



## Beating Drums or Beating Women? An Analysis of the Drum Universe in Burundi

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#### Abstract

This essay analysed the legal restrictions imposed on women by the 2017 Burundian Decree No. 100/196, regulating the operation of drums at the national and international levels. It argues that despite the fact that ancient Burundi drums were more than mere musical instruments, they were also sacred objects for the purpose of ceremonial use and were only used in exceptional circumstances and according to specific rituals. However, before the promulgation of the decree, drum beating was more a business-related performance where even some women were participants. This essay posits that drum beating basically represented all the major happenings of the country: enthronements, funerals of rulers or celebrating the cycle of seasons. It is also assumed that the politicization of an erstwhile cultural performance fosters the discrimination of an already marginalised layer of the society; women. One of the most surprising features, however, is that the different parts of the drum are named after parts of the body of the woman. Therefore the questions the researchers attempt to answer are the following: What are the consequences of motivations behind the decree to forbid women from beating drums? How is beating the drum synonymous to beating women? What are the social implications of this decree in this era of women's emancipation in Burundi?

**Keywords:** Burundi, drum beating, marginalisation, presidential decree, women



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## **1.0 Introduction**

Musicological studies on Burundian drumming and in particular on women and drumming in Africa show that the drum is one of the most shared and symbolic musical instruments in Africa. Despite this territorial expansion, a social category, namely women, is relatively sidelined in this area. In some cultures, the place of women in the world of drumming is critical. A quick case in mind takes us among the Wagogo in Tanzania where only women are allowed to hit drums at the same time as they sing and dance (Vallejo 1959). In Burundi, women have always had an ambiguous role. Although it is she who gives life and accompanies it by the care that she lavishes on each member of her family and the entourage, the society confers on her a place of faithful companion and respectful of the man. This person (a father, a husband, a brother, a relative, or any other administrative authority) often has the last word on the political, social and economic management of the family and/or the country. This sexist polarization of tasks is consecrated by culture. Thus, in verbal form or through different practices, the Burundian culture conceives that certain trades and practices are reserved for the woman while others are exclusively the right of the man. Traditionally, women have been excluded from activities related to beekeeping, hunting, building, external rearing of cows, etc. they were therefore confined to household work or folkloric achievements (products of basketry or weaving tablecloths and mats).

Over time, the field of drums was gradually opened to everyone, so that until recently they were played without any preconditions. It was not until 2017 that the government issued a decree restructuring the use of these instruments. While various other African cultures are harbouring comparable misgivings against the engagement of women into drumming, there have never been any attempts to transform these cultural norms or prejudices into official legislation. This chapter, among other issues, interrogates the motives behind the law which bars women from drumming and grapples with the consequences at different levels regarding the women's social position in modern Burundi. This is also discussed in connection with cultural policy, "nationalisation" and "governmentalization" of (neo)traditional music and dance, which at the same time has paved the way for the global spreading of "The Drums of Burundi" and its subsequent development into a kind of "world music"-trade mark.

The absence of the woman is also noticeable in the field of drums. Burundian drums are recognized as "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" by UNESCO since 2014, but are also both popular and venerated. Since the dawn of time, they have embodied a kind of mystical link between the country and its people, which considers them a fundamental identity element. This old tradition, once initiated from father to son, was sacred and reserved for male ritual performers only (the lineage of Batimbo

drummers, who are strictly men). Women could, generally, only accompany men in the dance, by clapping hands and/or singing. In time, drums were beaten only in exceptional circumstances (enthronement and funerals of rulers, cycle of seasons ...). They announced the greatest events of the country (enthronement, funeral rulers) and paced the regular cycle of seasons that ensured the prosperity of herds and fields. Ruth Finnegan (1970: 470) has investigated the importance of the drum art in Africa and opines that “drumming tends to be a specialized and often hereditary activity, and expert drummers with a mastery of the accepted vocabulary of drum language and literature were often attached to a king’s court. This type of expression is a highly skilled and artistic one and adds to the verbal resources of the language.

