding father Gihanga). They are predicted to lead a life in poverty characterized by envy of the wealth of relatives in Europe, without any prospect of prosperity, if they do not turn away from the misleading ideologies of the past (“carrying dead things”) – presumably Hutu-nationalism. Yet the poem indicates that ‘Non-Intore’ have three things in common with the Intore: they are Rwandans, they are, in principle, skilful and they are striving for prosperity. To escape from decline, their »conversion« to ‘Intore-hood’ is suggested. In accepting the new guiding culture and the new national objectives, they can become well respected and full members of the national community of chosen ones. The rhetorical question whether the biological parents that left their child behind or foster parents that adopted, well received and educated it are the better parents can be metaphorically understood as a comparison of the former Hutu-nationalist and the present government, the latter apparently being the morally committed saviour. Implied are the superiority and advantages of a national community based on common ethnical principles over the ideology

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of a common descent. The “Poem of the Intore” calls upon Rwandans to support the Government’s project and become part of and profit from a new national movement:

Be strong and make strong, Intore!

Those who as skillful people, skillful people living far far away, cheat you,

may they be afraid of the one who created us!

They are scared, fleeing, refusing to accept Gihanga [the creator of Rwanda] who could fill them with humaneness which prevents such [ideological] contamination

And those wandering around, where are they finally going?

The one who is not Intore passes his time in his village hatching vicious plans, killing persons and animals, thinking of his relatives living in Europe who do not give him any potatoes. In the morning he takes a club to threaten people so that the world may know that there is no peace.

Thus, which of the two is your parent: the one who gave birth to you and abandoned you or the one who affiliated and educates you thereafter?

If we refuse to be Intore, we will die, become like the dead, shameless and without nobility, we will become like the dead carrying dead things! He will die, you will die, you will become a widow and lose your children! We will leave behind orphans dying!<sup>45</sup>

Government representatives praise the Intore on Itorero ry’Igihugu Day for the missions that have been accomplished and evoke the dream of a new flourishing Rwanda. In the Government film “Urugendo rw’Intore” (2008), President Kagame is presented as an Intore among Intore. The film shows a speech by the President emphasizing equality but also the obligations of the Intore and highlights the population’s and its leader’s confidence in Rwanda’s ‘chosen ones’: “All of us, we are Intore. Even these high personalities are Intore [applause]. Among Intore, there are no big, small, all are Intore [ap-

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45 Excerpt from a poem. Translated from a Kinyarwanda. poem, it can be found in full length in NURC (2007).

plause]. Intore are characterized by love, the struggle for individual and country development. Intore are brave and faithful. Intore live in harmonious togetherness. Intore do not break agreements. Intore do respect themselves and others. Intore do not struggle for their individual interests only, they struggle for common interests. Intore are always proud [noble]. Somehow, you have been chosen to be part of the “chosen ones” because of trust they have in you, in order to be Intore for them and for our Rwanda.” (Translated from Kinyarwanda, Urugendo rw’Intore 2010)

### **The Culture-bound Logic of Societal Reconstruction**

Although Itorero ry’Igihugu draws on the pre-colonial tradition it does not fully reproduce its genuine form, due to the new function of the program and its role as an expression of the political will to overcome divisions. Access to the group of ‘chosen ones’ is no longer exclusively restricted to Tutsi but open to all loyal patriots irrespective of their origin. The new patriotism is far from being exclusive, giving after all publicity to the possibility of social integration of even ‘Non-Intore’ (defined as enemies of the nation), through conversion and commitment to one ‘moral culture’ and future vision. Access to the new national community is a matter of choice and none of descent – even though recourse to the mythical founding father Gihanga may as well imply a genealogical legitimization of the nation.

The program equalizes individual, national and government objectives and, at the same time, prioritizes national interests over the value of the individual and his life by demanding a commitment to the nation including self-sacrifice and by promoting a meritocratic norm (symbolized by the inner hierarchy among the Intore). Performance is understood as a voluntary, patriotically and morally motivated work to the benefit of the nation’s development and is introduced as a fair principle legitimizing new social differentiations. In Itorero, only high achievers living up to the national ideals merit recognition, whereas underachievers are at risk of becoming devalued. The program’s virtues of compassion and solidarity seem to contrast with the pedagogy of punishment which (besides civic education and cultural adjustment training) is to educate Rwandans to become Intore.

