

# Political Gender Quota in Rwanda

Has increased female inclusion in politics lead to a decrease in domestic gender-based violence?



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# Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how increased female political participation has affected domestic gender-based violence in Rwanda. In 1994, Rwanda saw an estimated 800,000 people being killed in a genocide. The country's economic, political and social structure was left in shambles. Post-genocide, women made up 70% of the population and were forced to take on new roles in the rebuilding of the country. Rwanda has since the end of the genocide taken gradual strides towards improving gender equality and reducing the prevalence of domestic gender-based violence, through the implementation of a multitude of policies and laws. The introduction of gender quotas has led to a clear increase in female political representation and participation. However, cultural norms and traditions remain deeply rooted and actual effects on the prevalence of domestic gender-based violence is debatable. Culture does not by itself change with the installment of new political directives or with the introduction of new programs and policies. This thesis bases its analysis on the theoretical frameworks' of "Institutional theory" and "Doing gender" in order to understand the interaction between power-relations and the strong traditional social structures that Rwanda is built upon.

**Key words:** Political gender quota; Women's empowerment; Domestic gender-based violence; Rwanda; "Doing gender"; "Institutional theory"

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# 1. Introduction

The Rwandan society has been built upon traditional patriarchal structures, as men dominated the social, economic and political life in the pre-colonial period (Jefremovas 1991). Women's ownership and inheritance of land was prohibited. Women were discouraged from making their opinions heard, and were expected to defer to men. The genocide in 1994 saw an estimated 800,000 people being killed in a little over 100 days. It remains etched into the collective memory, and left the country's economic, political and social structures in shambles (Jefremovas 1991; United Nations Security Council 1999; Stubbergaard 2005; Włodarczyk 2013; Debusscher & Ansoms 2013; Corrigan 2015).

Women were equally forced and enabled to take on new roles and tasks in the rebuilding of the country, as women post-genocide made up 70% of the population. The creation of the transitional government in 1994 saw a clear increase in women's representation in decision-making positions. Rwanda has as such taken significant strides towards reconstruction and reconciliation (United Nations Economic and Social Council 1998; Stubbergaard 2005; Hogg 2010; Włodarczyk 2013).

In 2003 Rwanda adopted its constitution, which states a thirty percent quota for women in parliament and government. The same year, parliamentary elections were held in which political parties promoted female candidates, and women gained as much as 49% of the seats in the parliament. This turned out to be the world's highest share of female parliamentarians (Stubbergaard 2005; Hogg 2010; Kubai & Ahlberg 2013; Corrigan 2015).

In the 2008 elections, Rwanda elected its first female-majority national legislative chamber, or Chamber of Deputies. This is the lower house of the national legislature of Rwanda. Women secured 56,25%, thereby surpassing the 30% reserved seats for women (Stubbergaard 2005; Hogg 2010; Kubai & Ahlberg 2013; Corrigan 2015).

In the 2013 election, as many as 64% of the seats of Rwanda's Parliament were taken by women. Since 2013, several laws have been passed aimed at preventing and punishing gender-based violence (GBV), granting more extensive property rights to women and securing women's participation in the workforce. Women's representation in Rwanda has during the past decade extended far beyond the national government, all the way down to the grass root level (Kubai & Ahlberg 2013; Corrigan 2015).

The history of modern Rwandan politics remains unparalleled in its determination to enforce gender equality in politics, at both the national and local level. But despite vast legislative changes, comparatively little appears to have changed in the popular attitudes toward gender roles and power relations. Statistics show a significant increase in female political empowerment, but appears to have had little impact on the still high prevalence of domestic

GBV (Jefremovas 1991; Hogg 2010; Kubai & Ahlberg 2013; Wlodarczyk 2013; Corrigan 2015).

Is the patriarchal mindset too deeply ingrained in the Rwandan society, hindering a profound cultural change? Can extensive institutional changes influence other social spheres of life, or is fundamental change simply implausible due to deeply rooted patriarchal social structures?

## 1.1. Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this thesis is to examine *how gender quotas and democracy interact*. Rwanda is unique, being at the forefront of political gender equality. The national structure of women's councils' where political affairs are discussed, is unusual from a global perspective. The Rwandan women's councils' are elected directly by the female population whom they represent (Kubai & Ahlberg 2013). It is widely argued that the government's initiation of women's councils' has opened up a new political arena for women, that will bridge the dividing-line between government and civil society. Yet, high female political participation (64% in 2013) has apparently not been able to change attitudes toward gender roles, and to balance out power relations between gender (Hogg 2010).

Women's capacity to control resources and surplus in Rwanda is limited, both socially and legally. Wealthy or powerful women are restricted in ways that wealthy and powerful men are not. It has been argued that the lack of democracy is hindering a well-functioning gender quota system, while others argue that it is due to the traditional societal structures rooted in unequal power relations between men and women (Hogg 2010; Kubai & Ahlberg 2013).

This thesis employs two theoretical concepts, more specifically "Doing gender" by West and Zimmerman (1987) as well as "Institutional theory" in order to ascertain what ideas, values and norms dictate women's participation in the reconciliation process. Based on an array of primary government publications, official documents and statistics, along with secondary academic literature, the research intends to bring greater insights into the gendered social construction of Rwandan post-genocide society. In line with the foregoing research objective, the research aims to answer the following question:

- Has the imposed political gender quota lead to a decrease in gender-based domestic sexual violence in Rwanda?

### 1.1.1. Limitations

Due to the wide array of existing publications on this particular topic, certain limitations have been delineated in order to narrow down the scope of the research. The time span covers 1990-2010, reflecting the prevalence of pre-genocide domestic GBV when data indicates the highest percentage, until the aftermath of the 2008-election when the first female-majority national legislative chamber was elected. It is critical to bear in mind that statistics might vary over time depending on findings, which might create some complications. Hence, source criticism is key.

