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Naomie Gutekunst                                                                                    April 2, 2019

The Power of Rwandan Women: A Look at the Role of Women in Society from the Nyiginya Kingdom to Today

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Abstract

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This thesis explores gender and power in Rwanda from the end of the Nyginya Kingdom, 19th century, to present-day Rwanda. Prior to colonialism elite women in Rwanda held a role in society that was not entirely equal to but was close to being on a par to that of their male counterparts. Using the stories of queens' Nyiramongi and Kanjogera, I illustrate the power that elite women could cultivate over the kingdom. Belgian colonialism created spaces for particular women to thrive while decreasing other women's opportunities. It also brought with it another version of patriarchy relative to what had existed before in Rwanda. The establishment of the *Foyers Sociaux* provided a platform through which Rwandan women were pushed into the domestic sphere, a space that was defined according to European norms. Using current-day demographics, I attempt to understand how women hold power within Rwandan society today. An interview with a former minister of Rwanda reveals what it is like being a female leader today. Without access to individuals at local levels, research on local organizations led by women attempts to reveal the role and work of women at non-governmental levels of society. A historical approach reveals that women have played a role in state-building throughout Rwandan history, and it is incorrect to assume that only after the genocide women have become powerful stakeholders in all levels of society.

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Acknowledgements

# Contents

# Chronology

| | |
|---|---|
| 17th century – 1959 | Nyiginya Kingdom |
| 1847-1867 | Reign of Queen Nyiramongi as queen mother |
| 1880's | First European explorers enter Rwanda and neighboring lands |
| 1895-1931 | Reign of Queen Kanjogera as queen mother |
| 1898 | Reich government recognizes Ruanda-Urundi as occupied |
| 1919 | First Belgian civil residence established in Kigali |
| 1924 | Belgian parliament approves mandate B status of Rwanda |
| 1946 | First Foyer Social established in Usumbura (what is today Bujumbura in Burundi) |
| 1950s | First schools established |
| 1941-1959 | Reign of Queen Gicanda |
| 1959 | Hutu domination in Rwanda |
| 1962 | Independence is declared with the presidency of Grégoire Kayibanda |
| 1990 | Major attack launched by RPF into Rwanda |
| 1994 | The genocide begins April 7th and last until July 4th, 1994 RPF rebels gain control of government |
| 1999 | First elections held in Rwanda |
| 2003 | New constitution and Paul Kagame elected President |
| 2017 | President Kagame re-elected president |

**Introduction:**

This thesis will explore women and power in Rwanda from the Nyginya Kingdom to present day. Much of the literature that surrounds Rwanda today attempts to understand Rwanda as a post-genocide society in relation to the events that led up to the genocide and the genocide itself. Similarly, much of the work produced on gender and women attempts to understand how the genocide, its gendered components, have informed national reforms and how these reforms may or may not be a step in the right direction for the women in Rwandan society. Scholars focus greatly on the government's role in these efforts ending up supporting Kagame's regime as having created a great and positive change in Rwanda, or against Kagame's regime seeing it as too authoritarian with reforms meant to impress Western nations in order to receive support and aid money (Straus et al., 2011). Reforms have put women in positions at high levels of the government, yet, it is much more difficult to say how these reforms have shaped the everyday lives of all women. The rape of women became tool of genocide used to torture and depreciate women, which would prompt unification of survivors after the genocide through self-help organizations. In addition, with 70% of the population being female immediately after the genocide women were to take on new cultural and societal roles. Efforts to empower women cannot solely be attributed to governmental efforts, but rather an immediate reaction by the women to act for the survival of their families and their communities.

My project extends to time periods far before the genocide to understand the political roles that women have historically held in Rwanda and how they have changed throughout time and informed women's roles in society today. I argue that throughout time there have been openings and closings for women to take on positions in state building such as the position of queen in the Nyiginya Kingdom, colonist reforms and independence, as well as pre- and post-genocide changes in society.

The first section of this thesis explores how my identity as a scholar and white woman has shaped and limited my entry point into my project. I then focus on three specific time periods. During the Nyginya Kingdom and pre-colonial Rwanda women held positions that were complementary to those of their male counterparts (Berry, 2018). Though most women were kept out of the public sphere they were seen as the backbone of the household and actively engaged in physically demanding work such as farming and harvesting. At this time, while women could not own land nor have inheritance rights, the patriarchy was not as strong as it would be later in Rwandan history. Women of certain lineages could rise up in ranks and become queen or even queen mothers. Though most literature suggests that the queen mother had little authority over the kingdom I argue that these women were essential to state building and held a great amount of power over males in the society. It does not go unnoticed that these women were able to establish themselves as a source of power through powerful men that they had relations to and with. In this next part of the thesis I analyze the effects of colonialism on Rwandan women. I look specifically at the case of the Foyers Sociaux established by the Belgian government in the late 1940's. These institutions instilled western ideologies of patriarchy and created hierarchy between Rwandan and European, between males and females, and among females. The foyers would open doors for Tutsi females and close doors of opportunity for Hutu women. Soon after the first schools would open for Rwandan men and then women. Three women who would later on have the privilege of attending these schools would become some of the most influential women of Rwanda in the late 80's early 90's. Just before and during the genocide women held high positions of power within the Rwandan government. Agathe Uwilingiyimana would become the first female Prime Minister of Rwanda in 1993 and Agathe Kanziga Habyarimana and Pauline Nyiramasuhuko would both become implicated and strong leaders of the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (MRND), Hutu-led forces during the genocide.

Finally, I explore how shifting demographics have led to new openings for women in the government and the implementation of new female-led organizations at local levels. An interview with former Minister of Health, Agnès Binagwaho, provides insight into what it means being a female leader today and how local level initiatives influence national decisions and vice versa. This body of work attempts to reveal that these large "changes" in mentality surrounding the position of women within society are not as drastic as we take them to be and that women have always played a role in state-building in Rwanda.

**Positionality/Limitations:**

Throughout the process of this research I have had the time to reflect heavily upon my position in reference to the research that I have conducted. It is my role as a researcher to be cognizant and consider how my personal background, values, and experience may affect the project I have been working on, my observations, interpretations, and analysis. I am a current undergraduate student studying Neuroscience and African Studies at Emory University in the College of Arts and Sciences. I am a twenty-one-year old white female, born in the United States to a French mother and a French/Rwandan father. Though unintentional it is possible that these identities that I hold may influence my research.

The choice to write a thesis specifically on Rwanda, a country notably known for its genocide in 1994, was to learn more about the genocide but also to learn about the country itself. With a father who grew up in Rwanda and Burundi, who also lay witness to the Genocide – I have always been curious to understand and know more about a history that led to what Rwanda is today. The Rwandan genocide was an incredibly brutal and devastating moment in Rwanda history. Rather than focusing on the brutality and devastation of the genocide – which today has been thoroughly

researched and documented, my attention was drawn toward the role and power of Rwandan women in politics. By looking in depth at a narrative which paralleled the genocide, but which was not encapsulated by it, this project also allowed for me to expand my general knowledge of Rwanda.

I have never been to Rwanda nor am I Rwandan. I believe this is one of the largest faults in my positionality as a full-time scholar located in the U.S. My research focuses on the lives and experiences of Rwandan women, something that I have not experienced myself. This has made it difficult for me to continue with my research as I feel that 1) I am not qualified to speak to the experiences of a group of which I am not a part of and 2) I lack the connection to what these women have experienced and are experiencing today. The best that I can do from my position is listen and remember that my research topic stems from curiosity to learn more about something I once had only heard stories about. Everything that I have learned up to this point from readings – each have their own opinions on the matters that I may speak about, thus, I have tried my best to make with these arguments one of my own that is not biased toward any particular narratives.

I ran into a research conundrum as I was working on this thesis leading me to draw on an eclectic methodological tool kit to understand women political status in Rwanda historically. I did not have a chance to travel to Rwanda. The scope of my research has been limited due to lack of primary source material outside Rwanda. I feel that this is a large limitation of this research because all of what I have written is based largely on secondary source material in addition to organization websites and pamphlets, demographics, and one interview that I was able to have with the former Minister of Health of Rwanda, Agnès Binagwaho. With more time and money, I would have travelled to Rwanda and hopefully carried out interviews with members of the NGOs/CBOs/local

efforts that I speak about. I did attempt to contact multiple local organizations through email, but no connections were ever made. With help from Agnès Binagwaho, I managed to secure an interview with the President of The Nyamirambo Women's Center, Marie Aimée Umugeni, who was able to answer my general questions about the organization. After traumatic events it is understandable that people will be reluctant to speak and in general women who were targeted victims of the genocide are still coping and healing (Burnet, 2012). There is also a general reluctance to speak about the climate of Rwanda especially regarding politics in the country today. Umugeni was hesitant to answer any questions regarding the politics of her organization. Being ethically, politically, and intellectually committed to this story I chose to deeply delve into secondary sources. I felt a moral obligation to continue with uncovering the story of Rwandan women – just because I did not have access to the primary sources that I needed, was not reason to leave this topic behind.

**Literature Review:**

Gender in anthropology

Much of the early research focused on gender and gender relations addresses gender through European and Western assumptions of women and how gender relates to male activities or the male perceptions of female activities (Morgan, 1989). With the second-wave feminist turn, the mid-1970s saw a great push for a new approach to gender focused on female subordination, female status, and gender roles of women, with a growing mind-set that "understanding gender relations remain [s] central to the analysis of key questions [...] in the social sciences as a whole" (Morgan, 1989). By and large, the 1970s feminist turn generated at least three approaches to gender that I will be drawing on in my work: social and cultural constructions of gender; theoretical historical constructions of gender as they relate to class; and, women's status and the development of gender models (Rosaldo et al 1974, Greene et al 1982, Freidl 1975).

