Destructive Conflicts Generating Reconstructive Empowerment of Women and Opportunities for Peace?

-A Comparative Study of Rwanda and Burundi, Exploring Women's Socioeconomic Situation in the Aftermath of Conflict

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Abstract

Conflicts are destructive for humans and societies, but are openings for rebuilding a more inclusive and sustainable society presented in the aftermath of conflict? This paper contributes to the growing research field and examines the link between conflict and window of opportunity for development, through a gender lens. Further, this study seeks to understand how conflict affected women's socioeconomic situation in Rwanda and Burundi.

Critical peacebuilding and feminist theories are combined with human security and human capital theory into a unique framework. Based on a qualitative method with help of quantitative data, socioeconomics is dissected and measured into six categories: education, literacy, fertility, land ownership, labour work and agricultural sector. Applied on collected data, findings show that a causal relationship can be established. In addition, empirical findings imply that Rwandan women are more socioeconomically empowered then Burundian ones. However, gender equalising empowerment still has to confront prevailing gender norms and hierarchies in both cases.

In sum, women's socioeconomic empowerment is found as gender roles are challenged, previous closed spaces are opening up and women's societal value are transformed in post-genocide Rwanda and post-civil war Burundi. Destructive conflicts can generate reconstructive empowerment of women and opportunities for peace.

Key words: *WPS, Post-Conflict, Peacebuilding, sub-Saharan Africa, Economic Empowerment, Socioeconomic Development*

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1   Introduction

There is no doubt that conflicts and war bring devastating consequences for the affected society and its inhabitants. At the same time, studies show how destructive conflicts may transform societies and its structures more rapidly than in societies without violent conflict. Also, research points at how especially women's status and societal role face progressive periods in the aftermath of conflict, gaining increased engagement and participation in formal and informal spheres. Furthermore, it is not unusual for women to take on responsibilities and work that otherwise belong to men at times of war. But what happens after the conflict? Post-conflict societies can be seen as a window of opportunity for gender relations in the society, to keep developing women's status, change unsustainable patriarchal structures and undergo the process of peaceful transformation.

Gender norms and equality work in relation to conflict resolution are emerging and setting the tone for contemporary peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Just over 20 years ago, the *United Nation's Security Council* adopted *Resolution 1325* (hereafter UNSCR 1325). This landmark resolution stresses the importance and promotion for women's full and equal involvement, participation and representation in peace processes on all levels. UNSCR 1325 recognizes the consequent impact the lack of an incorporated gender perspective has on durable peace and reconciliation. Further, the resolution, the whole *Women, Peace and Security* (WPS) agenda and following resolutions (such as res. 1889) stress the importance of economic empowerment. Yet, research examining the agenda and post-conflict reconstruction in general do not focus on economic empowerment, especially research on women's socioeconomic empowerment is missing.

Economic equality is crucial to achieve the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs). Besides showing how economic empowerment contributes to development, I am concerned about socioeconomic empowerment in relation to conflict and peace. The ways in which post-conflict economies are planned out nationally might affect and determine long-term policies and strategies, as well as prospects for peace. Therefore, it is important to examine the integral link between economic participation, peace and security.

Intrastate and civil conflicts were fairly common in the 1990s Africa. Among the most well-known and turbulent examples is Rwanda, which erupted in genocide in 1994. To say the least, the Rwandan society faces significant reconstruction work and peacebuilding. The neighbouring country Burundi also suffered civil war, emerging from ethnic divisions and affecting the population for a decade. Did the destructive conflicts in Burundi and Rwanda generate some sort of reconstructive empowerment for women?

1.1 Purpose and Aim of Study

The aim of this research is to investigate the links between conflict and socioeconomic empowerment, from a gender perspective. Is it possible to consider conflict as a window of opportunity for women's socioeconomic empowerment and if so, is the opportunity seized upon? The purpose of this research is to present, describe and explain what effects conflict might have on women's social and economic situation in Rwanda and Burundi. I intend to explore whether conflict increases women's socioeconomic empowerment or not. This research elaborates the research field by linking various theories and concepts by presenting an intersectional approach. Moreover, I intend to bridge the gap between *peacebuilding* and *development.*

1.1.1 Research Question

In order to fulfil the purpose and aim, this study proposes to answer the following research question:

How did conflict affect women's socioeconomic situation in Burundi and Rwanda?

2 Previous Research

2.1 Literature Review

The field of women and conflict is growing. However, the field is relatively limited in investigating the relationship between conflict and women's socioeconomic empowerment. This is the core of my study, which I am not alone in pointing out nor trying to fill the research gap with.

2.1.1 Contemporary Studies

Goetz and Hassim (2003) explore conflict as a window for political transitions. Most of previous and current research on the WPS agenda and the application of UNCSCR 1325 evaluate the work of the UN and its missions concerning women's political participation (see Hudock 2016; Hughes & Tripp 2015; Dahlum & Wig 2020). Further, links have been drawn between women's participation in peace negotiations and political participation after conflict: when women are invited to the negotiation table, peace is more durable (Aggestam & Svensson 2017; Anderson 2016; Paffenholtz 2014). Mainstream feminist research has not fully explored if the window of opportunity not only opens up for political progresses but also for economic empowerment. I spot a research gap on post-conflict reconstruction with a focus on women's socioeconomic empowerment and participation.

2.1.2 Conflict as an Opportunity

Hudock (2016) is one of many contemporary scholars (Ruiz Abril 2009; Buvinic et al. 2013; Tripp 2015; Hughes & Tripp 2015; Webster et al. 2019) to explore destructive conflicts as opportunities for reconstructive empowerment of women. Moreover, they recognise how conflict changes existing social orders and opens previously closed spaces for women, hence fostering empowerment. Ruiz Abril (2009) highlights that conflict is an opportunity to address issues in society, including gender. Further, Ruiz Abril implies that conflict is a chance for rebuilding

instead of reproducing unsustainable orders (Ruiz Abril 2009:17). This I investigate.

At the same time Vik Bakken and Buhaug's (2020) research advocates for how conflict generates rapid transformation in closing gender gaps and changing normative attitudes toward women -enough to start a long-term process of structural change in the post-conflict era. Besides ruining traditional gender divisions, war cultivates women's continued mobilization which in itself is an extension of empowerment and equality work. Vik Bakken and Buhaug finally suggest with their results that while civil war actually creates faster transformation and development, it is not preferable nor good for the society, but that it triggers positive changes (Vik Bakken & Buhaug 2020:2, 22).

During conflict women tend to be forced to take on new responsibilities on an individual, household and community level, thus altering traditional gender roles. For example, when men are sent to war, women fill in the otherwise unavailable social and economic roles. These new roles could be capitalized on in the post-conflict environment (Hudock 2016:7-8; Buvinic et al 2013). More precisely women become the providers, but the question is if it lasts post-conflict. According to Justino, this is only temporary due to a lack of structural changes and social acceptance (Justino 2018:82). Similarly, Webster et al. calculate that empowerment is only shown to be gained short or medium term, not extending 15 years (2019:256-257).

