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IS WOMEN POLITICAL INCLUSION AN END IN ITSELF IN RWANDA? A META-SYNTHESIS OF QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE EVIDENCES

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Abstract

Informed by the theory of women's political representation, the present paper employs a thematic meta-synthesis method to investigate whether or not women political inclusion in political institutions furthers gender equality in Rwandan society. The main findings suggest that Rwanda has achieved high political representation of women, which may increase power for some women by allowing them to have a greater voice in society and access to education. However, numerous women do not ensure gender equality in all spheres of life as they continue to suffer excessively from politico-ethnic exclusion, unemployment, poverty, heavy domestic responsibilities, gender-based violence, and lack of access to health care services. Legal changes and policies designed to promote gender equality are unquestionably worsening. Although an underlying economic rationale remains leading, gender policies and strategies are implemented with attention to quantitative results rather than qualitative outcomes. Our findings suggest that the current statistics on the gender gap do not express the real situation of Rwandan women. Besides, these

findings yield a theory that high women's political participation may not translate into gender equality. Future research should aim to explore possible solutions to the identified problems.

Keywords

Women Political Inclusion, Representation Theory, Gender Equality, Rwanda

1. Introduction

One of the most common ideas in women's political inclusion (hereafter “WPI”) and gender equality literature is that WPI promotes gender equality through challenging the existing social and political systems that nurture women’s oppression in both the private and public sphere. Scholars suggest that the participation of women in decision-making arouses political and economic benefits. Politically, it improves policy outcomes, increases women’s number in institutions such as the parliament, decreases corruption, and advocates the inclusiveness of marginal groups in public spheres. Economically, it considers women as agents of development, encourages women’s participation in the labour market, and contributes to economic and development growth (Dollar, Fisman, & Gatti, 2001; Kabeer, 2005). Gender wise, there is a belief that WPI is pivotal to the attainment of equal gender rights (Guariso, Ingelaere, & Verpoorten, 2017) probably due to the fact that countries with higher numbers of women in decision making institutions such as parliament tend to have all-inclusive laws on gender issues including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and divorce (Asiedu, Branstette, Gaekwad-Babulal, & Malokele, 2018). However, previous studies in this field have offered inconclusive data on whether or not WPI contributes to eradicating gender inequalities in different social spheres. These inequalities are reinforced by a host of barriers at all levels mainly based on stereotypes in the corporate world that hinder women’s career advancement, hence depriving them of the confidence to vie for higher roles in society (Thankachan & Riaz, 2018). Therefore, building on women’s political representation theory, the present study employs a thematic meta-synthesis method to provide a holistic understanding and interpretation of the impact of WPI on gender equality in Rwanda.

1.1 Research Issues: Why Rwanda?

The key motivation for researching on Rwanda is that the country has made a big change since the 1994 genocide and consequent war, in which about one million Rwandans were massacred and 250,000 women were sexually violated (Straus, 2006). Rwanda has rebuilt itself through different reforms based on gender equality such as a legal framework that includes laws on matrimonial regimes, donations, and successions, the organization and usage of land in Rwanda, as well as legal sanctions against perpetrators of gender-based violence (The Ministry of Justice,

2016). Further policies include the adoption of the Beijing conventions, that are meant to fight all forms of gender inequality, and the millennium declaration that among other things sets the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women as a must for sustainable development (The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, 2010). In the past two decades, the country is believed to have recorded significant economic growth, increasing standards of living and social changes focused on gender equality (Mukashema, Bokore, King, Husain, & McGrath, 2019). Women have been the foundation of this remarkable progress. Today, women percentage in the parliament reaches 61 per cent, which makes the highest number of women parliamentarians in the world (The World Economic Forum, 2018).

Even though the country has created a favourable environment for gender equality in general and WPI in particular, concerns have been expressed about the real impact of WPI given the progressively authoritarian system in the country since 1994 (Longman, 2006). In addition, this research focused on Rwanda due to the lack of academic studies on the impact of WPI on gender equality as one rare study only scrutinizes the influence of gender quotas on the symbolic representation of women (Burnet, 2011). Therefore, the present study comes to supplement the existing literature by analyzing not only the impact of women's symbolic representation on gender equality but also all different sorts of women's political representation.