Gender in Sub-Saharan Africa

The study of gender is a recurrent theme in research on Sub-Saharan Africa. However, some of this work simply projects Eurocentric understandings of gendered power onto this world region. For instance, anthropologist Meillassoux argues that a women's capacity to reproduce is at the center of their oppression and that men can control women through labor control and marriage (Meillassoux, 2001). Other scholars like Karen Sacks have argued that male dominance is rooted in class-based and state institutions (Sacks, 1982). These studies lack recognition of sub-Saharan women as powerful agents, representing these women as helpless victims. It is necessary to recognize women and men alike and not always as passive victims but actors who make use of societal customs and circumstances to their own benefit (Morgan, 1989).

*Women in Economy and Society, Constructs of Gender*

It is evident that there is a distinction between the roles of African women in the economy as compared to Western women. In Africa, a woman's most important emotional and economic ties are to their children and not to men, fathers or husbands (Potash, 1989). Kin group ties become important for women in relation to the mobilizing labor assistance for productive and domestic activities, and in marital disputes (Potash, 1989). Most women only have access to land and housing through marriage or through membership in a descent group (Potash, 1989). Men and women are known to have separate sources of income and women are commonly in charge of child care and subsistence agriculture (Potash, 1989). In areas such as Rwanda (eastern), Zimbabwe (southeastern), Malawi (southeastern), and central regions of the continent, where female farming was most prominent, men contributed to the household through hunting, herding, and fishing, and by participating in social obligations like bride wealth (Potash, 1989). Some women had control of their productivity, choosing what food they produced and how it was supplied to their families, although in some cases it contributed to the accumulation of wealth and increased status of her husband (Potash, 1985). A woman's produce and crafts (such as threads and cloths) were sometimes used for her own personal expenditures. In fact, it is difficult to locate societies where the male is the sole provider of the household (Potash, 1989). These ideas contradict the argument of Meillassoux that men control women's production. Though this does not imply that women were free from control or totally equal to their male counterparts (Potash, 1989)

Many Africanists argue that women's positions have declined as result of colonialism, Christianity, and capitalism (Potash, 1989). This argument is supported by the notion that some precolonial roles women held no longer existed post-colonialism. Women were forced to meet traditional obligations associated with womanhood, while also living under enforced western models and colonial

economic policies. The monetization of society meant that women were burdened with having to adopt income-earning activities (Hunt 1990, Potash 1989). Colonial policies favored men and supported their acquisition of new skills and income-earning possibilities (Hunt 1990, Potash, 1989). Although these changes were being implemented, UN studies reveal that generally female labor supplied at this time 70% of food production, 60% in marketing, 50% of animal husbandry, and 100% in food processing (UNECA, 1974). In Sub-Saharan African countries, independence brought an increase in the migration of women from urban centers seeking jobs opportunities and education though it is questionable the extent to which these women were truly independent.

*Political Organization*

The conceptualization of what constitutes politics is important when attempting to understand women's involvement in society. M.G. Smith and Barth, transactional analysts, have come to define politics as encompassing all behaviors (Potash, 1989). When looking at different cultures and societies, this definition allows for flexibility and a broad understanding of what can be regarded as 'women's political organization.' For the purposes of this research, this definition will be used as it encompasses all forms of women's involvement at various levels of power (Potash, 1989). Particular studies like that of Rosaldo found that women obtain power through manipulation, through taking on masculine political roles, and through the creation of distinct and separate women's groups (Rosaldo, 1974). In precolonial times, there were positions in political offices that could be held by men or women (Hoffer 1974). In Onitsha, Nigeria there were dual gender-based systems in which a female ruler and her council, concerned with mainly women affairs, functioned parallel to the king and his council (Okonjo 1976). Queen mothers, recognized as the king's counterpart, had their own courts, worked through cases, and sat on councils. The rule of the king and queen mother together was perceived as necessary in kingdoms (Potash, 1989). However,

colonial rule shifted women's political roles. Men became the sole recognized authorities and areas where women were known to have held positions of office and power were reduced or completely erased after independence (Amadiume, 1987). While there may have been a change, colonization was indeed followed by female resistance and women-led anti-colonial movements, notably in Ghana and Kenya (Mba 1982, Urdang 1984, Van Allen 1976). These movements should arguably be regarded as ways in which women assumed roles in the political sphere, although not regarded as traditional. Today women can be found holding elected and appointed positions at national, regional, and local levels. Women's general involvement and decision making in rural communities will be defined as political participation. In general, it is difficult to discern the extent to which women do influence the political sphere and it is important to distinguish women's participation at all levels of society.

Women in Rwanda

Two scholarly works that align closely with this project are those of anthropologist Jennie E. Burnet and sociologist Marie E. Berry. In general, there has been a growing body of literature assessing increased female representation in African governments. In Burnet's article, "*Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda*" she tackles the meaning of female representation within the Rwandan government, the effect of gender quotas implemented post-genocide, and their overall impact on women in society (Burnet, 2008). When the RPF assumed power in 1994, it named a transitional government that was to last only 5 years but extended until the process of 'democratization' began in 2001 and the 2003 constitution was established. Gender was a large focus of the transitional and the newly created democratic government. Burnet explains that the idea of democratization in Rwanda is viewed as a linear path through which an authoritarian government becomes a democracy. During this time, from 1994

onward, women were quickly appointed into positions as ministers, secretaries of state, court justices, and parliamentarians. A ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Affairs was put in place. "Women's councils" were created to promote women's interest in development, provide education on participation in the government, and advising on women's issues. They were established at all levels of society to connect local to national efforts. During this time NGOs also had a large role in promoting women-in development projects. Burnet argues that, as the Rwandan government continues to become increasingly authoritative, gender movements become increasingly symbolic in the nation, appearing to align with foreign aid initiatives (Burnet, 2008). For example, funds were being allocated to a variety of organizations to finance income generating projects, yet, Burnet found only certain elite women holding positions of power in organizations knew about funds being allocated to their organizations and many women did not understand what "women's councils" were (Burnet, 2008). Although these are some of the realities Burnet argues that at more local levels, women's organizations have been pivotal to rebuilding the society and supporting women post-genocide. Women were seen to be strategically positioned to promote change for several reasons: 1) the violence, stresses, and immediate effects of the genocide on the female populations, 2) the historical role of women's grassroots organizations and farming cooperatives; 3) support from the international community (Burnet, 2008). It is also very important to recognize that there was an incredible demographic shift after the genocide. The society had become predominantly female. Human Rights Watch estimates that immediately after the genocide the population was 70% female (Burnet, 2008). As refugees returned this number would eventually even out. Some women found themselves as heads of household taking on new roles in spheres they had once not been a part of. However, for a large part of women losing a man in the household increased their burdens of poverty and isolation (Burnet, 2008). In conclusion, Burnet sees the changes in Rwandan society regarding women as twofold: current female representation in the government could in the

long-term lead to a meaningful participation of women in a democratic political system, however;

currently, the increase in representation of women in an authoritative government, Burnet reveals,

represents a very minimal increase in women's political power; across the Rwandan society,

patriarchal views of women prevail.


Marie E. Berry's sociological work outlined in her book *War, Women, and Power: From Violence

to Mobilization in Rwanda and Bosnia Herzegovina* focuses on how war can be transformative and

in the cases of the Rwandan genocide and Bosnian War have brought on women's political

mobilization (Berry, 2018). Berry first provides her reader with a brief summary of women's

political roles historically in Rwanda, focusing on Queen Mothers, the complementary roles shared

by men and women before the Belgian regime. The 1980s sparked a women's movement across the

continent and in 1985 the UN held the 3rd World Conference on Women focused on creating new

strategies for women to become involved in development in their nations. At this time, women were

already increasing their presence in parliament, from 12.9% in 1983 to 15.7% in 1988, though their

presence was largely ceremonial, and the women were usually wives or family members of the

president or other men in high positions (Berry, 2018). Berry uses interviews to explore women's

mobilization during the conflicts; what happened to women during these conflicts, how they

responded, and what happened to women at the end of the conflicts. Though the countries that

Berry compares are completely different, and their conflicts arose out of different historical

contexts, Berry argues that the way that women were affected and responded to experiences of war

were similar. Her main argument for increased female mobilization is that there were deep

structural shifts: *demographic shifts* due to greater male death, conscription of men, imprisonment

of men, and population displacements; secondly an *economic shift* emerging out of the destruction

of infrastructures; and thirdly, cultural shifts that occurred from a consensual understanding that

man's propensity for war can be juxtaposed to women's "peaceful" nature (Berry, 2018). These structural shifts mean that people, and more specifically women, are taking on new roles within society. Berry argues these changes are seen first and foremost at community and grassroots levels, eventually creating a space where women can claim rights and organize themselves within these traditionally male political spheres. While the common perception of women is as victims of conflict, Berry defends women as decision-making agents becoming politically engaged through mobilization around a similar cause. Like Burnet, she reveals that strong female leaders of the civil sector were pushed to join the government leaving local levels either with minimal leadership and guidance or replacing these powerful women with supporters of the current government (Berry 2016, Brunet 2008). Women's apparent gains can mask deepening gender equality and oppression. One of Berry's prominent conclusions is that while advances have been made, unfortunately, they are not reflective of the conditions most women continue to live in today. Berry offers the concepts of 'patriarchal backlash' (re-emergence of patriarchal norms and violence in daily lives of women in response to their perceived accumulation of power) and 'hierarchy of victimhood' to explain why gains that women have made have not endured or been reversed post-conflict. Before the war women's organizations were some of the only cross-ethnic entities in the country (Berry, 2018). At the end of the war the Tutsi-dominated RPF government was adamant about eliminating the ethnic categories which helped cause the genocidal violence – new laws put in place allowed police to arrest anyone who used ethnic language in public. Though relying heavily on a development plan which entailed 'social engineering,' new forms of social categorization were implemented based on people's experiences during the genocide, what Berry calls 'hierarchies of victimhood.' According to the narrative that the genocide was an attempt to eliminate all Tutsis, the government identified Tutsis as victims of the genocide and it was Tutsis who received a large amount of support post-genocide. For example, female Hutu rape survivors were not offered the same resources as Tutsi

women. In this hierarchy Hutu are deemed perpetrators (Berry, 2018). Jennie Burnet (2012) argues that these actions effectively "amplified [the] silence" of Hutu and Twa victims as it erased their experiences from genocide narrative (110-112). These victimhood hierarchies have deepened divides within ethnic groups, decreasing the ability for women to mobilize between and within ethnic groups and creating fractures in women's organizing (Berry, 2018). International organizations distributed aid on the basis of these hierarchies and as such it was the Tutsi "survivor" organizations who were best positioned to receive funding while non-Tutsi organizations were regarded with suspicion (Berry, 2018). These divisions inhibited mobilization around shared gender interests. This work points to the fact that positioning women in power could be a way of legitimizing democracy in the eyes of international organizations (Berry, 2018). In addition, international aid efforts undermined women's gains as aid was distributed based on the identities of victims as defined by the state (Berry, 2018). Women's organizations were constantly re-organizing programming of institutions due to a created competition for funding from international aid.