There is some previous research on the relationship between conflict and economic empowerment. For instance, Ruiz Abril (2009) analyses economic empowerment as changes of attitudes and structures following conflict. Klugman and Mukhtarova (2020) link conflict to higher labour market participation. Also, Justino et al. (2018) show how especially civil wars increase women's labour market participation and propose that armed conflict affects economic growth and development. Likewise, Webster et al. (2019) declare that war creates economic openings and empowerment for women, which can spill over to political and social achievements.

On one hand previous research on conflict and women argues and shows a positive causation for conflict and women's empowerment. This approach dominates the field. On the other hand, there are some scholars (Pankhurst 2003; Meintjes et al. 2002) who suggest and portray a potential backlash for women. Pankhurst (2003) considers conflict and the post-conflict period as the end of women's gained freedoms and argues for how women are forced back into the kitchen and fields as soon as the men return (Pankhurst 2003:161). However, this is challenged by more recent research. Beyond already mentioned studies Aili Mari Tripp contests this backlash-argument by stating how it might have been so in the past but that it is not a trend since the 1990s, especially not in the sub-Sharan context (Tripp 2015:10).

2.1.3 Sub-Saharan Context

Tripp (2015) presents and explains a causal relationship between conflict and women's rights and changes in gender relations in a sub-Saharan context. Tripp assesses her arguments with case studies of Liberia, Angola and Uganda. In addition, Tripp validates that the post-conflict period is essential to seize upon as opportunities unfold after conflict disruptions, which societies should and could take advantage of. Along with new gender roles, the demand for equal rights and representation evolves (Tripp 2015:26, 33). Furthermore, Tripp concludes that conflict increases educational and economic opportunities, as in Uganda where women enjoy economic empowerment and manage major businesses they could not have run before the war (Ibid:106).

In the case of Rwanda, most studies examine how conflict resulted in higher percentages of women in decision-making bodies, such as parliamentary seats. This speaks to the focus on political empowerment. In addition, work on Rwanda has centred on post-conflict transitional justice mechanisms and how the society rebuilds and reconciles after the genocide in political and legislative terms (Lambourne & Gitau 2013; Hunt 2014; Brown 2016). Even if for example Brown (2016; 2017) acknowledges the importance of incorporating a feminist approach, thus evaluating the role of patriarchal norms, she only focuses on political victories for women. Lorentzen (2020) among others (see Debusscher & An 2013) represents the growing critical literature on Rwanda's success story, whether gender equality and women's rights really are shown in contemporary politics.

Burundi is not as highly profiled as Rwanda, especially not in existing literature with a gender lens. However, Anderson (2016) dedicates a chapter to the Burundian civil war and its increased political participation. Subsequent after the *Arusha Agreement* in 2000, a lot of research on Burundi is about political power-sharing, political democratisation and civil society liberation in general (Vandeginste 2009; Falch 2010). Again, the pattern for research on political empowerment is followed and thus other perspectives are missing.

Naturally, research concerning the two cases have been conducted by political scientists regarding their colonial history, mass violence and ethnical divisions (see Uvin 1999). Therefore, I seek to broaden the mainstream research.

Finally, research by Arostegui (2013) on the *Great Lakes* region's Rwanda, Uganda and South Sudan lays ground for my own research. Further, she shows how policies and laws legislated after the conflict changes women's status and living conditions, resulting in shifts in gender relations (Arostegui 2013:535-536). Even if Arostegui discusses the widows in Rwanda and the country's relevant institutional changes towards gender equality, she does not dig deeper nor explain how conflict and the post-conflict period is an opportunity.

2.2 Research Gap

To summarize, previous research has progressed in the field of exploring conflict and women's empowerment, yet shortcomings are evident. To begin with, I am broadening the mainstream research on the WPS agenda. Generally, I am contributing to the field by conducting a qualitative study, comparing Burundi and Rwanda and looking at socioeconomic factors in post-conflict settings. I investigate the social consequences of a conflict more deeply while overlooking the already well-studied political aspect.

Secondly, I intend to fill the research gap by testing and showing how conflict can be an opportunity for women's socioeconomic empowerment, hence gender equality and sustainable development of the society. In parallel, I also challenge the assumptions of conflict only being destructive and backlashing for women.

Thirdly, I am continuing the work on linking conflict to socioeconomic empowerment, connected to changes of attitudes and structures. In correlation, I am contributing to the field by conducting research on the Great Lakes region, sub-Saharan Africa.

Finally, I am filling the research gap and the insufficient literature through analysing, explaining and creating an intersectional approach with a more holistic perspective on post-war reconstruction and the relationship between conflict and women's socioeconomic empowerment. Furthermore, I want to bridge the gap between development and peace and conflict studies. While development studies do not connect development to peace and conflict, the same goes for peace and conflict studies which are ignoring the related dimension of development. By focusing on a broadening concept of economy and security, I fill this gap while supporting the rising feminist field that until recently has been ignored and still is an understudied and unused perspective.

3   Theory

3.1   Towards a Conceptual Framework

I use and develop existing theories and concepts from the literature on critical peacebuilding and feminist security studies.

To begin with, there is a rising critical research field, embracing feminist approaches on women and gender equality. With feminist theories pointing at gender (in)equalities, hierarchies, insufficient and biased peace and security research (Tickner 1992; Boulding 2000; Cockburn 2007), feminist Mary Caprioli is one of the leading scholars in studying the relationship between gender and conflict. Furthermore, *Gendered Conflict* recognizes how conflict is *gendered* and that *gender equality* could be defined as equal opportunities within formal and social spheres; socially, politically and economically (Caprioli 2000).

In parallel with Caprioli, Melander (2005) develops an analytical framework on empowered women and internal armed conflict. In a quantitative study, Melander finds out and supports previous feminist scholars and constructivists in that gender is socially constructed and the more empowered women are the less likely it is for internal armed conflict to erupt (Melander 2005).

More recently, feminists Ní Aoláin et al. (2011) link conflict and women's economic empowerment. Further, they compare women's health and other economic indicators in post-conflict countries with other non-conflict countries in the same region. As a result, Ní Aoláin et al. imply how economic and social status may very well be linked to conflict outcomes and experiences of women (Ní Aoláin et al. 2011:31-37).

To summarize, Caprioli and Melander's contributions are highly relevant as theoretical background for this research. Both of them come to the conclusion that gender equality decreases the likelihood of intrastate conflict and establish engendered conflict. Further, they recognise gender and gender inequality as socially constructed, thus changeable. Ní Aoláin et al. take this link further by observing a causal relationship between conflict and women's economic and social status. This is what I aim to study.