The researcher would like to stress how consideration of the political context of Rwanda is important for a critical assessment of women's political empowerment. The aim is to analyze the inclusion of women into politics, and not to go deep as such into Rwanda as a *democracy* or its process of *democratization*. Neither will the background of the genocide be the focus of this thesis, except for when it has had an impact and effect on women's political representation and participation. Furthermore, sexual violence as a weapon of war will not be considered. Instead, the statistics that this thesis bases its analysis on, is limited to sexual violence directed towards women on household level.

A potential drawback of this thesis is that it is based solely on primary and secondary sources derived through desk study research. Although source criticism is considered, authors might not always provide an objective outlook. Nonetheless, the methodology remains aligned with the research objective, ultimately rendering them suitable for the study.

### 1.1.2. Disposition

Following the introductory chapter including the purpose of the study and necessary limitations, Chapter 2 gives a literature review in order to map out existing research that has been conducted on the topic. This is followed by Chapter 3 discussing methodology. The paper relies solely on desk study research, however both primary and secondary sources, thereby strengthening the analysis. The primary sources include government official documents such as speeches and official documents. Secondary sources such as academic journal articles and books are seen as a necessary complement. In Chapter 4, the theoretical frameworks' – "Doing gender" and "Institutional theory" – for this research are introduced. Chapter 5 defines the term "gender-based violence", frames the prevalence of domestic GBV in Rwanda and the nature of male-female relationship as such. Chapter 6 describes women's political empowerment – representation and participation – and inclusion in Rwandan politics through a political gender quota. It also aims to map out the various initiatives taken by the Rwandan government to enhance women's political inclusion and empowerment. Chapter 7 pinpoints the results and thereafter, chapter 8 analyzes the findings. Chapter 9 presents concluding remarks, and provides an answer to the proposed research question. The 10<sup>th</sup> and final chapter proposes suggestions for additional research.

## 2. Literature Review

The literature review presents relevant research studies that have been conducted by a variety of authors on this topic up to date. The research is of both empirical and theoretical nature, further strengthening the thesis essay and providing it with a more solid base to develop arguments from. The researcher has found the relevant studies and articles included through a structured search discussion centered around key words such as GBV, political gender quotas in Rwanda and women and sexual violence in Rwanda.

Academic literature addressing GBV in Rwanda along with female political participation is plenty and diverse. However, when narrowing it down to whether an imposed political gender quota in Rwanda has led to a decrease in domestic GBV, some core issues emerge.

Rao and Kelleher (2005) observe that research tend to emphasize political representation, access to education and access to and control over resources as a mean to empower women and eradicate inequality. However, there has been little attention paid to the actual process. As such, “change must occur at both the personal and social level for gender equality to be realized” (Rao & Kelleher 2005). The aim should therefore not be to just add women to the existing social and political order, but rather as Prins (2006) explains, a different kind of political activity is needed along with new approaches addressing discrepancies arising from gender equality strategies that are root causes to the problem. Devlin and Elgie (2008) maintain how women’s issues in Rwanda are addressed more frequently through increased female political participation. The effect on actual policy outcomes have however been small. Women are likely to raise issues of equality, education and women’s poor economic position, but the few initiatives that are deemed successful are in the same area of already existing government policies (Prins 2006; Devlin & Elgie 2008).

Bauer (2008) among scholars such as Barnes & Burchard (2012), expand their line of thought to how changes in cultural attitudes and socioeconomic developments would have taken decades to bring about, without the introduction of a female political gender quota. Rwanda’s development on gender equality exemplifies the power of policy norms once they have been institutionally embedded. This presents evidence on how it is simply not enough to only reconstruct social order, but also to understand how to as efficiently as possible maintain the system. The high prevalence of women in the Rwandan parliament illustrates the potential of women’s inclusion, which is largely attributed to the introduction of a political gender quota (Bauer 2008; Barnes and Burchard 2012).

On a particularly different note, Clark (2015) analyses how a country’s political context influences the effectiveness of gender quotas. She highlights the level of a country’s democracy to determine the effectiveness of women’s quotas, and concludes with explaining how a country’s institutions influence the effectiveness of gender quotas. However, Barnes &

Burchard (2012) adopt a different approach by explaining how women seized their opportunities through political transitions, which in turn influenced them to further demand more representation. This resulted in the development of new constitutions and electoral rules to incorporate more women into office (Barnes & Burchard 2012; Clark 2015).

Drawing on postcolonial theory, Briggs & Sharp (2004) offer insights through which we can understand the gap between the implementation and outcome of gender equality programs in Rwanda. Gender issues have been included in the country's development policy, making gender equality programs subject to the same implementation criteria and procedures, and hence subject to the same challenges as other development programs. For example, it was assumed that once the GBV law had been instituted, women would instantly take the advantage and report violence to relevant authorities. The Rwandan government explained the assumption to rest on the belief that women would now be empowered and be in position to defy the norms and report sexual violence without fear of repercussions. Kubai & Ahlberg (2013) further explain how this assumption does not take into consideration prevailing hierarchies and power structures that inform gender relations, the role of the women in the family, notions of masculinity, economic dependence or the role of the extended family. Instead, leaders seem oblivious to the fact that following the implementation of the programs, social attitudes have not changed. For Briggs and Sharp, the discrepancy between the local perceptions of gender equality and the implemented policies have been characterized as "ignorance" by local community leaders. This could in fact be identified as one of the main causes of violence against women in Rwanda (Briggs & Sharp 2004 in Kubai & Ahlberg 2013).

Hogg (2010) develops a similar line of thought by emphasizing how women in Rwanda for decades have been subject of the patriarchal structure of the traditional Rwandan society, and thereby their consequent inequality within the family. In Rwanda, a gender-based division of labor was instilled at an early age, "girls were taught to help their mothers in the kitchen, while boys were trained to defend the interests of the family and the nation" (Hogg 2010). Physical and sexual violence was reportedly common. Hogg (2010) further explains how women suffered from total dependence on her husband. This characterization of the male and female relationship on social level, stretches itself and has influenced Rwandan politics. While women were not completely absent from political life, they were strongly underrepresented (ibid).