1.2 Theoretical Framework: Women Political Representation Theory

Globally, there has been extensive research into WPI, with most academics analyzing this in relation to three dimensions of representation including descriptive, substantive and symbolic (Childs, 2004; Coffé, 2012; Lawless, 2004). In this research, we draw from Coffé (2012)'s study of the conceptualization of female political representation especially as that study is well-adapted to the context of Rwanda. Focusing on the case of parliament, Coffé (2012) described the three types of representation maintaining that descriptive representation focuses on the number of members of parliament (hereafter "MPs"). Substantive representation is concentrated on the impact that WPI has on influencing governmental policy, while symbolic representation refers to women MPs as role models for other women in society. Other scholars have theorized Rwandan WPI as a symbolic representation (Kayumba, 2010; Uwineza & Pearson, 2009) and as non-substantive representation (Burnet, 2008; Devlin & Elgie, 2008; Hogg, 2009; Longman, 2006). However, these studies were criticized by Coffé (2012) for analysing each form of women's representation in seclusion while they are, in fact, interlinked. Therefore, the present study

holistically scrutinizes the impact of all sorts of WPI on gender equality in Rwandan society. More precisely, the present study aims at answering the following research questions:

1. Do Rwandan women reap from WPI?
2. Is WPI an end in itself?

2. Methodology

The current study employs a thematic meta-synthesis method to deeper understand the impact of WPI on gender equality in Rwanda. This method was considered best-suited for this study as it is regarded as one of the most appropriate approaches for interpreting secondary data to broaden understanding of a specific social phenomenon (Grant & Booth, 2009). The data were gathered from academic databases of Google, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect by using these keywords: “Rwanda women political inclusion”, “Rwanda gender quota”, “Rwanda gender equality”, “the effect of women’s representation in Rwandan politics”, and “women's political representation theory”. To ensure quality and completeness, journal articles, web pages, reports, working paper, dissertations, book chapters, and blogs published in the period of 2004-2019 were considered, which resulted in 101 articles. We borrowed and adapted 10 criteria (see Table 1) from a previous study in order to systematically review research studies (Treloar, Champness, Simpson, & Higginbotham, 2000). We chose to use these criteria because they are the most frequently used instruments for qualitative studies guided by meta-synthesis method.

The application of the abovementioned criteria on 101 articles yielded 33 articles that were most suitable to this research (see Table2). In order to assess the quality of included documents (see Table 1), we employed a three-point scale to each criterion (0 = criterion not met; 1 = criterion partially met; 2= criterion totally met). This point-scale was proposed by Boeije, Wesel, & Alisic (2011) as the best method for weighing the data in a qualitative meta-synthesis study. After assessing the quality of the 33 documents, we concluded that all of them were suitable for this study. These documents were analyzed through a thematic analysis, which is used to identify, analyze, and report key themes (Boyatzis, 1998). As such, this method was considered suitable for this research since it allows to scrutinize, pinpoint, and record themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and this was the aim of this research. We used Nvivo software to code the most robust themes (see Table 3).

Table 1: Quality Assessment of Included Studies

Criteria	Totally met	Partially met	Not met
1. Is the research objective clearly specified?	33	0	0
2. Is an appropriate motivation provided for employing a qualitative/quantitative approach?	28	5	0
3. Do scholars clearly outline the theoretical framework?	30	1	2
4. Do researchers cater for ethical issues?	33	0	0
5. Is the sampling technique suitable and will the sample epitomize the target group?	33	0	0
6. Do studies provide details about data gathering processes and how they were derived?	27	4	2
7. Do researchers explain the techniques used for keeping data organised retrievable?	23	7	3
8. What approaches of data analysis are employed and are they suitable to address the research purpose?	33	0	0
9. Do studies address the limitation regarding reliability and validity in the collection and analysis of data?	30	0	3
10. Is there a strong progression from research question to implications drawn from data	26	4	3

Source: Adapted from Treloar et al. (2000)