Even if today, in the Burundian drumming universe, this lively art is mainly reserved for Batimbo (exclusively men), the drums were played as part of official ceremonies and at a few other parties. It has been one of the cultural aspects that have largely kept their symbolic importance. In the drum culture, there are what Finnegan (1970: 471) calls “drum messages” which are about, for instance, births, marriages, deaths, and forthcoming hunts or wrestling matches. Death, at that time was publicized on the drum by a special alert signal and the words, beaten out in drum language. It should be noted that, although since independence (1962) the situation of Burundian women has evolved as a result of advocacy and all-out actions, culture and politics still impose almost impassable limits in certain areas. In the matter of drums, which are the concern of this discussion, the cultural tag is reinforced by the political one. Decree No. 100/196 of 20<sup>th</sup> October 2017 regulating the operation of drums at the national and international levels states that “It is strictly forbidden for women to beat the drum. In accompaniment to the drumming, they can nevertheless perform female folk dances” (Article 3). This role restriction is also accompanied by a delineation of spaces and circumstances where the beating of the drum is permitted. As soon as this law was signed, debates on it were organized without allowing any agreement of views, the interests of many being widely divergent. To justify the necessity of the said law, the government argued that the drums of Burundi must recover its symbolism of yesteryear and cease to be playable objects by everyone and everywhere.

In this paper we used a descriptive-qualitative approach to analyze the current critical debate on the Decree No. 100/196 of 20 October 2017 regulating the operation of Burundian drums at the national and international levels. In particular, we used this approach to record the trajectory of Burundian women (from birth to old age) according to the times and socio-cultural constraints. The world of drumming will also be reviewed, before embarking on the analysis of the future perspectives of the management of the “gender” issue at the social level with a special focus on the evolution of gender relations

in the field of drums, corollary to the decree of 2017 guiding the use of these cultural instruments. Our research questions, which turn around this decree, are the following: What really motivated the decree that prohibits women from beating drums, instruments whose parts bear the same names as those given to the constituent parts of the woman)? Is the law in question synonymous with the renationalisation of a cultural element that runs the risk of being out of control? What are the socio-cultural and economic implications of this decree on the emancipation of women in Burundi? In this discussion, we argue that the ban of women from beating the drum introduces a more complex discourse of control and domination of the males on the drumming universe in Burundi. In an attempt to prove this we rely on the existing cultural and linguistic evidence to emphasize the link between drumming and the exertion of cultural, economic and gender discrimination.

## **2.0 Overview of the socio-cultural and economic situation of Burundian women**

In Burundi, traditional social organization is patriarchal and patrilineal. According to Ndayiziga & Ngayimpinda (2012), it is the man who embodies the authority within the household and makes all the crucial decisions. For both authors, women have the social responsibility for the functioning of domestic life. She does housework and takes care of children and other family members. The role of the man's authority and the position of subordination of women reflect the relations of domination that characterize the relationship between men and women. This limits women in their fulfillment and the enjoyment of their rights in all areas of life. A number of cultural constraints therefore hinder gender equality and women's participation in decision-making bodies, as well as the affirmation of their economic role. The traditional mentality confines the woman in a subordinate role and a household life. From an early age, the family and society organize the rites of separation which accustom the boy to virile labors, separation from his mother, and openness to society; at the same time that they direct the girl to the housework, to the respect of the visitors. Each child must then follow the model of the parent of the same sex with specific learning according to the ages reached.

Overall, custom and tradition place women to the second position and consider them to be inferior to men, which deprives women of the right to make decisions in the household (Gahungu and Kazoviyo 2011). This long legacy of gender differentiation has resulted in denial of women's access to civic, social and economic opportunities and benefits. The social division of labor means that the woman remains overworked and confined to reproductive roles with unpaid, unrecognized and unappreciated work. In this context, the right to gender equality resembles a real challenge to the established social order in a country subject to both the weight of tradition and modernity. The movement

of women's emancipation still comes up against the survivals of the tradition, making the latter much more a householder than the man. While the Constitution of Burundi affirms the equality of citizens, the custom excludes women from access to land and other rights. The absence of a law that regulates these aspects keeps the Burundian woman in a status of subordination and poverty, rendering her incapable of fulfilling her social roles and responsibilities. As a result, Burundi is moving towards a stalemate, particularly in the face of the issue of women's access to land. Since the earliest times, the woman has not inherited land from her parents, nor from the husband's family. She has always been a victim of a discriminating situation, keeping her in a state of eternal deprivation and excluded from the family patrimony.