3.1.1 Concept of Peace, Security & Development

The feminist approach gives a nuanced and broadening perspective of the concepts of peace and security. Further, *Feminist Security Studies* (FSS) pay attention to the political economy of social relations and inequalities of the everyday life (Wibben 2011; Shepherd 2011; Hudson 2015:416). Feminist peace and security are concerned with how conflict and violence do not stop just because traditional security and ceasefire are reached between states. Instead, FSS look at how inequalities correlate with insecurities among the population, produced and reproduced in the wake of war and conflict. In other words, feminists recognize and demonstrate how security not only includes war and international violence but also domestic violence, rape, poverty and gender subordination -structurally threatening individuals at the local level, related to national and international politics everyday (Sjoberg 2009:198). This appeals to Galtung's concept of *peace* (1996), how peace is not just reached by ending *direct violence* but by also ending *structural violence*. Further, the absence of violence is divided into two parts: *negative* and *positive peace*. The latter being defined as the end of structural violence, thus what feminists seek to reach.

In the same spirit and following FSS, *human security* and *human capital* are expanding traditional concepts. While national economies might recover after conflict, human capital and human suffering take longer to regain. *Human security* as a concept involves providing for human needs and protection of freedoms and human rights. Social problems such as poverty, illiteracy and health are all covered in the human security concept (Taylor 2004:66; Kfir 2012:87). By engaging in economic and social rights, a human security approach addresses root causes of the conflict and Galtung's structural violence (Cahill-Ripley 2016:235). Peacebuilding that follows human security disassembles structures that contribute to conflict with development of social, political and economic infrastructures (Conteh-Morgan 2005:72).

Human capital is viewed by economists and development scholars as a measurement for human capacity and human security factors. *Human capital theory* concentrates on understanding humans as capital, thus investments change humans' capacities and ultimately improve their ability to also earn economic incomes. Accordingly, the theory stresses the connection between individual-level inputs and macro-level outcomes (Schultz 1961; Calkin 2018:44-50). Post-structuralist, constructivist and feminist approaches have later on developed and reframed human capital. The feminist critique of human security is its failure to understand humans as gendered (Sjoberg 2009:206). In addition, the feminist approach emphasises human security to be social, not only the needs of an individual (Tickner 1994). Furthermore, engendering mainstream theory has centralised how gender equality can be reached by empowering women through enhancing women's human capital (Heyneman 2003; Buvinic et al. 2013; Calkin 2018).

In sum, a feminist approach towards concepts of human capital combined with human security present how development, thus reconstruction in post-conflict, not only includes and depends on economic improvements but foremost the socioeconomic wealth of women (Gizelis 2009:509).

3.1.2 Theoretical Approach

The presented academics lay the foundations of my research on women's socioeconomic empowerment in post-conflict Burundi and Rwanda. Altogether, the theories of Caprioli, Melander and Ní Aoláin et al. fit well with the other critical and broadening perspectives and concepts on WPS. The interaction between taking gender, human security and capital into account while reconstructing a war-torn society is significant to evaluate. As the feminist approach offers a wider understanding for the gendered dual dichotomies; public and private spheres, formal and informal spaces (True 1996), it is appropriate to use this approach while investigating the socioeconomic empowerment of women. Introduced concepts and theories reflect my approach on how empowerment can be understood and measured in terms of security and equality. Moreover, levels of empowerment are to be valued in relation to peace and development.

3.2   Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research is based on previous academic work. However, I am developing past research into my own framework by incorporating different measurements. Since I am concerned with women's socioeconomic empowerment in causal relation to conflict, I begin by developing and completing the work of Caprioli (2005).

Caprioli explains that violence is sustained by socially and culturally specific norms, engendered structures (Caprioli 2005:164). The more advanced inequality, the higher risk of continuous violence. Following this, Caprioli firstly accentuates how measuring *fertility rates* says something about women's health and social standing. Furthermore, fertility rates correspond with levels of education, which also indicate norms and structures. Secondly, Caprioli distinguishes *labour force* to be the other important marker for gender equality. While fertility tells us about social standing, the labour market estimates women's participation and independence in the society -whether women have enough and equal status and access to formal spaces in the same way as informal and private spheres (Caprioli 2005). In her studies Caprioli concludes that a greater participation of women in labour force is sufficient to empower and enhance women's structural status in the long run (Caprioli 2000:63). Caprioli's work covers parts of my interest in socioeconomic empowerment. Yet, I want to add some measurements to better bring about my research and focus. As Caprioli admits unpaid labour is not included in her research (Caprioli 2000:58). I want to complete this since a considerable amount of women, especially in the African context, are relegated to agricultural work or the informal and unpaid work sector (Hughes & Tripp 2015:1520; Nordstrom 2010:164). Therefore, I intend to complete Caprioli's analytical framework by looking at women's labour force in the agricultural sector, which Ruiz Abril (2009) took in consideration while analysing the case of Eritrea. Thus, adding *agricultural work* to my theoretical framework can also be seen as

contributing and testing Ruiz Abril's theory of conflict breaking and transforming the gender-segregated labour market (Ruiz Abril 2009:8).

On a similar note, my framework is a continuation of Klugman and Mukhtarova (2020)'s theory on conflict and women's empowerment in terms of *employment*. Related to the theories above, they observe on one hand conflict leading towards increased employment because of changing gender roles during the conflict. On the other hand, they discover that while conflict might boost women's employment, the quality of work positions remains hierarchical -not necessarily improving women's societal role or norms (Klugman & Mukhtarova 2020:4). However, Klugman and Mukhtarova are certain that conflict is an opportunity for change as participation of women during conflict creates *female-headed households*. Once again, I make use of theories pointing at shifts of socially constructed gender roles that affect economic opportunities. By looking at labour market possibilities I test the theory that female labour market participation increases after civil conflict letting women assume the position as income providers.

From Melander's (2005) framework I am only interested in his outlined relationship between *education* and women's economic empowerment. Further, Melander shows how education signals traditional gender roles, thus the subordination of women. Moreover, education provides information about women's societal value (Melander 2005:699). Melander's other two measurements are more useful when examining political empowerment, which is not the focus in this paper. In order to further develop Melander, I am examining *female-to-male literacy rates*. Matching the *World Bank*, (il)literacy is a key indicator of development (World Bank 2012:392). According to Forsberg and Olsson (2020) educational investments correlate with violent conflict being less likely. In this way, female education shows inequality norms and societal capacity-building (Forsberg & Olsson 2020:16). This I am encouraged to interpret into my analysis on women's social empowerment.

Tripp (2015) identifies a causal relationship between conflict and women's rights and representation. By examining Liberia, Angola and Uganda she determines that conflict is connected to increased educational and economic opportunities. Tripp highlights *land ownership* as a critical factor of empowerment as it challenges patrilinear and gender discriminating norms. Just as land ownership illustrates economic empowerment, she agrees that elevated educational rights signify social empowerment (Tripp 2015:181). Also, Hudock (2016) remarks that conflict causes demographic imbalances and fosters new economic roles and rights for women such as being the head of the household e.g., taking responsibility for land and become entrepreneurs (Hudock 2016:8). As widowhood increased after conflict, unbalanced sex ratios were created which might force wider representation (Buvinic et al. 2013:118-119). Thus, I am adding land ownership to my framework to measure socioeconomic empowerment.

