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Women's Political Representation in Rwanda

Jennie E. Burnet

In the past decade Rwanda has become the global leader in terms of expanding women's inclusion in politics and promoting and securing women's rights. In 2008 Rwanda elected a female-majority parliament. Women realized this achievement in large part thanks to a gender quota system instituted in 2003. Beyond achieving gender parity in the legislature, Rwanda has adopted numerous laws since 1995 that promote and enhance protection of women's rights. These laws have placed sexual violence during the genocide among the most grave genocide crimes; extended equal inheritance rights to girl children; ensured women's rights to land ownership and wives' rights to have their names appear along with their husbands on deeds; and criminalized marital rape, domestic violence, and all other forms of gender-based violence (GBV).

Scholars have attributed Rwanda's success in enhancing and protecting women's rights and increasing women's representation through these policies to numerous factors. One is the long-term commitment to mainstreaming women by the current ruling party, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). A second stems from the strategies of Rwanda's vibrant women's civil society organizations (CSOs), which have engaged in behind the scenes lobbying of male allies to convince them to support policy initiatives and laws. A final factor is broader transformations in the international development context, whereby aid agencies have mainstreamed women and gender approaches (Burnet, 2008; Burnet, 2011; Coffe, 2012; Devlin and Elgie, 2008; Longman, 2006; Newbury and Baldwin, 2001; Powley, 2005; Powley and Pearson, 2007).

Rwanda is probably best known for the 1994 genocide of Tutsis in which at least 500,000 Rwandans, primarily Tutsi as well as politically moderate Hutu, lost their lives in

state-organized massacres.¹ The genocide occurred in the midst of a civil war, which began in October 1990 when the RPF, a rebel movement based in Uganda, invaded Rwanda.² During the genocide, Tutsi men, women, and children were systematically targeted for killing, sexually enslaved and tortured, and their property was stolen or destroyed. The violence was organized by Hutu extremist politicians who took control of the government and enlisted armed civilian militias and average citizens to participate in the killing. The Rwandan army backed this policy and participated in the genocide. The genocide came to a halt when the RPF seized the capital, Kigali, on 4 July 1994.

In mid-July 1994, the RPF named a transitional government that affirmed a commitment to power sharing by including representatives from political parties which had not supported the genocide. Since 1994, the RPF has remained the dominant party, and over time it has increased the number of seats it holds in parliament and the executive branch. After elections in 2013, the RPF holds the presidency and 41 out of 53 seats in the lower house of parliament. The remaining twelve directly-elected seats are held by parties close to the RPF.³ According to many observers, the RPF has become increasingly authoritarian over time (Longman, 2006; Reyntjens, 2006, 2011) and has maintained tight reins on the government and private media by systematically silencing dissenting voices (Sundaram, 2016), suppressing independent CSOs (Gready, 2010), and destroying potential oppositional parties (Reyntjens, 2006, 2011).

¹ Estimates of how many people died in the 1994 genocide vary widely. The question of numbers killed is highly politicized and so it is necessary to indicate the sources. The number I use here comes from Alison Des Forges (1999, p.15), *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*. For more on the numbers of dead, see Scott Straus (2006, p.41–64).

² The RPF is the current ruling party in Rwanda. Founded in Uganda in the late 1980s by Rwandan Tutsi refugees, the RPF's mission was to overthrow the government in Rwanda, which they viewed as a dictatorship and which refused to allow them to return home peacefully.

³ Last Elections: Rwanda Chamber of Deputies. *Inter-Parliamentary Union*. [online] Available at <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2265_E.htm> [Accessed 16 October 2016].

Despite the successes in improving gender equality and as apparent in the problems with the RPF controlled government, Rwanda ranks low on most democracy measures, being consistently ranked “Not Free” by Freedom House since 1999. The 2003 Constitution created a presidential system with a national parliament and a prime minister who performs many of the duties of a vice president. Most seats in both houses of parliament are attained through direct elections, but eight senators are appointed by the president and another four by the Forum of Political Organizations, which is a constitutionally-mandated “consultative body” that all political parties must join. The Rwandan political system is nominally multiparty, but in practice it is a single-party system, with the RPF functioning as a state party.