This exclusion of women is the result of socio-cultural practices inherited from a system that is both patrilineal and patriarchal, of which only the male is a winner through custom. This patriarchal conception of the woman defines her status and her role in society. Traditionally, marriage is never a union between man and woman. He dedicates the entry of the woman into the family of the husband, and more so, he seals an alliance between two families by the new interposed wife. Within the couple, it is always the woman who bears the responsibility for infertility, only because faced with the sterility of the husband, we always have an alternative through the levirate. A Kirundi proverbial expression sanctifies this practice, at the same time it makes the woman a real object of the husband's family: *"ugasanga so na so wanyu barwana, urabanguranya ntuzi so uwariwe"* (which can be translated as: in case of a battle between your father and your uncle, you should intervene since you do not know who your real father is). The design in the exercise of power is itself phallocratic: *"inkokokazi ntibika isake ihari"* (which translates as: the chicken never crows in the presence of the cock). In this proverb, there is a cultural exercise of patriarchal power. Like many African men, Burundians believe that no woman ever speaks in public as long as her husband, brother-in-law or stepfather, and even her son are there.

It is on this basis that the widowed woman is never the reference person. This status was automatically recovered by her son when she had it. Otherwise, it is one of his brothers-in-law or his father-in-law who was answerable for the household life vis-à-vis society. And the notion of brother-in-law, with all the prerogatives attached to it, extends to the most distant cousin. In terms of household property management, the woman is left with the management of non-strategic assets, with little market value, which are generally the object of social exchange at parties. Even today, because of this legacy, few women take the responsibility of family representation, to conclude important transactions without the approval of the brother-in-law because the woman is still perceived as a stranger to the husband's family. Thus, a widow without male descendant

never inherited wealth, and the one who had had only girls had just the minimum necessary for the maintenance of her children. In the end, the primary role of women reduced to a real child-making machine, in a society where fertility seems to be the only reason for marriage. As soon as she is married, her own family considers her to be part of the husband's family, but the latter only accepts her when she is lucky enough to have a male offspring and thus to perpetuate the husband's family.

In the opposite case, if she gives birth to a baby girl, this is perceived as a bad luck. The woman is accused of degenerating the family. The perception of property acquisition itself excludes the woman. The Burundian tradition distinguishes two modes of acquisition, namely the property of the family (inherited from father to son) and the property acquired by bravery, in fact any other form of acquisition, including the purchase. Both forms of property acquisition models traditionally exclude women. She cannot claim family ownership since socially she is not a family member. She only becomes so by chance of marriage. However, her family and the role she should play there, is mediated by her husband or male offspring. Property acquired by bravery also excludes the woman since it is related to a relationship with the power embodied by the man. The economic exclusion of women thus stems from the ambiguity surrounding their status in terms of family affiliation. Two proverbial expressions structure this ambiguity: *"umukobwa akura iyo aroye"* (translated as: the girl acquires belonging and property only where she gets married), and *"igito gitabwa iwabo"* (which can be translated as: the husband's family can always repudiate her, and in this case she has only the choice to return home). However, nothing forces the family of origin to resettle with dignity the woman who finds herself in these conditions.

### **3.0 The Burundian drum and its cultural and political significance**

Existing literature shows that there was a strong relationship between drums and nature, so much so that the drums announced the beginning of the agricultural year and the sowing of the sorghum seeds to make sorghum beer. The Burundian drum is made from a piece of tree trunk cut from certain special forest species. An adult cow's skin is stretched over this hollowed-out section of the trunk and secured to the wood using wooden pegs. In general, the drum is played with sticks. The drummed rhythms of Burundi have got interesting and special rhythms and their spectacular staging, with a special melodic and generally rigid technique. The production and manufacture of drums is a long and delicate work that is entrusted to craftsmen specializing in the art, helped by a tanner who prepares the skin. The sound box is made from the hollow trunk of a tree. The manufacturer chooses a tree that will allow him to make four or five drums. After cutting the tree, they leave the wood in a place to dry for a while before emptying