## 3. Methodology

The following chapter outlines the methodology and explains why the research has been designed the way it has. This thesis is solely document-based, wherein the researcher investigates a single case by delving into a multitude of empirical and theoretical evidence. It is based upon relevant government official statistics, documents and speeches as well as academic journal articles and books. Through this discussion, one hopes to enable a critical examination of the desk study and the forthcoming results by the reader.

### 3.1. Selected Material

This thesis adopts a single case study research design, which is the “investigation of an issue examined through one or multiple cases, within a limited setting or context” (Bryman 2012: 67-68). The research analyses a contemporary phenomenon, more specifically, a political gender quota within a Rwandan context. It is imperative to note that case studies are an advantageous choice when one seeks to contribute to a better understanding of a certain “political phenomenon”. Moreover, it is particularly favored within a context that deals with an extensive variety of material, ranging from governmental sources, to books and academic articles (ibid).

One of the strengths of the aforementioned design lies within the ability to deal with a variety of evidence. Hence, this thesis draws on governmental, non-governmental and international organizational sources for relevant textual and statistical information. These outlets are also viewed as primary sources that were “recorded at the time of the event” (Bryman 2012: 544). Alongside this, news outlets as well as academic journal articles and books are part of the foundational ground. Yet, these are regarded as secondary sources and hence also viewed as such. The thesis is as mentioned predominantly document-based, and the researcher delves into both empirical as well as theoretical evidence to strengthen the foundational ground.

LUBsearch and the University Library have been the primary search tools for identifying relevant academic journal articles and books. An array of literature has been reviewed, covering political gender quotas and the prevalence of domestic GBV before and after the 1994-genocide. The extensive amount of existing literature marks the topic’s relevance, and creates a solid foundation to develop further research from.

Secondary sources are viewed differently; they base their analysis on the foundation of primary sources. They analyze the area investigated out of the scope of their own interpretation. As such, academic journal articles, news articles and books are considered as secondary sources. With regard to the sensitive nature of the topic, this study is pursued with the understanding that both primary and secondary sources may be altered by the preconceptions of the values and the setting that surrounds the author. One setback of leaning on solely qualitative methods is that it creates difficulties to objectively replicate a study through quantitative measures. It is also practically impossible to maintain a completely objective view, while subjectively limiting the scope of the research. As such, what to include and what to filter out in a study is always a balancing act.

Governmental sources such as the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) and the Gender Monitoring Office among others, provide trustworthy statistical data on the prevalence of pre-genocide domestic GBV. There are also numerous studies carried out by various governmental organizations on political gender quotas and the outcome they have produced. International sources, such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and UN Women, provide a more critical discussion and analysis in its country assessment on violence against women.

The sources that this bachelor thesis is based upon predominantly adopt a theoretical approach, but in many cases applicable statistical data is used to empirically test different hypotheses on how political gender quotas and domestic GBV are connected. By this mean, the research has arguably been able to create a critical analysis built upon differing perspectives.

The research combines “Doing Gender” by Candace West and Don Zimmermann (West & Zimmerman 1987) and “Institutional theory” as theoretical frameworks’. By examining the Rwandan case through the lenses of both theories, the researcher wishes to enable this study to be applicable to other contexts and cases. As such, the significance of this particular study will be further improved.

## 3.2. Ethical Considerations

The research is marked by the absence of interviews and field studies. Emphasis has been directed towards ensuring a correct style of quotation and citation, in order to correctly represent empirical and theoretical material.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

In the analysis of women's political participation in Rwanda, and its subsequent effect on domestic GBV, this research opts to combine the theoretical frameworks of "Doing gender" and "Institutional Theory". As such, both theories have shaped the core of the forthcoming analysis.

### 4.1. Doing Gender

"Doing gender" was first introduced by sociologists Candace West and Don H. Zimmermann in 1987. West and Zimmerman argue that gender is not something we are, but something we do. Gender must be continuously socially reconstructed in light of "normative conceptions" (Deutsch 2007) of men and women. People act with awareness that they will be judged according to what is deemed appropriate female or male behavior. These normative conceptions of men and women vary over time, ethnic groups, and social situations. However, the opportunity to behave as "manly men" or "womanly women" is ubiquitous. Hence, gender is an ongoing emergent aspect of social interaction (West & Zimmermann 1987; Deutsch 2007).

"Doing gender" exposes the weaknesses of deterministic structural accounts of gender. The theoretical insights enhance the research's understanding of how gender differences arise from the different resources to which men and women have access to, or the different social locations they occupy. With regards to the current context, "doing gender" might explain women's disproportionate share of housework as a function of their husbands' income: "Men do less housework, because their greater incomes give them the power to opt out of it" (Deutsch 2007).

Based on Rwandan evidence, inequality in the distribution of household labor seemingly continues to persist even when women contribute to half of the household income. The theory is in short the idea that gender, rather than being an innate quality of individuals, is a psychologically ingrained social construct that actively surfaces in everyday human interaction (ibid). Hence, women simply continue to take care of the household due to deeply rooted societal norms, where responsibility for household chores long have been deemed as belonging to women (West & Zimmermann 1987).

From a traditional Rwandan point of view, the level of female political participation is a marginalized concern. Laws and policies aimed at increasing political gender equality were introduced by an authoritarian government. Hence the political measures taken did not have broad support amongst the population. To take a real step away from gender inequalities requires taking a step away from authoritarianism. A democratically elected government with

broad support has a completely different political mandate to change public opinions than an authoritarian government. In line with the theoretical foundation of “doing gender”, people act with the awareness that they will be judged according to what is deemed appropriate. In order for gender equality to be considered appropriate or normal at the household level, cultural norms and traditions need to change. A democratically elected government might have the potential to change not only laws and policies but also public opinions (ibid).

