Norm Appropriation through Policy Production: Rwanda's Gender Policies

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This article contributes to current debates on the role and agency of actors on the receiving end in norm diffusion processes, and explores the role of the Government of Rwanda in appropriating gender equality norms through policy production. It considers policy production as a central meaning-making activity in norm diffusion and applies a definition of appropriation as a discursive mechanism through which meaning is negotiated and constituted. Through an analysis of national policy documents on gender equality, it finds that appropriation occurs when the meaning of gender equality is altered to serve as a central feature in the construction of a 'new' Rwandan identity.

Keywords: appropriation; gender; norm diffusion; policy analysis; Rwanda

Introduction

This article takes an interest in how actors on the receiving end of norm diffusion processes actively shape norm content through policy production, and with what effects. It studies the role of the Government of Rwanda (GoR) in altering the meaning of gender equality norms through its national gender policies. Rwanda is often praised for its achievements in the area of gender equality. More than 60% of parliament and cabinet positions in Rwanda are currently held by women, and the period since the 1994 genocide has seen several legislative, policy and institutional gains for women. Rwanda might therefore appear to have simply adopted existing international norms on gender equality. By focusing on changes in norm content however, I find that the GoR is an active shaper and mover in the norm diffusion process rather than a passive adopter of international norms. Based on a reading of existing literature and an analysis of national policy documents on gender equality, I argue that the GoR, through the formulation of

policy, has appropriated gender equality norms to serve as a central feature in the construction of a 'new' Rwandan identity. The analysis finds that the GoR formulates *gender inequality* as a problem of *women's exclusion from the formal economy*, and of *people having the wrong mindset*. As will be shown in the analysis, the GoR thus connects the promotion of gender equality to a broader nationalist agenda, actively appropriating these norms to serve their own political ends.

Norms can be defined as 'standards of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity'.[1] International gender equality norms have been formalised in a range of multilateral agreements and documents through the global promotion of gender equality and women's human rights. This has taken place through various initiatives, such as the UN Decade for Women, the World Conferences on Women, and the World Conferences on Human Rights, supported by the activism and lobbying of feminists over time and across borders. In 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which has been ratified by 189 countries and is regarded as the most authoritative piece of the international discourse on women's human rights.[2] The World Conferences on Women were a series of conferences on women's issues that were organised between 1975 and 1995. Of these, perhaps the best known is the 1995 Beijing Conference, which resulted in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA). The BPfA was the first to formally address the issue of women and armed conflict, and the document is regarded as an important precursor to UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, as well as the seven follow-up resolutions that have been passed since the adoption of 1325 in 2000.

In this article, gender equality norms refer to the specific content of these multilateral agreements and documents, as well as the general principles that underpin

and support them, and their application in policy and practice. This is in line with much recent constructivist scholarship on norms, which considers norms as processes that are characterised by their ongoing constitution.[3] The article builds on this literature and adopts a definition of norm appropriation as a discursive mechanism through which meaning is negotiated and constituted. This process involves a struggle to establish one's interpretation (of a norm) as the definitive one. Focusing on norm content allows us to examine the agency of receiving actors in defining the meaning of norms. Here, I attempt to build on and develop recent work on appropriation that aims to capture local reactions to rights promotion, and move away from a view of local actors as passive recipients of norms. I focus on how receiving actors may change the meaning of norms *through the formulation of policy*, and how such change happens. The article thus seeks to contribute to current debates on the role and agency of actors on the receiving end in norm diffusion processes.[4]

In order to shed light on how receiving actors may use policy production to alter normative content during norm diffusion, I look for 'problem representations' in specific policy proposals, and study the effects of these with a view to uncovering how we are governed through policies. Problem representations are the implicit problems that can be identified in the policy proposal that is being analysed.[5] Given the central role played by the government in promoting gender-based reform in Rwanda, I focus on policy production as a central meaning-making activity in norm diffusion, through which a contextualised version of norm content is defined. In the national gender policies included in this analysis, the problem of *gender inequality* is formulated as a problem of *women's exclusion from the formal economy*, and of *people having the wrong mindset*. By analysing these problem representations and their effects, I find that the GoR connects the promotion of gender equality to a broader nationalist project

which includes the construction of a 'new' Rwandan citizen. In the case of Rwanda, appropriation occurs when the meaning of gender equality is altered for the purpose of national identity construction.

The next section introduces the methodological approach and the empirical material. Section three outlines the conceptual framework, and section four provides a background on Rwanda. Section five analyses and discusses the two problem representations identified in the policy documents. Section six expands on these and discusses the appropriation of gender equality norms for a nationalist project. The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of policy production in norm diffusion. I suggest that, when Rwanda's gender policies become an integral part of a non-inclusive nationalist agenda, the long-term effects could potentially be unfavorable for its citizens.