Berry is not suggesting that the genocide itself was beneficial for women, however; this conflict has offered women opportunities and exacerbated the need for reforms that otherwise would most likely not have become part of the Rwandan narrative until later. Her work provides a framework for understanding how war can catalyze the mobilization of women, yet, cautions against seeing this as progress towards gender equitable futures.

These two works situate Rwandan women and their roles pre- and post-genocide. They offer detailed accounts of how these roles have seemingly changed but also remained unchanged overtime. From their findings, it is evident that women's mobilization was a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained by one factor alone. The work done by Berry and Burnet will serves as a

backbone from which I explore ways women address societal issues, the impact of international organizations on female participation in reconstruction, and mobilization around womanhood post-conflict.

Neo-Liberalism

The concept of neoliberalism emerged as an ideological and philosophical movement based loosely around free-market capitalism (Munck, 2005) Neoliberalism revolves around the assumption that the government works against 'efficiency and liberty;' as such roll-back policies which reduce state intervention allow for the creation of markets that can nurture individual freedom (Hayek 1976, Munck 2005). Thus, neoliberalism essentially "disable[s] the state from interfering with the established order of society" (Munck 2005). Besides decreased government intervention neoliberalism supports financial and labor market deregulation, privatization of the economy, property rights, competition in the public services, and liberalization of trade (Munck 2005). While the concept was first introduced and gained backing in the early to late 1930s under Hayek and The Mont Pèlerin Society, it is most commonly associated with the policies of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan throughout the late 1970s and 1980s (Peck and Tickell 1994, Ganti 2014). This ideology opposed the Keynesian consensus and state-centered planning, which had lasted from the ending of WWII to late 1970s (Ganti, 2014). To this day, neoliberalism "remains a major ideology that is poorly understood but curiously draws some of its prodigious strength from that obscurity" (Ganti, 2014). The push towards global neoliberalism ideals parallels a large surge in the creation and presence of non-governmental organizations worldwide in the 80s/90s.

Neoliberalism and NGOs in the Global South

Neoliberalism has been invoked to explain a large variety of specific political and socioeconomic measures across the globe, such as cutbacks to welfare in the U.S., post-socialism in Europe and Asia, or structural adjustment programs in the Global South (Ganti, 2014). For the purpose of this study, the focus will be mainly on the latter. The first stages of global neoliberalism promoted the 'roll back' of the state, the consolidation of free markets, and deregulation of the labor market (Munck, 2005). As a result, NGOs, while promoting western democracy as an agent of change, could still bypass governments and channel funding into local communities (Veltmeyer and Petras, 2005).

In African development, neoliberalism came into play as a push to decrease or fully remove the state from the economy (Harrison 2005, Naim 2000). At the time of this surge, many African nations were transitioning into independence and pursuing growth and equality at an international level for their nations (Englebert 2011, Losch 1990). Policies of neoliberalism were imposed on much of the world through the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Aid policies and loans as well as sponsored structural adjustment programs (SAPs) imposed neoliberal policies onto developing nations (Hanson and Hentz 1999, Harrison 2005). All of these policies (i.e. liberalization of markets, tax reform, less state intervention) were promoted as mechanisms for long-term growth and were an attempt to correct the socioeconomic development policies which had previously devastated these nations. Nonetheless, these attempts are actually viewed as having caused a weakening to the direct control of African states (Munck 2005). Little concern was paid to the social and cultural features of African countries, ignoring ways in which "prices, preferences, and other aspects of social life are shaped by the past" (Harrison 2013, Harrison 2005, Munck 2005). Furthermore, in Latin America

and Sub-Saharan Africa the implementation of neoliberal reforms are often correlated with underdevelopment: an ever-so-growing decline of socioeconomic conditions, a widening of inequality between the wealthy and poor, increased social turmoil, peaks in unemployment, and unaffordable social services (Veltmeyer and Petras 2005, Munck 2005). More specifically, the African debt crisis has worsened during this era of globalization. These results reveal a failure to recognize, engage, and understand fully the social and historical processes and relations which brought on these development issues in the first place (Veltmeyer and Petras 2005).  The effects of neoliberalism in the Global South have been detrimental. While the work and agendas of NGOs should not be generalized, the efforts of NGOs should be considered in relation to the neoliberal concepts of aid and reform.

Neoliberalism and 'NGOization'

According to Arundhati Roy, NGOs hold a colonial attitude and lack in the ability to understand local communities. She describes NGOs as being an 'indicator species,'

> "The greater the devastation caused by neoliberalism, the greater the outbreak of NGOs. Nothing illustrates this more poignantly than the phenomenon of preparing to invade a country while simultaneously readying NGOs to clean up the resultant devastation (Roy 2004)."

This study will analyze NGOs through their relation to neoliberalism and development interventions in the Global South. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were first defined as such in the charter of the newly created United Nations in 1945. Generally, NGOs are regarded as non-profit, independent organizations which act independently of governmental authority. The proliferation of NGOs in the 20th century is serving to reinforce growing globalization, with more aid being channeled through NGOs than through the WB and IMF (Ganti, 2014). As neoliberalism

has and continues to enter the Global South through structural adjustment programs and free market reform imposed by the West, the presence of NGOs increases to fill the gaps in services to the public sector once (or never provided) by the government after the 'roll backs' (Choudry and Kapoor, 2013). Today there is much debate as to the roles of NGOs in development and democratization.

The ideas presented in the following works provide a general understanding of how NGOs have been complicit in neoliberal policies and western notions of democracy. The limitations of NGOs, co-opted by neoliberalism within the global south, are revealed in relation to how they "maintain systematic inequalities and reinforce unequal development" (Fisher, 1997).

Choudry and Kapoor (2013) focuses on the negative effects of NGOs in the transformation of state and the economy, while arguing for a solution to these issues through the realignment of NGO work with the state and private sector. In doing so, this would address the struggle between capitalism and the interests of the common people (Choudry and Kapoor, 2013). While NGOs are usually perceived as institutions through which every social issue should be addressed, Choudry and Kapoor (2013) argue that NGOs stall the process of 'authentic democratization.' Through the professionalization of the individual, de-politicization, and the privatization of local organizations, NGOs seemingly build and support civil society. There are many debates regarding the definition of civil society – here it will be regarded as general term for people and organizations which is separate from the state but interacts with it from a distance. Transformations of the civil society can lead to transformations of the state (Fisher, 1997). The civil society promotes democracy through activism of general society, its transformations can lead to transformation of the state, provides a voice to those often less heard, and creates power and opportunities at the local levels (Fisher

1997). At the same time, actions of NGOs 'undermine social movements', enforcing instead economic and foreign global neoliberal agenda policies (Choudry and Kapoor, 2013). Since NGOs are typically financed through development aid agencies, Western nations, the UN, and/or the World Bank, the agendas of these more powerful do have a large influence on NGOs (Choudry and Kapoor, 2013). With the boom of NGOs in the late 80s/early 90s competition developed for funding and those who succeeded were those who met the agendas of their funders or who did not challenge their views and goals (Fisher,1997). In addition, due to funding constraints, NGOs cannot provide equal amounts of resources as compared to the cut in public spending (Choudry and Kappor, 2013).

Roy reveals that in India, structural adjustment meant the state withdrew funding from development initiatives in more rural regions and as such NGOs were seemingly filling the vacuum created by the retreating state (Roy, 2016). However, in the long run they deepened the divide between the government and the public and were more loyal to their funders than those that they work with (Roy, 2016). Furthermore, she argues that NGOs can be regarded as "reaffirming racist stereotypes and achievements" and can project themselves as "missionaries of the modern world (Roy, 2016)." Roy claims that at the at the local levels funds available to NGOs to provide support to organizations and employ people are interfering with "[local] movements that have traditionally been self- reliant" and those who may have been activist in resistance movements against societal and governmental issues (Roy 2016, Ganti 2014). Ganti further argues that NGOs are deeply connected to the transformation of the state (Ganti 2014). NGOs are challenging the governance capacity in the Global south by 'weakening their sense of social contracts' at different levels of society while also creating a divide between elites and subalterns hindering local political participation (Ganti, 2014). Although Sharma (2008) argues that NGO and state partnered development interventions may "de-radicalize empowerment, depoliticize inequality, and reproduce

power hierarchies," they can "lead to subaltern political activism centered on questions of redistribution and social justice" (Ganti 2014).