Table 2: Dataset

Authors	Publication Year	Study Types	Methods
1. Abari	2017	Web Page	Qualitative
2. Abbott, Mutesi, & Norris,	2015	Report	Qualitative
3. Avramovic & Ringh	2018	Thesis	Quantitative & Qualitative: Survey, interview
4. Bauer & Burnet	2013	Journal Article	Qualitative
5. Bayisenge	2015	Journal Article	Quantitative & Qualitative: Survey, interview & FGD*
6. Berry	2015	Journal Article	Qualitative
7. Burnet	2008	Journal Article	Qualitative: Ethnography
8. Burnet	2011	Journal Article	Qualitative: Interview
9. Burnet	2012	Book Chapter	Qualitative: Interview
10. Buss & Ali	2018	Book chapter	Qualitative
11. Cascais	2019	Web Page	Qualitative: Interview
12. Debusscher & Ansoms	2013	Journal Article	Qualitative: Interview
13. Devlin & Elgie	2008	Journal Article	Qualitative: Interview
14. Gatsinzi	2018	Thesis	Quantitative & Qualitative: Survey, interview
15. Guariso, Ingelaere, & Verpoorten	2017	Working paper	Qualitative: Interview
16. Herndon & Randell	2013	Journal Article	Qualitative: Interview
17. Hogg	2009	Journal Article	Qualitative

18. Kagaba	2015	Journal Article	Qualitative: FGD*
19. Kantengwa	2010	Journal Article	Qualitative
20. Longman	2006	Book Chapter	Qualitative: Interview
21. Powley	2005	Book Chapter	Qualitative: Interview
22. Reini	2019	Report	Qualitative
23. Reyntjens	2004	Journal Article	Qualitative
24. Schindler	2011	Journal Article	Qualitative
25. The Ministry of Education	2016	Report	Quantitative: Survey
26. The Ministry of Education	2017	Report	Quantitative: Survey
27. The National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda	2012	Report	Quantitative: Survey
28. The National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda	2015	Report	Quantitative: Survey
29. The WomenStats Blog	2018	Blog	Qualitative: Interview
30. Topping	2014	Web Page	Qualitative: Interview
31. Uvuza	2014	Dissertation	Qualitative: Interview
32. Wallace, Haerpfer, & Abbott	2008	Journal Article	Qualitative: Interview
33. Warner	2018	Web Page	Qualitative: Interview

Note: FGD*=Focus Group Discussion

Source: The Present Study's Authors

Table 3: Main Themes

Themes	Codes	Yes		No		Total	
		F	%	F	%	N	P
Benefits From WPI	Urban elite women: Self-confidence, social prestige, good salary, respect in public space, access to education	29	88	4	12	33	100
	Other (rural, poor, grassroots level) women: Nothing instead of over-workload, unpaid jobs, family conflicts	29	88	4	12	33	100
Political obstacles	Politico-ethnic exclusion	28	85	5	15	33	100
	Unfair elections and fictitious representation	27	82	6	18	33	100
Socioeconomic obstacles	Gender and power inequalities	24	73	9	27	33	100
	Persistent poverty	23	70	10	30	33	100
Legal obstacles	Laws offer non-protection to women	23	70	10	30	33	100
	Vague and unclear laws	21	64	12	36	33	100
	Gap between legislation and implementation	20	61	13	39	33	100

Educational obstacles	Low literacy rate and tertiary education enrolment	20	61	13	39	33	100
	Gender gap in university completion	19	58	14	42	33	100
Health obstacles	Lack of access to health care services	18	55	15	45	33	100
	Unwanted pregnancies	17	52	16	48	33	100
	GBV	15	45	18	55	33	100

Source: The Present Study's Authors

3. Results

3.1 Do Rwandan Women Reap from WPI?

3.1.1 Considerable Benefits for Urban Elite Women

Majority of the studies (88 per cent) revealed that only a small number of urban and elite women have reaped great benefits from WPI and improved their self-confidence, access to well-paid positions in the parliament (See Figure 1) and ministries, better purchasing power including cars, clothing, and domestic servants. These forms of benefits are epitomized by the following testimony from one of the female interviewees:

Economically also I have a better salary, I have a car that I could not have bought before, even if it is a loan but I pay it with my salary which also increases my confidence (Uvuza, 2014: 114).



Figure 1: Women Members of Parliament

Source: Kwizera (2019)

However, numerous studies stressed that this is just part of the reality as for instance, many women members of parliament (hereafter WMPs) are struggling to balance job and family roles

including all the tasks assigned to them in their homes. Besides, the findings indicated that some WMPs have basic levels of education and lack of leadership, analytical, as well as computer skills (Herndon & Randell, 2013; Wallace et al., 2008), without which their level of political involvement is almost impossible.