## 4.2. Institutional Theory

“Institutional theory” predicts how norms and values do not change as quickly as formal institutions. This refers to governmental bodies as well as societal and less informal institutions such as for example marriage. It focuses on the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure. It considers the processes by which structures, rules, norms and routines become established as authoritative guidelines for social behavior. Institutional theorists assert how the institutional environment influences the development of formal structures in an organization, often more profoundly than market pressures (Amenta & Ramsey 2010: 16; Allemand et. al 2014)

“Institutional theory” can be used to explain the causes of gender diversity gap in government. Institutions continue to affect society and influence organizations’ behavior. Institutional pressures such as rules, norms, laws or other various social constructs, may contribute to improving diversity on different levels of governance (Amenta & Ramsey 2010: 16). In a society defending values such as gender equality, the government and other political organizations may comply with the system of values and other social constructions. Organizations should not only be economically successful but the level of legitimacy is equally important within the world of institutions (Allemand et. al 2014).

In the case of Rwanda, the government might impose a law creating reserved seats for women in the Parliament. However, this does not automatically bring about a shift in societal perception or instilled traditional norms. Women might have legislative power as parliamentarians, but women still continue to take care of household duties just as they have always been expected to do. Norms, culture and habits change at a slower pace than legislative measures (Amenta & Ramsey 2010: 16). “Institutional theory” further encroaches on the area of this study as it examines how institutions shape society, thereby in the long run also traditions and values. Political gender equality measures introduced by a people-elected democratic government should have a higher likelihood to bring about change in traditional norms, than policy measures introduced by an authoritarian regime (ibid).

## 5. Prevalence of Gender-based Violence in Rwanda

Just as the Rwandan genocide cannot be explained without understanding the political spectrum in which it took place, the roots for still widespread domestic GBV requires an appreciation of traditional gender relations in Rwanda. This section explores the perceived gender roles in Rwanda. It moves on to briefly defining gender domestic violence as explained by the United Nations along with the official definition of the Rwandan government. Thereafter, domestic GBV before 1994 in Rwanda and women's subsequent political inclusion is mapped out.

### 5.1. The Perceived Gender Roles in the Rwandan Society

This section explains and discusses the gender roles existing in the Rwandan society, dating back to pre-genocide. It is crucial to understand such roles and perceptions in a given society as they constitute a point of departure for "doing gender". It is against the normative perceptions of an ideal women and an ideal man that we are assessed by the society (West & Zimmermann 1987).

Pre-colonial Rwanda was a highly centralized kingdom, and formed the social structures of present-day Rwanda. Rwanda's population, prior to the genocide, was comprised by three different ethnic groups: The Hutu, the Tutsi and the Twa. Prior to the colonial era, Tutsis occupied the higher strata in the social system, and the Hutus the lower. However, by 1910 control was handed over to the Germans. During World War 1, power was again shifted, but to the Belgians. The Belgians implemented a ten-year-development-plan, a series of socioeconomic reforms to promote political progress and social stability. However, this program subsequently again granted the Tutsis political, economic and social domination over the Hutus. This spurred tension and ultimately laid the foundation for the subsequent genocide in 1994 (University of Pennsylvania 2016).

Women's role and responsibilities, stretching from the pre-colonial period to the genocide in 1994, included educating the children, managing the household and maintaining traditions. The value of family-life was underlined and stressed as priority. A gender-based division of labor was instilled at an early age. Boys were taught to defend the interests of the family and the country, while girls were raised to help their mothers in the household. They were taught the importance of obedience, respect and submission. Thus, to build a house and to ensure family income were tasks assigned to men, while housework such as educating children, cleaning and

preparing meals were female chores. Interestingly enough, women conducted 65-70% of agricultural work, yet did not have the capacity to control natural, economic and social resources (Jefremovas 1991; Hogg, 2010). In short, women's ownership and inheritance of land pre-genocide was prohibited, and women were discouraged from voicing their opinions. An example of a "good woman" is someone who is caring, gentle, humble and not outspoken" (Wlodarczyk 2013: 16).

"In our [Rwandan] culture, women are not supposed to be up and talk, people will start doubting you're just making noise: "That one, we know her as somebody who makes noise". There is the way the culture has been shaping us, that we don't talk the when men do. Like when we were young, if my mother would hear me making noise with the boys, she would say: "What's wrong with you? You know that women...Stop doing that. You're supposed to be polite!" You know, there is a way that they have brought us up...in that polite manner. Sometimes you don't even know you have the right to speak" (Wlodarczyk 2013: 16).

In the above statement, it is explained how according to Rwandan tradition, a woman who is outspoken is disregarded as "someone who makes unnecessary noise". She mentions how it is instilled from an early age how playing with boys and behaving boyishly is frowned upon, and not suitable for a girl (Wlodarczyk 2013).

The Rwandan society is built upon norms and traditions, accordingly the ideal woman should be married and have children. Her primary responsibility is to care for the family and maintain the household. However, success in education and professional life is also underlined. Underlining how difficult it is to succeed in both areas, Rwandan women describe this stereotype as a "superwoman": "A good woman from a Rwandan perspective is one who knows how to keep her house well, takes care of the children and her husband, a kind of superwoman" (Jefremovas 1991; Jessica in Wlodarczyk 2013; Debusscher & Ansoms 2013)

In pre-colonial times women managed to exert substantial autonomy in their role as mothers and food producers and could hold powerful religious positions. However, eventually their rights, although rather limited, were cut off during colonial rule and post-independence paid little attention to the situation of women (Jefremovas 1991; Debusscher & Ansoms 2013).

## 5.2. Definition of Gender-based Violence

Domestic GBV directed towards women represent a widespread global social problem, rooted in unequal power relations between men and women. In most societies, the woman's dependency on the man, and their submission or transgression of gender norms contribute to the prevalence of domestic GBV. There is no universally agreed upon definition of GBV. However, Article 1 of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines violence against women as "any act of GBV that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary

deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (United Nations 2003; Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion 2011). The General Assembly Resolution on the Elimination of Domestic Violence against Women expands the scope of violence to also include “economic deprivation and isolation, which may cause imminent harm to the safety, health or well-being of women” (ibid). The definition can also be extended to include sexual abuse and harm (United Nations 2003; Stubbergaard 2005; Hogg, 2010; Kubai & Ahlberg 2013; Wlodarczyk 2013; Corrigan 2015).