Evolution of Women’s Political Representation

Women’s political representation in Rwanda has evolved from the total exclusion of women in positions of power under Belgian colonial rule to a female majority parliament as of 2017. This evolution has been characterized by several decades of incremental improvements during the postcolonial period followed by a sea change in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide. In the span of ten years, women’s representation increased dramatically – from 4% in 1995 to 48% by 2003 – and paved the way for numerous policy changes that enhanced women’s rights.

As a formerly colonized nation, Rwanda’s political trajectory today was profoundly shaped by Belgian colonialism (1917-61) and the decolonization process (1952-61). Belgian colonial administrators, who were all men, and the Roman Catholic priests, who created the first schools, brought European patriarchal ideas about the sexual division of labor and gender roles in society. As a direct result, formal education beyond basic literacy was limited to men until the 1940s. Church schools run by Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Adventist missionaries did teach some women and girls how to read so that they could be converted to Christianity and participate in worship. This unequal access to education and European ascribed gender roles had implications for the overall position and treatment of women in Rwanda.

The decolonization process and independence were critical moments in Rwandan politics that profoundly shaped the country's postcolonial trajectory. Two primary political conflicts characterized the decolonization process. First, Hutu and Tutsi nationalist elites jointly pursued the end of Belgian colonial rule and its replacement with self-rule. Second, Hutu partisans sought emancipation for the Hutu majority, from Belgian rule and what they claimed was Tutsi colonialism (Golooba-Mutebi, 2013). In November 1959 pro-independence demonstrations transformed suddenly into attacks against Tutsi political elites and their families: several hundred Tutsis were killed, a few thousand homes were burned, and approximately ten thousand (predominantly Tutsi) refugees left the country (Reyntjens, 1985, p.261). As a result, Belgium developed a hasty decolonization plan that called for a transition to a participatory democracy consisting of multiple political parties. Although a few political parties attempted to appeal to voters across ethnic lines, the largest and most influential parties mobilized along ethnic lines. By the end of the transition, Rwanda had a democratically elected Hutu president, Grégoire Kayibanda, who was from southern Rwanda, and a parliament held by Hutu-dominated parties.

During this decolonization process, women and women's issues never emerged as a key issue of debate. Nonetheless, Rwandan women gained the right to vote and the right to stand for election "for all offices except president" at independence in 1961 (Martin, 2000, p.323). Published sources remain silent on how and why these rights were extended to women at this moment. The restriction on the office of the president was eventually removed in 1978 (Martin, 2000). Despite this progress, women were scarcely represented in politics during President Kayibanda's government (1961-73). The first woman was elected to the Rwandan National Assembly in 1965. Under President Juvénal Habyarimana's government (1973-94), women began to emerge as leaders. In the 1970s, women gained access to higher education (albeit in very small numbers) and the international feminist movement changed the global political climate for women's rights affecting Rwanda. By 1982, there were four women parliamentarians out of a total of 70 in Rwanda. In 1983, the number of women in parliament more than doubled to nine. Women's representation in the legislature under President Habyarimana peaked in 1988 at nearly sixteen percent (Burnet, 2008, p.370; Muberanziza, 2003).

Women's leadership started becoming more prominent outside of just the government. In 1989, several political parties, which had been dormant under the single-party state and dictatorship of Habyarimana, re-emerged and began demanding political liberalization. Although men dominated the political liberalization movement, women were not completely absent. Agathe Kanziga Habyarimana, wife of the president, brokered a great deal of power behind the scenes. Many of her male kin occupied important positions in the Habyarimana government and Rwandan military. The *Mouvement républicain national pour la démocratie et le développement* (MRND), the state political party, had created a women's wing, called the Urama in 1988. The other political parties that re-emerged in the early 1990s also created women's wings. Among the national leaders of the *Mouvement démocratique républicain* (MDR) party was, Agathe Uwilingiyimana, who was named Minister of Education in 1992 and then Prime Minister of Rwanda in 1993.⁴ Other women ministers in the early 1990s included Agnes Ntamabyaliro (Minister of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Artisans 1992-93, and Minister of Justice 1993-94) and Pauline Nyiramasuhuko (Minister of Women and Family 1992-94).⁵

The nascent political liberalization was disrupted in October 1990 when the RPF invaded Rwanda. The civil war continued throughout the early 1990s until Habyarimana, facing dramatic losses as well as continued pressure from donors, was forced to the negotiating table. The result was the 1993 Arusha Peace Accords, which brought an official end to hostilities and outlined a transition plan to move the country to multiparty politics and democratic elections.