it. The final work will take place at the home of the drum manufacturer. The exterior is smoothed and the interior is hollowed out to obtain walls with a thickness of 20 to 23 mm. The height can vary from 40 to 130 cm, with a diameter of 50 to 70 cm at the top and 10 to 20 cm at the base. Nowadays, you can also (rarely) use 200 liter metal drums, which is not only cheaper, but also easier. The sound of the metal drum is however not comparable to that of the wooden drum, and this process remains marginal. The skins are stretched on the two openings of the sound box, the hairs towards the outside. They are soaked, and then scraped to remove the remains of the flesh, before stretching them in the sun to dry. The way to fix the skins on the sound box is typical of drums and differs from that used for other membranophones. The two skins, upper and lower, are interconnected by means of thin vertical leather straps and are thus stretched on the sound box. To obtain this tension, a complex operation, it takes the intervention of several people so that each step proceeds correctly. For large instruments, about 50 meters of thongs are used. According to Guillet and Nduricimpa (1984), the manufacture of drums requires a good number of instruments. Here is the list of some of these:

- i. *Ishôká*: Felling ax.
- ii. *Ikirimyo*: Long gouge (about 1.30 m) used to hollow out the trunk.
- iii. *Rwânkamikũmbi*: A sort of varlope used to polish the outside and the inside of the drum box.
- iv. *Imbâzo*: An adze used to skin, roughen the trunk and trim the drum.
- v. *Umutwêro*: Chisel used to pierce the holes where the ankles will be inserted.

In Burundi, “*ingoma*” was beaten only by the ritualist drummers, at the royal court or those of princes (Jeune Afrique, issue of June 15, 2015). It was beaten in the morning to regulate the activities of the day and show that the king was well awake and at work. The same drum was played in the evening to announce the end of the day or the end of the country activities and the beginning of the evening. The drum also resounded to announce an event, such as the coronation or the funerals of a sovereign and, at the end of each year, for the ceremonies of umuganuro, the festival of sowing of sorghum, which marked the beginning of the planting season.

The term *ingoma* (drum) in Burundi has a very wide semantic field; it can refer to percussion drum, ritual drum, dynastic drum, power (royalty or otherwise), reign (or equivalent), government, era, particular country (kingdom). Equally, nobody in Burundi could manufacture a drum or have a drum manufactured without a formal order from the king, who alone held the privilege of owning the drums and having them played for himself. Since the advent of the Republic, the drum is no longer royal, but remains sacred, as are the rituals related to it. At the same time respected and popular, the instrument is

supposed to be beaten only for the nation, in particular during national ceremonies like the Independence Day or visits of international guests of higher rank. However, for some time, drummer groups have been selling their services to entertain weddings or family celebrations. The country is currently working to better enforce the regulations governing the use of the instrument, both in Burundi and abroad. Thus, the release of the drums out of the country remains subject to an official authorization and it is no longer allowed to play the drum anywhere except those places as indicated above. The Ministry of Culture even plans to protect the “*umuvugangoma*” (*Cordia africana*, see Appendix 1), the tree traditionally used for the manufacture of drum sound boxes. Young plants have recently been discovered in Bujumbura and the government would like to initiate research programs to ensure the sustainability of this species; and with it, the know-how and the art of the drummers.

Drums are beaten to celebrate life in Burundi. Drummers wear white, red and green, the colours of the Burundian flag, and their performances can be seen in some parts of the country, especially in Bujumbura. Here visitors can watch them during rehearsals or during official events. You can also visit Gishora Drum Site in Gitega Province (Central Burundi) which is a traditional place for the drummers where old and new drums are kept in traditional huts. During the time of the monarchy, some drums had specific functions. For instance *Karyenda* represented the soul of Burundi and symbolized power and fertility, *Nyabuhoro* was considered the guarantor of the country’s security, *Inajurwe* and *Inakagabiro* ensured the country’s protection against internal risks of all kinds, while *Rukinzo* accompanied the king during of his displacements inside the kingdom. Traditionally, drums in the east African country were played at important communal events such as the king’s coronation and the spring festival of the planting of crops. The festival was Burundi’s main fete, celebrated in December to bless the farms. Although there are several types of traditional drums in Burundi, the one that hold great power and significance is “*Karyenda*”. In the past, it was hidden in a special place in the king’s palace and was only played for the king at special ceremonies. Despite the changes in culture, the traditional ways of playing the drum and dancing to the beat remain the same. During the drummers’ exhibition, the drums are arranged in a semicircle and each plays a special role in relation to the rhythm (see appendix 2):