Methodology and data

For the analysis of the Rwandan policy documents on gender equality, I draw on Carol Bacchi's 'what's the problem represented to be' approach to policy analysis. This approach sets out to ask questions about the sources of policy and how it operates, as well as to understand how governing takes place, and with what implications for those being governed.[6] According to Bacchi, policies give shape to problems, as opposed to the other way around. Bacchi's theory thereby questions the commonly held assumption that policies are created to fix problems that exist 'out there'. The analysis therefore starts by identifying the problem representations that exist within Rwanda's gender policies. Problem representations are the implicit problems that can be identified in the policy proposal that is being analysed, based on the assumption that what we propose to do about something indicates what we think needs to change.[7] In the national gender

policies included in this analysis, the problem of gender inequality is formulated as a problem of *women's exclusion from the formal economy*, and of *people having the wrong mindset*.

Bacchi's approach is useful because it confers an active role to agents in identifying and shaping particular understandings of policy problems. Problem representations are elaborated in discourse, and 'discourses are socially produced forms of knowledge that set limits upon what it is possible to think, write or speak' of a given subject matter.[8] According to Bacchi, we are governed through policies and the problem representations they contain. The way a problem is represented constrains ways of thinking about the proposals for social intervention, which can have different effects for different people. We therefore also need to analyse the assumptions and presuppositions within problem representations, with a view to identifying their effects and the implications for those being governed.[9]

In order to be able to identify problem representations, we should focus on "prescriptive texts": texts that tell us what to do.[10] Policies are an example of such a text. I therefore focus on a selection of national policies on gender equality produced and made publicly available by the GoR (see Table 1). The government institutions that take part in promoting, shaping and implementing the government's gender policies are often referred to as the 'National Gender Machinery', and consist of the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF), the Gender Monitoring Office (GMO), and the National Women's Council (NWC). In addition, the National Gender Policy highlights the importance of mainstreaming gender across all different sectors.[11] The national policy documents included in this analysis (see Table 1) are positioned in a hierarchical relationship to one another, with the National Gender Policy as the overarching policy on gender in Rwanda. All the other policy documents include

references to this policy. Further, the National Gender Policy and the National Policy against Gender-based Violence are followed by strategic plans outlining activities and targets/indicators for their implementation. The strategic plans for the Gender Monitoring Office and the National Gender Cluster outline the objectives, activities and targets for these institutional bodies in a similar manner. The 1325 National Action Plan, which outlines the national implementation of UNSCR 1325, is also formulated in a similar manner with clearly outlined activities and indicators. The Girls' Education Policy outlines overall and specific objectives of the policy and proposed actions, activities, and strategies to achieve these.

[Table 1 near here]

Although the state is only one player among many in processes of norm diffusion,[12] there are several reasons for focusing on the role of the GoR in this case. One is that governments play a privileged role in the construction of policy problems. This is because their understandings of a problem are formed and constituted in legislation, policies, and reports.[13] A second reason is practical and concerns the availability of data. Governments generally produce reports and policies that can be used for analysis, but the GoR has been particularly active in doing so (and making these documents publicly available). Further, as has been argued elsewhere, the political will of the GoR has played a crucial role in securing gains for women in the post-conflict period and is "frequently cited as the primary cause of women's remarkable political successes".[14] The centrality of the GoR in the norm diffusion process thus warrants that we take a closer look at the ways in which it has contributed to altering norm content, and with what effects.

Global norm diffusion and appropriation in post-conflict settings

Several studies have shown how violence can contribute to changing gender norms in the aftermath of conflict, often opening a window of opportunity for promoting women's participation and rights.[15] Having studied the changes in women's rights and participation in post-conflict Africa for more than two decades, Tripp finds that African countries that have experienced conflict with high death rates or of long duration also experienced greater gains in women's political representation in the post-conflict period. Civil wars and conflicts that ended in negotiated settlements also had better chances for restructuring the political order and negotiating women's inclusion and rights. Further, the changes in women's representation did not become visible in Africa until the 1990s, coinciding with the global promotion of gender equality as described above.[16] Similar findings have been made by others, such as Mageza-Barthel, who shows how the Rwandan women's movement used the global (UN) gender norms in its efforts to insert gender-specific demands in the post-genocide period.[17]

While Tripp's argument convincingly shows how important legislative gains have been made in the aftermath of many African conflicts, other scholars have asked how these gains translate into practice.[18] For example, several studies have pointed out that despite new legislation prohibiting gender-based crimes, women often do not bring cases to court, due to stigma, lack of trust in the court system, or practical obstacles such as living too far away from the police station or court house and being unable to afford the time and transportation costs.[19] In the case of Rwanda, critics usually attribute this implementation gap to the strategic co-optation of gender equality norms by the GoR, or the unintended consequences of its policies and reforms.[20]