In July 2008, Rwanda imposed a law aimed at preventing and suppressing GBV. The law defined GBV as “any act perpetrated because of the victim’s gender, which results in bodily, psychological, sexual and economic harm to somebody just because they are female or male. Such act results in the deprivation of freedom or in negative consequences within or outside households” (Rwanda National Authorities 2008). The bill acknowledges international instruments that enshrine the rights of women, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and Rwanda’s 2003 constitution, as well as efforts to bring justice to the thousands of women who were sexually assaulted during the 1994 genocide. It also observes how there, prior to the installment of the law, have been no civil or criminal law identifying and providing redress for violence against women (ibid).

With reference to what actions may be considered gender-based, gender can be seen as the allocation of roles, attitudes and values that are deemed by the community to be appropriate for each sex. Hence, these traits are results of social construction and represent the perception of men and women, girls and boys in a given culture and society. These roles, which define the power relations between men and women in terms of who takes decisions and owns resources, are learned and reinforced through interactions at home and in the community (ibid).

Therefore, GBV should be seen as physical, sexual, emotional or social harm or abuse directed against a person on the basis of his or her gender role in a given society. Although both women and men are subject and exposed to sexual violence, more women are affected. Hence, the definition by Rwandan authorities lay the foundation for this research, except that the thesis does not address sexual violence outside the household, but focus solely on sexual violence when directed towards the woman in a domestic relationship (Umubyeyi et. al 2016).

### 5.3. Nature and Extent of Gender-based Violence in Rwanda

In some cultures, domestic GBV may be regarded as part of life. Hence, the violence is accepted or viewed as a family matter. Due to such societal norms, reporting or leaving an abusive relationship is less likely, due to subsequent life circumstances for many women. As such, many women choose not to seek help, but continue to suffer in silence (Hogg 2010; Corrigan 2015).

Physical and sexual violence against women have been reported as common in the traditional Rwandan society. A report from November 1999, conducted by the Government of Rwanda confirm how: “from a young age, the Rwandan girl... experiences different forms of violence that she does not discuss... According to tradition, physical violence is perceived as a punishment. In most cases, women accept it as such... The inferior status of the woman, and her ignorance encourage her into submission and expose her to rape and sexual services... Women also suffer from psychological violence... The woman is obsessed by the behavior that is expected of her. She suffers from total dependence on her husband.” (Government of Rwanda 2008).

The report explains how male domination within the family has been and continues to be the norm. Women are expected to remain silent. The passing of new laws has not shown significant improvements in women’s everyday life. The situation in Rwanda today, reflects the country’s history. Women are still responsible for daily subsistence and do most of the heavy labor of Rwandan agriculture. Men have no obligation to use the money they have earned to contribute to the subsistence of the household. Men in Rwanda control the lives of their wives and children, however are not economically responsible for them (ibid).

Several studies over the years point to high levels of domestic GBV in Rwanda. According to the World Report on violence and health published by the WHO in 2002, the type of abuses women undergo are often perpetrated by husbands or male sexual partners. The private nature of this type of violence often make it invisible since it always tends to happen behind closed doors, or because legal systems and cultural norms often deal with this type of violence as a family affair or as a normal part of life (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion 2011).

Efforts have been made to protect women in abusive relationships. A national gender policy was instituted in 2004, followed by the constitution of a law against GBV in July 2008 (ILO 2010). The policy’s vision is to free Rwanda from all forms of gender-based discrimination and wish to see both men and women equally enjoying the development process. It highlights principal guidelines on how to integrate gender issues in social, cultural, economic and political planning (ibid).



## 6. Women's Political Empowerment

This chapter aims to frame the measures of women's political empowerment and inclusion in Rwandan politics through a political gender quota. It explains the defining characteristics of a political gender quota system in order to map out various initiatives taken by the Rwandan government to enhance women's political inclusion.

### 6.1. Gender Quota Systems

Quota systems for women aim to ensure that women constitute a certain number or percentage of the members of a body, committee or a government, so women are not isolated from the political life. It is a form of affirmative action designed to help women overcome the obstacles that prevent them from entering politics in the same way as their male colleagues (quotaproject.org 2017).

There are three main types of gender quota policies: reserved seats, party quotas and legislative quotas. Reserved seats establish seats that only women are eligible to compete for. Party quotas are set by political parties in order to aim for a particular number of women among their candidates for political office. Lastly, legislative quotas are a legal requirement that apply to all political groupings. It sets a minimum for the share of women on the candidate list (Burnet in Franceshet et al 2012; quotaproject.org 2017).

Quota systems generally aim to ensure that women exceed a predefined share of a political body. In some countries, political quotas are applied as a temporary measure until the barriers for women's entry into politics have been removed. However, most countries having applied quota systems have not limited their use of quotas to a set timeframe (Burnet in Franceshet et al 2012; quotaproject.org 2017).

Evidence suggest that women tend to have a different preference on household spending than men. To incorporate women in decision-making can thereby contribute to improvements on all levels of society. Women's representation can also indirectly influence and increase men's attention to policies that specifically concern women and children (Connolly 2004; Chen 2010; Barnes & Burchard 2012; Clark 2015). Gender diversity may in short contribute to value creation since it enhances problem solving by bringing more alternatives; "diversity may favor creativity and innovation; diversity of knowledge increases decision-taking qualities and contributes to more expertise; lastly, gender diversity positively influences creative discussions" (Allemand et. al 2014).

## 6.2. Political Gender Quota in Rwanda

Rwanda was the first country in the world to impose a political gender quota at all levels of governance (Burnet in Franceshet et al 2012). Prior to the 1994 genocide, women constituted 10-15% of Parliament. However, following the genocide, Rwanda saw significant changes in gender roles and ideologies, and in the representation of women in government and civil society. This was partly enforced as women comprised as much as 70% of the population after the genocide. The adopted policies can primarily be attributed to the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), whom since seizing power following the genocide consistently has pursued gender policies and continues to increase the participation of women in politics. The RPF is still the political ruling party in Rwanda (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion 2011).