Along with that, Ní Aoláin et al. endorse future research to continue their study by broadening their measurements. Moreover, they call for structural measurements such as land ownership, employment and occupation levels. This they estimate will look further to the quality or standard of life, the gender reality of ruling social norms. Ultimately Ní Aoláin et al. support structural research on how women

formally and informally are (in)secured and call specifically for indicators of the legal system (Ní Aoláin et al. 2011:29, 34). This I aim to answer in this research.

In conclusion, I theorise that conflict might provide a window of opportunity for women's socioeconomic empowerment. Because of adjustments of societal roles during conflict and demographic changes in the aftermath of conflict, opportunities for transformative structures seem brighter and are related to peace and development. The time after a conflict is thus essential to seize upon. Further I recognise a feminist approach, therefore I also theorise on how peace, development and security depend on these structural adjustments. In consequence, I evaluate constructions of gender relations and women's endorsement in society from a socioeconomic point of view. Women's socioeconomic empowerment correlates with national actions towards a secure post-conflict environment and future. Thus, I have created a unique theoretical framework consisting of appropriate factors which covers both social and economic empowerment.

3.2.1 Overview of Theoretical Framework

Source: Author 2021

4 Research Design & Methodology

4.1 Variables, Hypothesis and Proposition

My independent variable is *conflict* while my dependent variable is *women's socioeconomic empowerment.*

I propose that the relationship is causational, e.g. I suggest that conflict might cause a window of opportunity for women's socioeconomic empowerment. Therefore, I explore following hypothesis:

(H1): *Conflict creates a window of opportunity for women's socioeconomic empowerment*

(H2): *Conflict does not create a window of opportunity for women's socioeconomic empowerment*

(H3): *Women in Rwanda enjoy greater socioeconomic empowerment then Burundian women*

In accordance with my theoretical framework, I expect that destructive intrastate conflict might result in greater socioeconomic empowerment, thus are reconstructive. Overall, I hypothesise that intrastate conflict open spaces, challenge traditional gender roles and revaluate women's societal value, thus transforming the society structurally in the post-conflict period.

4.2 Operationalization

4.2.1 Conflict & Post-Conflict

I am defining my independent variable in accordance with *Uppsala Conflict Data Programme's* definitions. Therefore, I easily pinpoint and confirm *intrastate conflict, mass violence* as well as *one-sided violence* by looking at UCDP's graphs (UCDP 2021).

Regarding *post-conflict* I look at the time after a signed peace agreement in the case of Burundi and the time after the genocide in the case of Rwanda. The timeframe is about 20 years after the conflict *ended.* This choice is based on that structural changes take time to become visible and to get measurable results. In both cases I inspect data from before and after the conflict, meaning 1990-2019.

4.2.2 Empowerment, Norms and Socioeconomics

Affect in the research question refers to level of empowerment. Empowerment is a complex term, nonetheless I operationalize it as Kabeer (1999): *the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.* In other words, I question whether women in Rwanda and Burundi expanded their power in the aftermath of conflict.

Norms are related to constructivism, critical approaches and the feminist notion of gender. Norms entail openly expressed and acknowledged practices. Furthermore, engendered norms describe acceptable behaviours in relation to gender (Petesch 2018:345).

In line with the theories of expanded security and capital, I operationalize *economic* into covering both conventional economics and social capital as indicators for progress and structural changes. Particularly I am involving human gains such as education, everyday life security and employment.

As announced in my theoretical framework, I understand, measure and dissect socioeconomic into six categories: education, literacy, fertility, land ownership, labour work participation and women in the agricultural sector. Together these variables will holistically indicate and reveal if conflict did present a window of opportunity and if Rwanda and Burundi seized upon it.

4.3   Comparative Design

In order to investigate the research question, I perform a qualitative comparative research design. Further, I compare two cross-national cases (Höglund 2011:115). This makes my research a *small-N* comparison (Halperin & Heath 2020:237). Through the lens of my theoretical framework, my study aims to offer some answer to how conflict might have affected women's socioeconomic situation in Burundi and Rwanda differently.

To understand and reach results, I compare women's situation before and after the intrastate conflict. Then I evaluate and analyse Rwanda and Burundi against each other.

4.4 Case Selection – Why Rwanda and Burundi?

In accordance with the *most similar system design* (MSSD) I have selected Burundi and Rwanda. The two cases share many important characteristics but differ in one crucial aspect related to the X-variable (Halperin & Heath 2020::239). In contrast to Rwanda, Burundi struggles to reach negative peace as hostilities and violence occur. However, both post-war countries are above the global average in closing gender gaps, thus working towards a positive and durable peace (World Economic Forum 2017; Galtung 1996). Perhaps it is due to a possible window of opportunity caused by conflict. By picking cases that are as similar as possible it is easier to investigate specific and essential factors to how the two differ (Höglund 2011:116).

4.4.1 History & Background

Burundi and Rwanda share some history. Both of them have a colonial legacy, being part of the German *East Africa* between 1894-1918 and then under Belgian trusteeship as the territorial unity *Ruanda-Urundi* until 1962. In addition, their colonial history established ethnic classifications and divisions between *Hutus* and *Tutsis* (Chrétien 2003:275).

In the case of Rwanda tensions, ethnicity separations and socioeconomic structures was followed by massacres of Tutsis in 1994 (Collin 2019:3). The genocide killed thousands of civilians and the exact number is contested, but around 800,000, primarily Tutsi, died (Lemarchand 1997).

As in Rwanda, Burundi have gone through frictions regarding political power, economic wealth and ethnicity. These several crises resulted in mass violence and a 12-year long civil war from 1993 (Lima & Dezalay 2015:51). Still Burundi encounters violence and instability in correlation to elections (Plauchut 2015).

Rwanda and Burundi are similar in some aspects. To begin with, both are sub-Saharan African countries in the Great Lakes region with about the same population size. Also, they share a similar conflictual behaviour and pattern consisting of brutal ethnic divisions leading to civil war, rebel and mass violence. Lastly, the peacebuilding efforts belong to approximately the same time frame, the Burundi peace process officially taking place 1994-2004 (*Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement* signed in 2000) and the Rwandan genocide rehabilitation and post-conflict reconstruction beginning from 1994- onwards (Möller 2011:75).

At the same time the two are alike they differ in other aspects. Firstly, even if both cases are relatively peaceful, Burundi faces political instabilities and suffers violence relapses from time to time more than Rwanda. Secondly, Rwanda is typical when discussing and analysing a *successful* case in terms of post-war (genocide) recovery. With the highest ratio of women in parliament by 2003 it is interesting to dissect whether post-genocide Rwanda also empowered women in economic terms (Tripp 2015:5). While Rwanda portrays the *successful* case, Burundi is not unsuccessful but expected to be behind Rwanda's progresses.