3.1.2 No Gain for Other Women (Rural, Poor, Grassroots Level)

Unlike urban elite women, elected officials at the local level (see Figure 2) are not compensated through wages or stipends from their participation in politics, as revealed by several studies (88 per cent). This is epitomized by the following testimony from a rural female interviewee:

We never thought that things would be like this. A wife leaves her family for trainings, for communal labor, for meetings, and then a week has gone by. No time to work at home or to go to the fields. The husband who is there thinks you are going to come with something for the family [i.e., money or other tangible benefit]. You see, there is nothing but trouble and conflicts in the family. When you think about leaving this position, something that is not at all easy to do, you are accused of having the [genocidal] ideology. We have found that it's not anything more than exploitation, creating poverty in our families ... we are going to die (Burnet, 2011: 330).



Figure 2: Grassroots Women Leaders
Source: The New Times (2019)

Besides, our findings revealed considerable anger and frustration from husbands over wives' absence from household activities with "*nothing to show for it*". Consequently, the husbands tend to make their wives' workload heavier by refusing to lend any assistance with all

types of job. For rural women in leadership positions, it becomes an uphill task since most of them cannot afford to hire house helpers to deal with numberless chores such as cooking, cleaning, caring for kids and collecting water at home, planting, weeding, and harvesting (Burnet, 2012).

3.2 Is WPI an End in Itself?

While WPI statistics may lead to the conclusion that Rwandan women are free from all issues that women experience in other nations, most of the studies included in our meta-synthesis argue otherwise. Instead, a number of women remain faced with the same serious gender inequality issues as before the implementation of pro-women policies (Avramovic & Ringh, 2018; Buss & Ali, 2018; Gatsinzi, 2018) (see Table 4):



Figure 3: Women Jailed for Political Motives

Source: Mashego (2018)

Table 4: Lingering Obstacles

Social Spheres	Obstacles	Descriptions
1. Political	1.1. Politico-ethnic exclusion	Most WMPs are from one ethnic, ruling party and women in opposition party are silenced or jailed : see Figure 3 (Cascais, 2019; Longman, 2006; Reyntjens, 2004; The WomenStats Blog, 2018; Warner, 2018).
	1.2. Unfair elections and fictitious representation	The population is informed in advance of the candidate for whom to vote. WMPs are members of the RPF or its coalition partners (Berry, 2015; Longman, 2006; Powley, 2005; Reyntjens, 2004).

2. Socioeconomic	2.1. Gender and power inequalities	Power relations and gender roles have not changed much. Many women face heavy workloads, power and gender roles imbalance (Burnet, 2008; Devlin & Elgie, 2008; Kantengwa, 2010).											
	2.2. Persistent poverty	Many women live in extreme poverty in rural areas. Girls face unemployment and discrimination for pursuing careers traditionally regarded as male employment (The WomenStats Blog, 2018; Topping, 2014).											
3. Legal	3.1. Laws offer non-protection to women	Law No 59/2008 of 10/09/2008 on prevention and punishment of gender-based violence: sexual harassment in public space is not legalised although sexual harassment by a husband or an employer is both illegal (Abari, 2017; Abbott et al., 2015; Kagaba, 2015).											
	3.2. Vague and unclear laws	Law No 59/2008 of 10/09/2008 on prevention and punishment of gender-based violence in Article 8: The article is unclear as regards women's motherhood leave (Ibid).											
	3.3. Gap between legislation and implementation	Women do not always have the right to own the property by acquiring a property certificate because of men's reluctance (Bayisenge, 2015).											
4. Education	4.1. Low literacy rate and tertiary education enrolment	Public tertiary education enrolment in 2016: Male 70% vs Female 30% (The Ministry of Education, 2016). Literacy rate: 72.1% Male vs 39.1% Females are able to write (The National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2015).											
	4.2. Gender gap in university completion	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Exit Award (2015-2016)</th> <th>Male</th> <th>Female</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Bachelor Degree</td> <td>9,047</td> <td>8,725</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Master's Degree</td> <td>605</td> <td>316</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ph.D.</td> <td>2</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Source: The Ministry of Education, 2017</p>	Exit Award (2015-2016)	Male	Female	Bachelor Degree	9,047	8,725	Master's Degree	605	316	Ph.D.	2
Exit Award (2015-2016)	Male	Female											
Bachelor Degree	9,047	8,725											
Master's Degree	605	316											
Ph.D.	2	0											
5. Health	5.1. Lack of access to health care services	60% of women cannot access health care services due to lack of money (The National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2015).											
	5.2. Unwanted pregnancies	Half of all pregnancies											
	5.3. GBV	One in five are victims of sexual violence (The National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2012)											