Fisher (1997) argues that NGOs are supported by official development agencies, heavily based on the values of neoliberal economics and liberal democratic theories and are the new alternative to previous development discourses and practices. Fisher sees NGOs as doing one of the three key things necessary for the success of neoliberal policies: providing training and skills that allow individuals to compete in markets, providing access to welfare for those who have been marginalized by the market, and contributing to so-called democratization and growth of the civil society (Fisher, 1997). Although NGOs have emerged where state-directed change has failed or faces limitations (mainly due to SAPs/reform), they act as alternatives to the state by facilitating "ideological autonomy form the state, political parties, and development at the local level" (Fisher 1997). Fisher (1997) promotes the idea that while NGO and developmental policies assume that democratization is a byproduct of development, democratization and development efforts may be contradictory (Fisher, 1997). It is important to note that all of these works are careful not to draw conclusions about all NGOs, remaining adamant in reminding their readers that NGOs are incredibly diverse (Fisher 1997, Ganti 2014).

This section was meant to address how as neoliberalism takes hold in nations through SAPs, a decline in government participation in the public sector, and the subsequent proliferation of NGOs. In post-genocide Rwanda, NGOs and neoliberalism will be analyzed as possible solutions to reconstruction, reconciliation, and democratization. More specifically, these concepts will be used to further understand the proliferation of grassroots organizations led by women and whether or not these organizations created new roles and opportunities for them.

**Part I**

***Pre-colonialism: The Nyiginya kingdom and Queens mothers***

During the period of the Rwandan Nyiginya kingdom, lasting from the second half of the 17th century to Rwanda's colonization, oral and written documentation provides evidence that women were important sources of power, especially in their roles as, *umugabekazi*, or queen mothers (Watkins 2014, Vansina 2005, Berry 2018).

Generally, in precolonial and early colonial times, women shared complementary roles to men in the household and society (Berry, 2018). It was common to live in large agricultural based families and as a result dividing up the roles within the family based on gender and age was important in ensuring the efficiency and ability of the family to survive (Burnet, 2012). With women and man being both vital to the stability of the shared environment, there was little to no competition in their roles (Nyrirasafari, 1974). Within the household, men took care of building homes, cutting trees, hunting as well as all aspects related to public life and space (Nyrirasafari, 1974). Women were typically caretakers of the household and children, however; additionally, they were involved in physically demanding work such as farming, planting, and harvesting (Berry 2018, Nyrirasafrai 1974). They were seen as the economic, spiritual, and moral center of the 'urugo' (the household comprising husband, wife, and children) (Burnet, 2012). Most 'elite' women at the time did not perform these laborious jobs. While women were the essential producers of the household, they held no property or inheritance rights and had no rights to excess resources that they may have produced (Berry 2018, Vansina 2004). In addition, a woman's social identity and rights to land were derived from the men to whom they were related, may that be a husband, father, or brother (Burnet 2012, Vansina 2004). Patrilineages were a fundamental element of Rwandan precolonial society and as such a woman's membership of a lineage defined how she was regarded in the social sphere (Burnet 2012). Young women did have the ability to create an alliance and

bring bride wealth to her new family which gave them some freedom of action (Vansina, 2005).
Though once wed, these women remained subordinate to other women in the household until they
bore children or had their own home built (Vansina, 2004).  Some women became famous
magicians or healers, and in rare occasions prophets (Vansina, 2004). Vansina argues that at this
time women held a more equal position in society in relation to men with regards to living standards
and social classes than they would later on (Vansina, 2004). While women are always pivotal to
society moving forward it will be necessary to note that there are openings which provide more
space for women in the political realm and closures regarding which women – particularly the elite
and educated, could become involved in higher levels of society.

A women's power in society had multiple possible origins. Social power was determined by
age and gender as well as productive and reproductive abilities (Vansina 2004, Burnet 2012).
Extreme examples of this establishment of power are women of the Bega clan who held land rights
in their own lineages and the queen mothers who not only held power over their sons but were key
actors in the kingdom (Berry 2018, Burnet 2012). The case of queen mother is peculiar because of
course this position was reserved for a woman who had become a part of the royal family, she was
already of elite status. However, it does shed light on how some women were able to move up in
ranks to become some of the most powerful figures in the Rwandan kingdom at the time.

From the time in which the kingdom still existed, from the pre-colonial period to 1961 when
the last king was deposed, the term 'elite' and in this context 'elite woman/female' in this work will
be used to refer to women of higher standing social lineages – for example a queen or a woman
born into a powerful lineage. 'Non-elite' thus will be in reference to all other women in society.
These denotations shift towards the end of the colonial period and again, once independence was
gained – after educational institutions were put in place for women to take part in.  Instead, post-
independence these two groups will be referred to as an educated group and a non-educated group.

'Educated woman' refers to women who have attended school past primary or even secondary institutions whereas 'non-educated woman' refers to those not having had this privilege. 'Non-educated' is in no way meant to diminish the role of these women in society. Education here is standing in as a proxy for income and while also accounting for the enduring importance of lineage after the monarchy was dismantled.

In general, the role of queen was not a passive one and as we will see, the role of queen mother brought with its great influence and prestige within the kingdom and society. Becoming *umwamikaz*i or, queen, was greatly influenced by a woman's status and lineage *(*Watkins, 2014*)*. In general, the queen(s) (usually a *mwami*, the ruling king would have more than one queen in his court) served as administrators, judges, and regular contributors to the monarchy (Watkins, 2014). Some queens were recognized for setting up their own factions of advisors and clients while controlling armies and cattle herd. Under a queen's rule, her own family gained the ability to influence the *mwami,* the ruling king, and the court (Watkins, 2014). For the queen, producing a son or sons was significant, as one could be chosen as heir to the king (Des Forges, 2014). When her son eventually would take the throne, the queen would become queen mother (Des Forges, 2014). A queen mother worked alongside her son, as the co-ruler, holding the highest official position of authority open to a woman at the time, a position seen as a foundation of the kingdom's court (Des Forges, 2014). The power that a queen mother held was independent of that of the king and in some regards equal (Vansina 2005). In general, the queen mother's political role was regarded with respect to her management of the court and the royal household (Watkins, 2017). Though the king ultimately held the power over the monarchy as head of the ruling lineage, it was the queens who perpetuated or manipulated the existence of the ruling lineage as it is them who birthed sons with potential to become king (Watkins, 2014).

*Nyiramongi becomes a queen*

Queen Nyiramongi (r.1847-1867) wife of king Gahindiro, became queen mother, when her biological son Rwogera became Gahindiro's heir to the throne (Watkins, 2017). Recognizing the power of feminine agency early on, Nyiramongi found her way into the position of queen mother as she advocated for herself, her family lineage, and for her son to become the heir to the throne (Watkins, 2017). As queen, Nyiramongi had a fair amount of prestige because of her lineage in the Ega clan which related her to the king's mother and co-regent, Umugabekazi Nyiratunga (r.1801-1820), another queen mother, and Nyiramongi's cousin (Watkins, 2017). It is possible that this connection impacted Gahindiro's final decision to make Nyiramongi one of his queens and eventually the queen mother (Watkins, 2017). In addition to her already powerful lineage, once Nyiramongi became queen she could offer the king stability through her reproductive ability to bear an heir to the throne (Watkins, 2014).

*Nyiramongi and her akazu*

In order to maintain for queens and queen mothers to maintain their power, they utilized relationships powerful men. Nyiramongi's political network, or *akazu* grew into a powerful political and military network that would prevail over those who wanted to claim her power (Watkins, 2014). *Akazu* means "little house" in Kinyarwanda and the term is mostly associated with the group of radicals and militants loyal to the First Lady Agathe Habyarimana implicated in the 1994 genocide (Berry, 2018). While well known for her *akazu*, Habyarimana was evidentially not the first woman to build such a powerful system, ruling over groups of mainly men. Nyiramongi *akazu* was built through a system of patronage: she provided cows as gifts in exchange for loyalty and servitude (Watkins, 2017). While normally done by the queen mother, Nyiramongi did this during her time as queen increasing her family's influence and weakening political rivals through the

creation of two armies and cattle herds for her brother and herself to command (Watkins, 2017).

Her brother, Rwakagara, would become her advisor within the court. While Nyiramongi had power

in her role as queen her position was greatly elevated by the power of chiefs who would join her

faction (Watkins 2014, 2017). Taking advantage of these relationships she would be able to take

down or remove all those who posed a threat to her. When her son was of age to officially take the

throne, she did not step into the background. Instead, with most of her enemies out of the way, she

set out to stabilize the power of her *akazu,* bringing her into conflict with her own son (Watkins,

2014).

  Nyiramongi's reign reveals the importance of gender and lineage during this time of

Rwanda's monarchy. Though attempts at her life were made, even by her own son, Nyiramongi

remained an effective leader. The institutional power that she gained as queen mother in addition to

her own personal power reveals a portrait of elite women as political actors during this time. Her

actions bring into view how society and development functioned at the time in Rwandan history.

Nyiramongi along with queen mother Nyirauhi Kanjogera (r.1895-1931) disprove a belief that

women could not have their own power within a largely male dominated society.


### Nyirauhi Kanjogera and the 'Coup d'État de Rucunshu'

  The position of queen mother was originally established to solidify the power of the

Nyiginya clan, however; overtime it became a mechanism by which rival lineages could challenge

and, in some cases, overpower the ruling lineage (Watkins, 2014). Marriage to the king formed an

alliance through which the queen's own lineages could establish a sense of power in the royal court

(Des Forges, 2014). Kanjogera, who ruled as queen mother from 1895 to 1931, is most famously

remembered for her role, alongside her brothers, Kabare and Ruhinankiko, in the planning and

killing of the heir to the throne, known as the 'Coup d'État de Rucunshu,' installing the Abakagara

lineage of the Ega as the ruling power of the Rwandan monarchy (Twagilimana, 2016, Buscaglia 2012). No other elite had successfully overthrown the reigning king, as she did, and as noted she was not alone in doing so. King Rwabugiri's heir did not have a mother and as such Kanjogera was chosen as adopted queen mother – that she was a member of the Bega clan and he named a woman who had a son who could potentially rule over the kingdom (Forges, 2014). And Kanjogera wanted just that. She began scheming with her brothers even before the king Rutarindwa would take the throne to put her son, Musinga, in power (Des Forges, 2014). By 1895 there was already a European presence in Rwanda and though relatively suspicious of them, Kanjogera used her access to them to start taking down Rutarindwa (Watkins, 2014). By 1896 most of Rutarindwa support was eliminated by and he would commit suicide. As queen mother, Kanjogera was positioned politically to ensure that her son Musinga became the next king (Twagilimana 2016, Des Forges 2014). Musinga was 12 years old when he became king and thus all decisions were made by Kanjogera and her brothers (Watkins, 2014). Together they would personally deal with those who opposed her and her son's illegitimate transfer of power (Des Forges, 2014).

