

Women Have Found Respect: Gender Quotas, Symbolic Representation, and Female Empowerment in Rwanda

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Building on previous studies of women's formal, descriptive, and substantive representation in Rwanda, this article examines women's symbolic representation, defined as the broader social and cultural impact of the greater representation of women in the Rwandan political system. It explores the cultural meanings of gender quotas by analyzing popular perceptions of women, of women's roles in politics and society more broadly, and of changing cultural practices vis-à-vis gender. Data were gathered over 24 months of ethnographic research conducted between 1997 and 2009 and by ongoing documentary research. The study finds that although Rwandan women have made few legislative gains, they have reaped other benefits, including increased respect from family and community members, enhanced capacity to speak and be heard in public forums, greater autonomy in decision making in the family, and increased access to education. Yet there have also been some unexpected negative consequences, such as increased friction with male siblings, male withdrawal from politics, increased marital discord, and a perception that marriage as an institution has been disrupted by the so-called upheaval of gender roles. Most significantly, increased formal representation of women has not led to increased democratic legitimacy for the government.

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Gender quota policies aimed at increasing the proportion of women in political office now exist in more than a hundred countries. While gender quota policies tend to emphasize the number of women in government, in many countries they “have led to a shift not only in the political agenda but also in the gender consciousness of female representatives and the political engagement of female constituents” (Krook 2006, 111). The use of gender quotas to increase women’s representation rests on political theory about representation. Pitkin’s (1967) seminal work on political representation conceived of representation as multifaceted, comprised of formal, descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation. Using Pitkin’s theoretical model, Schwandt-Bayer and Mishler (2005, 424) tested an integrated model of women’s representation in 31 countries. Their results confirmed the interconnectedness of these dimensions of representation and suggested that increased formal and descriptive representation of women increases legislatures’ responsiveness to women’s concerns. Yet they also found that “women’s policy responsiveness has little or no influence on women’s perceptions of the legitimacy of the legislature” (Schwandt-Bayer and Mishler 2005, 424). Since their analysis only included representative democracies, it is unclear whether the same interconnectedness holds for nondemocratic governments that implement gender quotas.

In this article, I examine the impact of gender quotas on the symbolic representation of women and girls in Rwandan society. Building on my previous study of women’s formal, descriptive, and substantive representation in Rwanda (Burnet 2008a), I have as my main purpose here to examine the cultural meanings of national, local, and party gender quotas in the Rwandan political system. Rwandan women have reaped little legislative benefit from the increased presence of women in the legislature (Burnet 2008a). Little legislative impact, however, does not necessarily mean that gender quotas have had no impact at all. What does the increased presence of women in governance symbolize for ordinary citizens? Have public attitudes toward women, whether as political leaders or ordinary members of society, changed? Have gender quotas raised awareness of what women can achieve? Have quotas legitimated women “as political actors, unraveling at least to some degree previously accepted gender roles” (Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo, n.d.b)? How have public attitudes toward women in politics and women in general changed in response to the increased representation of

women in governance structures? I address these questions by examining women's (and some men's) perceptions of women, as well as women's roles in politics and society more broadly. I also consider changing cultural practices vis-à-vis gender. These data were gathered over 24 months of ethnographic research conducted between 1997 and 2009, as well as by ongoing documentary research.

Rwanda is frequently cited as a success story in terms of the impact of gender quotas. In 2008, Rwanda became the first and only country in the world with a majority-female national legislative body. Yet more detailed analysis of the Rwandan case reveals that increased representation of women has not led to a greater statutory protection of women's rights, nor has it led to a more democratic political terrain. Nonetheless, this case study finds that gender quotas have generated impacts far beyond the political sphere. The top-down policies that brought large numbers of women into government improved women's career and economic opportunities, thereby improving social mobility among women. Because quotas apply to national, regional, and local levels, their impact has been broad and deep. Additionally, the Rwandan Patriotic Front's (RPF's) women-friendly policies overturned the colonial and postcolonial patriarchal gender paradigm, whereby husbands worked and made important decisions while wives managed the domestic sphere and remained financially dependent on men. Yet urban, elite women have reaped the greatest benefits from these changes, thanks to increased access to salaried jobs, including lucrative positions in the national legislature and ministries, and greater purchasing power (for items like automobiles, clothing, and domestic servants), whereas rural peasant women in elected positions in local government have seen their workload increased and their economic security undermined.

Another key finding of this case study is that citizens do not distinguish between the impact of gender quotas and many other policy changes and laws that have improved the status of women in Rwandan society more broadly. When asked about the impact of the gender quotas, respondents did not make explicit, causal links between the increased representation of women in all branches of government at the national, regional, and local levels, on the one hand, and new women-friendly legislation or policies or changed relationships between citizens and the state, on the other. Rather, they viewed the quotas as part of this broader set of reforms implemented by the RPF-led government. Given that policy decisions and their implementation flow top-down, and that members of parliament are not perceived as representing constituents' interests or

concerns, it is no surprise that citizens link the gender quota policy and women in office to a broader set of commitments to gender equality. These government policies have had a diffuse and widespread impact on citizens' daily lives, particularly in terms of women's choices and opportunities.

After a brief explanation of my research methods, I provide background information on the Rwandan political system, Rwandan conceptions of gender, and the evolution of gender quotas in that country. Then, I present data on the positive impacts of gender quotas as perceived by ordinary Rwandans. In the third section, I discuss popular perceptions of the negative impacts of gender quotas. In the concluding section, I discuss the implications of the data and the relationships among gender, power, and democratic legitimacy, as well as the implications of the Rwandan case for political theory about gender quotas and political representation of marginalized groups.

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on ethnographic research conducted in urban and rural Rwanda between 1997 and 2009, including more than a hundred formal interviews with the leaders and members of women's civil society organizations, and several hundred ethnographic interviews with ordinary citizens in rural and urban Rwanda, as well as monitoring of legal statutes and policy changes and ongoing literature reviews. In depth, ethnographic research constitutes a holistic approach, often summarized as "participant observation," and has widespread acceptance within anthropology. This approach consists of intensive, mixed-methods research, often with a focus on qualitative data.¹ Data collected as part of my ongoing ethnographic research in Rwanda have included indirect and direct observations of behavior, and elicitation techniques, including ethnographic interviews, unstructured and semistructured individual interviews, semistructured group interviews, and structured interviews.²

1. See Chapter 2 of Bernard and Ryan (2010) for a detailed description of commonly used data collection techniques.

2. Indirect observation of behavior involves looking for what Bernard and Ryan call "behavior traces," meaning the material traces of human behavior that appear in physical objects, public speech acts, photographs, newspaper or magazine articles, Internet discussion boards, and publications, among other things (2010, 19–20). See King (2009) and Thomson (2010) for a discussion of some of the ethical perils and methodological challenges of conducting research in Rwanda.