Research on norm diffusion in International Relations initially addressed the issue of norm promotion in domestic contexts by looking at the role of international

organisations and norm entrepreneurs, such as civil society and transnational advocacy networks, in shaping the interests of states.[21] Scholars focused on processes of norm internalisation and socialisation, and developed models to describe the dynamics of how international norms influence state behaviour, including the 'norm life cycle' model, 'boomerang' effects, and the 'spiral model'.[22] These models sought to explain the spread of human rights norms throughout the international system, and while they offer a dynamic account of norm creation, diffusion and socialisation, they depict a relatively static view of norm content. For example, Risse et al. identified instrumental adaptation, argumentation and habitualisation as three distinct types of socialisation processes in their 'spiral model'. These would work together, across different phases, to socialise states into compliance with human rights norms.[23] While the spiral model offers interesting insights and explanatory power in modelling the movement from norm expectation to country-level results, as well as acknowledging the occurrence of local adaptation through instrumental adoption and tactical concessions, it did not substantially engage in a discussion on how norm content might change as a result of these processes.

This gap has been addressed in much of the later research on norm diffusion, which has focused on how the normative environment (in this case, the domestic context) may affect the meaning of norms through a range of processes, including translation, contestation, localisation, vernacularisation, and appropriation.[24] Ongoing debates also explore the role and agency of actors on the receiving end in norm diffusion processes.[25] This scholarship offers a more dynamic view of norm content as norms spread across different contexts. It recognises that the norms that spread tend to be vague, allowing for their content to be interpreted in a variety of ways and for them 'to be appropriated for a variety of different purposes'.[26] Instead of focusing on

government behaviour as a reaction to norms, the focus is on the meaning of norms changes as a result of (conflictive) interaction.[27] Wiener highlights the role of social practices in re/constructing the meaning of norms, and shows how social change occurs as a result of discursive interventions.[28] Krook and True likewise argue for a discursive approach to understanding changes in norm content, viewing norms as 'anchored in language and revealed by repeated speech acts'.[29] With reference to the ongoing constitution of norms, and thus their potential for contestation and change, this literature views norms as 'processes' rather than as 'things' with fixed meanings.[30]

Adopting a process perspective on norms leads me to conceptualise appropriation as a discursive mechanism through which norm content is negotiated and constituted. When norms travel across different contexts, appropriation can be described as a situation where the same concept is used, but its meaning is changed. In other words, it is 'the practice of a given agency using terms developed in one context, to mean something quite different in another context'.[31] Similar to constructivist arguments about local manipulation and adaptation,[32] recent work on appropriation aims to 'capture local reactions to rights promotion', and to analytically grasp the complexity of the empirical reality of the local context, thus moving away from a view of local actors as passive recipients of norms.[33] Here, appropriation is defined as the 'intentional reinterpretation of ideas across cultural, spatial and temporal contexts aimed at definitional power'.[34] This underlines the fact that appropriation involves processes of knowledge construction and struggles over hegemony. Norm appropriation thereby entails a change in political intent, as well as a change in meaning. According to Pereira, appropriation entails 'competing claims to knowledge by actors located in hierarchies of power' and it is an ongoing 'discursive struggle to present a given point of view as the definitive statement on the subject'.[35] This is also where appropriation

differs from other mechanisms such as translation, in that it involves a change in political intent. The norm is not openly contested or rejected, but serves an additional (political) purpose in the context in question.

Promoting gender equality in Rwanda

Between April and June 1994, between 500,000 and 1 million people were killed in the genocide against Tutsi and moderate Hutu in Rwanda.[36] The causes of the genocide are to a certain extent still disputed, but are largely understood to stem from the historical ethnicisation of socio-economic categories. It is generally argued that ethnic identities in Rwanda were reinforced and made static by the Belgian colonisers, especially after the Belgian colonial reform of 1926–36. The reform created a system of rule where the Hutu majority was ruled by a minority of Tutsi constructed as racially different and superior, and saw the issuance of the first 'ethnic' identity cards. While the Tutsi minority was considered and treated as elite by the colonisers, the Hutu majority population saw opportunities lost on them during the colonial period. Towards independence, Tutsi privilege and colonial power were challenged by new popular movements and the Hutu majority.[37] The period from 1959 to 1963 saw the Hutu social movement gain power through independence in 1961 and elections in 1963. This period was marked by violence and persecution of parts of the Tutsi population, and a resulting Tutsi exodus to neighbouring countries. In 1990, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a force made up of Rwandan exiles living in Uganda, invaded from Uganda and established a presence in the Northern part of Rwanda. This marked the start of the civil war that culminated in the genocide in 1994. The genocide only ended in July 1994 after military victory and capture of the capital Kigali by the RPF – today, Rwanda's ruling party.