### The King and Kanjogera disagree

With a fear of threat to her own power always lingering, Kanjogera was aware that she needed to strongly and closely control her son (Watkins, 2014). It was widely accepted that the king's actions and decisions in the royal court were those of his mother and Kabare, who became his mother's closest advisor (Des Forges, 2014). Musinga was unable to publicly oppose his mother often deferring to her in situations (Des Forges, 2014). Although Musinga could technically not rule without his mother in position as queen mother he would attempt to limit her influence through attempts at establishing relations with Europeans (Des Forges, 2014). However, as long as Kanjogera and her brother retained support from the most influential and wealthy in the kingdom,

this would prove to be difficult (Des Forges, 2014). She relied heavily on her position as queen mother to threaten and execute all who posed a threat in order to insure obedience. Furthermore, her position allowed her to create relations that would impact the trajectory of Rwandan history for years to come. She used her power to create an alliance between the Nyiginya royal court and the Germans. In addition, she accepted the Roman Catholic missionaries within Rwanda to set up churches and schools (Des Forges, 2014). Ironically, she ultimately gave colonizers great access to the Rwandan society and allowed for the colonial administration in Rwanda to begin dismantling the Rwandan monarchy.

It is important to link these powerful women to their history to better understand how they functioned within it and extend those insights towards creating an understanding of women in power at the present time. Elite women were important actors and played a role in state-building of the Nyginya Kingdom. Later on, we will see that generally this trend continues as some elite women become protagonists in Rwandan state-building post-genocide. In, addition while these women did have great forms of power throughout the kingdom and were the ones who made important decisions, their positions and prestige were achieved in accordance with their relation to powerful men (Berry, 2018). These accounts do not relate the queen or queen mother to relationships with the general society outside the court. Thus, no conclusions can be drawn as to how elite women in positions of immense power may have influenced opportunities for non-elite women. Nonetheless, this joint ruler-ship, of son and mother would prove to wield great amounts of power for few elite women in the Rwandan kingdom.

### *European influence on gender roles : Les Foyers Sociaux*

Colonialism had a great impact on the Rwandan society, notably on Hutu and Tutsi

relations, but also on the perception of women in Rwanda, continuing into post-colonial times. The

region would become the object of much rivalry between Europeans as a result of the Berlin

Compromise in 1885 and the subsequent scramble for Africa (Rumiya 1992, Lugan 2009).

Eventually, German occupation of Ruanda – Urundi (under the Belgians Rwanda and Burundi were

known as one territory of Ruanda – Urundi) was acknowledged by the Reich government in 1898

(Lugan, 2009). Early on, German occupation and supremacy was symbolic as the king, queen

mother, and chiefs (of the Nyiginya Kingdom) continued to have power over their lands and the

civilians within them (Lugan, 2009). With the end of World War I, German occupation ended.

Ruanda along with Urundi, considered as a "mandate B" colonies, were to be directly administered

by the Belgians (Lugan 2009, Rumiya 1992). Most notably the strong kingship of Rwanda would

come to be dismantled under European influence (Chrétien and Straus, 2006). By 1931, Belgian

officials had unseated Musinga, Kanjogera's son, and replaced him with his eighteen-year-old son,

Rudahigwa (Dorsey, 1994). In order for the colony to compliment and provide needed resources for

the Belgians own society, great attention was put on economic and social development (Dorsey,

1994). Belgians refinement of society through manipulations of traditional culture and norms was

present early on and would continue to occur throughout occupation. An example of this is the

prioritization of the Tutsi population to create and "elite," a "hierarchy between the colonized,"

which once established would dismantle fluid social identities and lead to more rigid categories of

Hutu and Tutsi (Berry, 2018). A hierarchy was even created in gender between women, an already

underrepresented group by colonial standards (Hunt, 1990).

*Création des foyers sociaux*

The first *foyers sociaux* were established in the Belgium Congo in 1926 (Hunt, 1990). The foyers were "a new colonial institution, where monogamy, authority of the male, and western notions of women as the base of the family, would be practiced," created to implement the nuclear family model (Hunt, 1990). It served as a space to domesticate woman of African societies, modeled off the European, white women (Buscaglia, 2012). In the late 40s/early 50s the Belgians were interested in increasing the status of women through programs of "female promotion" (Buscaglia, 2012). While in most colonies of Europeans domestic education of women was promoted, the Belgian *foyers sociaux* was unique, placing much of its attention on the wives of urban elite or *évolués* (Hunt 1990). Missionaries created the first *foyer social* in Usumbura in 1946, aimed at the Catholic *évolués* (Perraudin, 1963). Later on, two others would be established in Astrida (name changed to Butare after independence) and Nyundo in 1949 and 1952 respectively (Buscaglia, 2012). Wives of men were to be of equal 'evolué' status, with domestic educations that could parallel their husbands (Hun, 1990). The foyers, while seemingly implemented to promote women involvement, were merely extending the standing of their male counterparts. By 1948 the *foyers sociaux* became part of the state mission as missionaries were replaced by social workers to create an educational welfare program (Perraudin, 1963). State sponsored foyers would bring opportunities for "non-elite" women to participate in the foyers (Hunt, 1990). However, the foyers were set up in a hierarchy, offering lower level courses that most women could participate in and higher-level courses reserved for a small minority of 'the most gifted women' (Hunt 1990, Gilberte De Clerq, 1961).

Though the foyers were promoted as a strategy to improve the life of women and girls, setting them free from a hindering traditional culture, it also encouraged hierarchies "amongst women, among African, among man and women, and between white colonials and Africans"

(Buscaglia 2012, Hunt 1990). Women began in the *course de masse* (course of the masses), a basic course where they learned western skills like sewing, knitting and the occasional instruction on personal hygiene (Hunt 1990, Ministère des Colonies 1952). A small group of the best students would have a chance to continue into a housekeeping course where they were being formed into "true ladies of the house" being taught gardening skills, familial hygiene, child rearing, and familial education (Hunt, 1990). The highest formal training women could receive, if deemed 'gifted', was becoming a *foyer social* monitor, allowing these women to become assistants of the European social workers. Candidates had to be married and had to have permission from their spouse (Hunt, 1990). Classes at this level taught writing skills, etiquette, child care, first aid, professional ethics, and home economics (Hunt, 1990). Once a woman completed this course they were eligible to apply for a *carte du mérite civique* (social merit card), typically reserved for the most 'évolué' men, seen as a separate class from all others by colonial standards ('Carte de mérite civique', 1948). Women who made it to higher ranking courses had greater access to colonial privilege and were more successful in attaining jobs with higher incomes – creating women of *évolué* or *non-évolué* status (Dickerman, 1984). While seemingly moving up in rank through the hierarchal nature of the courses offered, women remained submissive to their European counterparts (Hunt, 1990).

The colonial government promoted the foyers for all women. However, a key aspect which should be analyzed is the placement of these foyers. One in particular was in Astrida – at the time the center of the kingdom. Works documenting the effects of religion and colonialism in Rwanda establish that Tutsi elite were concentrated in central regions of the state whereas the non-elite and Hutu reside in the peripheries (Newbury 1989, Longman 2009). Though not necessarily specified, knowing that the colonial government promoted the Tutsi population, at least this one institution targeted a population already regarded as elite in society and more evolved or of proper standing by colonists. Thought the colonial administration was seemingly promoting and bettering women's

lives in society, by targeting on an already elite, with access to these institutions it would not affect the hierarchy of society. Additionally, the participation of the Tutsi women in these institutions could be regarded as them choosing to reproduce their elite status by appropriating and distinguishing themselves from the masses. It is necessary to understand that many women chose not to involve themselves in the *foyers sociaux* as it was not something required of women in society. Furthermore, not all women had the access to these institutions as they were geographically inaccessible – a 'privilege' for those who could attend.

It was shortly after the implementation of the *foyers sociaux* that one of the first schools, L'école Sociale de Karubanda, was founded to educate young women in social work in order to compete with their male counterpart "from a professional, personal, familial, and social point of view" (Buscaglia, 2012). A select few women would be given the opportunity to attend and receive an education in schools set up by the colonial administration (Hunt, 1990). Well known female political figures under President Habyarimana; Agathe Habyarimana, Pauline Nyiramasuhiko, and Agathe Uwilingiyimana, would study or work in these schools (Buscaglia, 2012). These women who did get the chance to attend the foyers and schools enforced the dynamic of elite and educated women being bolstered in to higher positions within the society.

In the late 1950s, a group of Hutu extremists led a rebellion November 1, 1959 bringing Hutu control to Rwanda after decades of ruling by the monarchy and Tutsi elite (Straus 2008). Independence was declared in 1962 with the presidency of Grégoire Kayibanda (Dorsey, 1994). Many Tutsis would be expelled from the country with a large diaspora into the Congo, Uganda, and other neighboring countries. The impact this change had on women in society – the exclusion of Tutsi women from society (which most likely occurred in colonial institutions like the Foyers Sociaux and schools), and, the following bolstering of elite Hutu women are acknowledge here; but,

will not be discussed in this work. A group of women who were once underrepresented and promoted would become promoted within societal and colonial establishments.