In the highly politicized context of postgenocide Rwanda, ethnographic interviews have proven to be “the only realistic tool available for gathering information,” as Bernard and Ryan (2010, 28) explain. While ethnographic interviews appear to be informal conversations, they are instead intentional interactions on the part of the ethnographer, who elicits information on issues of interest through the use of simple questions, such as “What do you think about X?” or by asking follow-up questions when informants spontaneously bring up an issue of interest to the ethnographer. According to Bernard and Ryan, the goal of ethnographic interviews is “to understand the cultural norms” (2010, 28).

To investigate the cultural implications of the gender quota policies, I conducted individual and group interviews with male and female citizens in urban and rural Rwanda, grassroots women’s organizations, members of government, former members of government, and women leaders of civil society organizations during a five-week field trip in 2009. This intentional sample was selected in order to assess the broader impacts of gender quotas on Rwandan society and on the perceptions of women. Except where noted, I conducted all interviews myself in either Kinyarwanda, French, or English. Interviews in Kinyarwanda were conducted with a Rwandan interpreter.³ Questions about the impact of gender quotas were integrated into semistructured interviews that covered several other topics. First, a basic question on the impact of gender quotas was asked: “What changes in Rwandan society or your daily life have resulted from the government’s gender quota policy?” Then, several questions were used to elicit additional information, such as: 1) “Anything else?” 2) “You mentioned many positive changes; have there been any negative changes?” 3) “You mentioned several negative changes; have there been any positive changes?”

Every interviewee refused to be recorded with a digital audio recorder, and so interview “transcripts” were recreated by means of detailed, handwritten notes taken by the author and interpreter.⁴ Ethnographic interviews were recorded in field notes written on a daily basis. The interview transcripts and field notes were coded using *in vivo* coding for major themes that emerged during the interviews. Additional themes

3. The interpreter is a Rwandan woman, born and educated in the country. She is a native speaker of Kinyarwanda and fluent in French. She prefers to remain anonymous.

4. Each person wrote a separate “transcript” of the interview based on our individual notes. Then, we reconciled our two versions and integrated the texts. Where we remembered things differently, we discussed our differences. Where we could not come to a consensus on the exact contents of a statement, both versions were noted in the interview transcript and considered in data analysis.

were generated during the production of interview transcripts and during reading transcripts and field notes after the fact. A subset of themes was then selected and developed into a code book for use in data analysis, as described by Bernard and Ryan (2010, Chapters 3 and 4).

The 2009 data were then compared with earlier data gathered in previous field trips to Rwanda. Throughout the 15 years I have been conducting research on Rwanda, data collected have included interview transcripts, detailed field notes written on a daily basis, Rwandan newspaper and magazine articles, online articles and discussions on Rwandan Websites, and ongoing monitoring of the *New Times* (Rwanda's daily, independent English-language newspaper), BBC Kinyarwanda-Kirundi news service, and *Imvaho Nshya* (Rwanda's daily government-run Kinyarwanda-language newspaper), as well as of allAfrica.com, which draws news stories from sources across the continent.⁵

In the 2009 group interviews, most respondents were female, but some men were also interviewed on the subject.⁶ Throughout this article, I indicate the sex of interviewees and usually the region where the interview was conducted, but names and other identifying information have been withheld per confidentiality protocols. Given the composition of my sample, I am primarily relating the effects of gender quotas on women's attitudes and on men's attitudes as they are perceived by women.

RWANDAN POLITICS, GENDER QUOTAS, AND THE WOMEN'S AGENDA

Rwanda is probably best known for the 1994 genocide in which at least 500,000 Rwandans, primarily Tutsi as well as politically moderate Hutu, lost their lives in state-sanctioned massacres.⁷ The genocide occurred in the midst of a civil war, which began in October 1990 when the Rwandan Patriotic Front, a rebel movement based in Uganda, invaded

5. The research was conducted over a series of field trips to Rwanda in 1997, 1998, 1999–2001, 2002, 2003, 2007, and 2009. All field research was conducted with the oversight and approval of the Institutional Review Boards of the University of Louisville and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

6. I did not gather demographic data on interviewees.

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

Rwanda.⁸ The genocide came to a halt when the RPF seized the capital, Kigali, on July 4, 1994. In mid-July 1994, the RPF named a transitional government, which it called the “Government of National Unity,” whose composition reaffirmed the RPF’s promised commitment to power sharing outlined in the Arusha Accords by including representatives from political parties that had not supported the genocide. By 1995, it was clear that the power-sharing arrangement was more window dressing than reality as the RPF exerted greater influence than the other parties and mandated most policies. This consensual dictatorship continued until 1998, when the government launched a transition process that it called “democratization.”

This transition began with the election of grassroots administrative leaders at the 10-house, cell and sector levels by voter queuing behind candidates at open-air community meetings. District-level elections by means of secret ballot were held in 2001, and a Constitutional Commission was appointed. In 2003, a new constitution was approved through a national referendum in May, followed by presidential elections in August and parliamentary elections in September. Despite these elections, the RPF regime has become more authoritarian since this transition process began (Longman 2006, 146; Reyntjens 2006). The “orchestrated nature of elections is an open secret in Rwanda” (Burnet 2008a, 366). RPF officials have vetted candidates in elections at every level since 1998, and in most communities, the population was informed in advance of the “correct” candidate for whom to vote.⁹ Beyond influencing election outcomes, the RPF regime has maintained tight reins on the government and private media by silencing dissenting voices systematically, by suppressing independent civil society organizations, and by destroying potential opposition parties (Reyntjens 2010).

Rwanda ranks very low on most democracy measures.¹⁰ The 2003 Constitution created a presidential system with a national parliament and a prime minister who performs many of the duties of a vice president. Most seats in both houses of parliament are attained through direct elections, but eight senators are appointed by the president and another

8. The RPF is the current ruling party in Rwanda. Founded in Uganda in the late 1980s, the RPF grew out of earlier organizations of Tutsi exiles (such as the Union Nationale Rwandaise whose intent was to return to Rwanda through armed resistance.) The RPF ended the genocide in July 1994 by taking control of the country.

9. Interviews, multiple locations in Rwanda, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2009.

10. For instance, Freedom House rated Rwanda as “Not Free” in its 2009 annual report, *Freedom in the World*.

four by the Forum of Political Organizations, a constitutionally-mandated “consultative body” that all political parties must join. The Rwandan political system is nominally multiparty, but in practice it is a single-party system, with the RPF functioning as a state party. While parliament is majority female, most of these women are card-carrying members of the RPF or its coalition partners. In addition, women elected to seats reserved for women were nominated, or at least vetted, by the RPF via the Forum of Political Organizations. Thus, most of these women owe allegiance to the RPF, rather than to the constituencies who elected them.