- a) *Inkiránya*: central drum who is the first to be defeated and who sets the tone
- b) *Igishikizo*: drums following the rhythm given by the central drum
- c) *Ishāko*: drums giving steady rhythm



- d) *Inkórero*: drums giving the continuous rhythm, corresponding to that of ishāko

#### 4.0 Drums and the woman in Burundi

The importance of Burundian drums can be read in their anatomy. Perhaps one more prejudicial argument to justify the resemblance of the woman and the drum is the morphology of the two. Let us have an analysis of the different parts of the drum and compare/link them with the female body:



As said above, drumming in traditional Burundi was part of particular ceremonies such as births, funerals and enthronement of kings. Not only are drums sacred and venerated but they also represent the powers of the king and his hand on fertility and regeneration. A drum in its morphology has many similarities with the female body. In the drumming tradition, a drum is a representation of the female form. Burundians believe that the carving of the drum represents a woman's body: its belly is likened to her vagina and the bulging legs, to her breasts. Like the female, this revered instrument is seen as the centre of life. The constituent parts of these instruments are strangely similar to those of the woman. The main parts of the drum are:

- Inda*: literally the belly; this is the sounding box of a drum.
- Amabêre*: literally the breasts, the udder of a cow-ankles
- Uruhānga*: literally front-surface of the strike
- Icāhi*: literally skin in which the mother wraps the baby-skin covering the drum
- Urugorí*: literally maternity, it is lanyard crown holding skin taut
- Amâso*: literally the eyes. These are holes in which the ankles are pushed

- g) *Umukõndo*: literarily umbilical cord; this is the foot of the drum
- h) *Umucisho*: literarily belt supporting the child. The mother wears it on the back; it is thread skin tying the breasts
- i) *Umubábo*: literarily hot iron band decorating the base of the sound box
- j) *Ino*: literarily toe-lower part on which holds the drum
- k) *Inyama ya kibizi*: literarily calf-part located between the back of the knee and the foot
- l) *Intege*: literarily back of the knee, the part located between the sound box and the calf
- m) *Imoko*: literarily stick; this is the part of the ankle
- n) *Indásāgo*: aesthetic scarification notch around the part under the skin
- o) *Incorogo*: literarily lower contours escaping the skin
- p) *Imbigá*: literarily upper contours
- q) *Ubwāmi*: literarily vagina; this is the upper part covered by the skin that the drummers hit with the drumming sticks

The design of a Burundi drum is said to personify the body of a woman. In this way, women are made part of the drumming performance without having to perform it. The female body parts represented on a typical Royal Drum are said to be: the breasts, the navel, the stomach, and the genitals. The breasts are signified by small wooden blocks around which ropes are tied and attached to cowhide which covers the opening of the drum. The 'navel' of the drum is a small indentation at the bottom of the drum. It is a sign of beauty in Burundian belief to have a navel which is hollow, or curves inward. The belly of the drum is the opening, which is covered by cowhide. When one beats on this skin above the belly, the noise becomes intense. And as the belly in the woman carries the child, as does the drum carry the music to its strong interior. The genitals of the drum are called '*Ubwami*' (a euphemism in Burundian culture which symbolises the female intimate parts and translated as 'kingdom'). It is on this part that the drummers beat with sticks to produce a musical rhythm that is coordinated in a spectacular way.