The policies and laws concerning GBV instituted by the RPF since 1994 include (ILO 2010; Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion 2011):

1. “The National Gender Policy”. The overall goal is to promote gender equality and equity in Rwanda, through a clearly defined process for mainstreaming gender needs and concerns across all sectors of development. Its objective is to ensure that women and men have the same access to resources, goods and services, and that specific needs are taken into account in the entire development process. It falls within the framework of the sustainable and equitable development program adopted by the Rwandan Government (ILO 2010).
2. “The National Policy on Violence against Women and Children”. Its objective is the prevention and eradication of all forms of violence against women and children in Rwanda (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion 2011).
3. “The National Reproductive Health Policy”, which implicate how perpetrators of sexual and domestic violence are subject to punishment by law. This policy integrates GBV services into health services (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion 2011)
4. “The Draft Law on the prevention and repression of GBV” specifies GBV as a crime and further clarifies the penalties (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion 2011).
5. “The Draft Law on reproductive health” particularly focuses on sexual violence in general and violence against children and minors (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion 2011)
6. “The 27/2001 Law on Children rights and protection against violence” introduced and adopted in 2001 particularly emphasizes sexual violence against women (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion 2011)
7. Establishment of anti-GBV and child protection committees from the grassroots to the National level (ILO 2010).
8. Establishment of One stop centers for GBV survivors care in medical, psychosocial, legal support (ILO 2010).

9. A men's association, "Rwanda Men's Resource Center" (RWAMREC) that strives to inform the population and eradicate GBV, specifically violence against women (ILO 2010; Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion 2011).

Other enactments by the RPF include the creation of the Ministry of Gender, organizing women's councils at all levels of government (cell, sector, district and provincial) and simultaneously pursuing all three types of quotas: party quotas, reserved seats and legislative quotas. The RPF has since its origin in 1987, consistently emphasized gender equality as a means to improve society (Burnet 2008). It shows the undivided political will and commitment of the Rwandan Government to address women's empowerment and sexual violence against women (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion 2011).

Party quotas have been pursued by all political parties since 1999 as a strategy to gain more seats in parliament. In 2003, the Rwandan government instituted a constitution reserving 30% of the seats for women in the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of parliament. Alongside, a legislative quota was installed reserving 30% of positions in all decision-making bodies for women, on both national and local level. Women were now legally bound to be represented at all levels of governance. As a result of these policies, Rwanda elected its first female-majority Parliament in 2008. Women now secured 56,25% of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies, thereby surpassing the 30% reserved seats for women. Since 2008, laws aimed at preventing and punishing GBV, and laws on granting more extensive property rights to women and key legislation on women in the workforce have been passed. These include "the Law on Prevention and Punishment of Gender-based Violence": "Prevention and Protection against gender-based violence" and "Cases and Penalties for Gender-based violence" (Rwandan National Authorities 2008; Rwanda National Authorities 2010). Women's political participation has since the 2003 constitution continued to improve, and during the 2013 elections women's representation rose to a vast 64%. Hence, women's representation on all societal levels in Rwanda extend far beyond the national government, all the way down to grass root level (Burnet in Franceschet et. al 2012).

## 7. Results

The following chapter outlines the results derived from a variety of studies and reports conducted by for example MIGEPROF, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and annual reports by the National Police.

News media outlets and statistical reports based on governmental findings generally point out Rwanda as “the No.1 Country for Women in Politics” or “Rwanda: The Land of Equality” (Masanja et. al 2016). However, statistical reports conducted by the National Strategic Plan for HIV and AIDS 2009-2012, point to “the experience of sexual violence towards women in partner relationships remain a fact of life ingrained in the experiences of women across Rwanda” (Kubai & Ahlberg 2013).

Sexual assault towards women in households increased dramatically following the civil war in 1990. Even though rape existed prior to the war, it was not widely recognized as a problem and women’s organizations did not mobilize on the issue. Before, during and after the genocide, rape and sexual violence became a common feature and was in many contexts considered as normal. In a study conducted by the Rwandan Women’s Interassociation Study and Assessment, Kigali, Rwanda in 1994, 49,4% had been victims of rape (Burnet 2012).

A 2005 Demographic Health Survey conducted by MIGEPROF showed that 35% of interviewed women reported having suffered physical domestic sexual violence. It is safe to suggest that the prevalence of sexual abuse in marital relationship is high (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion 2008).

A baseline survey on sexual and gender-based violence in households was conducted by UNIFEM in collaboration with the Rwandan government in June 2008. It surveyed a total of 1056 women in the Rutsiro, Kayonza, Ngororero Districts and the city of Kigali in Rwanda. The results indicated that 59,2% of the respondents described their first sexual encounter as something they desired at the time, 22,9% did not want it to happen but accepted it, and for 17,8% it was something that they accepted yet against their will (United Nations Development Fund for Women 2008).

Out of the total of 1056 surveyed women, 49% had been sexually abused/insulted by their husbands/spouses, and 20% reported that their husbands/spouses threw objects at them, knocked them down or brutally grabbed them. Furthermore, 31% had been victims of the use of force by their husbands/spouses to have sexual intercourse with them, while 15% of the respondents declared that their husbands/spouses imposed sexual acts which they did not want to (ibid). About 21% of the reported victims went to the police, out of which 13% indicating they were well received, 5,8% badly received and 2,2% being very badly received (ibid).

A sub-report on sexual forced intercourse by random perpetrator further indicates how out of 108 women surveyed, 48 had suffered forced sexual intercourse while 44 had suffered attempts of forced sexual intercourse (United Nations Development Fund for Women 2008).

UNIFEM complemented the statistical data with qualitative focus group- and semi-structured interviews. Results show how the type of abuses most frequently mentioned are “insults and beatings by husbands” (ibid). The causes of such GBV mentioned are “ignorance, by the women, about the laws that protect them” (ibid). “Culture that continues to be a hindrance to the development of women”, “differences in income between husband and wife, especially when the wife’s income is higher” (ibid).