Despite its authoritarian approach to governance, the RPF has mainstreamed women from the beginning, and many of its policies have been modeled on the National Resistance Movement in Uganda (Longman 2006, 140). Some of its achievements include the creation of a Ministry of Gender, the creation of women’s councils from the grassroots to the national level, and the promotion of women’s civil society organizations (Burnet 2008a, 373–80). Numerous pieces of legislation have extended additional rights to women, including classification of rape or sexual torture as among the most serious crimes in the genocide statute, additional rights for pregnant and breast-feeding women in the workplace, a law outlining children’s rights that included all the rights listed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, the mandate in the 2003 Constitution that women must occupy at least 30% of positions in decision-making bodies, and a gender-based violence law (Burnet 2008a; Devlin and Elgie 2008, 249). Yet as Devlin and Elgie note, only one significant piece of legislation (the gender-based violence law) was passed after the 2003 elections, when legislative gender quotas began (2008, 249). Many improvements in the situation of women and women’s rights in Rwanda emerged from women’s civil society organizations and the women’s movement in Rwanda prior to the institution of gender quotas. For example, the granting of inheritance rights to girl children through changes in the marriage laws in 1998 could not have been achieved without lobbying by these civil society organizations and women in the government (Burnet 2008a, Republic of Rwanda 1999).¹¹

On the international stage, Rwanda is often perceived as a success story, with the 1994 genocide giving way to a subsequent renaissance in Rwandan society under the guidance of the RPF’s Paul Kagame, initially

11. See Newbury and Baldwin (2001a, 2001b) and Burnet (2008a) for more information on women’s civil society organizations.

as vice president and later as president. The notable advances of women have contributed to this perception (Burnet 2008a, 370–71; Powley 2003, 2005, 2008a, 2008b). The 2001 district-level elections, which included reserved seats (approximately 30%) for women at the cell, sector, and district levels of government, led to a dramatic increase in female representation in local government. Thus, the story of women's representation in Rwanda extends far beyond the national government, penetrating all the way down to the grass roots. Given that the vast majority of citizens only rarely (or even never) come into contact with senators or deputies, but come into monthly contact with local officials at mandatory community meetings and communal labor projects (*umuganda*), it is not surprising that the majority of ordinary Rwandans interviewed for this research spoke most often about women in the local government and community, rather than the national legislature.

Despite these remarkable gains by women, several analysts have concluded that the women-friendly policies have been manipulated as a tool to help maintain the RPF's hold on power and to maintain a positive reception from the international community (Burnet 2008a; Longman 2006; Reyntjens 2010). Yet regardless of whether the RPF served its own ends through the increased protection of women's rights and the greater representation of women in government, these policies could "lead to transformations in political identities, subjectivities, and agencies" and might "pave the way for effective engagement in democratic governance should it emerge" (Burnet 2008a, 386). In this article, I attempt to assess these transformations and examine them as the result of increased symbolic representation of women in the Rwandan public sphere.

Gender roles have changed dramatically since the 1994 genocide. The genocide, civil war (1990–94), and their aftermaths resulted in rapid change within society, especially in terms of gender roles. The civil war and genocide produced more than two million refugees, along with hundreds of thousands more internally displaced persons. The economic and physical infrastructure had been destroyed at every level. Following the genocide, many Rwandan women found themselves as heads of household, whether because their husbands were dead, in exile, in prison, or in military service with the RPF. Survivors, particularly women, found that so-called traditional ways of life and modes of being were no longer possible.

According to Rwandan custom, women relied on men for access to the means of livelihood (Burnet and RISD 2003, 187; Human Rights Watch

1996, 19). After the genocide, women took on new roles in the domestic and public spheres that Rwandan society had previously not ascribed to them. These roles included everyday tasks customarily taboo for women, like putting roofs on houses, constructing enclosures around houses, or milking cows, in addition to those in society, such as head of household or government administrator (Burnet 2008a, 384). Many Rwandan women took on primary economic responsibility for their households because their husbands were either absent or unable to do it. Prior to the genocide, Rwandan law had forbidden Rwandan women from engaging in commercial activities, entering into contracts, or seeking paid employment without authorization from their husbands (Human Rights Watch 1996, 22). In practice, many husbands (and even most husbands in the cities) allowed and even encouraged their wives to work, but the husbands often controlled the women's salaries or profits from commercial endeavors. In practice and by law, women's businesses were vulnerable to plunder by their husbands or to complete takeover (Jefremovas 2002, 97–108).

With the disruption in gender relations, some women found the freedom to pursue careers or commercial activities. Yet this “opportunity” to challenge customary notions of womanhood and women's roles in the family and community should not be portrayed too rosily, as has been the tendency of some journalists and feminist policy analysts. For peasant women in rural areas, the absence of husbands increased the burden of crushing poverty and social isolation. Farming without their husbands' labor resulted in a heavier workload and lower yields, as well as reduced social status in the community (Burnet 2008a, 385). The lack of income from husbands' labor in the cash economy left widows and prisoners' families without the money necessary to pay for health care or school fees. For middle-class and elite women, their newfound “freedom” was bittersweet. Even the most successful businesswomen lamented the heavy burden of having sole financial responsibility for themselves and their children — not to mention the social, emotional, and psychological consequences of widowhood or single motherhood.¹² Many researchers have understood this gender revolution as an example of war disrupting normal social relations, however; others have demonstrated that the war and genocide accelerated transformations that were already underway in Rwandan society (Burnet 2008a; Longman 2006; Newbury and Baldwin 2000, 2001a, 2001b).

12. Interviews, multiple locations in Rwanda between 1997 and 2003.

Since 1999, the government of Rwanda has simultaneously pursued three types of quotas: reserved seats, party quotas, and legislative quotas. The first reserved seats were created by administrative decisions concerning local-level elections in 2001, when female candidates stood for seats reserved for women at the cell, sector, and district levels. The 2003 Constitution created reserved seats for women in the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of parliament.

Party quotas have been pursued since at least 1994 with the creation of the transitional government. Political parties sought to nominate female candidates for cabinet posts or to include women on party lists for government appointments. The Rwandan Patriotic Front, the *de facto* state party, has mainstreamed women in its own infrastructure since its origins as a rebel army, with women occupying important posts in the party, and in the Rwandan government since they came to power in 1994 (Burnet 2008a, 363). Many of the RPF policies and approaches have been modeled on those of Museveni and the National Resistance Movement in Uganda (Burnet 2008a, 367; Longman 2006, 140). Powley (2005, 159) attributed the RPF's approach to gender as emerging out of 'Tutsi exiles' experiences of discrimination. According to statements from RPF leaders, such as Rose Kabuye and John Mutamba, the RPF embraced notions of gender equality in the hopes of improving society.¹³ Since at least 1998, other political parties have actively recruited female candidates, promoted women to cabinet-level appointments, included them on party lists, and put them forward as candidates in general elections for nonreserved seats.¹⁴

As a result of these policies, Rwanda elected the first female-majority national legislative chamber in 2008, when women secured 56.25% of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies, far surpassing the 30% reserved seats for women.¹⁵ As Meier (n.d.) found in Belgium, the rising number of women in Rwandan politics cannot be attributed to gender quotas alone; in Rwanda, many women won seats not reserved by the quota system. The 2003 Constitution provided legislative quotas guaranteeing that women should comprise at least 30% of all positions in decision-making bodies, and not only the national legislature (see Article 9, number 3).