### Rwandan Independence

Independence, has affected women's societal position in Rwanda – not only from an ethnic standpoint. The 1961 constitution and those following would provide a structure that guaranteed equality of all people before law (Straus, 2013). Though men and women were considered "legally equal," the men were deemed the natural head of the family (Art. 30, 1961 Constitution) and only men were legally allowed to run as president (Art. 54, 1961 Constitution). More changes followed with the 1978 and 1991 constitution; family was no longer defined as "man, women, and children," and the man was no longer the head of the family. Nevertheless, the national framework continued to subordinate women to men in the home and public spheres. In general, independence did not bring about much mobility for women still perceived as "minors under the guardianship of fathers, brothers, husbands or sons" (Burnet 2012, Turshen, Meredeth 2001).

### Two women on a path to success

Agathe Uwilingiyimana and Agathe Habyarimana are two educated women who have had immensely powerful roles within society in the 1990s. The two were active at the Karubanda school, both played roles in the early moments of the genocide and both connected through governmental appointment and marriage to Juvénal Habyarimana, respectively. It was partly their access to education that would lead them to their high positions within the Rwandan government at the start of the genocide; one being involved in starting the genocide, the other losing her life trying to fight it. Their stories describe how educated women could hold power in Rwanda pre-genocide.

Agathe Uwilingiyimana was born in 1953, at a time when Rwanda was still under the control of the Belgians and the kingship was being torn apart (FAWE, 2002). A Tutsi, she was born in the town of Nyaruhengeri to peasant farmers (Volcansek, 1996). She attended Gikore Central Catholic School for primary school and was admitted to Notre Dame de Cîteaux High School, in Kigali, where she studied math and chemistry (Volcansek, 1996). Uwilingiyimana was adamant in urging her fellow classmates to not give in to ethnic hatred which she personally rejected (FAWE, 2002). From early on in her life and career it was evident that she went against the norms of society. She would obtain a Certificate of Teaching Humanities from the National Teacher Training Institute – based in educational traditions of the Belgian colonial system (FAWE, 2002).

In 1976 she left to teach mathematics at L'école Sociale de Karubanda in Butare. Aside her job responsibilities, she was still required to take care of the home, her family, her parents and her in-laws. After receiving a BS in chemistry and becoming a teacher at the Butare Official Academic Schools she became the director of the small and medium sized industries in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Cottage Industries (Volcansek, 1996). She was one of the only female senior officers in the Ministry at the time (FAWE, 2002).  She then moved on to a position as Minister for Primary and Secondary education. Much of the choices she made were criticized, including her decision to denounce a system allocated seats in public schools based on ethnicity and rather published lists exclusively based on merit providing opportunities to children of any ethnicity. She encouraged young women to pursue science and appointed women as heads of school sectors, both notably reserved for men (FAWE, 2002).

Uwilingiyimana's political career, as prime minster, came at one of the most crucial times in Rwandan history (Volcansek, 1996). Her appointment as Prime Minister in July 1993 put her in place to facilitate the negotiations between the Hutu government and the Tutsi dominated RPF (rebel movement) (Straus, 2008). After the president was killed on April 6, 1994, Uwilingiyimana

held a meeting publicly opposing the president stating that his attitude was not worthy of Head of State. At this point she was already the target of extremists who did not support her pro Rwandan stances and actions. The presidential guard would kill her and her husband on April 7, 1994 at the start of the genocide (Volcansek, 1996). Her death so soon after the president have led some to believe that this was a planned coup by the presidential guard and within 24 hours the genocide began (Straus 2013, Volcansek, 1996).

Agathe Kanziga Habyarimana was the wife of President Juvénal Habyarimana. She has been regarded as the real power behind the presidential office – coming from an elite Hutu clan from the north of the Rwanda who ruled an independent principality into the late 19th century (Twagilimana, 2016). She attended high school at the Ecole Sociale de Karubanda. She is best remembered for her central role in the start of the Rwandan genocide, having a significant political power as a first (Wyk, 2017). Similar to queen mothers, she had the ability to shape and affect decisions through the traditional akazu which consisted of her husband, close relatives, and influential Hutu extremists – sometimes referred to as "Le clan de Madame" (the First lady's clique) (Wyk, 2017). Agathe frequented "The Network Zero", a group of individuals considered planners of the genocide. In addition, Kanziga was an avid supporter of extremist media organizations like the RTLM radio and Kangura newspaper which published propaganda attacking the Tutsi population and promoting ideas of genocide (McGreal, 2010). After the death of her husband she appointed a new army chief of staff who held strong anti-Tutsi views. Soon after she was flown to France and eventually arrested for her involvement in the genocide by French authorities in March of 2010 (McGreal, 2010).

It is evident that there are similarities between the elite women of the Nyiginya kingdom and the educated women of pre-genocide Rwanda. These women were able to maneuver themselves into positions of authority where they could make decisions and be political actors in society. The queen mothers were involved in the politics of the Nyiginya kingdom and Uwilingiyimana and Kanziga in the politics of the government. Although all these women did have powerful men standing by their sides as kings, sons, advisors, brothers, and president, these women did not stand in the background. These roles remain open for women in society today as more doors have continued to open.

There has been a shift in how women are holding power and entering the political realm. If politics can be considered as "all behaviors," and civil society as actors in the general society, this allows for flexibility and a broad understanding of what can be regarded as a political mobilization and organization. In this work these definitions will be extended to institutions of non-governmental organizations, grassroots organizations, and community-based organizations started and lead by women in Rwanda. These organizations speak to a shift in how women in politics and their power can be perceived such that there is much less of a reliance on a male counterpart to be successful. Part II of thesis will venture to understand how present-day Rwanda is creating space more women in society and politics.

**Part II:**

*Demographics and the genocide*

To understand gender in Rwanda today it is important to understand the timeline of events which occurred up to the genocide and thereafter, while also evaluating the countries changing demographics. Historically, gender roles positioned men as the protectors of the family and as such it wasn't unusual that many of those who ended up participating in the genocide and those who

would be killed during the genocide were men (Mwambari, 2017). Women thus were found less on the front of the fighting bearing the weight of having to continue on with life and the roles males would previously have taken on. Ninety percent of Tutsi women that survived the genocide are recorded to have been molested in some way (Weitsman, 2008). Rape was used as a conscious systematic strategy to intimidate, degrade, and humiliate women, girls, and other civilians as an act of genocide – "[terrorizing] the community and warn all people of futility of resistance…those targeted as victims as well as those who might wish to protect the intended targets." (Turshen 2001, Sharlach 2000, Burnet 2012). The attack of Tutsis in Rwanda evidently had a gendered component to it. In addition to the targeted rapes, propaganda leading up to the killings during the genocide were directed towards Tutsi women specifically (Weitsman 2008). Gender and ethnicity became a large component of the targeting and rape of Tutsi women. Interventions led by the government and outside organizations focused mostly on Tutsi victims or widows and not those who might not fit the dominant assumed identity of victim (Hutu female, male) (Burnet 2012).

During the genocide while women were a majority of the victims suffering from the gender-based violence, women also participated in the violence. In 1997 there were around 5,000 women (mostly Hutu) serving sentences for acts of violence during the genocide, comprising around 5% of the prison population (Berry, 2018). Most were and are serving time for aiding male perpetrators – however some directly participated in the killings and some were seen as equal to high ranking males; amongst those were Agnès Ntamabyariro, Agathe Habyarimana, and Valérie Bemeriki to name a few.

While these women are regarded today as perpetrators of genocide we cannot dismiss the fact that they had enough power and were in positions to control the masses and spread genocide mentality and also cannot disregard their relations to influential men at the time. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is an example of this. At the time of the genocide Nyiramasuhuko held a position

within the interim government lead by prime minister Jean Kambanda, appointed April 8, 1994,

after the death of Habyarimana, as the Minister of Family and Women's development. She was well

positioned within the government to play an influential role in the proceedings of the genocide.

Nyiramasuhuko was highly involved as minister in the beginnings of violence with the MRND

dismissing those who did not follow her orders in carrying out the genocidal mentality (ICTR,

2011). Most notably, she supported and aided in the subordination of female rape victims during

the genocide, supporting and accompanying militiamen who went to the prefectures to abduct and

rape female Tutsis (ITCR, 2011). Permitting the rape of thousands of women like her and

overseeing the actions of many male perpetrators -- she used her power at a price. June 21, 2011,

she would be the first female convicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda for

seven charges of involvement in the planning and execution of the genocide, including "rape as a

part of a widespread and systematic attack against civilian population" (ICTR 2011, The Daily

Telegraph 2011*).* There were also women who played roles as rescuers in the genocide (Mwambari,

2017). All these women whether they were a part of or supporting the MRND Hutu opposition or

the RPF Tutsi rebels, were using their personal power to carry out the genocide or save those

victims to it.


### *Post-genocide reconstruction and emphasis on gender*

> "The question of gender equality in our society needs a clear and critical evaluation in order
> to come up with concrete strategies to map the future development in which men and
> women are true partners and beneficiaries. My understanding of gender is that it is an issue
> of good governance, good economic management, and respect of human rights" (Kagame,
> 1999, Izabiliza 2005).

After the genocide, an important issue for the RPF government was the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment to ensure sustainable development and peace (Izabiliza, 2005). Reforms would be emphasizing the need to increase the role of females in decision making (Izabiliza 2005, Burnet 2008). The first local elections after the genocide took place in 1999 and the first presidential and legislative elections in 2003 (Longman, 2011). In 2003, the constitution was amended to implement a 30% quota for women decision making positions to ensure that women were not isolated from political life (Burnet 2008, Longman 2011). This same year women gained 49% of the seats in the parliament making this the world's highest representation of female parliamentarians (Burnet, 2008). By 2005, women held 48.85% of seats in parliament (Lacey, 2005). During the 2008 elections, Rwanda elected its first female majority national legislative chamber, the lower house of the national legislature, securing 56.26% of female member, surpassing the reserved 30% seats reserved for women (Burnet, 2008). Two of the women in the national parliament are elected by solely women. By 2013, as many as 64% of the seats in the Rwandan parliament were taken by women and several laws were passed aimed at preventing and punishing gender-based violence with more property rights being granted for women securing their participation in the workforce (Burnet 2008, Berry 2018). Women also working as cabinet members, chief justices of the supreme court, and deputy police chiefs (Lacey, 2005). At more local levels women elect women's councils that operate parallel to local councils (which once did not allow female participation) in order to address women's education, health, and security needs with local authorities. With these reforms taking place, more educated women have been able to increase their participation in national level politics, and the sheer increase in numbers of participation is an incredible feat for a country having to completely rebuild itself after 1994. Although as evident from the work this is not as ordinary as one may perceive it to be since historically this educated population has been able to be been involved in state-making and high-level politics.