4.5 Data Collection and Material

I am conducting a qualitative research and throughout I use *secondary sources* (Halperin & Heath 2020:195). Because my research concern gender, norms and structures there is room for interpretations, thus objectivity and source criticism are applied and strived for (Dulic 2011:36). Qualitative data materials are brought from literature by scholars, NGO reports and academic articles, in addition to official documents. My qualitative data and arguments are substantiated with quantitative data, brought from international institutions such as the World Bank, UNDP and OECD.

Material on Rwanda was found to be easier to access and find, as a lot regarding Burundi is written in French the key words do not match. However, in studies and datasets covering sub-Saharan Africa the two are regularly included.

4.6 Benefits and Limitations

Along with my chosen research design there are great possibilities and limitations. The benefit of conducting this qualitative research is that I get to investigate complex concepts and study interesting cases without travels and at relatively low time and economic costs (Halperin & Heath 2020:15-16). By conducting a small-N comparison and systematically analysing few empirical cases, Burundi and Rwanda, I achieve strong internal validity (Ibid:168).

On one hand, small-N studies provide detailed analysis and high internal validity. On the other hand, the external validity is weak. The extent the results of this study can be generalized beyond these particular cases is relatively low (Ibid:163). Nonetheless, as motivated above it is a relevant study.

5   Empirical Findings

5.1   Rwanda

Before the genocide in 1994, Rwandan women seem to have limited access, participation and power in the public as well as private sphere. In consonance with the *Family Code of 1992*, men were legally the heads of Rwandan households. In practise the law for example prohibited women from inheriting property and opening bank accounts without her husband's consent (Sharlach 1999:391). Further this addresses the ruling norms about women, regardless ethnicity or class, belonging to the private homes without autonomy nor possibilities to challenge her husband's decisions (Brown 2017:33). In other words, Rwandan women were restricted legally and socially, public and private.

During the genocide, Rwanda's establishment of social, economic and political structures and institutions were completely destroyed (Hunt 2014:150). Economically the conflict hit differently across the provinces, thus reconstruction depended on specific regional losses. Nationwide, human and capital deficits were great, and consequences of the setbacks affected the entire population (Verwimp & D'Aoust 2013:168). However, just as Rwanda's institutions and formal structures were destroyed, so too were patriarchal patterns and women's restrictions.

In the aftermath of genocide new sets of access, participation and power unfolded for Rwandan women. The women played key roles in reconstructing the society from a grass-root level (Hunt 2014:154). The grand majority of the deceased were male, which created an unbalanced sex ratio (Brück & Schindler 2009:301). As evidence, approximately 70% of the entire Rwandan population were female (Gervais et al. 2009:15). Changes in the demographics meant that women took over as head of households. In fact, 34% of Rwandan houses had a female head in 1996 (Parmar 2013:693). Briefly the post-genocide period forced women and girls to adopt traditional men's roles, but did increased responsibilities correlate with increased socioeconomic opportunities? At least the *National Strategy* of 2017 requests a continued work for women's empowerment in the upcoming seven years which is sustained by widening women's access to finance and gendered employment (Republic of Rwanda 2017).

5.1.1 Education & Literacy

It appears that both education and illiteracy advance in the post-genocide period. To begin with, primary school enrolment in 1991 before the genocide, was 78% of relevant age-appropriate girls. In 2009, quite some time afterwards and when school became mandatory, the percentage increased to 151% (World Bank 2012:383). Moreover, primary school enrolment is almost gendered balanced with 0,89 girls to boys (AfDB 2019:29). The mean schooling increased most rapidly in rural areas of Rwanda (Shapiro & Tenikue 2017:679). All in all, boys and girls attend school in equal numbers (Hunt 2014:151).

Even if the statistical data points at gender equal education and high participation, many young girls cannot and do not finish school. Since females are still accounted to help out at home and become heads of the families, a significant amount of girls are not eligible to break the cycle and ever enter the labour market, thus benefit from economic development. The reality shows how Rwandan girls enjoy school to some degree as much as boys, but that household status still relegates women (Gervais et al. 2009:16).

Then, gender inequality is more prominent in terms of (il)literacy. At the end of the 1990s, adult illiteracy for women marked 40% while the number was only 28% for men. However, 15 year later, adult illiteracy for women was lowered to 33% (AfDB 2019:30). In total the World Bank estimates that 71% of the Rwandan population could read and write in 2010 (World Bank 2012:393).

5.1.2 Fertility

The fertility rates imply transformation in Rwanda. As in education, development in fertility varies in rural and urban areas. Prior to the genocide, the average women in rural regions gave birth to 6,3 children while the urban woman had 4,5. In 2010 fertility dropped to 4,8 children for rural women and 3,4 for urban (Shapiro & Tenikue 2017:674). This makes the total fertility rate for Rwanda 4,5 in 2010 (AfDB 2019:23). The downhill trend continues as the latest number (from 2019) is only 4 children per Rwandan woman (World Bank 2021b).

Before the genocide Rwanda struggles with overpopulation. Because of the terrible losses in -94 the promotion of birth control was unpopular, presenting a potential obstacle for development (Westoff 2012:169). Consequently, a new family planning programme was revealed in a national population policy in 2003. The programme recognises how reduction of births are essential to reach higher quality of life and development for the whole Rwandan population (Ibid:175). An effect is seen in the usage of contraceptives, which is among the highest in the sub-Saharan region. Starting from 17% and rising to 52% in 2010 is a great achievement (Ibid:171).

In line with controlling births, abortion adjustment also advances fertility in Rwanda. Since the *Maputo Protocol*, established by the African Union, went into effect in 2005, rights to legal abortion raised. Rwandan women enjoy legal rights

to safe abortion service, especially in relation to pregnancy of rape, incest or forced marriages (Parmar 2013:690-691).

Rwanda's relative success in fertility is associated with economic growth and socioeconomic development. For example, the ideal number of children has significantly declined from wanting five children to a decade later ideally have three children (Westoff 2012:171). The reduction and preference correlate well with the national family planning policies. In 2011 the prime minister of Rwanda stated that family planning contributes to improve health of mothers and children and that it empowers women into economic productivity (Habumuremyi & Zenowi 2012). Besides changed ideals being a factor, education is another (Westoff 2012:174). In other words, as the socioeconomic capital of women increases, the fertility seems to decrease.

5.1.3 Land Ownership

It seems like the post-conflict Rwandan state tries to empower women legally in closing gender gaps on land rights and inheritance. As a result of an engaged civil society, especially by women's groups, government-sponsored policy discussions and reconstruction work begin to make people in general and women in particular aware of their rights (UNIFEM 2010). Consequently, policies are changed and refined which causes an increase of land designated to women (Ali et al. 2011). In 1999 a law on inheritance was established as the first legal framework to be gender inclusive and protective of women's equal right to access and granted property (Republic of Rwanda 2004). Since then both sons and daughters inherit parental property and married wives are protected and given the power to decide on the spouse's legacies (Ali et al. 2014:267; Hudock 2016:11). According to the World Bank's demographic survey from 2012, up to 66% of the dead husband's assets are received by the wife (World Bank 2012:163). With the inheritance she is permitted to use the assets for loans and government backed funds (Hunt 2014:151).