13. For Rose Kabuye's comments see the Hunt Alternatives Fund Website, http://www.huntalternatives.org/pages/401_rose_kabuye.cfm. For John Mutamba's, see Powley (2005, 159).

14. Interviews with women recruited by political parties, multiple locations in Rwanda, 1999, 2000, 2002.

15. UNIFEM website, http://www.unifem.org/news_events/story_detail.php?StoryID=736 (accessed November 9, 2009).

Since gaining a female majority in parliament, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians (FWP), a caucus for female members, has struggled to define a legislative agenda for women. In 2004, the FWP did not take specific policy stances on the 2004 Land Law. Instead, they stated, in conjunction with the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development, that land was an issue for all Rwandans and not just for women, despite the fact that a policy study by LandNet had found that rural women viewed land rights as central to their livelihood and well-being (Burnet and RISD, 2003). Before gaining this majority, the FWP had led several policy initiatives to enhance women's rights, including the 1998 inheritance law, which gave women and girls equal rights to inheritance and established the capacity for women to keep their property separate in marriage, and gender quotas, which were included in the 2003 Constitution. In 2006, the FWP found a unifying women's issue, gender-based violence (GBV), and drafted a bill. A UNIFEM press release erroneously stated that the parliament passed the bill in 2006 (Zirimwabagabo 2006), but the law languished in committee for nearly two years.¹⁶ The GBV bill finally became law in 2008, adding important protections to women's rights and making domestic violence illegal under Rwandan law (Republic of Rwanda 2009a). While the GBV bill was an important victory, less than a year later the majority female parliament approved a new labor code that reduced paid maternity leave from eight to two weeks and increased the work week from five to six days and from 40 to 45 hours (Republic of Rwanda 2009b). As discussed later in this article, ordinary Rwandans often pointed to this labor legislation as an example of how female parliamentarians put their individual interests (i.e., staying in their positions) ahead of the interests of average Rwandan women. Urban elites frequently cited the new labor law as an example of "politics as usual," meaning that the legislature rubber-stamped whatever laws the executive branch or RPF inner circle mandated.

Several scholars have argued that women's increased presence in government sends important signals to female citizens that lead them to become more politically involved or feel more politically efficacious (Atkeson 2003; Atkeson and Carrillo 2007; High-Pippert and Comer 1998). Yet others have found that the election of women appears to have only weak effects on trends in women's political engagement (Karp and Banducci 2008). In Rwanda, the impact of gender quotas on women's

16. Pearson (2008) attributed the delay to Rwandan parliamentarians' inexperience drafting legislation because most legislation in Rwanda is drafted by technocrats in the executive branch.

political engagement, defined as participation in elections, is difficult to assess because voting is required in practice, though not by law. Participation in elections is recorded on citizens' voter registration cards and, since 2009, on the electronic chip embedded in the new national identity cards. Local officials question citizens who do not vote and may assess fines or withhold government services, such as issuing birth certificates or other documents.

Measuring the impact of quotas on female citizens' political involvement or feelings of political efficacy is equally difficult because the country is not democratic, and citizens (and even legislators) have little capacity to influence policy. Although the political system is representative in name, in that parliamentarians are said to "represent" specific geographic regions, in practice this representation is fictitious because most members of parliament do not reside, and in some cases may never have resided, in the communities they were elected to represent. Because elections are staged events with predetermined outcomes, members of parliament have little or no incentive to represent their constituents' interests. In addition, most legislation originates in the executive branch, and so members of parliament rarely generate or even shape legislation. In fact, they have strong incentives to follow the policies dictated by the executive so that they remain in good stead with the RPF and retain their seats in parliament, which come with generous salaries, stipends, great social prestige, and many other benefits.

What is measurable in the Rwandan case is how the dramatic increase of women in the public sphere has raised "awareness of what women can achieve and legitimate[d] women as political actors, unraveling at least to some degree previously accepted gender roles," as Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo (n.d.b) define symbolic representation. In conversations with a wide variety of Rwandans, in group interviews with grassroots women's organizations, and in individual interviews with leaders of women's civil society organizations conducted in May and June 2009, most respondents agreed that gender quotas and the increased representation of women in the political system have encouraged women to take leading roles in other areas of Rwandan society.

WINNING THE RACE: POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER QUOTAS AND THEIR IMPACT

In 2009, when asked whether broader cultural changes had been provoked by gender quotas, women responded with a decisive yes. Respondents

consistently reported that women felt freer to speak out in public, had increased access to education, and had become “entrepreneurs” in every arena, including politics. Although interviewees gave these responses to questions about gender quotas, my ethnographic data going back to 1997 make it clear that several other factors have also affected Rwandan women’s political subjectivity (Burnet 2005, 2009, n.d.). These factors include the large number of female-headed households after the genocide, the experiences of women in refugee camps between 1994 and 1996 or 1997, the roles of women’s organizations and local associations before and after the genocide, the roles played by international organizations encouraging women’s engagement with community matters, the 1998 elections of grassroots women’s structures, and the cell-, sector-, and district-level elections in 2001.

Women as entrepreneurs in every arena. The majority female legislature and inclusion of many more women in all levels of the government have had a dramatic impact on Rwandan society more generally. In response to a question about the impact of gender quotas in the Rwandan political system, one female interviewee said:

You see that women have become true entrepreneurs in every arena. Most of the cars on the road today in Kigali are driven proudly by women. They [women] have raced ahead and seized every opportunity. They have gone back to school to get their degrees. They have started businesses. They have joined the Party [referring to the RPF] and gotten government posts.¹⁷

Women have surged ahead in all domains in the wake of the 2003 Constitution, which created legislative gender quotas.

While the majority female legislature has been an important symbolic victory for Rwandan women, of greater impact has been women’s increased engagement in local-level governance structures. Many women serve as local-level (village, cell, sector, or district) elected officials in posts not reserved for women. Their acceptance by local

17. Interview, Kigali, June 2009. Conducting research in the “terribly closed world” of rural Rwanda, as de Lame ([1994] 2005, x) described it, can be quite challenging for many reasons. Paramount to this study is the tendency for Rwandans to give responses that conform to what James C. Scott (1990) called the “public transcript,” that is, the commonly held script of what should be said in public about the state and about relationships between citizens and the state. In other words, Rwandans often repeat the party line, rather than saying what they really believe to be true. As King (2009, 132–3) noted, the public transcript is identifiable because the same phrases or statements are said by many different respondents in the same way. While I have attempted to distinguish rote repetition of the public transcript from more accurate statements about what people really think, it is inevitable that the data I report here may have been influenced by this phenomenon.

communities represents a sea change in public attitudes toward women. Increased participation of women at the local level has helped legitimate them as political agents in the popular imagination of rural people. When asked whether women were capable of leading and wielding power as well as men, one woman from North Province responded, “Better than the men even. A woman knows what she should do and when she should do it,” implying that men can easily be distracted from their mission by other things, such as beer or the opposite sex.

Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004, 1428) found that female citizens in India were twice as likely to communicate with local elected officials if there was a female elected official occupying a seat reserved for women through gender quotas. My findings in Rwanda suggest a similar effect. Several women interviewed in 2009 noted that the gender quota policies had given women an advantage over men in regard to problem solving. As one woman stated in a group interview with a women’s cooperative in a rural community in North Province, “A woman can easily approach her female friend who is an authority. This authority understands her well and can help her with her problems. That’s where the men have found problems.”¹⁸ Thus, female community members express the hope that a female local authority can understand things from their perspective and give assistance in their capacity as government officials. Yet this respondent also noted that men felt that they have lost out because they no longer have the advantage of approaching local authorities informally at a local bar over a beer to express their problems and seek a solution. Furthermore, as I will discuss in detail, not all interviewees indicated that female local authorities were any different from the men in this regard or others.

Speaking out in public. In a 2009 group interview, one respondent said, “Women dare to speak up at public meetings. . . . There is a Kinyarwanda proverb that says, *Nta nkokokazi ibika hari isake* — Hens do not crow where there is a rooster.”¹⁹ Over the past 15 years, I have often heard this proverb used to express the notion that women should be silent in public and allow men to speak on behalf of the entire community. According to custom, husbands (or fathers or brothers) represented a household in meetings, and they voiced any concerns of the household on behalf of all household members, including their wives (or daughters or sisters). Yet as will be discussed in more detail, a

18. Group interview, North Province, Rwanda, May 2009.

19. Group interview, North Province, Rwanda, May 2009.

wife could represent the household in meetings if her husband was absent. Nonetheless, before the implementation of quotas in the 2003 Constitution, women were unlikely to speak up at public meetings and were easily silenced by men if they did not agree with the women's opinions.

The willingness of women to speak in public settings has grown dramatically since 2003. When I interviewed women members of a church-based organization in a rural community in southern Rwanda in 2001, they expressed reluctance to speak up at public meetings although they were active participants in the life of their own organization. When I returned in 2007 and again in 2009, the same women proudly recounted their vocal participation in local government and community meetings. Several of the association members served as *inyangamugayo* (judges) in the cell- and sector-level *Gacaca* courts that had been responsible for adjudicating cases of genocide between 2003 and 2007.²⁰ In addition, the association members had conducted their own investigations, located witnesses, and advocated for the release of people falsely accused of genocide during the *Gacaca* process. All of these activities were somewhat risky given lingering tensions over the genocide. The women attributed their willingness to speak out to the broader impact of the national gender quota policy on men and women's attitudes toward female citizens' competency. The large number of women in local government, coupled with the clear endorsement of women as political authorities by President Kagame, the RPF, and the central government, sent a clear message to rural citizens that women must be accepted as legitimate political agents or local government authorities.

Greater access to education. Many interviewees in 2009 cited girls' greater access to education as a benefit of the increased representation of women in government. National campaigns to promote universal education, as well as the newfound career opportunities for educated women, convinced many rural families that educating female children was a worthwhile investment. A female interviewee noted that "girls attend school in large numbers in Rwanda today, not like in the past when they were kept at home to cook, clean, take care of younger children, and work in the fields."²¹ World Bank Development Indicators support the perception that more female children attend school now

20. For more on the *Gacaca* courts, see Burnet 2008b, Human Rights Watch 2008, Oomen 2005, Waldorf 2006, and Wierzyńska 2004.

21. Interview, rural community, North Province, May 2009.

than in the past and that girls attend school in greater numbers than boys.²² Although the campaign for universal education cannot be directly tied to the increased representation of women in government or to gender quotas, in the minds of average citizens, particularly rural farmers, increased education of girls is connected to gender quotas because these initiatives are perceived as being part of the government policy initiative to improve the status of women.

Joint decision making over domestic resources. Rwandan women in colonial and postcolonial times lived under a legal regime that subordinated them to men by impeding their economic autonomy. Many of the women-friendly policies implemented by the RPF-led government since 1994 have improved women's economic autonomy by restoring individual economic rights to married women. The transformation in women's economic independence accelerated rapidly starting in 1998, well before the creation of legislative gender quotas. In interviews and focus groups conducted in 2009, the most frequently mentioned impact of legislative gender quotas in Rwanda was on joint decision making over domestic resources in Rwanda and on the increased autonomy of women as economic subjects:

Woman, North Province: Before, the husband made decisions on his own. For example, a husband wanted to buy a field without his wife knowing it. He sold livestock as he wished without consulting his wife. But today, the men must try, and we discuss things together to see the advantages and disadvantages. And, in making decisions about having children, we make them together. Except for some men who do not understand, this [policy] helps people to make decisions together. Before the state made this law, the men did as they wished. They brought many wives [married more than one woman at a time]. But now, that is no longer the case.²³

Woman, South Province: There are men who sit down with their families and they make their decisions together. A daughter who cultivated a field of cassava with her mother, they made 60,000 RwF profit. When they

22. World Bank Development Indicators on education for Rwanda are only available for a few years: 1990–92, 2001–5, and 2007–8. In 1990, the earliest data available from before the genocide, 261,580 girls did not attend primary school, whereas 247,256 boys did not attend, or approximately 14,000 fewer girls than boys attending primary school. In 2001, the earliest data available from after the genocide, 167,378 girls did not attend primary school whereas 175,791 boys did not attend, or approximately 8,000 more girls than boys attending. In 2008, the most recent data available from after the educational reforms of 2007, 21,679 girls did not attend primary school whereas 38,391 boys did not attend, or approximately 16,000 more girls than boys attending. Source: World databank, available at: <http://databank.worldbank.org/ddp/home.do?Step=12&id=4&CNO=2>, (accessed March 28, 2011).

23. Group interview, women's cooperative, town in North Province, Rwanda.

showed the money to the father, they decided to buy a cow. The cow is there, and the husband is very happy, and he encourages his wife and daughter.²⁴

Female interviewees, even those who classified their marriages as “good” before the 1994 genocide and civil war, noted a change in the ways that spouses made decisions about family resources. They said that their husbands had begun to recognize that wives sometimes had good ideas and that women were less likely to waste their money on alcohol or gambling.

Another key change that interviewees noted in 2009 was women’s autonomy as economic agents to go out and become entrepreneurs. One woman explained how this change enhanced family life and marriage: “A wife can leave the house to go find money like men. In this way, there aren’t any conflicts. Husband and wife, together, find a way to move the family forward [develop the family].”²⁵ Increased economic autonomy was not a benefit cited by all women. For instance, widows and other female heads of household emphasized how difficult it was to bear sole responsibility for the financial well-being of the family and the challenges of balancing work (whether managing a farm, a business, or a professional job) and domestic responsibilities.

“*Women have found respect.*” Perhaps the most significant evidence of the impact of gender quotas on the symbolic representation of women was the repeated mention that the inclusion of women in government helped women “find respect” (*babona agaciro*). The word I have translated as respect, *agaciro*, can also mean utility, value, importance, or (good) reputation (Jacob 1984, 188).