Despite changes, the highest positions within the government remain reserved for men. The last two women, Victoire Ingabire and Diane Rwigara who attempted to run against President Kagame ended up in jail (Straus et al 2011, Face2faceAfrica 2017). It is unreasonable to lay blame to their unjust imprisonment on the fact that they were female without recognizing men who oppose or question the government, have also landed in jail or exiled. Repression of any and all opposition is an ordinary action by the current government.

### *Former minister of Health Agnès Binagwaho on Health, NGOs, and Gender*

Women have always been a part of state building in Rwanda and being able to interview with Agnès Binagwaho was pivotal to understanding not only what it is like to be a woman in the government and how gender influences reforms but also about the process of democratization and policy making within Rwanda.  Like other women before her, Binagwaho had an education past secondary school which allowed her to access potions at more national levels. Binagwaho's approach to democratization helps to reveal the approach of the general government to reconstruction and development post-genocide. Remember that neoliberalism was largely promoted in the 80's as a mechanism for longer term growth in African development. Governments as well as NGOs would support neoliberal policies and western notions of democracy in order to gain support from the international community. Many of the policies Binagwaho touches on are neoliberal in nature – promoting less state intervention and monetary reforms, for example the new insurance policy that promotes women, though being juxtaposed by an authoritarian government.

Binagwaho has contributed to the transformation of the Rwandan Health System. Binagwaho is the current Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive of the University of Global Health Equity in Rwanda, which she co-founded. She is also a Professor of Global Health Delivery and a

Professor of Pediatrics at the University. In addition, since 2008 Binagwaho has served as a senior lecturer at Harvard Medical School and is an Adjunct Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at Dartmouth Medical School.

Binagwaho was born in Nyamagabe, Rwanda and moved to Belgium at the age of three with her family. She completed her general medical degree in Belgium and proceeded to receive a master's degree in pediatrics in France. She completed her Ph.D. dissertation entitled "Children's Right to Health in the Context of the HIV epidemic: The Case of Rwanda," at the University of Rwanda. From 2011 to July 2016 she served as Minister of Health of Rwanda under President Kagame. She had prior severed as the Permanent Secretary of the Minister of Health from October 2008 to May 2011 and as the Executive Secretary of Rwanda's National AIDS Control commission from 2002-2008.

As Minister of Health, Binagwaho's overall goal was to secure equal, equitable and affordable access to healthcare for all Rwandans. Before changes could actually be made for this goal to be reached -- as Minister of Health, Binagwaho had to seek the support of the beneficiaries, the civil society, and her colleagues within the government for all proposed health reforms and policies.  To see any of her ideas implemented, her colleagues had to agree that the outcome of what was being proposed had value for all the people in the country. To move forward in her mission, she knew much support was needed, not only from the Rwandan government and the Rwandan people, but also through partnerships outside the country. To further ensure her goals could be met, she cultivated partnerships with extra-national entities, bilateral and multilateral agencies like WHO, UNICEF, the World Banks, or foundations and NGOs: "the country had a good plan, its own plan, a plan that fits the country's history and missions, and everything is ours and you put your partners in that plan." Binagwaho was aware that sustainability was key in order to create a new functioning health system. Though  partnerships were important, if a partner insisted

on propositions not benefitting the initiative, she did not cave in: "you just say no this is the plan, however; some partners want to do things differently but this time it seems like a good decision for all Rwandans so we all come together and we revisit the plan with the Rwandans and include it in our plan so that it is always the national plan that we follow."

With regards to health, Binagwaho believes that, "it doesn't matter if you are poor or rich, though you may have less access to intervention and care, health affects everyone." She argues that not only are there policies and reforms at the national level affecting local levels of society, there are also local groups informing the national policy:

> "Nobody, no policy, no group, no constituency has the monopoly of innovation, knowledge, and goodness, and to make sure that you care about what any group can provide in improving access to health for all you just put everybody around the table."

Rwanda has deeply influenced the world with certain health policies the country put in place through innovations that have proven to be less costly to implement while more equitable and allowing for expansion and access. For example, Rwanda's "Mutuelle de Santé," a community-based health insurance (CBHI), is an insurance plan with a cost of only $5 per capita that is subsidized by the government and gives wide access to primary care -- "women and children across the world are still dying unnecessarily, by improving financial access through affordable healthcare, you can remove this issue." Binagwaho argues that the world has also influenced them in their pursuit of proper health access and equity. New technologies are created every day in all parts of the world that impact how care can be provided in more efficient and affordable ways and doctors like Binagwaho availed herself of these opportunities.

> "No country is a silo. Especially health being based on science and science can be generated all over the world, so you need an open mind of the world to make sure that you bring to your people the best services."

Rwanda is making strides towards closing their health inequality gaps relying on their own novel ideas and practices but also by taking note of what is ongoing around the world.

While working in France, Binagwaho worked largely with vulnerable populations, whom she referred to as "quart monde" (the quarter of the world). There, her work was facilitated by the infrastructure already in place to help these people. Upon returning to Rwanda after the genocide, Binagwaho's drive as a doctor had not diminished, though she would quickly realize that while she wanted to provide the best care that she could to everybody, she was not equipped to face the challenges that lay ahead: "the people in need in number was so huge and the capacity to help them was so little that I was not prepared," "[I had] only my knowledge and knowledge doesn't save when you need surgery or medicine, there was a lack of tools and diagnostic equipment." In France Binagwaho's job was to be the best clinician for those who needed her, now in Rwanda, Binagwaho hoped to create a system that allowed doctors like her to be the best clinicians for their patients. At first, there were some discomfort as Binagwaho was with only a few, working as a pediatrician in hospitals in a country she felt she didn't know, "Binagwaho hoped to create a system that allowed doctors like her to be the best clinicians for their patients."

Binagwaho used the participatory process and provided the example of deciding to create a law to facilitate access to care for handicapped people,

"I am not handicapped so I cannot put myself in the shoes of a handicapped person as I have never faced a problem to reach a health facility, so I better ask the people who face that problem what their problems are and what they believe the solutions are."

The first thing that would need to be done was to connect with local organizations dealing with handicapped people to make sure that the new law answered to the problems these people are seeing first hand and experiencing. The law was to be created by everyone involved from patients and caregivers to law-makers: "we have the idea and we work out the law, we then call them back and say this is what we have produced can you help us to improve it." In addition to working with those that the law pertains to, a variety of sectors had to come together; those in charge of labor, culture, disaster management, to ensure that the law addressed all issues that could arise. "So, when you have the law it is comprehensive; everyone has come to a consensus. We arrive at a compromise and we don't fight at the end." Binagwaho recommends that after 5 years, the initiative may be revised as situations have changed, more people become educated, and the country grows economically. Binagwaho remarked on the flexibility, holistic approach, and "the inclusiveness [of this process] means the locals have as much to say as the national for in the end they are the beneficiaries because the national is working for them."

Binagwaho works with many women at her level, "women [today have] the space and are promoted." She notes that ten to fifteen years ago women were much less educated and competitive on the market, a result of positive discrimination -- the practice or policy of favoring individuals belonging to groups known to have been discriminated against previously, was used to openly promote women. Though this practice no longer occurs as many more women begin to work, Binagwaho believes that there are not enough women leaders at the community levels as there is

still perceived to be a strong sense and tradition of patriarchy. She notes that today, "we have two female community health workers for one male, but how many villages have Chiefs of the village that are women? Chiefs of the villages are regularly elected. Should be 50% at minimum considering how many males and females are in the population", suggesting that this divide is greatly due to constraints that women have all over the world. Most everywhere, it is up to women to handle house work making any job they take on an extra burden to female workers. On the other hand, it is most common for men to only worry about their jobs.

"At the community level, we need to educate men to take a portion of the work of the women inside the house so that they can work more outside the house."

Nowadays, at different levels of society, the patriarchy is less evident. The 2003 constitution set a 30% quota for any gender to be elected for elections to be valid in Rwanda. This has favored women. In 2003 alone around 50% of parliamentary seats were given to women. Today that percentage is at 67.5% according to Binagwaho, a number is "borderline because 70% is the maximum for one of the other genders which is in place to protect men as well."

Binagwaho went further to describe policies created to allow for more gender equity. In the private sector, recognizing that companies were less likely to hire young women fearing they would lose money if these women went on maternity leave, the government put in place a maternity leave insurance. This insurance designed to pay for maternity leave is funded via a 0.003 percent of everyone's taxes allowing the companies to keep their resources and recruit another person during the time without losing money. This promotes the work of young women that are at the age of producing children. The country also promotes a family approach.

"A man today cannot insure himself without also insuring his family - wife and children. Without proactive activities like that biology and the nature of things are against us

[women] in a productive age because our productivity is not valued meaning caring for children and men cannot bear...The issue is much less than other countries… We have made a lot of progress; studies show that this is one of the best places to be a woman…But you need to remember that gender equity is a journey."

Bringing order to Rwanda after the genocide has involved increasing female representation within the government and women like Binagwaho today are pivotal to state development, reconciliation, and reconstruction.