Despite these legal actions' attempt to strengthen women, cultural and contextual norms and realities are not taken into account. It appears that securing land and property is complex and not gender neutral. For example, the 1999 law on inheritance did not take into account the contextual fact that not all marriages are registered or strengthened due to various social circumstances. This unfavoured a lot of genocide widows. Further, marriages have to be acknowledged by a certain number of the husband's family members and by civil authorities. And since legal registration were not common praxis and the fact that many family members were lost during the genocide, thousands of women, wives, daughters and mothers were left without anything (Brück & Schindler 2009:301-303).

Finally, even if new land acts and laws are effective, customary law still prevails (Zuckerman & Greenberg 2009:7). In the case of Rwanda progresses have been made most visible in the cities and in the public and political spheres, yet in the rural areas and in the private and domestic spheres gender relations and hierarchies remain. Thus, even if a woman technically owns and inherits land and property it is usually her husband who makes all the decisions, conducts business and owns the

land in practice (Brown 2016:243-244). In conclusion, post-genocide Rwandan women have been empowered but contextual gender norms predominate and still impede gender equality.

5.1.4 Labour Work

Findings suggest that Rwandan women are relatively active in the labour market. Actually, Rwandan female labour market participation is at the top with 88% working women (OECD 2012:216). Before the genocide women's labour was key in food crop production as the men handled cash crops and animal farming (Verwimp & D'Aoust 2013:168). Still, the majority of Rwanda's labour market and pay checks are found in the agricultural sector. However, the labour market participation rose significantly during and after the genocide (Klugman & Mukhtarova 2020:8). And during the whole 2000s women's total share of labour force have consistently been around 51% (AfDB 2019:34).

Although records show that women are employed and working, statistics show that approximately 80% of working women are not salaried. In addition, men are more than twice as likely to be salaried employees (Klugman & Mukhtarova 2020:12).

5.1.5 Agricultural Sector

As presented above, Rwanda's economy depends on agriculture. A fallout of the genocide was that the agricultural base of the country was damaged. With the grand loss of men, women were left to build up the agricultural sector (Parmar 2013:692). In 2000, right in the early post-conflict reconstruction phase, 94% of women's employment were found in agriculture. In 2019 the number were down to 71% (World Bank 2021d). However, the share is still above average in the sub-Saharan region and women struggle to enter other sectors like the formal financial one (Klugman & Mukhtarova 2020:12; UNECA 2019:17).

5.2 Burundi

On one hand Burundi is not far from the gender progresses of Rwanda, on the other hand Burundi is found to lack behind. Prior 12 years of civil war, traditional Burundian norms viewed women as a gift from God to accompany men and his needs. Therefore, women were systematically excluded from the public and trusted to manage the family at home (Rwantango 2015). Even if women had voting rights since 1961, female participation and representation was limited. During the years of civil war sexual violence was widespread and various women's groups started to mobilise and advocate for peace and human rights (Burke et al. 2001:15). Along with the peace process women's groups participated in the international mediation

process, leading to the *Arusha Agreement* in 2000 (Lima & Dezalay 2015:51; Anderson 2016:8).

Also, in the post-war period women began to gain power and were essential in the reconstruction work towards a lasting peace on community and national level (Burke et al. 2001:27). Since 2005 Burundi have a gender quota of 30% in the parliament (Brown 2016:243; AfDB 2019:6). But did the increased participation result in gender equal policies and a continued work for women's empowerment? According to Ndikumana and Sebudandi, the saying *la poule ne chante pas quand le coq est là* reflects how even if women are seated at the table, men still rules (2012:29). Aside from political changes, Burundian women suffer disproportionally from political crises and following violence. Most notable is the escalated violence after the 2015 election when civilians were targeted and violence against women was used again. *UNHCR* found evidence of torture, forced disappearances, sexual violence, and several mass graves (Plauchut 2015).

Besides political crises, post-civil war Burundi tackles with economic problems. The civil war played it's part by halving Burundi's GDP between 1993 to 2003. In parallel rural poverty increased from 40% before the war to about 70% in 2003 (IMF 2007). Major infrastructure was demolished during the war and more then Rwanda, Burundi depends on agriculture which has weakened (Verwimp & D'Aoust 2013:169). This still makes Burundi one of the world's poorest countries. Moreover, data shows how men are less affected than women by poverty (UNDP 2012:4). Nonetheless, Burundi is an economically vulnerable country and economic empowerment is tough to gain for everybody. In the latest national development plan covering 2018-2027, the state declares promising strategies towards enhancing socioeconomic services, human capital and that women particularly should be viewed as economic opportunities and be embraced better (République du Burundi 2018).

5.2.1 Education & Literacy

Education before and after the civil war is utterly different statistically. In 2000, only 38% of girls were enrolled in primary school. Ten years later the share was about 96% (AfDB 2019:88). Most likely this is due to civil war ending and the fact that the Burundian government made primary school, *école fondamentale*, free from 2005 (Nkurunziza 2015:21). Also, since 2014 Burundian children are obligated to attend school for nine years which was not legislated before (Verwimp 2018).

At the same time statistics and laws prove increased school enrolment, discriminations exclude some children to attend or complete school. Further, most of the schools are situated too far for rural residents, not distributed around the country and because of bad infrastructure and limited resources families cannot send their kids to school. Additionally, ethnic discrimination remains a political issue (Prendergast & Smock 1999:14). Also, gender is a factor. As stated above, traditional gender norms prevail and many Burundians do not believe that education is for girls. Hence women face unequal social access to education with the

expression *Nta mashure y'umukobwas* (there is no point in educating a girl) in the background (UNDP 2012:9). But looking at the numbers again, female to male in primary school 2010-2016 is 1,02 -meaning that about the same amount of girls (actually 0,02 more) are enrolled as boys (AfDB 2019:29). Supporting this notion of girls actually being encouraged to school is a survey conducted by *Afrobarometer* between 1999-2013. They conclude that families with limited resources, forced to choose just one of their children to school, base their choice on abilities and personalities rather than gender (Ndikumana 2015:2).

Even if evidence indicates that education is gender equal, illiteracy rates reveal a different insertion to the discussion. Generally, illiteracy is common in Burundi. Total adult literacy rate is 67% (World Bank 2012:392). However, women's illiteracy rate is 45% compared to 30% of men. This rating from 2017 is sadly not a great progression from 2000 when women's illiteracy was 48% (AfDB 2019:30). As stated by Rwantango (2015) it seems like traditional cultural norms on education impact women harder than men, as evident in terms of illiteracy and the lack of qualified women to enter and advance in the public sector.

5.2.2 Fertility

Fertility rates demonstrate some empowerment of Burundian women. In the beginning of the peace process, in 2000, the fertility rate was seven children per women. Some time afterwards, in 2019, the number was down to 5,3 births per women (World Bank 2021a). However, fertility diverges urban and rural women. While urban women had 4,8 children on average, rural women gave birth to 6,6 in 2010 (Shapiro & Tenikue 2017:674).