In interviews and focus groups conducted in 2009, the term *agaciro* frequently came up when women commented on the impact of quotas on relationships between men and women in the community or in the home. In response to a follow-up question about the reduction in domestic violence in the region, one woman explained that husbands no longer hit their wives “because of awareness-raising campaigns and because men have realized the dignity of women (*agaciro k’umugore*).”²⁶ This woman implicitly linked quotas to the government’s awareness campaigns against domestic violence and explicitly linked the campaigns to the changed attitudes of men. Another woman attributed the change in men’s behavior to the respect gained by women: “Women have found respect (*babonye agaciro*), the men no longer have many wives, almost not at all

24. Group interview, women’s cooperative, rural community in South Province, Rwanda.

25. Interview, rural community, North Province, Rwanda, May 2009.

26. Group interview, women’s cooperative, rural community in North Province, May 2009.

now.”²⁷ Respondents in this focus group went on to explain the ways that women supported each other to oppose a husband who took a second wife and to force him to leave her. One woman described women’s liberation as a *fait accompli* that a few stubborn men had yet to accept, explaining that “there are still those men who do not want to accept the authority of women, who don’t know that women have found respect (*yahawe agaciro*).”²⁸

Almost universally, urban and rural women voiced pride about the change in the status of women in Rwandan society. One rural woman marveled, “Even the population obeys these female authorities. It’s a step forward for us [women].”²⁹ Yet, class distinctions emerged in the responses. Urban women and rural elite women tended to focus on the spreading of so-called modern ideas about the equality of the sexes to less educated Rwandans. Peasant women, on the other hand, tended to talk more about the recognition of women’s innate dignity by both men and women, but by men especially. These class distinctions are important since urban and rural elite women have benefited from gender quotas in material ways more than have peasant women. As I discuss later, peasant women have found their unpaid service in local governance structures to be an added burden on their already heavy load. By contrast, urban and rural elite women who worked for a salary, ran a business, or supported a husband’s career used their unpaid government service as a means for accruing social capital.

In sum, when responding to questions about the broader impacts of the gender quota policy on Rwandan society, respondents did not explicitly cite women’s increased representation as the impetus for change in gender roles. Rather, they linked the gender quota policies to a broader set of equality reforms implemented by the RPF-led government. These reforms, as a whole, have changed perceptions about, and the activities involved in, women’s roles. Given that policy implementation is top-down, and given that members of parliament were not perceived as representing constituents, it is no surprise that citizens linked gender quotas to broad government initiatives that increased the public presence of women.

WHO ARE THE LOSERS? THE DOWNSIDES OF GREATER EQUALITY

While most interviewees mentioned positive changes in Rwandan society resulting from quotas and the empowerment of women more generally,

27. Group interview, women’s cooperative, rural community in North Province, Rwanda, May 2009.

28. Group interview, women’s cooperative, rural community in South Province, Rwanda, May 2009.

29. Group interview, women’s cooperative, rural community in North Province, Rwanda, May 2009.

several also mentioned unexpected downsides. After all, if women are perceived as winning greater opportunities and autonomy, then, logically, another group must be perceived as losing them. While I never asked a direct question about men's perceptions of these changes (to avoid generating biased responses), several respondents spontaneously stated that men, or at least some men, felt as if they had lost out because of women's advancement. Three key themes emerged in the interviews: brothers' anger over the extension of inheritance rights to women, the withdrawal of men from politics, and increased marital discord.

Angry brothers. When asked about social changes related to the gender quotas, many female respondents noted that the 1998 inheritance law had increased friction between women and their brothers. Again, respondents perceived quotas as one component of a set of policies that have extended and protected women's rights and increased opportunities and equality for women.

Woman, North Province: Our brothers have never been happy because they are obliged to divide the property of our parents with us. It's a total negative for the men.³⁰

Woman, North Province: Allowing women to inherit is good, but we now have conflicts with our brothers. They [an anonymous "they," meaning "the government"] say that we should inherit property from both our in-laws and our own lineage as well. They [our brothers] have found that they are the losers.³¹

Given that it is fathers and brothers who traditionally intervened when women found themselves in difficult or violent marriages, and who offered land (and, thus, livelihood) in the event of a failed marriage or early widowhood, increased friction with their male siblings puts women, especially peasant women, in a more fragile position socially.

Male withdrawal from politics. Before the 1994 genocide, politics, whether at the national, regional, or local level, was largely monopolized by men. Although a few prominent women stood out, including Agathe Uwilingiyimana, the prime minister in April 1994 and one of the first politicians killed in the genocide, men dominated the political arena. With the rise of women in Rwandan politics since the late 1990s, many men have turned away from politics as a career because "women are the winners."³² Given that the outcome of most elections is predetermined,

30. Group interview, rural community in North Province, Rwanda, May 2009.

31. Interview, town in North Province, Rwanda, May 2009.

32. Interviews, multiple locations in Rwanda, May–June 2009.

some men present their candidacy but know in advance that the position will go to a woman.

Furthermore, quotas have influenced civil society organizations in favor of female candidates over men with similar qualifications. This corrective to past gender biases has catapulted women ahead but made some men feel left out. As a result of this perceived exclusion from government and civil society organizations (the primary employers in the Rwandan economy), many men preferred to focus their energies on private business endeavors. Other men faced long-term unemployment, leading to crises of self-identity.

Related to this withdrawal from politics was a general “psychological complex” among men that it was “not even worth it to try” because the “good positions” always went to women.³³ As one elite woman from Kigali noted, “It’s as if men have a complex nowadays.”³⁴ She went on to explain that more women than men returned to school to seek degrees necessary for the constantly rising employment standards and that it seemed as if some Rwandan men “do not even try.”

Marital discord. Rural and urban respondents cited increased marital discord as a consequence of the quotas and improved status of women. Rural respondents attributed the increased discord to men’s ignorance about women’s dignity and rights, whereas urban respondents attributed it to women “behaving like men,” meaning that women’s greater economic autonomy had led them to enjoy individual freedoms, such as socializing after work, that had previously been reserved for men.

Many women interviewed, particularly married women, indicated that many husbands were frustrated about their wives’ participation in governance.

Author: How have people here received these changes?

Woman: Positive for the women, negative for the men. Men have never been able to understand sudden changes. They are not at all happy that women are progressing. *Urugo ruvuze umugore ruvuga umuhoro* — At home when the wife speaks, out comes the knife.³⁵

Here, the respondent focused on the transformation in women’s agency and willingness to speak out by drawing on a Rwandan proverb. According to this proverb, a vocal wife in the home means that there is

33. Interviews, multiple locations in Rwanda, May–June 2009.

34. Interview, Kigali, Rwanda, June 2009.

35. Group interview, rural community in North Province, Rwanda, May 2009.

little peace or harmony in the family. Ideologically, Rwandan custom calls for a wife's submission to her husband and his decisions. Yet, most wives who characterized their marriages as "good" stated that husbands consult with wives when making important decisions. Nonetheless, when husband and wife do not agree, the husband's decision prevails. One consequence of women's empowerment was that some wives were less willing to silence themselves when they thought their husbands were making unwise decisions. While I cannot use the data I have gathered to estimate how widespread this phenomenon was, the issue was frequently mentioned as a contributing factor to marital discord. Of greater consequence to marital discord, however, were the competing responsibilities to household and community that women in elected positions negotiated.