After the genocide, many Rwandan women found themselves in new roles as heads of households. The Rwandan state lacked the means to meet the needs of its people, and so women started coming together to support each other and to confront their common problems. This activity, in combination with extensive donor support and funding as well as supportive policies of the post-genocide government, spurred an extraordinary growth in the number of women's organisations and their activities during the late 1990s.[38] Experience from civil society gave many women the skills they needed to enter politics, and in the transitional period from 1994 to 2003, the Rwandan women's movement succeeded in working with the government in order to achieve policy and legislative changes. These achievements include the classification of rape and sexual torture among the most serious crimes in the 1996 Genocide Law and the adoption of the 1999 'Inheritance Law'. This gave women the right to inherit property, but also gave them full legal rights to enter into contracts, to seek paid employment, to own property and to open bank accounts in their own name. Finally, the process of drafting the new constitution from 2001 to 2003 established the 30% quota for women in all decision-making bodies, as well as several other clauses protecting women's rights.[39]

Many have argued that the gains in legislation and policy in Rwanda's transitional period largely came as a result of changes in social relations and the role played by the women's movement, in combination with supportive attitudes in the RPF.[40] At the same time as Rwandan women increased their presence in civil society, there was substantial support within the RPF for their representation and participation, and protecting women's rights and promoting women's public participation were core components of RPF policy.[41] While the transitional period coincided with an increase in international attention to gender issues from the 1990s, the legislative and policy gains

were rather mixed for women in the years following the 2003 elections (which introduced unprecedented levels of women's representation in parliament).[42] Many have thus questioned the significance of women's political representation and the transformative potential of Rwanda's new gender equality policies. Some critics argue that Rwanda's gender-based reforms have failed to fundamentally transform the lives of ordinary women. Berry, for example, asks which women stand to gain the most from these reforms. She shows how, in theory, the gender-sensitive legal framework extends rights and opportunities to all Rwandan women, but that informal power structures prevent many from accessing these rights, and even create new forms of oppression for others.[43] Many have also focused on the strategic/political co-optation of gender equality norms, arguing that the GoR's motivation for promoting these policies is mainly to secure international support and investment, or that the focus on high levels of women's representation is a way to divert attention from increasing authoritarianism, human rights abuses, and the dominance of Anglophone Tutsis in government.[44] More recent work by Berry and co-authors expand on this argument of 'deliberate instrumentalisation of gender parity for political – and sometimes conflict-related – ends' in the Rwandan context.[45] They argue that promoting women has been a fruitful political strategy for the GoR, as it painted a positive picture of Rwanda to the international community while the regime simultaneously tightened its grip on power. In addition, absorbing women into Parliament and other government offices effectively drained civil society of resources, while also eliminating potential sources of political opposition.[46] In this article, I build on these insights and show how the appropriation of gender equality norms, through policy production, has been integral to this process in Rwanda.

Problem representations of gender inequality in Rwanda's gender policies

Rwanda's gender policies have been analysed with a view to uncovering how the GoR actively takes part in formulating and shaping norm content in the area of gender equality. The analysis focused on identifying problem representations in the government's gender policies, and examining their effects. Problem representations are the implied problems that can be identified in a policy proposal. In the national policy documents studied here, I identify two problem representations: gender inequality as a problem of *women's exclusion from the formal economy* and of *people having the wrong mindset.*

The first problem representation that can be identified in these policies is gender inequality as a problem of *women's exclusion from the formal economy*. Proposed solutions to this problem are formulated in terms of education, training or capacity building that will make women capable of participating. In the policy documents included in this analysis, gender equality is viewed as a means to sustainable development. The National Gender Policy's main mission 'is to contribute to the elimination of gender inequalities in all sectors of national life, in order to achieve the nation's goal for sustainable development'.[47] There is an implied causality about how promoting gender equality will lead to economic development and growth. This rests on a number of assumptions, including that women constitute unexploited resources and that their contributions are essential to reaching the country's full potential. This ties in with broader policy goals about economic development pursued by the GoR, such as transforming 'Rwanda into a middle-income country with a service-led economy by 2020'.[48] This is also apparent in the GoR's framing of gender-based violence (GBV) as a threat to the economic development of Rwanda.[49]

An additional assumption is that women's contributions to development will materialise through their participation in various societal processes (such as the formal economy, the labour market, etc.). It is further assumed that women's participation will enhance the efficiency of these processes (such as the transition to a middle-income country). Policy proposals include to 'facilitate and support capacity building programs for increased participation of women in paid economy with emphasis in technical areas'.[50] According to the National Gender Policy, 'gender inequality lies in the under-representation of women at different administrative levels'.[51] Again, we can see how gender inequality is understood to mean the exclusion of women from societal processes. This discourse highlights instrumental and practical reasons for promoting women's rights, rather than normative ones. Rather than being a problem of unequal power relations, gender equality is conceived of as a technicality to be solved by increased compliance and accountability to international and national commitments, and according to the Gender Monitoring Office, 'gender equality in the Rwandan society is advanced through increased accountability of all sectors'.[52] When gender inequality is understood as a problem of women's exclusion from the formal economy, it is implied that the process of achieving equality will happen through economic development, indicating a mutually reinforcing dynamic. Rather than aiming at a profound transformation in gendered power relations, including within those structures to which women gain access (global and local),[53] this understanding rationalises women's empowerment and gender equality based on efficiency gains, and views these as the process of women entering the formal economy or other existing societal structures.