### *Women in political positions at local levels, local organizations*

Up until now this work has attempted to tell the story of Rwandan women and power. As probably noted the stories that have been shared have all identified a specific type of woman. This is not to say that all of these women were the same but that they share similarities: they are women of elite or educated status who through their own fruition were able to become a power at the highest levels of society. These stories of the women who made it to the highest ranks available to women in their time were to be paralleled with those of women at community and local levels. Access to information about women at these levels of society proves difficult without the ability to physically go to Rwanda.  Thus, this section will focus on organizations created and led by women after the genocide. These initiatives reveal an opening for women to hold positions of power leading organizations which empower themselves and their communities. Two points that should be acknowledged are 1) These organizations were created by women acting to ensure their own survival and well-being as well as those of other community members in the process have become pivotal to reconstruction and 2) As of April 2001 all non-profit organizations are to be registered through the government and are tightly controlled, thus, while attempting to steer clear of

government involvement at this level of society and female empowerment, these cannot always be disconnected (Gready, 2010).

Immediately after the genocide women made up approximately 70% of the Rwandan population. This dramatic shift has put great pressure on women to facilitate rebuilding of their society and take on new roles which have altered their labor and familial responsibilities and perceived power (Mwambari 2017, Berry 2018). In some communities the population of women would rise to comprise 80% of a community (Mwambari, 2017). Coordinator of AVEGA, Aurea Kayiganwa stated "Genocide changes … It forced women to get active, to take care of themselves. So many of the men were gone" (Lace, 2005). The changing demographics of the country helps explain why during reconstruction more women's voices have been heard and are regarded as more credible in reconciliation.

Women from a greater range of education and economic backgrounds have started to participate and assume greater roles in society. Women at local levels are working side by side with men; 34% taking on the role of head of the household and performing non-traditional roles such as managing finances, building households and roads, taking care of orphans and homeless children, and leading organizations (Izabiliza 2005, Mwambari 2017). The interests of established organizations active before the genocide and new ones focus largely on women's rights and equality, economic empowerment, and reconciliation efforts (Mwambari 2017, Berry 2018). The birth of women-led cooperatives provided and continue to create spaces through which women's interests and concerns can be communicated (Izabiliza, 2005). Women have created organizations catered for women, widows, and girl survivors in addition to the general female population. Without being able to visit these organization or ask questions about international NGO and national NGO involvement, the next section using websites and news articles will highlight a few organizations, their missions, and current projects.

*Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe (PF/TH):* This organization originally brought together 13 pre-and post-genocide NGOs. It is open to all rural and urban women (Mwambari, 2017). Its goals are to encourage peace, reduce gender discrimination, and promote socioeconomic reconstruction (PF/TH webpage, 2019). It is supported by the United States Agency for International Development, Women in Transition (WIT), and UNHCR's Women's Initiative (RWI) (PF/TH webpage, 2019). This organization has helped increased women's participation in national issues (Mwambari, 2017). It was involved in the creation of a 'National Action Plan' that promotes training to increase general women participation in societal initiatives, with Femme Africa Solidarité and the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) (Mwambari, 2017). It campaigned in support of the 30% gender quota that became a part of the 2003 constitution and helped establish a Gender Monitoring Office with MIGEPROF (PF/TH webpage 2019, Mwambari, 2017). In order to accomplish their goals PF/TH has had to work with the state and thus its own agenda has become largely influenced by that of the state (Mwambari, 2017).

*Duterimbere*: A non-governmental organization to empower women and eradicate poverty. It was founded in 1987 by 29 women and today promotes women entrepreneurship through grass root organizations. The organization has multiple projects which are heavily supported by outside organizations and international NGOs. Mostly in partnership with OxFam, the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, and the German Federal Ministry for Economic cooperation it has set up many different women cooperatives and education in entrepreneurship and financial literacy (Duterimbere webpage, 2019).

*Association des Veuves du Génocide Agahozo (AVEGA Agahozo):* AVEGA was established in 1995 by 50 genocide widows (AVEGA, 2019). It provides medical and psycho-social care through three

established Health Centers, and through training they provide socio-economic development of widows and dependents (AVEGA webpage, 2019). Additionally, it provides access to legal representation and advice if needed (AVEGA webpage, 2019). AVEGA played a role in drafting the amendment to the genocide law to recognize all crimes of sexual violence as Category One (highest offense) crimes (Gruber Yale, 2011). It also lobbied in parliament for the passing of a law providing widows with access to their husbands' land and property (Gruber Yale, 2011). One of AVEGA's current project aims to provide members with access to livestock. Another project attempts to teach members to read and write. Their third project aims at bettering the environment through collection of rain water and rebuilding forests (AVEGA webpage, 2019). There is no mention on their website of governmental or international entities that this organization partners with for its projects.

There are hundreds more of organizations like the ones mentioned above focused on supporting Rwandan women socially, economically, and psychologically. Many do receive support from the government and international organizations. Due to the monitoring mechanisms of the government those who follow in line with the government, aligning themselves with its agenda benefit the most from support (Gready, 2010). Some organizations have come under complete control as government members take on highest jobs available within NGOs (Gready, 2010). With the sheer number of organizations that have been created after the genocide there must remain spaces in which this is not the case. There remain organizations that have not gained international recognitions and having the ability to visit organizations like these would give a better perspective of how these organizations feel they fit in society.

### *The Nyamirambo Women's center (NWC)*

Marie Aimée Umugeni is the president of NWC. We were able to have a conversation about the organization over email. She was happy to tell me the story of NWC but did not feel qualified to answer questions pertaining to political implications of NWC or international aid.

NWC was created in 2007 by 18 Rwandese women. Led by solely women, NWC aims to address gender-based violence, gender inequality, and discrimination (NWC webpage, 2019). They provide women with access to free education in literacy, basic computer skills, sewing, and empowerment training to increase employment opportunities (NWC webpage, 2019). NWC established a product line in 2013, "Umutima," which means heart in Kinyarwanda, produces women's accessories, children's clothing, and household products and employs over 50 local community women (NWC webpage, 2019). A community library was opened in 2014 by NWC to promote literacy of youth and it offers tours to tourists in their community. In 2015 the organization received financial help from a donor in Switzerland that helped turn NWC into an 'income providing initiative' (Essa, 2018). Being a place where women can make money and gain some financial independence means a woman has the money to support herself, provide her family with more than just the basics for survival, and ultimately empower herself (Essa, 2018). While this organization may be tightly controlled by the government it offers a great example of female power outside of the government. These women are supporting themselves through initiatives whose success is dependent on their work.

## Conclusion:

With a great majority of scholarly work focusing on a surge of Rwandan women filling the seats of the government and on the expansion of non-governmental organizations, it is tempting to conclude that women are only now becoming actors in the Rwandan society. The present body of

work uses a historical approach to recount the story of women in Rwandan society who have held incredibly powerful positions and have been pivotal to state building.

Three different general time periods have been explored through the work — the Nyginya Kingdom (pre-colonialism), colonialism and independence, and the genocide and reconstruction. These periods proved to create openings and closings for women in society. In the Nyginya kingdom, queen mothers held an overwhelming amount of power not just over their sons but over men in general and wielded great success within the society. Women were the backbone of the family in society at local and community levels and though they may not have had as much to say in the public sphere as they do today there is something to be said for their support of society. The Belgian colony officially took root in the 1920s which would create an obvious social rift promoting Tutsi females over Hutu. It would be the Tutsi females that would later on become victims to the gender-based violence component of the genocide. The independence of Rwanda would bring a closing to the power that Tutsi women had once held and an opening for Hutu women in society.

Three prominent women at the beginning of the genocide showed great amounts of authority and strength within the government – one Agathe Uwilingiyimana, would hold the courage to challenge the president though it would cost her life. After the genocide, opportunities for women would increase as a result of demographic changes and a need for a force to help in the rebuilding of communities and country. Women would continue to maintain their role within the government but now at a higher ratio to their male counterparts. Like women within the government, women's organizations would become pivotal to rebuilding the society and supporting women post-genocide.

While it can be said that a lot of these organizations are under close control by the government, it seems wrong to generalize that women's empowerment and development are non-existent. Taking this perspective makes the narrative about the government and less about the

women who are a part of these organizations, those who are creating them and keeping them running. While they may align closely with the policies of the state they are still providing a support system that women in the country do need and that they society needs in order to reconstruct after the genocide. One needs to be skeptical of the western consensus that concludes Kagame's regime is what ultimately opened up space for women as this gives him too much power and diminishes that of women at the source of change. From a western lens, the Rwandan government is incredibly authoritarian – only allowing for the voices of women to be heard unless they challenge the consensus. This is however not an attribute of the government that is unique to gender as male counterparts are being silenced too. Through these seemingly authoritarian actions, ones which are not so different from Rwanda's past leaders, Kagame has brought a sense of order to a society which was rifled with disorder.

Work by Mary Berry (2014) "*When "Bright Futures" Fade: Paradoxes of Women's Empowerment in Rwanda*" sheds light on empowerment of women at all levels of society through interviews conducted with 152 women from parliamentarians to young women in local societies. She defines power as control of resources and rights, however; in the case of Rwanda underlying obstacles have prevented women from controlling these rights (Berry, 2014). Women still deal with poverty, struggles in obtaining employment, and "gaps between expectations and reality" (Berry, 2014). The three constraints she outlines for women today are the institutions of family, the education system, and the labor market. Berry concludes that giving women more rights does not equate to dismantling the underlying social structures which produce their subordination in society. What Berry reveals here is important – while we see advances in women taking on positions in the government or leading non-governmental organizations there is still much to be done if Rwanda wants to see equality for all its women.

There do remain differences between the experiences of women in urban and rural regions of Rwanda, and women, especially in rural areas lack great access to opportunities (Berry, 2014). Binagwaho revealed in her interview that "gender equity is a journey." Women within the government and these organizations should be looked at from this perspective. They are not going to be able to change the institutions that have systematically been implemented within their society for decades in 20 years, especially not after an event like the genocide which left the country in ruins – but they are part of a process that will hopefully lead to a more equitable future.

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