Despite the promise of the Arusha Peace Accords, the transition came to a dramatic and violent halt on 6 April 1994 when President Habyarimana was killed when his airplane was shot down by unknown assailants. Hutu extremists took control of the government

⁴ Uwilingiyimana was killed on 7 April 1994 along with her husband and the ten Belgian soldiers who were guarding her as part of the U.N. peacekeeping mission to Rwanda, United Nations Assistance Mission to Rwanda (UNAMIR).

⁵ Nyiramasuhuko was among the leaders of the Interahamwe during the genocide and was the first woman found guilty of genocide and using rape as a weapon of genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in 2011.

and military. They organized a genocide against Tutsis and others defined as ‘enemies’ of the state and enlisted civilian militias, which had begun as the youth wings of the Hutu extremist political parties, as well as ordinary citizens in the killing. In the span of four months an estimated 500,000 Rwandans, including 77 percent of Rwandan Tutsis, lost their lives in a state-sponsored genocide (Des Forges, 1999, p.15). The genocide came to an end when the RPF took military control of the majority of the territory, driving the Hutu-extremist government, militias, and army into exile. The fleeing government encouraged, and sometimes forced, approximately two million civilians to go with them.⁶

The aftermath of the 1994 genocide left the RPF needing to rebuild the country and reconcile the population around a national identity. The RPF quickly named a transitional government, which included a significant number of women. The Transitional National Parliament (TNP), appointed in 1994, included ten women or fourteen percent of the total seats. Over the next five years, the number of women in parliament increased. By 1999 over one quarter of parliamentarians were women and before parliamentary elections in 2003, women held 25.7 percent of seats in parliament.

Women’s parliamentary representation in the Rwandan government continued to increase dramatically after the institution of gender quotas in the new constitution approved via referendum in 2003. The constitution requires that at least 30 percent of positions in all decision-making bodies in government be held by women and created reserved women’s seats in the lower house of parliament, the Chamber of Deputies. In the first national elections held under the new constitution, women were elected to 39 out of 80 seats (48.8 percent), including the 24 seats reserved for women (Burnet, 2008, p.370). In the 2008 elections, Rwanda became the first national legislature with majority women when they won 45 out of a total of 80 seats (56.3 percent). In the 2013 elections, women won 51 out of 80 seats (63.7 percent). Since 2003, women’s representation in the Senate, the upper house of parliament, has hovered just above the constitutional quota of 30 percent, with women consistently holding nine or ten seats out of 26 seats (35-39 percent).

⁶ The official UNHCR count of Rwandan refugees in other countries in 1994 was 2.257 million while the Government of Rwanda estimated over 3 million. See <http://data.unhcr.org/dataviz/> [Accessed 27 February 2014].

In achieving such a high percentage of women in legislative representation, a key strategy was the inclusion of women in high priority positions on the candidate lists of the major political parties. None of the registered political parties in Rwanda requires gender quotas in their party lists according to party statutes. However, the National Consultative Forum of Political Organizations, a constitutionally mandated coordinating entity, issued instructions in 2013 to parties to alternate male and female candidates on their lists. This mandate proved to be significant in promoting women candidates. For instance, the RPF-Inkotanyi party maintains a women's league and includes party members on the party's women's councils at every level of government down to the village (*umudugudu*) level. Yet, the party constitution does not require any gender quotas. Nonetheless, in the 2013 parliamentary elections the RPF candidate list began with a female candidate and largely alternated female and male candidates.⁷ Of the three opposition parties who presented independent candidate lists for the 2013 parliamentary elections, two parties, Parti Socialiste-Imberakuri (PS-Imberakuri) and Liberal Party (PL) put women candidates at the head of the list.⁸ As Dahlerup (2005, p.150) has noted, the gender of the candidate at the head of party lists can play a decisive role in the gender outcome of parliamentary elections in multi-party, first-past-the-post electoral systems.