The GoR envisions a shift from subsistence farming to market economy as the path to transforming the country economically. As women make up the majority of those who engage in subsistence farming, changing their behaviour becomes a key

strategy towards achieving this goal. Again, empowering women means enabling them to participate in the formal economy. Ironically, this devalues the work in which the majority of Rwandan women engage and what is traditionally seen as women's work. For example, women and men's 'limited capacities, skills, agricultural assets and technologies to transform the agriculture of subsistence into a market oriented agriculture for food security and income generation'[54] should be addressed by undertaking 'sensitive measures aimed at transforming the subsistence agriculture into a market oriented agriculture and empower the farmers especially women with appropriate knowledge and skills'.[55]

When women's empowerment and gender equality is conceptualised as women entering the formal economy and thereby making their contributions to sustainable development, this also individualises responsibility with women for ending poverty. This echoes the 'add women and stir' rhetoric common in international development discourse in the 1970s.[56] It portrays both poverty and gender equality as a technical, and not a political problem, and involves a change in meaning and political intent away from a feminist idea of gender equality as a transformation of gendered power relations.

In Rwanda's gender policies, promoting gender equality is presented on the one hand as a matter of empowering women by providing training, skills and access, and on the other hand, as overcoming the obstacles that prevent women from realising their potential contributions to development, such as backward values, attitudes, and practices. The second problem representation, where the problem of gender inequality is seen as *people having the wrong mindset*, concerns the need to change people's values and attitudes, and implies a profound transformation of people's mindsets.

In Rwanda, both women and men are envisioned to participate in and benefit from development processes, and in this sense, they are seen as partners in development:

> The Government of Rwanda (GoR), through Vision 2020, seeks to transform Rwanda into a middle-income country by 2020. The role of women in realizing this Vision is critical. The Government has recognized and demonstrated, in word and practice, that in order to fast-track the achievement of its Vision and the Millennium Development Goals both women and men must equally participate in, and benefit from, development processes.[57]

However, the ability to act as partners in development is premised on the acceptance of gender equality. Because the majority of those targeted by these policies are the poor and uneducated, this becomes an issue of changing people's mindsets towards accepting the narrative of gender equality as it is presented by the ruling elite. For women, this involves overcoming cultural and practical barriers, such as 'heavy reproductive workload preventing women from getting time to participate in decision making and other political, cultural and economic activities'[58] or 'women's marginalized position and their economic dependence on men'.[59] For men, this involves adopting supporting practices and attitudes, such as overcoming the 'biased perception that women are not made for decision making'.[60]

Consequently, empowerment entails the transformation of 'traditional' women and men into partners in development. Women's empowerment becomes a matter of addressing the 'persistence of cultural/traditional barriers to the fulfilment and respect of women's rights' and thus of changing people's mindsets.[61] In the policies, this is for example formulated in terms of 'resistance to behaviour change and poor understanding of gender concept'[62] and the 'need for men to be sensitized and empowered to effectively involve themselves in ending GBV'.[63] Further, the 'traditional' women and

men are in need of 'sensitization to promote understanding of gender and positive social norms and attitudes within the community'.[64] Following from this, Rwandan women and men are either considered (civilised) partners in development, or (rural/traditional) subjects in need of transformed attitudes and values (mindsets). Women are almost always viewed as potential resources, while men can be both resources and obstacles to women's empowerment and thereby to sustainable development.

Further, a feminist understanding of women's empowerment can be described as 'the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability'.[65] Instead, it is very clear from these policies which life choices women are expected to make. Women must continue to put the needs of their families, and by extension the nation, before their own in order for their contributions to be possible and to have the desired effect. Rather than challenging gender roles and stereotypes of women as caring and self-sacrificing, these policies thus rely on them.[66]