The traditional designation “chosen one” may by addressing the need for positive self-regard and distinctiveness potentially create emotional bonds between the individual and the new community and motivate commitment to the in-group cause (Kelman 1997). In Itorero, honoring the Intore is linked to a depreciation of Rwandan »Non-Intore« and may trigger a psychological impact facilitating the integration of opponents into the new political order. Assuming that people generally strive for a positive social identity and better life opportunities, the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1986) suggests that degradation of the Non-Intore, exclusion from the community of the chosen as defined enemies of the country and conjuring of their lack of future prospects may encourage members of stigmatized groups to switch sides in an effort to gain self-esteem and economic benefits.

Itorero ry'Igihugu may also further national unity as it promotes cooperation to achieve a common objective. The Realistic Group Conflict Theory (Sherif 1966) states that the need for cooperation of conflicting groups in order to achieve a common goal is likely to reduce intergroup tensions as well as dismantle hostile images of the other. A strict organization as set up with the program increases efficiency and promises developmental outcomes which in turn could favour social cohesion. On the other hand, the same efficient control structure, reminiscent of an army, may also meet security interests, creating a double security architecture as is the case in Uganda (see e. g. Kagoro 2012). Accordingly, Rwandan opinions of the program show that there is both hope for an improvement of social and economic conditions, as well as fear based on past experience of a continued political functionalization of cultural traditions, government programs and the restriction of individual freedom.

The new image of the national culture symbolized by the Intore seems to be closely related to the tradition of the RPF's Tutsi and, at the same time, counters negative Tutsi-stereotypes and the image of the Rwandan culture promoted by Hutu-nationalism. However, the Government's founding narrative of a culture-based, moral, united and strong pre-colonial nation and its cultural decline seems to serve nation-rebuilding. By defining all Rwandans as victims of a loss of culture and simultaneously as heroic promoters of a cultural and moral revolution for the return to a 'Golden Age'-like state, this narrative of national recreation externalizes guilt by making the colonizers



responsible for social tensions and bridges social divides by providing a positive, heroic collective self-image, derived from the familiar figure of the Intore. It is furthermore remarkable that although Hutu-nationalism is rejected, elements of its political rhetoric, such as the repeated reference to a moral 'revolution', are integrated into the new political context and combined with patterns of the old tradition. Itorero ry'Igihugu draws on the continuity of the Itorero tradition as a shared cultural heritage. It applies principles of participation and equality to ensure the people's commitment to Government goals. By drawing on the new interpretation of the old, originally military tradition, the Government aims at establishing a democratic culture of peace and interestingly doesn't perceive 'community spirit' and a 'top-down approach' as collectivism or authoritarianism and as diametrically opposed to this objective. It, however, seems as if the program draws on a rather different aspect of the Itorero tradition, namely on an authoritarian-like normative orientation exemplified through the artistic performances of the Intore.<sup>46</sup>

One can wonder if the revitalization of the Itorero tradition is possibly the only way of addressing all Rwandans, of motivating and uniting them by making the new community imaginable and emotionally accessible. Do glorifications of Rwanda's culture, defined as moral and heroic, and staging Rwandans as heroic people help overcome a national trauma and create a new positive and integrative national self-image after genocide? Or do they hinder a critical appraisal of the past with its nationalistic mobilization and handed down cultural and political conventions? Jan Assmann's presumption as to a historically grown collective self-image that "[t]hrough its cultural heritage a society becomes visible to itself and to others. Which past becomes evident in that heritage and which values emerge in its identificatory appropriation tells us much about the constitution and the tendencies of a society" (Assmann 1995: 133) could be given an entirely different interpretation as far as Itorero ry'Igihugu is concerned. Does the Government with the adapted Itorero tradition possibly hold up a 'cultural mirror' to society, for Rwandans to recognize and at the same time re-create and re-invent themselves as a nation? Far from any idea-

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46 This specific recourse to a Rwandan tradition could also be seen as an expression of Rwanda's modernity in the sense of Shmuel Eisenstadt.

lization of cultural heritage as conflict medicine<sup>47</sup> Itorero ry'Igihugu exemplifies numerous facets of harnessing and the complex impacts of a reinterpretation of an old tradition for the purpose of designing a new political order and overcoming inner divisions.

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<sup>47</sup> See e. g. Zartman (2000), Bräuchler (2011). *Itorero* has not yet been added to the UNESCO list of „intangible cultural heritage“. Within the framework of the *Declaration of Libreville*, made at the *International Conference on Intercultural Dialogue and the Culture of Peace in Central Africa and the Great Lakes Region* in Libreville (18-20.11.2003) only *Gacaca* (Graca [!]) was enlisted as peace promoting immaterial cultural heritage.

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