In terms of other aspects of inclusion, the key actors in Rwanda's ruling coalition, including the RPF and President Paul Kagame, have advocated for greater representation of women since at least 2001. President Kagame and key ministry officials have "repeatedly articulated strong support for women's role in government and society" (Longman, 2006, p.141). In a 2008 speech before the UN General Assembly, the president said, "With regards to empowering women and promoting their socio economic and political participation, we continue to make modest progress. We believe that, besides improving gender relations in

⁷ NEC releases preliminary MP candidates list. *Great Lakes Voice*. [online] Available at <<http://greatlakesvoice.com/nec-releases-preliminary-mp-candidates-list/>> [Accessed 3 February 2014].

⁸ NEC releases preliminary MP candidates list. *Great Lakes Voice*. [online] Available at <<http://greatlakesvoice.com/nec-releases-preliminary-mp-candidates-list/>> [Accessed 3 February 2014].

our country, this marks healthy progress towards realizing our vision of a united, democratic and prosperous Rwanda.”⁹ President Kagame has regularly spoken on gender, women’s rights, and the importance of equal opportunities for girls and women as cornerstones to the nation’s development.¹⁰

Although the RPF’s commitment to gender equality and women’s rights has helped secure and enhance women’s political representation and rights, several scholars view the RPF’s women friendly policies as a way to maintain its political dominance (Longman, 2006; Devlin and Elgie, 2008; Reyntjens, 2011). Today, political parties in Rwanda are “highly unequal in strength,” and the RPF “possesses more financial and intellectual resources and therefore the capacity to organize and mobilize support than any other party” (Golooba-Mutebi, 2013, p.17). After the genocide, the RPF became the dominant party in a governance system characterized by regular elections with limited competition between parties (Golooba-Mutebi, 2013; Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2012). As such, when it comes to promoting gender parity and women’s rights, the RPF controls the political agenda while other parties do not have the political power to significantly influence outcomes.

While gender parity in legislative representation has largely been successful and is an important step for Rwanda in achieving additional gender focused policy initiatives, having women representatives does not inherently guarantee that women’s rights will be prioritized. While parliament is majority female, most of these women are card-carrying members of the RPF or its coalition partners. In addition, the women elected to seats specifically reserved for women were nominated, or at least vetted, by the RPF via the Forum of Political Organizations. Thus, most of these women owe allegiance to the RPF, rather than to the constituencies who elected them. As such, these women politicians adhere to RPF ideology, which impacts what they support and advocate for in the policy-making process.

⁹ Cited in National Gender Policy 2010.

¹⁰ Speeches. *President Paul Kagame’s website*. [online] Available at <http://www.paulkagame.com/index.php/speeches> [Accessed 17 December 2015].

Impact of Women's Political Representation

The increase in women's political representation in Rwanda has had numerous impacts in terms of legislation protecting and enhancing women's rights, changing attitudes towards women as leaders, and the diffusion of ideas about gender equality into other spheres. Surprisingly, many of the most significant legal gains for women came before the adoption of the gender quotas in 2003. In the first ten years, the impact of increased women's representation in Rwanda was somewhat limited, as measured by legislation that protected or enhanced women's rights and interests (substantive representation). However, the impact was extensive in terms of public opinion towards women as leaders (symbolic representation). Recent achievements in terms of legislation enhancing women's rights, however, do suggest that larger numbers of women in the legislature as well as in the other branches of government is having a lasting impact on women's substantive representation.

Legislation Protecting and Enhancing Women's Rights

In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, the parliament enacted many new laws to protect women's rights. Three significant pieces of legislation helped revolutionize gender norms in Rwandan society: the 1995 genocide code, the 1999 inheritance law, and the 2003 constitution. Htun and Weldon (2010) distinguish between policies that are either transformative or ameliorative in terms of gendered ideas and power relations.