Again, social norms are ruling. For example, age of marriage and ideal of children affect the fertility rates. On one hand, the relatively high marriage rate (58%) causes more births as the norm is that couples have to be married. On the other hand, Burundian society has developed the ideal of only having three to four children, which is low comparing to neighbouring countries and reduces the fertility (Degfie et al. 2019:10-14). In addition, contraception is, surprisingly compared to the region, broadly accepted and used which further decreases the fertility (Degfie et al. 2019:22, 25).

5.2.3 Land Ownership

Land and inheritance rights are long-lasting subjects in Burundi. Findings indicate that even if Burundians support women's rights in general, land inheritance by women are especially neglected (Ndikumana 2015:1). Long before the civil war broke out, in the context of the UN's *Decade for Women* (1976-1985), land inheritance was a key issue for women's movements in Burundi. Just ahead of the civil war, 1991-1993, drafts on legislation were made by the national commission. Then the civil war begun and the process was haltered. Still to this day no law has been adopted on women's property rights and access to land (Saiget 2016:366-371).

Instead, general international laws are implemented which are not passed by the national assembly, hence local customs rule (Okonya et al. 2019:3).

These local customary rules are rooted in traditional patriarchal norms and systems. Further, the system distinguishes women as usufructuaries of land, meaning she is welcomed to use the land but she can never own it since land belongs to men (Ndikumana 2015:1). If she inherits land it is disproportionally allotted to her brothers and she cannot pass it down to her children (Saiget 2016:365). In other words, customary regimes are generally disadvantageous to women.

Besides dividing gender relations, land and property emphasize socioeconomic cleavages between rural and urban populations. In addition, the issue is politicised since the civil war as following refugees and displaced people no longer have access to their original properties. To deal with opposing authorities, women's movements and international actors have started to frame women's land rights as a development issue, thus de-politicising the issue (Saiget 2016:366, 375). However, changes are not yet seen.

5.2.4 Labour Work

Preceding the civil war, Burundian women participate highly in the labour market. Prior to the war, 91% of age-appropriate women worked. With the slightest decline following the 12-year conflict, the rate was 85% (OECD 2012:216). Even if the decline is in contrast to labour force boosts of other conflict-affected countries in the region, Burundi's participation is above regional and global averages. In fact, the gender gap is found to be reversed, with more women employed then men (Klugman & Mukhtarva 2020:24).

Notably, the public opinion, measured by the *Government Activity Observatory* in 2008, declares that women could and should work. Moreover, the study finds out that women progressing as leaders are perceived as a natural development of hard work (OAG 2008). Most Burundians work in agriculture and for the public sector (Nkurunziza 2015:22).

5.2.5 Agricultural Sector

As noted above, Burundi depends on agriculture. Out of its eight million inhabitants, 90% of them live in the rural areas and thus survive on agriculture (Okonya et al. 2019:3).

The gender distribution in the sector is relatively even, having 55% working women (AfDB 2019:74). In the beginning of the millennium 96,6% of Burundian women were employed in agriculture. In the post-conflict period, in 2019 the share was 93,7% (World Bank 2021c).

5.3 Summary of Empirical Findings

5.3.1 Table of Empirical Results

	Rwanda	**Burundi**
Education	-Increased in numbers -Fulfillment gaps	-Increased substantially -Traditional gender norms prevail
Literacy	-Higher	-Low, quite unchanged
Fertility	-Decreased	-Decreased
Land Ownership	-Legal progress -Customary laws	-Unchanged -Customary laws & politics
Labour Work	-Higher participation -Unpaid work though	-Unchanged, still high
Agriculture	-Lower participation	-Still high participation

6   Comparative Analysis

Both Rwanda and Burundi suffered the consequences of turbulent mass violence in terms of a genocide and a long-lasting civil war. It is safe to say that their societies were torn and as the empirical findings suggest, women's socioeconomic empowerment were different in the post-conflict setting. But to what extent did structures change and what distinguishes the two cases?

6.1   Educational Wealth & Secure Literacy?

Whether conflict causes conditions for structural changes, is first of all analysed in education and literacy. In both Rwanda and Burundi education levels increased in the post-conflict period. Further, empirical findings propose that school enrolment is gender equal in both cases. Through the eyes of my theoretical framework, higher school attendance implies that women become socioeconomically wealthier in the aftermath of conflict. Because of increased education women increase their human capital and societal value. At the same time, engendered structures are exposed in both cases as traditional gender norms are discovered. These unfavourable norms and attitudes keep hindering some Burundian girls from socially accessing education, as well as letting Rwandan girls drop out of school. In other words, conflict can be seen as a window of opportunity for women to gain socioeconomic wealth by increasing their human capital through education. However, structures are not fully transformed which still benefit traditional gender norms.

   Looking at literacy rates, Rwandan women are more empowered than Burundian. By lowering their illiteracy rate with 13 percentage points, compared to Burundi's modest drop of three percentage points during the same time frame, Rwanda proves the possibilities. Higher literacy strengthens women's capacity building, thus appeals to extended safety in the everyday life and power to make strategic life choices. If you cannot read or write your participation in the society is limited and the promotion from the private and informal sphere is hard to reach. Even if primary school was boosted (il)literacy did not change in Burundi, meanwhile Rwandan women enjoyed some development.

6.2 Fertilized Social Standing

Evidence for my theoretical argument is found in the structural changes measured in fertility. In both cases fertility was found to be different in rural and urban areas, yet fertility rates decreased. This was closely detected in parallel with the emerge of family plans and norms. In Burundi marriages and contraceptives controlled and lowered the fertility. Likewise, Rwanda develops national family programmes, abortion laws and a smaller family ideal. Altogether the average women give birth to four-five children in Rwanda respectively Burundi, which is relatively low in the sub-Saharan region and about two kids shorter than two decades ago.

Thanks to reconstructive development, coordinated to the theory, lower fertility changes women's social standing and health. When women no longer have to spend all her time at home for reproductive work, education becomes a clearer option, hence gender norms and inequality gaps are challenged. Accordingly, inferences of social empowerment are initiated in Burundi and Rwanda's lowered fertility.

6.3 Laws of the Land

Perhaps land ownership is the most notorious indicator for how conflict do not offer a window of opportunity for structural changes. At least by assessing Burundi where women's lack of land ownership is untouched by the destructiveness of the civil war and advocating activists. In contrast, gender equalising land laws came into force in Rwanda. Legal rights empowered Rwandan women somewhat by paving the way for changing gender roles. However, just as in Burundi costumery laws and norms take over, as evident for the post-genocide widows. Even if female-headed households expanded and created demographic unbalances in the post-conflict period, property and land ownership generally follow patriarchal norms, thus economic opportunities and social security for women are reduced.

Comparing the two cases, Rwandan women are granted more power in relation to land ownership then before the conflict. Meanwhile Burundian women are still denied equal access and rights as men. Land ownership is a great resource and affects people. In these cases, women's social and economic situations are negatively affecting as the laws of the land is still unfavourable to them.