Appropriating gender equality norms for national identity construction

Appropriation involves efforts to establish a hegemonic account of a given subject, and there is a high level of consistency and repetition in the GoR's discourse on gender equality. The ruling RPF draws legitimacy from its role in representing the victims of the genocide and from having won the war, and thereby ending the genocide. This is further strengthened by the failure of the international community to not only prevent but also to intervene to stop the genocide. In the literature on Rwanda, it is often argued that this 'genocide guilt' among actors in the international community has silenced a lot of criticism and accorded the GoR a larger degree of agency than what might otherwise have been the case.[67] Mageza-Barthel has argued that because of the special relationship between Rwanda and the international community after the genocide, the GoR could

choose which norms to subscribe to and to what extent they would be implemented.[68] The GoR is also known as an unusually independent actor in development cooperation (despite its dependence on foreign aid).[69] The government has also invoked this 'genocide guilt' on occasions when it wanted the international community to stay out of its business. Criticism against the GoR over human rights issues or meddling in other conflicts in the region has become more vocal over the last decade, but only on rare occasions has this resulted in sanctions, such as the withholding of development aid, and with little lasting effect.[70]

Further, the GoR draw their legitimacy from formulating and representing an (implicitly understood as preferable) alternative to the past. They do this by setting themselves apart from former colonial masters and regimes, presenting themselves as inclusive rather than divisive and exclusionary, based on the inclusion of ethnic groups, women, youth, the handicapped, and other marginalised groups. Although the GoR has increasingly been the object of criticism from international observers for its human rights record and authoritarian leadership style, it has been quite successful in forging an image of itself in the years following the genocide as a democratically elected government promoting unity, inclusion, economic development, gender equality, and good governance. Upon its victory in 1994, the RPF named a transitional government called the 'Government of National Unity', and 'undertook an ideological programme called "national unity and reconciliation" to build a "New Rwanda"'.[71] The new government 'worked to erase the colonial past and move towards an imagined future where Hutu and Tutsi, men and women, would be equal'.[72]

The GoR not only considers itself as a preferable alternative to past regimes, it also perceives itself as the only alternative to any past or future regimes if a return to violence is to be avoided. Mann and Berry argue that the GoR justifies its tight grip on

power based on the existence of a number of threats that it perceives as having the potential to bring down the regime. These include Hutu sectarianism, a growing number of political rivals and organised dissidents, and a possible invasion from militias in Congo. Since the GoR also lacks confidence in Western intervention, threats to the regime thus become threats to the overall security of the country. It is within this perception of threats and insecurity that the GoR is motivated to pursue development and growth as a strategy to maintain political control, and violence as a justified means to do so.[73] This also justifies the demands that the regime is putting on the population in terms of changing both their behaviour and mindsets to contribute to the development of the nation.

The discourse on gender equality must therefore be understood as closely linked to both the conflict past and the envisioned future. This future can be found formulated in policy documents, such as the government's development strategy, Vision 2020:

> The Vision 2020 is a reflection of our aspiration and determination as Rwandans, to construct a united, democratic and inclusive Rwandan identity, after so many years of authoritarian and exclusivist dispensation. We aim, through this Vision, to transform our country into a middle – income nation in which Rwandans are healthier, educated and generally more prosperous. The Rwanda we seek is one that is united and competitive both regionally and globally.[74]

According to Mann and Berry, in order to enhance state power and political control, the GoR engages the entire population in the process of changing Rwanda's image into one of prosperity and stability. This is done by investing in social services, making the physical and institutional environment amenable to business and political control, and by instilling the values of nationalism and progress in the population. They refer to the latter as 'working on people's "mentalities" and "sensitizing" them to modernity and progress'. This includes erasing ethnicity from public discourse, and

associating success with hard work instead of ethnicity, thus emphasising

entrepreneurship, individual accountability and self-sufficiency.[75]

In a similar manner, the problem identified in Rwanda's gender policies of

people having the wrong mindset involves an ideological transformation from

'traditional' subjects into 'modern' subjects who fit into the image of the modern

Rwanda. As we have seen, adopting the right mindset is also about fulfilling one's duty

to the nation and being a good citizen. Good citizens embrace gender equality and fulfil

their duty to the nation by participating in public decision-making processes at the local

and national levels. Further, good citizens adopt modern worldviews, and are partners to

and supporters of the government's vision of transforming Rwanda into a market-driven

economy. Other citizens appear to be misguided. This includes women who resist the

transformation from subsistence to a market economy, and men who prevent their wives

and daughters from fulfilling their duty to the nation, and who are governed by

traditional gender roles and relations. These citizens must be educated and reformed to

reach their full potential. The transformation of the nation into the vision presented

above therefore also involves the transformation of its citizens. Through these problem

representations, the GoR connects the promotion of gender equality to a broader

nationalist project which includes the construction of a 'new' Rwandan citizen. In this

case, appropriation occurs when the meaning of gender equality is altered for the

purpose of national identity construction. Gender equality has become a central feature

in the GoR's efforts to define an official account of the nation's past and future, and its

own, as well as the role of Rwandan women and men, in that future. The particular form

appropriation has taken derives from rationales of national politics that are closely

linked to the historical legacies of conflict.