Ameliorative policies "improve the status of women as a group and alleviate gender based class inequities" while transformative ones challenge dominant views and norms on gender equity, often expressed in "the doctrine of organized religion and the codified tradition of major cultural groups" (Htun and Weldon, 2010, p.207). Under this typology, the 1995 genocide code can be classified as ameliorative, the 1999 inheritance law as transformative, and the 2003 constitution as ameliorative in intent and transformative in outcome. Fewer pieces of legislation enhancing women's rights passed in the first several years after the gender quotas began in 2003 (Devlin and Elgie, 2008, p.249), but they have begun to increase.

In the aftermath of the genocide, the government needed to craft a legal statute to prosecute those accused of planning, organizing, or participating in the genocide. The

original statute drafted in 1995 did not specifically address rape, sexual torture, or sexual enslavement. Female survivors were outraged and began speaking publicly about the sexual violence they had suffered. Women's CSOs organized around the issue and connected with an international coalition of feminist human rights lawyers. Collectively they advocated for rape to be added to the Category 1 genocide crimes in the national statute and for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) prosecutor's office to include sexual crimes among genocide crimes and crimes against humanity. These initial efforts between 1994 and 1997 framed most claims in terms of women's rights and crimes targeting women and girls. By 1997, the discourses shifted from "women" to "gender," when the Ministry of Women's Affairs became the Ministry of Gender and Family Affairs (MIGEPROF) (Powley and Pearson, 2007, p.18). Political elites made gender equality and equity a national priority when it included a commitment to "continuously update and adapt its laws on gender" as a cross-cutting pillar of its Vision 2020 Strategic Plan, which was adopted in 2000 (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 2000, p.21).

Women's CSOs further took up another important gender issue in the aftermath of genocide: inheritance law and property ownership in marriage. According to Rwandan custom, women relied on men for access to resources required for one's livelihood (Burnet and RISD, 2003; Human Rights Watch, 1996). With the extent of the massacres, women-headed and child-headed households grew exponentially (Burnet, 2012). Because Rwandan law limited women's property rights and excluded women and girls from inheritance either as spouses or children, these households were extremely vulnerable to having their property expropriated by others, especially by male kin. In response to this situation, women's CSOs, the MIGEPROF, and the Forum for Women Parliamentarians (FWP), worked closely together in formulating policy, crafting a new law, and lobbying decision-makers in other ministries and within the inner circle of the RPF to pass the controversial inheritance bill. The legislation, commonly referred to as 'the inheritance law,' amended the civil code to create three matrimonial property regimes and to change the default inheritance structure in order to divide property equally among all siblings, including women and girls, instead of only among male siblings. The law also gave women full legal rights to enter into contracts, seek paid employment, own property in their own names and separately from their husbands, and open bank accounts without the

authorization of their husbands or fathers. Passed by the National Assembly in November 1999, the law dramatically reconfigured customary inheritance practices and gave girls equal rights with boys in matters of inheritance.

The third significant piece of legislation to change gender norms was the 2003 constitution. The new constitution was simultaneously an ameliorative and transformative policy. On the one hand, it alleviated gender-based class inequities by creating a government wide gender quota of 30 percent and instituting reserved women's seats in the lower house of parliament. On the other hand, it codified into law women and men's equality, in contrast to cultural and religious notions that had long placed women under male authority in Rwanda.

After the 2003 gender quotas, legislative progress on women's rights appeared to slow. In Rwanda, as in much of sub-Saharan Africa, the vast majority of legislation originates in the executive branch crafted by technocrats in the relevant ministries (Coffe, 2012) or by international consultants engaged by the government or United Nations. The newly-elected women parliamentarians, many of whom came from CSOs, took some time to discover their new role working inside the government. The very first piece of legislation to originate in the new parliament, as opposed to the ministries, came from the Forum of Women Parliamentarians. The 2008 anti-GBV law was a ground-breaking piece of legislation on numerous fronts. The legislation directly challenged deeply entrenched cultural notions that subjugated women's rights in Rwanda by outlawing domestic violence and defining non-consensual marital sex as rape and a punishable crime. The anti-GBV law has been vigorously implemented and has transformed numerous institutions in Rwanda from the National Police to the creation of GBV one-stop centres that holistically address GBV survivors' needs, whether legal, economic, physical, or emotional. Finally, it was one of the first comprehensive laws criminalizing all forms of GBV to be passed in sub-Saharan Africa.