6.4   Labour Work Firing Gender Roles?

On one hand labour market participation in Burundi and Rwanda present an inclusive development, on the other hand a lot of women are unpaid and stuck in the agricultural sector. Associated to high employment is independence, both economically and socially. Unlike Rwanda, the Burundian women's participation was not affected by the civil war -it was as high as ever. In that sense, working Burundian women was neither boosted nor downsized, hence not empowered.

In contrast post-genocide Rwanda's women were activated to join the labour market. The public role of women changed. Even so, findings illuminate how the vast majority of both Rwandan and Burundian women are working in the agricultural sector, thus not in formal spaces. To continue, it is questionable to consider Rwandan women to be empowered when 80% of the employed are unpaid labour force. While both of the countries retain a gender quota to the parliament, gender roles for the mainstream are not altered.

The fact that most people are operating in agriculture is not remarkable as both Rwanda and Burundi's GDP consist of agricultural products. But through the theoretical framework it is apparent that there is a gender segregation in the labour market, visible in lower sectors such as agriculture. In Rwanda the percentage of women working in the agricultural sector was lowered. In comparison, Burundian women employed in agriculture was still high in the aftermath of conflict. Therefore, little empowerment is seen in the two cases in terms of agriculture as a measurement.

6.5   Indications

In the light of contemporary research, I spot how conflict creates conditions that make women's socioeconomic empowerment possible in the cases of Rwanda and Burundi. Furthermore, conditions for empowerment are unfolded more or less. The six categories work well together and create a holistic picture over changed gender norms and roles, opened and taken spaces and spheres and lastly women's possibly transformed societal value.

What distinguishes the cases is that Rwandan women seem to be more empowered than Burundian. Overall, this implies that Rwandan women have wider access, participation and power in the society because of a window of opportunity presented itself and the Rwandan society seized upon it.

In opposition the Burundian civil war also, in some terms as shown in some measurements, faced a window but did not or could not process it just as good.

7 Discussion and Concluding Remarks

7.1 What My Research Discloses

The findings in this research are of importance to the research gap on conflict and women's socioeconomic empowerment. Together my findings point at that conflict might stir structurers up. The raise of female-headed households and unbalanced sex ratios during war is shown to likely be in favour of women and gender equality. As Ní Aoláin et al. (2011) propose, conflict affects women's economic and social status. This is outstanding in Rwanda.

In the end hypothesis H1 and H3 turned out to be correct. Conflict does create window of opportunity for women's socioeconomic empowerment and Rwandan women enjoy greater empowerment then before the genocide. In Rwanda all of the variables showed empowerment. In Burundi only two of six parts, education and fertility, was positively developed in the post-conflicted period. Nevertheless, my research discloses a causal relationship between conflict and a window of opportunity for socioeconomic empowerment of women, evident more or less in Burundi and Rwanda.

The research both confirms and challenges previous research and literature. Also, it is evident that research in this field need future research. First of all, evidence for Caprioli's (2005) expectations, that greater participation decided by social and cultural norms lead to empowerment, is implemented and confirmed in women's expanded school and labour market participation. Moreover, Tripp's (2015) theories are confirmed as educational opportunities and enrichment pursued conflict in both Rwanda and Burundi. And in line with Melander (2005) and the human capital theory, increased education verifies socioeconomic empowerment.

At the same time, results show how social and cultural norms sustain engendered participation and access in for example land ownership. Simultaneously Ruiz Abril's (2009) fear of women being relegated to lower sectors of the labour market hierarchy is realised as both Burundian and Rwandan women are employed within agriculture. Following this, Klugman and Mukhtarova's (2020) view that conflict is an opportunity for changing gender roles in the labour market is questioned. Rwanda's success story of gender equality is tested, and findings show that even if female participation, representation and employment are high, wages are low and unpaid work is discovered. Moreover, as socially based discrimination is the reality, structural violence is high and human security low. Accordingly, positive peace is absent in both cases (Galtung 1996). However, this opposite direction of the linkage between conflict and empowerment needs further research.

My research result cannot declare whether a more empowered and gender equal society, like Rwanda, have higher likelihood of durable peace.

Per contra my research can confirm that from a gender perspective reconstructive empowerment are on the road. Rebuilding instead of reproducing unsustainable and unequal patterns are on its way in both cases and, as Tripp (2015) trend spotted. Any backlash is not found in these sub-Saharan countries. Although it is important to underline that development and gender equality is far from fully reached, Burundian and Rwandan women have not lost any rights, engagements or representation. However, as the starting point is gendered to women's disadvantage it is essential to keep up the good work and still acknowledge women's subordination, the encountered dichotomies of spaces and spheres as well as the inequalities and structural violence it generates everyday -as the feminist framework recognise. My research identifies how conflict might, as in Rwanda and Burundi, trigger positive change and enhance women's life conditions and the society's gender relations. Data showed how various laws were established or absent, affecting women and development. Thus, it agrees well with Arostequi's (2013) research that policies in post-conflict are especially important in order to achieve positive outcomes.

What my research cannot tell is if the development of empowerment and transformation of society was quicker due to the conflict or just as an autonomous evolvement. Neither if the changes are only temporarily. In other words, Vik Bakken and Buhaug's (2020), Justino's (2018) and Webster et al.'s (2019) research are not addressed. This presents a hole to fill in future research.

Another matter this research's framework cannot bring forth is if the Burundian society is on its way towards a similar development as Rwanda. One size does not fit all and perhaps Burundi are progressing in other aspects then studied and measured in this research. In addition, Burundi encounters much more instability and direct violence in the post-war period then Rwanda, which might halter for example the state's possibilities to alter policies and change structures. Future research needs to investigate further why and if Burundi really is lacking behind.

7.2 Conclusion

Conflict costs in human lives and suffering, but can something be gained in the aftermath? The research gap on investigating post-conflict reconstruction, through a gender lens with a focus on socioeconomic factors, is somewhat filled with this research. By bridging the gap between peace and conflict and development studies and using critical peacebuilding, a feminist approach to human security and human capital theory, I prove that progressive periods are offered post-conflict.

By assessing six different factors of socioeconomics in Rwanda and Burundi, before and after the genocide and civil war, I conduct a comparative analysis. Altogether improvements emerged and glimpses of structural changes appear.

Beside what my research shows, I promote that this field should continue to grow. Potential research should supplement my findings with other perspectives, for example I encourage more research from a micro level rather than macro. As empowerment involves individuals it is relevant to collect first-hand experiences, develop context-specialization and dig deeper into regional differences, perhaps in single case studies.

In conclusion, empirical findings suggest a causal relationship between conflict and women's socioeconomic situation. It is possible that conflicts create a window of opportunity for women's empowerment. At least this research proposes that is the case for Burundi but foremost Rwanda. Thus, destructive conflicts can generate reconstructive empowerment of women and opportunities for peace.

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