The discourse on gender equality thus goes beyond merely governing gender relations, to include the construction of new citizens within a nationalist project, and an image of a future in which the GoR safely guides its people towards prosperity and happiness. The GoR uses gender equality norms to elicit the support of the people in order for its vision of the Rwandan nation to materialise. Debusscher and Ansoms have argued that the GoR's aims to promote women are secondary to sustaining economic growth and political control.[76] While this is certainly true, based on this analysis I would also argue that gender equality is in fact an integral part of the process by which the government seeks to attain these primary goals. The findings thus support existing research that claims gender equality norms are being instrumentalised for political ends.

Conclusion

In this article, I have used problem representations as an analytical lens through which to study the appropriation of gender equality norms in Rwanda's gender policies. By analysing problem representations and their effects, I find that the GoR connects the promotion of gender equality to a broader nationalist project, appropriating gender equality norms for the purpose of national identity construction. Here, norm appropriation is understood as a discursive mechanism which can be observed in the formulation of policy. Policy production as a meaning-making activity is thus seen as central to norm diffusion, and the analysis shows the active role of the GoR in defining the meaning of gender equality in the Rwandan context.

Through policy production, gender equality has taken on a particular and contextualised meaning in Rwanda, and has become inextricably linked to the project of constructing a post-genocide national identity. Other scholars have argued that the vagueness of norms actually causes them to diffuse more widely, as they can be filled

with content by their 'receivers'. This suggests that appropriation may actually assist in the wider diffusion of norms, and partly explains both the apparent success of gender-based reforms in Rwanda, as well as challenges to the broader implementation of its gender policies. The analysis also supports arguments about the instrumental use of gender equality norms for political purposes. However, the analysis cannot establish whether the GoR (or actors therein) believes gender equality to be a good thing in and of itself. What this article has shown is that, through the way in which gender equality norms are formulated in Rwandan policy documents, these norms have become part and parcel of the pursuit of a nationalist agenda and, in this process, their meaning has been altered. It should be noted, however, that when this nationalist agenda is non-inclusive and supports the use of violence and oppression to reach other goals, the long-term effects of Rwanda's gender policies may turn out to be less favourable for the majority of Rwandan women and men.

In order to shed light on how local actors may shape processes of norm diffusion, the focus here has been on the agency of the GoR in altering norm content, and its policies form the basis for the analysis. But this approach may also be applied to other types of actors, empirical material, and policy areas. While this focus on the GoR positions it as the 'receiver' of international gender norms, the analysis also highlights how the GoR does a lot of governing of its own. Through its production of policies, institutions and discourse, it becomes a norm provider to many local 'recipients', whose agency cannot be fully grasped in a study of this sort. It is however clear from the analysis that citizens' interactions with specific norms can be substantially shaped by government policies, particularly in a context like Rwanda. Examining how actors such as governments interact with and appropriate norms through policy-making is therefore of great interest for understanding how norms travel across different contexts.

Notes

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1. Finnermore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics", 891.

2. See Zwingel, "How do Norms Travel?"

3. Van Kersbergen and Verbeek, "politics of international norms"; Wiener, "Contested Compliance"; Krook and True, "Rethinking the life cycles."

4. See Berger, *Global Norms*; Björkdahl and Gusic, "'Global' norms 'local' agency"; Groß, "from global to local"; Groβklaus, "Appropriation"; Lake et al. "Gendering Justice."

5. Bacchi, *Analysing Policy*, 32.

6. Bacchi, *Analysing Policy.*

7. Bacchi, *Analysing Policy*, 32.

8. Bacchi, *Analysing Policy*, 35.

9. Bacchi, *Analysing Policy*, 16.

10. Bacchi, *Analysing Policy*, 34.

11. Rep. of Rwanda, "National Gender Policy," 7.

12. Finnemore, "International organizations as teachers"; Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics"; Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*.

13. Bacchi, A*nalysing Policy*, 33.

14. Tripp, *Women and Power*; Berry, "When 'Bright Futures' Fade," 8.

15. Tripp, *Women and Power*; Hughes and Tripp, "Civil War"; Mageza-Barthel, *Mobilizing Transnational Gender Politics*; Freedman, *Gender, Violence and Politics*; Berry, "When 'Bright Futures' Fade."

16. Tripp, *Women and Power*; Hughes and Tripp, "Civil War."

17. Mageza-Barthel, *Mobilizing Transnational Gender Politics.*

18. Berry and Lake, "Gender Politics after War", 343; Berry, "When 'Bright Futures' Fade."

19. Lake et al. "Gendering Justice"; Bronéus, "Women and Peace Hypothesis."

20. Berry, "When 'Bright Futures' Fade"; Berry and Lake, "Gender Politics after War"; Longman, "Rwanda: Achieving Equality"; Mann and Berry, "Understanding Political Motivations"; Reyntjens, "Constructing the truth."