Source: The Present Study's Authors

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The abovementioned findings reveal that, although WPI has opened opportunities for a few women to enter elite positions (Schindler, 2011), many women are not better-off and patriarchal attitudes are still deep-rooted. Specifically, WPI has failed to deeply change women's status quo and has increased politico-ethnic exclusion instead (Longman, 2006; Pottier, 2002; Reyntjens, 2004). Some scholars credit these failures to the current authoritarian nature of Rwandan government that utilizes WPI under the guise of democracy as a way for attracting foreign investors and aids donors rather than allowing WMPs to promote women-friendly policies, tolerance for ethnic and political dissent (Bauer & Burnet, 2013; Hogg, 2009; Longman, 2006; Reinl, 2019). WPI shortcomings are thought to stem from the fact that the parliamentary elections are fabricated, which confirms "*the image of a cosmetic operation for international consumption*" (Reyntjens, 2004:186). This also corroborates The Norwegian Institute of Human Rights election observers report that witnessed fraud in parliamentary elections (Samset & Dalby, 2003).

The findings also reveal that WPI has reinforced the status quo (Guariso et al., 2017), hence increasing poverty because local representatives do not receive wage, yet they spend all their time in performing political responsibilities rather than catering for income-generating activities. Further, another fact explaining this increase in poverty is that unemployment rate is very high even though the official data shows that poverty has reduced progressively since 11 years ago (The National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2015). This finding confirms a recent report showing Rwandan poverty statistics have been manipulated for the sake of asserting economic miracle and maintaining Rwanda's relationship with its major donors (Wilson & Blood, 2019).

Another important finding is that despite important numbers of WPI, women still face gender inequalities in private and public spheres. At home, for instance, domestic duties are still divided along traditional gender lines even though women have obtained political positions. It is as if, as long as family relations are based on traditional gender division of labor, men and women cannot engage equally in politics. This finding is supported by Mosedale's (2005) study indicating that economic and political empowerment of women without mechanisms to eradicate traditional gender division of labor at home and at work is not enough to bring gender equality.

Further, the findings revealed that women legislators are obliged to protect the RPF political party interests rather than protecting women's rights. This finding supports Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler's (2005) study stating that in undemocratic countries like Rwanda, increased women representation in political life does not translate into elected representatives' responsiveness to women's rights and concerns. Thus, this finding confirms the multi-faceted theoretical framework of women's political representation suggested by Coffé (2012) as a suitable model for understanding the impact of WPI on gender equality in Rwanda. More particularly, while this model allows to understand WPI weaknesses in general, it also indicates that the representation in place is more descriptive than anything else.

The present study's findings bear significant implications in that they generate a theory that WPI is not an end in itself. One of the explanations to this is that, contrary to the roots of women's rights in feminism in European countries (McLaughlin, 2014), Rwanda's promotion of gender equality in general, and WPI in particular, has not resulted from grassroots women's movements, but primarily from top-down RPF's policy agenda (Burnet, 2008; Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). Given that, Rwandan women still face different serious inequalities in different social spheres including politico-ethnic exclusion, GBV, gender roles and power inequalities, lack of access to health care, service and legal protection, etc. Hence, one would hope that this research

will probably arouse the Rwandan government in cooperation with grassroots women's activist groups, and human rights activists to address the above-mentioned gender biases. Besides, this study revealed that some female politicians needed technology-related skills, leadership skill, gender, and feminist analytical skills. In order to provide a firm foundation for WPI, this research will possibly inspire Rwandan government and civil society to plan necessary strategies for tackling this issue.

In a nutshell, considering that this study provides a general overview of different shortcomings of WPI in Rwanda, further research remains acutely needed to theorize the above-mentioned problems, hence exploring possible solutions. Given that the above findings point to a situation where women participation in Rwandan politics yields uneven, incongruous and somewhat deviating outcomes, which is always strongly refuted by the government, future studies may need to devise new interdisciplinary approaches to deeply analyse the Rwandan situation. Women political participation is often stifled by various social issues including patriarchy and related gender misconceptions (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). We therefore recommend that future research dwell on images, stereotypes and media representation of women in Rwandan political instances.

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