The National Police Annual Report on Violence from 2007 indicates that sexual violence perpetrated against women by their husbands is still extensive. In their report from 2008, results indicate that rapes outnumbered all other crimes in the first three months of 2008. Data from 2009 show that 388 rapes were reported while in 2010, the figure had risen to 430. Nearly one third of Rwandan women (31%) have experienced physical violence since age 15 (Ministry of gender and Family Promotion 2011).

Data from the National Police report from 2010 also reportedly showed how the police, health and legal services did not encourage women to report the violence inflicted upon them. Instead, silence and cover-up of the abuses was encouraged. More so, the research revealed how a majority of the women spoke for the first time about the abuse when they were questioned (ibid).

A National Strategic Plan for Fighting Against GBV produced in 2011 by the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion indicate that during a period of three years, 259 wives were murdered by their husbands, and 2000 cases of rape were reported (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion 2011).

The National Health Management Information System (HMIS) database, suggests a slight increase in victims of sexual violence in partner relationships in Rwanda – from 6,299 in 2012, to 6,348 in 2013 (Masanja et al. 2016).

## 8. Analysis

The following chapter analyzes how women's political empowerment and inclusion in government has impacted the prevalence of domestic GBV.

The Rwandan government has created a favorable environment for enhancing gender equality. It has long expressed a strong commitment to expand women's rights and it has taken numerous steps to increase women's political participation. As such, Rwanda has made great efforts to eradicate domestic GBV through the introduction of a range of initiatives. The most recent is the National Policy against GBV introduced in July 2011 (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion 2011).

However, the statistics in this research indicate that despite all the efforts made by the government to enhance gender equality, the prevalence of sexual violence directed towards women in partner relationship continues to remain high (ibid).

Is culture to blame for violence? It has been suggested that despite the political progress Rwanda has enforced, people do not want women to have a say in the society. It is repeatedly said that "men are the decision-makers in homes" (Kubai & Ahlberg 2013); "men look at women as part of their property" (ibid); and that "it is a cultural belief that men have authority over women, therefore women should be submissive and respectful to men" (ibid). Rwandan society is characterized by a patriarchal societal structure that underlies the unequal social power relations between men and women. This has translated into men's dominance and women's subordination. Gender inequalities have therefore in the past not been seen as unjust and representing inequality, rather it is considered respected social normality (ILO 2010). Following the implementation of laws and policies ensuring gender equality, continuous male resistance is based upon how men feel threatened by women's new found freedom (Kubai & Ahlberg 2013).

"In the past women did not know their rights and obligations. Now things are changing here. Gender issues have tended to destabilize some homes. Some men are bitter about gender equality. Some men leave everything to women to do in order to prove their equality. Some women are drinking in bars up to 11.00 pm, and when asked why they are not at home looking after children, they respond that the president has given them voice. When such women arrive at homes, the children are not fed or bathed! Issues of gender have been misunderstood, and they are now causing instability in many homes. In the Rwandan culture, if a man pays dowry, it means he has full authority over the woman, but things are changing" (ibid).

This mirrors how gender equality policies and programs are perceived by many men as challenging the status quo, or as an unnecessary disruption (Debusscher & Ansoms 2013). There is a discrepancy between the culturally defined place and role of women in the society, and the political agenda to promote and enforce gender equality. It is therefore not too surprising that in spite of the progressive gender policies that have been implemented since 2003, domestic GBV remains a problem. On a different note, contrary to the popular opinion of Rwanda having achieved the world's highest female representation in parliament (64% in 2013), Amnesty International reports how evidence suggest that the prevalence of domestic gender-based crimes is now higher than it was before the genocide (Kubai & Ahlberg 2013).

Although Rwandan authorities have introduced a range of different programs that encourage women to report sexual violence, most cases go unreported for fear of repercussions. Some women even withdraw their complaints and demand that their husbands are to be released from police custody while waiting for trial (Kubai & Ahlberg 2013). The man continues to be “the head of the family”, and reinforces the theory of “doing gender” in which the structure of gender in society is already decided (Debusscher & Ansoms 2013).

In what ways can the authoritarian political structure in Rwanda be seen to hinder the effect of political gender quotas on domestic GBV? A political gender quota and policies and laws against GBV are of democratic nature, but implemented by an authoritarian regime. Policies have not been introduced by a people-elected government, which means that the political initiatives lack broad support amongst the population. Thereby it is unreasonable to expect that political decisions would lead to significant change in general opinions. More so, domestic GBV in Rwanda is fed by multiple factors. It is a combination of cultural norms and deeply rooted traditions along with socio-economic development (United Nations Economic and Social Council 1998; Kubai & Ahlberg 2013).

“It is too simple to assume that the participation of women will lead directly to fundamental change in itself” and thereby transform the hegemonic order. Under conditions of inequality, deliberative processes tend to serve dominant groups, and subordinated groups will not get the opportunity to properly think through and articulate their interests” (Kabeer, 2005: 15 in Debusscher & Ansoms 2013).

Cultural norms and traditions are identified as the primary factors that promote violence against women. There is no doubt that the Rwandan government has had a strong political will to transform the society into a gender equal one. Domestic GBV remains however a perennial challenge. Rwanda can therefore be argued to experience an ongoing clash between old and new values: politically motivated programs and cultural norms (United Nations Economic and Social Council 1998; Hogg 2010; Kubai & Ahlberg 2013; Debusscher & Ansoms 2013).

Gender equality on all levels is imperative for achieving a desired change of cultural mindset paving the way for national programs and initiatives aimed at reducing domestic GBV to succeed. Emphasis has been put on political representation, access to education, access to and control over resources as well as women's empowerment. Little attention has been given to the actual process. As such, change must occur at both personal and societal level for gender

equality to be realized (United Nations Economic and Social Council 1998; Hogg 2010; Kubai & Ahlberg 2013; Debusscher & Ansoms 2013).