21. Finnemore, "International organizations as teachers"; Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics."

22. Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics"; Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*; Risse et al. *Power of Human Rights*.

23. Risse et al. *Power of Human Rights*.

24. Acharya, "How Ideas Spread"; Berger, *Global Norms*; Groβklaus, "Appropriation"; Levitt and Merry, "Vernacularization on the ground"; Zwingel, "How do Norms Travel?"

25. Berger, *Global Norms*; Björkdahl and Gusic, "'Global' norms 'local' agency"; Groß, "from global to local"; Groβklaus, "Appropriation"; Lake et al. "Gendering Justice."

26. Van Kersbergen and Verbeek, "politics of international norms"; Wiener, "Contested Compliance"; Krook and True, "Rethinking the life cycles," 104.

27. Wiener, "Contested Compliance," 191.

28. Wiener, "Contested Compliance," 192.

29. Krook and True, "Rethinking the life cycles," 105.

30. Van Kersbergen and Verbeek, "politics of international norms"; Wiener, "Contested Compliance"; Krook and True, "Rethinking the life cycles."

31. Pereira, "Appropriating 'Gender' and 'Empowerment'," 44.

32. Berger, *Global Norms*; Lake et al. "Gendering Justice."

33. Groβklaus, "Appropriation," 1253–55.

34. Groβklaus, "Appropriation," 1254.

35. Pereira, "Appropriating 'Gender' and 'Empowerment'," 44–45.

36. Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell*; and Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis*. Estimates of how many died in the genocide vary and are highly contested, but most sources place the number somewhere between 500,000 and 1 million.

37. Baines "Body Politics," 481; and Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers.*

38. Newbury and Baldwin, "Confronting the Aftermath"; and Longman, "Rwanda: Achieving Equality."

39. Mageza-Barthel, "Asserting Their Presence!," 174; and Burnet, "Gender Balance," 376–378.

40. Longman, "Rwanda: Achieving Equality"; Burnet, "Gender Balance"; and Debusscher and Ansoms, "Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda."

41. Longman, "Rwanda: Achieving Equality" 139; and Burnet, "Gender Balance," 375.

42. Bauer and Burnet, "Gender quotas," 108.

43. Berry, "When 'Bright Futures' Fade," 15–17.

44. See Longman, "Rwanda: Achieving Equality"; Reyntjens, "Constructing the truth"; Burnet, "Gender Balance"; Burnet, "Women Have Found Respect"; Debusscher and Ansoms, "Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda"; Bauer and Burnet, "Gender quotas."

45. Berry and Lake, "Gender Politics after War," 343.

46. Berry and Lake, "Gender Politics after War,"; Mann and Berry, "Understanding Political Motivations."

47. Rep. of Rwanda, "National Gender Policy," 19.

48. Rep. of Rwanda, "Gender Monitoring Office," 27.

49. Rep. of Rwanda, "National Policy against GBV," 6.

50. Rep. of Rwanda, "National Gender Policy," 21.

51. Rep. of Rwanda, "National Gender Policy," 15.

52. Rep. of Rwanda, "Gender Monitoring Office," 22.

53. Carella and Ackerly, "Ignoring rights is wrong."

54. Rep. of Rwanda, "National Gender Policy," 18.

55. Rep. of Rwanda, "National Gender Policy," 21.

56. Carella and Ackerly, "Ignoring rights is wrong," 3.

57. Rep. of Rwanda, "Gender Monitoring Office," 15.

58. Rep. of Rwanda, "National Gender Policy," 18.

59. Rep. of Rwanda, "National Gender Policy," 9.

60. Rep. of Rwanda, "National Gender Policy," 18.

61. Rep. of Rwanda, "Gender Monitoring Office," 18.

62. Rep. of Rwanda, "National Gender Policy," 18.

63. Rep. of Rwanda, "Gender Monitoring Office," 19.

64. Rep. of Rwanda, "National Policy against GBV," 13.

65. Kabeer, "Resources, Agency, Achievements."

66. Cf. Carella and Ackerly, "Ignoring rights is wrong."

67. Reyntjens, "Constructing the truth," 5.

68. Mageza-Barthel, *Mobilizing Transnational Gender Politics,* 75.

69. Hasselskog et al., "National ownership."

70. Reyntjens, *Political Governance*; and Reyntjens, "Constructing the truth."

71. Burnet, "Gender balance," 365.

72. Baines, "Building Peace in Rwanda," 228.

73. Mann and Berry, "Understanding Political Motivations," 128–130.

74. Rep. of Rwanda, "Vision 2020."

75. Mann and Berry, "Understanding Political Motivations," 133–136.

76. Debusscher and Ansoms, "Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda."

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