Many rural women interviewed in 2009, whether they thought gender roles in Rwanda had changed a lot or "not at all" as a result of quotas, said that the gender revolution in Rwanda had increased domestic conflict for some families. They cited two primary reasons for increased conflict: 1) husbands who had not come to recognize the "dignity of women," and 2) husbands who were frustrated by the lack of benefits to the domestic unit from wives' service as local officials.

For those [men] who do not understand [the gender equality laws], there are always conflicts in the family, always fights, because the men say, "When has there ever been a wife who makes decisions for the household?" If these conflicts persist, then there is a divorce. . . . It does not happen all that often, but even so this type of story is not unheard of.³⁶

Rural married women elected to village-, cell-, sector-, or district-level administrative positions often found themselves at a loss to explain to their husbands "what good" was coming from their work as government officials. Local-level officials did not receive salaries or stipends, and they spent a great deal of time exercising their duties as well as participating in meetings or training sessions. As one woman from North Province stated:

We never thought that things would be like this. A wife leaves her family for training sessions, for communal labor, for meetings, and then a week has gone by. No time to work at home nor to go to the fields. The husband who is there thinks you are going to come with something for the family [i.e., money or other tangible benefit]. You see, there is nothing but trouble and conflicts in the family. When you think about leaving this

36. Group interview, women's cooperative, town in North Province, Rwanda, May 2009.

position, something that is not at all easy to do, you are accused of having the [genocidal] ideology.³⁷

Another woman from North Province summed it up, “We have found that it’s not anything more than exploitation, creating poverty in our families . . . we are going to die.”³⁸ Many wives noted that their husbands were angry or frustrated that they were absent from the home and the fields with “nothing to show for it.” In the past, men who served in local-level positions reaped many social benefits, such as increased prestige in the community, as well as increased networking opportunities and small “gifts” (in the form of beer, crops, or money) given by citizens in gratitude for duties rendered by a local official. Women local officials were not gaining these benefits due to perceived gender differences, as well as vigorous anticorruption campaigns by the government that curtailed the practice.

Beyond lamenting the lack of tangible benefits, men made their wives’ workload heavier by not assisting them with their work in the fields, at home, or in their role as local officials. Most rural women cannot afford to hire workers to assist with the numerous duties that fall on a wife’s shoulders: cooking, cleaning, caring for children, and fetching water at home and planting, weeding, and harvesting in the fields. Since local-level elected officials were not compensated through salaries or stipends, rural women were left to their own devices to manage these competing responsibilities. While female local officials would have been able to justify their absence to their husbands if they were “bringing something home,” the women arrived “empty-handed.” Their husbands became angry because they believed that their wives were shirking their duties at home.

Interviewees and focus group participants in urban areas also brought up increased marital discord as an unexpected outcome of quotas and other equality initiatives. Urban respondents attributed increased marital discord to women “behaving like men,” referring to both positive and negative aspects of women’s changed behavior. On the positive side, respondents cited things like increased assertiveness in decision making about the family and family resources, as well as increased educational attainment among women that improved their ability to find lucrative employment. On the negative side, respondents cited several unexpected

37. “Having genocidal ideology” and “spreading divisionism” were criminalized in 2001 with the passage of Law no 47/2001 On Prevention, Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Discrimination and Sectarianism.

38. Interview, town in North Province, Rwanda, May 2009.

consequences of women's independent work and social lives, as well as their increased economic autonomy and legal protection. Because more wives had their own careers that provided sufficient economic means for leading an independent life, women were less likely to be "stuck" in unsatisfactory marriages as they had been in the past. Furthermore, the strengthened legal protections of women's rights made seeking divorce less risky for urban women. The downside of this increased autonomy, according to respondents, was rising divorce rates.

Many respondents explained that the "promotion of women," referring not only to quotas but also the entire set of government initiatives to increase women's equality, had resulted in more time spent outside of the home. More women worked outside of the home and took night courses at the many new universities. Respondents concluded that because women spent more time outside of the home, they had more contact with men other than their husbands. As a result, some women had begun to "behave like men" by taking lovers outside of marriage. Whereas, in the past, many wives had tolerated similar dalliances by their husbands given the economic risks involved in divorce, men were less constrained. Thus, according to the perceptions of many urban elites, gender quotas and policies promoting women's equality had destabilized the institution of marriage.

NOTHING HAS CHANGED: GENDER, POWER, AND DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY

A key measure of the impact of gender quotas on the symbolic representation of women is the way "citizens feel about government generally": whether it has changed and whether the increased presence of women in governance has led "them to judge democratic institutions as more just and legitimate" (Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo, n.d.b). Baldez (2006, 104) states that gender quotas "can revitalize public faith in the political system" as they did in Latin America in the past 15 years. In Rwanda, however, the gender quotas have had little effect on popular perceptions of the government's legitimacy. Although most respondents cited numerous social or cultural changes resulting from the gender quota policies, several stated explicitly that "nothing has changed" in terms of gender roles, political power, or the democratic legitimacy of the state in Rwanda.

Several rural women with low levels of formal education but high levels of engagement in community-based organizations insisted that little had

changed in terms of gender roles in Rwandan society, mostly because female heads of household have always made decisions. As a woman from a rural community in South Province explained, “Nothing has changed. A woman who is alone usually makes decisions by herself. She is used to doing everything for herself. Who is she going to ask for advice? We haven’t noticed a change because a woman who is by herself doesn’t have a rival.” In other words, widows and female heads of household have always exercised power in the family and in the community as symbolic “men.”

Another woman from a town in North Province said that quotas “have changed nothing really. Except to make things worse.” She went on to characterize the inclusion of women in local governance structures as a form of exploitation that increased the workload of rural women in the service of maintaining the ruling RPF’s hold on power. A female civil society leader and RPF party member likewise found that rural women considered their increased role in local governance to be an added burden.

Many international organizations link women and better governance, a link often reiterated by Rwandan officials. The view from below, however, is quite different. Peasants generally view female officials as “no better than men,” in that female representatives face the same pressures to comply with directives from above and the same human frailties and temptations leading to corruption. For instance, when asked whether female local officials required bribes, one woman replied, “Everyone must have that.” She then illustrated her point with the following story:

One thing that happened to me, my husband was going to his parents’ place to divide the fields among the brothers. I went in his place because he wasn’t available. A mediator (*umunzi*), a woman, asked me directly for money by saying, “Ma’am if you aren’t able to give us money, your husband won’t have a single field here.” I was obliged to give the money; I didn’t have any other choice.³⁹

Several other male and female respondents confirmed that female local officials were just as corrupt as male. Moreover, the increased presence of women has not led Rwandan citizens to perceive the government as a more democratic institution. When asked whether they found it easier to talk to a female than to a male local official, most women stated that it was “no different.” These results coincide with those of Zetterberg (n.d.), who found that the “undemocratic legacy of Mexican politics” led

39. Group interview, town in North Province, Rwanda, May 2009.

citizens to mistrust the “old [male] elite” and the new (female) representatives. In Rwanda, women parliamentarians were not viewed as representing either women’s interests or the interests of the communities they were formally elected to represent.