Poverty is a contributing factor behind the high levels of domestic GBV in Rwanda. Failure to contribute to one's family economically and the dependency on the husband has made women feel "useless", much in line with the theory of "doing gender". Ultimately women become exposed to sexual violence as a result of strained relationships at home when there is no money (Kubai & Ahlberg 2013). This points to how a country's institutions do not automatically bring a shift in societal perception or instilled traditional norms, in line with the arguments of the "institutional theory". Women might be more political empowered, but are still expected to care for household duties just as they have always been expected to do. Norms, culture and habits change at a slower pace than legislative measures (Deutsch 2007; Amenta & Ramsey 2010; ILO 2010).

Even though Rwandan women are driven into the labor market to increase their economic contribution, their domestic influence remain largely unaffected. Women's participation in economic activities at national level have reportedly been measured at 56,4%, while men's participation is at 43,6% (ILO 2010). But women are often employed as "supporting staff", while men continue to occupy key positions and continue to earn significantly more. Women compose the majority of the labor force, but despite their economic contribution they continue to maintain subordinate positions in their families (Deutsch 2007; Amenta & Ramsey 2010; ILO 2010). The statistics highlight women's marginalized position whereby they continue to be economically dependent on the man even if they participate in the workforce. Poverty affects men and women differently, mainly due to existing inequalities in terms of development opportunities and control over economic resources. This is fundamentally due to their respective roles and responsibilities that have been socially constructed. More so, it suggests how lack of influence in the household is an inherent characteristic of women, originating in their sex, rather than solely a result of societal pressure. Rwandan traditions and culture are too deeply rooted in the societal structure, for institutions to simply change them. This finding is in line with West's and Zimmermann's (1987) argument of how most of the differences between women and men are a product of social interaction, and is commonly referred to as "natural". Differences between men and women are simply being viewed as "uncontestable" and "unchangeable" (West & Zimmermann 1987; Deutsch 2007; Amenta & Ramsey 2010; ILO 2010).

The "doing gender" approach implies that if gender is constructed, then it can also be deconstructed. Gender institutions can therefore change, and the social interactions that support them can be undone (West & Zimmermann 1987). "Institutional theory" suggests that policies and laws are a product of decisions, whilst norms and culture are deeply rooted and follow a slower pace than decision-making processes (Deutsch 2007; Amenta & Ramsey 2010). As such, to enforce gender equality laws and policies will not result in rapid changes in gender equality and reduced GBV on the household level. Traditions and norms are deeply embedded and take time to change, but laws and policies slowly pave the way for cultural changes. In that sense, Rwandan politics has the potential to slowly decrease the prevalence of domestic GBV in the – hopefully not too distant – future (West & Zimmermann 1987; Deutsch 2007; Amenta & Ramsey 2010).



## 9. Concluding Remarks

Rwandan politics have in many ways been progressive over the last two decades, having introduced a multitude of policies, laws, strategies and programs to ensure gender equality at both national and local political level. Political measures have, however, not been able to change deeply rooted cultural norms and traditions.

Women's post-genocide entry into the political life has not induced a significant change in traditional gender perceptions. Women may have gained political power, but in everyday life, traditional gender relations continue to prevail, with women carrying the responsibility for the household. The general opinion continues to be unwilling to accept the political power that has been given to women, and men continue to dominate at household level where they according to tradition still are in charge. Regardless of increased gender equality in the political arena, traditional power balances between gender continue to prevail in the household. The woman still has an inferior role at the grass-root level, and domestic GBV continues to be seen as "normal". It is too simple to assume that the increased political participation of women, would rapidly lead to fundamental change and thereby transform the hegemonic order.

It will take time for cultural norms and attitudes to change, and for the Rwandan society to take a step away from their old norms and beliefs that continue to justify domestic GBV. Culture does not change as rapidly as the installment of new political directives or with the introduction of new programs.

The introduction of a political gender quota would have been expected to significantly improve the status of women in society, leading to a gradual decrease in domestic GBV. The statistics point, however, to the fact that the prevalence of GBV remains merely unchanged. Based on the findings of the research, one could conclude that Rwanda's gender issues are based upon deeply rooted cultural norms and traditions. As such, to take a step away from gender inequalities require taking a step away from authoritarianism. A political gender quota is a democratic initiative. However, Rwanda continues to remain authoritarian.

It would be unfair to say that Rwandan politics have failed, but as long as democracy remains weak and political power centralized, it is doubtful whether the status of the woman will be significantly improved. In the long run, the achieved increase in female participation and representation in government could prepare the path for Rwandan democracy.

## 10. Proposing Additional Research

This research has examined if women's political empowerment in Rwanda has had an impact on the prevalence of domestic GBV. The timespan for the analysis covers the years 1990-2010. Since 2008, laws aimed at preventing and punishing GBV, and key legislation on women in the workforce, have been passed in Rwanda. Future research in order to examine the real effects of these policies would provide valuable further insight. To this end, it remains theoretically significant to continue the research both in Rwanda and in a different country, facing conditions similar to those that this thesis has analyzed. This would ultimately contribute to a deeper understanding of how women's increased participation in politics through gender quotas can improve the status of the woman in society.

Further research could also take point of departure in countries, regions, political bodies or even companies having introduced different forms of gender quotas. The impact to be analyzed could vary depending on the characteristics of the environment where gender quotas have been introduced. Cuba has unofficially introduced a political gender quota, but refuses to incorporate it as a law (Luciak 2005). India has introduced a quota for women at local level, but consistently reject proposals for reserved seats on national level (Krook 2009). The nature of the research topic could also be applicable in a study of gender quotas on the corporate boards, where for example Norway has introduced gender quotas on boards of companies listed on the Oslo Stock Exchange (Solsvik and Fouce). The common denominator for all three examples is the introduction of some sort of gender quota, while the actual impact to be analyzed should be adapted to the environment in which the body operates. Naturally, further research can also take the point of departure in countries actually having experienced decreasing numbers of GBV, and analyzing different policy measures and their impact on development.

Examining the impact of gender quotas in a wider context may strengthen the conclusions on how changes through decision-making processes interact with cultural changes. The theories of "Doing gender" and "Institutional theory" constitute a useful framework for broadening the scope of studies on the subject, rendering the conclusions of this study further insight.

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