According to Baranshakaje, one of the greatest guardians of the Burundian drumming traditions, the drum is a woman or simply the woman is a drum (Journal online "Jimbere" of 18 April 2017). To assert this, Baranshakaje relies on the expression "*ingoma y'ikirwa*" which literally means "the king's conjugal bed". *Ingoma y'ikirwa* is equivalent to "drum fighting in bed". Even the skin used to make a drum must necessarily be that of a heifer. In addition, the drum is beaten using *Imirisho* (wooden sticks) symbolizing the penis. Still according to Baranshamaje, a woman who beats the drum practices masturbation; the Burundian woman can never touch the penis of the man only in case

of sexual act. The union with the drum is therefore a sacred rite reserved only for the only men. However, there is a question one would ask: between the woman and the man, who would be in the right position to beat this drum, if of course the morphology of the two can be implied?

### **5.0 Sociocultural and Economic Implications of the Decree**

Burundian women have been banned from beating the Royal Drums since October 2017. All groups seeking to perform cultural shows must from now on register with the Ministry of Culture and are not allowed to perform outside of official ceremonies without authorisation from the ministry. This ritual dance was in 2014 placed on UNESCO's "Intangible Cultural Heritage" list, which describes it as "a spectacle combining powerful, synchronised drumming with dancing, heroic poetry and traditional songs." It says the "entire population of Burundi recognises it as a fundamental part of its heritage and identity." The Burundian government's decision is perceived as a way of limiting the freedoms of women in society, but many have chosen to back the decision. From a traditional cultural stereotype, we can find some explanation why women in Burundi are not allowed to be Royal Drummers. According to Patrice Ntafatiro, a researcher of Burundian culture, during the 15th century during the first years of the monarchy in Burundi, women were allowed to be drummers. The practice of beating the drum was initially reserved for the clan called "*Abanyagisaka*," located in Gitenga, Central Burundi. Ntafatiro argues that at that time women were beating drums because it was a tradition belonging to an entire clan and some of its families. The same researcher draws the attention that first Burundian monarch, Ntare Rushatsi Cambarantama is the one who asked that these drums be played only at the court and only for the king. This is how they became 'Royal Drums'. Once the king had announced his decision, men and women from the "*Abanyagisaka*" clan sat together to discuss how to deal with the new legislation. The drummers and drums themselves were regulated and only played once a year in a royal festival called '*Umuganuro*' (the festival of seeds). Before this holiday, which took place around November of each year, the members of this drumming family would spend months preparing. They would go into the bush looking for the trees from which they would make the drums. This endeavor could take longer than four months. Because of this, and because of reports of incidents of incest between the clans' people, the elders came to the agreement that only men will play the drums. The drums in turn became representative of the female and designed in a way that would reflect this symbolism.

To further expand this family of drummers, two other clans were added to this noble mission: the “Abasangore”, who were known for their handiwork as well as “Abaragane”, who were blacksmiths who provided the iron equipment to make drums from tree trunks. The three families are the originators of this Burundian drumbeat. Over time, more and more people took part in drum making and drum playing. After a long wait, women took advantage of the women’s emancipation movement and found a place in the drumming game once more. Today, the drums are played for entertainment: but for centuries they were a sacred rite, symbolic of a united kingdom. In modern times drumming groups have flourished, performing at weddings, graduation ceremonies and baptisms. While traditionally a male-dominated field, several female drumming groups have emerged in recent years. The rituals were traditionally male, but more and more women have started their own drumming groups, until the recent law in which the government says goes against the country’s long-held tradition. Therefore, not everyone was allowed to play it, especially women because playing drum for them is against culture because many people still consider it taboo. “It was no little thing, nor as commonplace as it is today... For God came through the drum to protect the monarchy and the kingdom, the whole country,” according to **Adrien Ntabona**, a Burundian Catholic Father. Burundians also believe that a woman who turns into a drummer was considered a curse to her family and would never bear children.