Not all legislation related to women and women's rights has improved the situation of women, however. The 2009 Labour Law adopted by a majority female parliament reduced the paid maternity benefit guaranteed by law from twelve weeks at full pay to six weeks at full pay followed by an optional six weeks at 20 percent pay. In addition, the law increased the work week from five days to six days and from 40 hours to 45 hours. The law

was strongly promoted by the executive branch and the RPF to make the country more “investor friendly.”¹¹ Professional, salaried women affected by the law, as well as their husbands and families, felt betrayed by women legislators who appeared to vote according to their own interests (by maintaining their good standing with the RPF) instead of in the interests of women and families (Burnet, 2011).

In response to the new law, women’s CSOs – led by Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe, an umbrella organization – began lobbying the president and key actors within the RPF to reconsider the law’s provisions on maternity leave (Interview, 2013). Women’s CSO leaders strategically chose to keep their campaign quiet, raising the issue in private meetings, instead of taking it public (Interview, 2014). In early 2015, their campaign succeeded and the president proposed a restoration of the maternity benefits through a public-private partnership. Under the new Maternity Leave Benefits scheme employers are responsible for paying the employee’s full salary for the first six weeks of benefits, then the Rwanda Social Security Administration pays the second six weeks of the employee’s full salary. The RSSA benefit is an insurance plan funded through employee contributions withheld in their regular pay checks as part of their contributions to the RSSA.¹²

Beyond legislation the Rwandan government made significant progress on numerous development issues that deeply affected women and girls’ lives, such as gender parity in education, universal health care, and poverty. The adoption of the Vision 2020 Strategic Plan in July of 2000 was the foundation for much of this success. This ambitious strategic plan sought to set Rwanda on course to become a middle-income country, whose economy was based primarily on agricultural exports, the service and hospitality sector, and information communication technology (ICT), by the year 2020. Vision 2020 included the

¹¹ “Rwanda: New Labor Law to Protect Both Employees and Employers” by Sam Ruburika published May 15, 2009 [online] AllAfrica.com website. Available at <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200905190222.html> [Accessed 19 October 2009].

¹² “Full pay for maternity leave resumes July” by Eugene Kwibuka published March 24, 2015 [online] *New Times* newspaper. Available at < <http://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/article/2015-03-24/187192/>> [Accessed 30 December 2015].

Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of universal education for all (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 2000, p.15) and set the goal of 100 percent net primary school enrollment by 2010 (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 2000, p.27). In the same year, the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) created the “Education for All” program and campaign (Interview, 2015). The awareness-raising campaign attempted to address the cultural reasons for girls’ exclusion from primary education. Public opinion towards women as leaders

Women’s issues have been framed in a gradually changing manner in the public sphere in Rwanda since 1994. In the first several years after the genocide, gender issues and protecting women’s rights were constructed as a social necessity. Because the 1994 genocide created a new context for gender relations, Rwandan law and society had to change to accommodate the new status quo. However, over time, women’s issues came to be framed as morally right, as beneficial to the entire society, and as the so-called “modern” way to do things. According to one long-time activist in women’s CSOs, a key reason why gender equality took off after the 1994 genocide and creation of the Government of National Unity was the changed ideology of the RPF (Interview, 2014). Before the genocide, the government said that it was committed to women’s rights, but it did little in practice to challenge patriarchal ideas and practices. For example, men would say that the purpose of gender equity was to “force men to weed gardens” (Interview, 2014). After the genocide, the RPF started implementing policies to put gender equality into practice (Interview, 2014). Finally, as the gender quotas took hold and Rwanda became recognized as a world leader on gender issues, promoting women’s rights became a point of national pride. Rwandans today are proud and will tell you that “Rwanda is first in gender.”