As Baldez (2006, 105) found for many Latin American countries where candidate nomination is highly centralized, gender quotas in Rwanda have reinforced the status quo. In the eyes of many Rwandans, especially well-educated elites in Kigali, Rwanda’s gender quota policies have resulted in the solidification of the RPF ruling party’s hold on power. In the words of a former (male) senator and member of an opposition political party, the only thing gender quotas have done is “ensure RPF dominance.” Because positions in the legislature and the ministries come with good salaries and many benefits, women who have benefited from quotas and occupy these positions owe their loyalties to the RPF, which echoes the importance of patronage politics found in Morocco by Sater (n.d.) and in Uganda by O’Brien (n.d.). In Rwanda, no matter which party they are affiliated with, women parliamentarians toe the line in order to remain where they are. They rarely mobilize around “women’s issues” and, in some cases, vote for legislation that reduces legal protection of women or eliminates women friendly policies.

CONCLUSION

When the impact of gender quotas on the symbolic representation of women is measured, it is important to ask whether quotas have altered “gendered ideas about the public sphere, which have traditionally associated men with politics and women with the realm of home and the family” (Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo n.d.b). In Rwanda, gender quotas have transformed gendered ideas about the public sphere. Legislative gender quotas and policies promoting women’s rights have promoted women in public life. In urban and rural political spaces, women have taken visible roles in local government, business, and civil society. Yet these changes did not emerge solely from the legislative gender quotas instituted in 2003. Rather, their origins date to the emergence of women’s civil society organizations in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Burnet 2008a; Newbury and Baldwin 2000, 2001a, 2001b). Nonetheless, gender quotas adopted by political parties in the 1990s and the legislative quotas in 2003 accelerated these preexisting processes of change.

Because Rwanda is so frequently cited as a gender quota success story, it is vital to assess broader transformations in Rwandan society as accurately as possible. While the Rwandan parliament was the first and only in the world to be majority female, the increased representation of women brought little change to the legislative process. Most legislation originates in the executive branch, and the majority female parliament has created little legislation improving the status or rights of women. Furthermore, increased female representation has not ushered in a more democratic political era; the executive branch still maintains tight control over civil society organizations, the media, and elections. As Zetterberg (n.d.) shows in Mexico, gender quotas are embedded in the broader political context, and thus have little effect on women's political engagement or on the perceived legitimacy of democratic institutions among the electorate.

The Rwandan case does illustrate, however, that gender quotas can have impacts beyond the political sphere. The RPF's top-down policies have improved economic and professional opportunities for women and increased their social mobility. Since gender quotas apply to all levels of government, from the parliament all the way down to the "village" (*umudugudu*), their impact has been broad and deep. Gender quotas have reversed the colonial and postcolonial gender paradigm, where men worked in the public sphere while women managed the domestic sphere and remained financially dependent on men. This symbolic reversal has benefited urban women more than rural women because urban women have found increased access to salaried positions and greater purchasing power, while rural women in local government positions have faced increased workloads without remuneration.

Another important finding of this case study is that citizens do not distinguish between the impact of legislative gender quotas and the many other policy changes that improve the status of women and girls (such as mandatory primary school education). Perhaps citizens' frequent contact with local-level government officials and their distance from parliamentarians leads them to focus on changes in their everyday lives. The prevalence of generalized responses to specific questions about women and politics in my data, however, signals an important reality of Rwandan life: criticism of the government, the RPF, or President Kagame and of policy or legislation is risky. By citing the broader benefits of a set of policies and laws that improved the status of women in Rwandan society, respondents avoided making specific, and possibly critical, statements about those in power. In rare instances, respondents

who trusted me and other listeners made frank (and critical) statements about some of the negative consequences of the gender quotas, their impact on the symbolic representation of women, and the tightly controlled nature of politics.

Several lessons can be drawn from this case study. First, having more women in government does not necessarily lead to greater democracy or a more democratic government. Second, even when implemented as top-down policies put in place by an authoritarian regime, gender quotas and equality policies more broadly can lead to significant cultural changes in attitudes toward, and perceptions of, women and their competence. Third, greater numbers of women in government can lead to increased political, social, and economic agency among all female citizens, not only those women in government. Finally, the increased autonomy of women can have unintended negative consequences, such as marital discord, rising divorce rates, and an increased workload on women who are already overburdened.

The Rwandan case suggests that Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler's (2005) finding that increased formal and descriptive representation of women increases legislatures' responsiveness to women's concerns does not hold true for (nondemocratic) authoritarian states. Given that women legislators in Rwanda are more beholden to the RPF political party than to the constituents who, in theory if not in practice, elected them, it is not surprising that these women legislators supported legislative proposals (such as the labor law) emerging from, and supported by, the executive branch. Nonetheless, if Pearson's (2008) assessment of Rwandan parliamentarians' lack of experience drafting legislation is accurate, then hypothetically, we may see greater legislative initiative on the part of the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, in particular, as well as parliamentarians in general, in the future. Current signs, however, point to the continuation of an authoritarian style of governance in Rwanda (Reyntjens 2010).

The 2010 presidential and parliamentary elections were characterized by severe repression of independent media critical of the RPF or President Kagame and by the suppression of the few genuine opposition parties that tried to establish themselves (Reyntjens 2010, 12). In addition, average Rwandans lived in great fear during the months leading up to the elections. This fear was best summed up by a genocide survivor who responded "Pray for us" to an e-mail in which I asked about the social atmosphere a month before the elections. Shortly after President Kagame's landslide victory for his second, and final, term

under the current constitution, a minister in the new cabinet suggested a change in the constitution to allow him to run for a third term.

This case also confirms that Pitkin's multifaceted model of political representation is helpful in understanding representation in nondemocratic states. Transformations in formal and descriptive representation can lead to changes in symbolic representation, even if substantive representation does not improve. As some interviewees noted, "Nothing has changed" in terms of substantive representation because increased formal representation has not transformed the governance style. Despite Devlin and Eglie's (2008, 251) finding that Rwandan women legislators felt confident that a "gender agenda" was guaranteed by their presence, ordinary citizens perceived legislators as putting their own individual interests ahead of those of the broader population. Although Pitkin's model is relevant and helpful, the Rwandan case also suggests that the experience of women's representation is not universal, as Devlin and Eglie (2008, 250) conclude, but rather is, at least in part, context specific. Local configurations of state, political, and economic power matter as they influence the experience and outcomes of political representation.

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