But in modern Burundian society, some women have defied this stereotype. These belief systems were put behind to pursue drumming as a profession that would empower them. Some activist women have started to actively participate in the development of their families through cultural preservation. For them, this cultural performance can allow women to transform their lives through social and financial empowerment. In the beginning, people made fun of women drummers because of the cultural mindset associated with the latter. But, women persisted and ignored their ridicule as they looked to underscore that a woman is not tied to home activities, or has no limits to strive for her development. The news about the decree banning women from beating and playing the drum was received with hostility by Burundians who took to social media to express their frustration. The majority of them believe this action to be a major setback for Burundian female drummers venturing into what is a male-dominated field. “This is violation of Article 13, 22, of the Constitution,” human rights activist Dominique Simbare wrote. He refers to Article 13 of the Constitution of the Republic of Burundi, which provides that “all Burundians are equal in [their] merits and dignity. All citizens enjoy the same rights and have the right to the same protection of the law. No Burundian may be

excluded from the social, economic or political life of the nation because of their race, language, religion, sex or ethnic origin”.

Apart from the socio-cultural discrimination, there are also economic impacts on the women as well as on men. The president’s decree has economic implications over the country’s renowned drumming rituals. The decree reads as follows: “It is strictly forbidden to those of the female sex to beat drums. They can however carry out female folk dances accompanying the drums”. This decree bans female drummers and limits the sacred tradition to official events. This decree can be seen as an authoritarian slide and a sign of increasing efforts to control Burundian society. It is important to recall that Burundi’s ritual dance of the royal drums was, in 2014, placed on UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage list. For trespassers, there is a fine that amounts to \$280. The presidential decree, signed on October 20, said that if an organiser gets permission to have drummers perform at an event, he must pay the Treasury a fee equivalent to 245 euros (\$280). This figure is to be paid daily if the group performs abroad. From all indications, this is a law that deprives women in particular and all drummers in general from an evident source of income.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

This paper has discussed the implication of the presidential decree that bans women from beating the drum in Burundi. A descriptive-qualitative research design was used to analyse and discuss the world of drums in Burundi and the issues arising from the recent decree. From our findings, the researchers come to the conclusions that the decree acts against the women’s rights. In fact, it discriminates the very people whose body incarnates the very musical and power instrument. Article 22 of the constitution of Burundi states that “All citizens are equal before the law” and this assures them equal protection. No one may therefore be subject to any sort of discrimination under the pretext of culture. In line of this law, however, an already marginalised category of the social layer is discriminated against. While the woman is forbidden by the decree from beating the drum, she is, in turn, herself beaten; this is to say, she is struck by the social and economic consequences of the Presidential decree as discussed above. In this paper, the researchers have also considered that the Burundian drum has got parts that resemble those of a woman. Therefore, if the morphology of the drum resembles in many regards that of a woman, the latter should be, instead the one with more rights to beat it; and not the man. In reorganizing the use of drums, the Burundian government did may not have wished to specifically target the restriction of women's scope in this area (although it is one of the most negatively affected social strata). The return to the source and the renationalization of these highly symbolic cultural objects seems to be the major

objective of this reframing. The 2017 decree would have been designed to give the Burundian drums its nobility, following the decision of UNESCO in 2014 declaring these instruments "Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity". However, the drawbacks of this decree plunge the woman in a situation of victim in many domains. Burundi has a unique and long-standing musical heritage. Drum dance is an integral part of the culture. No one can deny the fact that every culture evolves. If Burundian women can beat and play the drum, this should be understood as a way to bring about innovation in their culture, especially enabling themselves in what is considered a man's field. Today, the woman's presence in those erstwhile "men's fields" can be found in other domains of life: there are female soldiers, drivers, and leaders. There should be then nothing strange if the woman was also a drummer. To break taboo and avoid confinement in traditions, women would like to be given full exercise of their potentials in all spheres of life in their society. Finally, it was observed that citizens are primarily responsible for keeping their culture alive by sieving out the good and the bad. The women drummers are the country's cultural ambassadors. It is amazing that women play the drums. There are some cultural changes that are not avoidable. We can be proud of their achievements. In the Burundian drum history, some modern women have been both to regional and international cultural festivals and thus have been able to generate income and keep as well the culture alive and dynamic. As professional drummers, they can change their lives since they make groups and that it is a profession that pays their bills with comfort. Therefore, the researchers believe that good cultural changes bring about societal development.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

Umuvugangoma (cordia Africana):

<https://twitter.com/lkiriho/status/942666650570063872>



### Appendix 2

Drum exhibition : <http://igihe.bi/burundi-igiti-gikorwamwo-ingoma.html>