Yet, in the beginning of this gender revolution, advocates for women’s rights often used a different approach behind closed doors or in the private sphere. These women often couched their advocacy to male audiences in terms of family-oriented, ‘motherist’ politics by appealing to the men’s sense of justice for their own mothers’ and daughters’ rights (Interviews, 1998 and 2000). This strategy was successful in engaging males to support women’s rights. However, despite initial strategies having to structure their argument for equality in terms that best suited men’s beliefs and ideologies, women have increasingly found respect in Rwandan society. With the ability to have a more political and social role

in the public sphere, this has also impacted the private sphere. Women and girls are being given more opportunities like their male counterparts. This change in everyday social life is a major step forward for women's rights in Rwanda.

Diffusion of Gender Equality in Other Spheres

The promotion of gender-based policies has influenced other aspects of Rwandan social life. Since 1994, Rwandan culture has undergone numerous changes in terms of dominant ideologies about gender. Between 1997 and 2011, women experienced “increased respect from family and community members, enhanced capacity to speak and be heard in public forums, greater autonomy in decision making in the family, and increased access to education” (Burnet, 2011, p.303). While it was normative for elite women to work prior to the 1994 genocide, their husbands often controlled their salaries and by law were the de facto head of household (Jefremovas, 2002; Burnet and RISD, 2003). However, the 2003 Constitution's gender quota resulted in an obvious change in the representation of women in government offices from the national level down to the grassroots. The presence of more women in decision-making roles “gave girls the self-confidence to believe that they could achieve these things and hold these jobs” (Interview, 2014). With this belief, and as more professional opportunities opened up to women, older women returned to school to complete their studies (Interview, 2015). Their actions set an example and inspired younger women to stay in school (Interview, 2015). Girls “have new opportunities to pursue education and now grow up being told by NGOs and state officials that education is the key to ‘the good life’” (Berry, 2015, p.14). High profile awareness-raising about the importance of girls' education and the opportunities available to educated girls and women have had a significant effect on girls and their families.

While public ideas about gender equality and women's rights have changed rapidly in the past twenty years, gender roles and the sexual division of labor within the household, family, and extended kin group have been slower to change. Rwandan scholar Justine Uvuza related the story of a woman parliamentarian whose husband insisted that his wife

iron and set out his cloths each day *herself*, in lieu of a domestic worker.¹³ Professional women still bear responsibility for managing the domestic sphere including overseeing domestic workers, ensuring food purchases and meal preparation, supervising childcare and schoolwork, as well as maintaining a clean and orderly household and ensuring the laundry is washed and ironed (personal observations and interviews, 2006-2016). Rural women elected to local government office face increased marital conflict as their husbands question why they spend so much time out of the home (Burnet, 2012, p.323-324). Berry (2015, p.21) concludes that the Rwandan government's efforts to implement policies favorable to women "can actually reinforce [women's] dependence on men," "create new forms of oppression," restrict women's labor, and "further entrench their poverty."

Despite these challenges and short-comings, the increased representation of women in Rwanda has transformed normative ideologies related to women and their roles in society. Gender quotas and policies promoting women's rights have increased women's visibility in public life and women have taken on new roles in local, regional, and national government; business; and civil society. Having more women in government has not organically led to a more democratic government nor has it increased plurality. In fact, there is some evidence that mainstreaming women within the party and in government helped the RPF build a nation-wide constituency and maintain its dominance. Although Rwanda is still best known for the 1994 genocide, its achievements in terms of women's political representation and enhancing women's rights are gaining the country and its president distinction. These gains extend beyond legal frameworks for women's rights and include things like gender parity in primary education, mandatory twelve years education, and the national healthcare scheme that insures all citizens.

¹³ "It's the No. 1 Country for Women in Politics – But Not in Daily Life" by Gregory Warner, NPR news, July 29, 2016 [online] Available at <<http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2016/07/29/487360094/invisibilia-no-one-thought-this-all-womans-debate-team-could-crush-it>> [Accessed 18 October 2016].

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