Women Transforming Peace

by

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Abstract

Women comprise roughly half of the world’s population. Notwithstanding, in major peace processes from 1990-2019, women have served as 2% of mediators, 5% of witnesses and signatories, and 8% of negotiators.¹ This underrepresentation of women is not only an affront to the moral principle of equality, but it is also counterproductive given the body of evidence demonstrating that women’s participation in peace processes makes a resolution more durable. This thesis synthesizes various sources to offer an integrative case as to why women’s involvement in peace talks makes a resolution more enduring. At the heart of the argument is that women’s collaborative tendencies and distinct life experiences are invaluable assets in conciliatory talks. They allow women to expand the conversation at the table, so that peace resolutions have the potential to refashion the social fabric of a society, instead of merely ending violence and changing a nation’s leadership. Addressing a wider array of social and political issues gives way to more robust solutions that touch upon larger segments of society. This, in turn, promises longer-lasting harmony.

Introduction

The premise of this thesis is that women should be involved in peace processes not only for the sake of fairness, but ultimately, because including women in the peace apparatus is an effective way to ensure that peace will stand the test of time.

Studies have illuminated women’s distinctive abilities in conflict resolution, and historically, women have made important contributions to peace. Even in the Medieval Ages when European women were treated like property, with few women being taught to read, European noblewomen were married off to noblemen to secure political alliances between nations, or to ensure the continuation of a dynasty. Women also served the purpose of peace-weavers, a term applied to “women given in marriage in order to secure peace among enemy or rival people.” In this sense, even though women were made to be powerless, they nonetheless served a political purpose. Despite their subordinated position in comparison with their male counterparts, they wielded influence in the space they could: the domestic realm, where they worked to build bridges.

Contemporarily, much of women’s contributions to peace is made through community networks, civic groups, and non-governmental organizations. While these contributions by informal avenues are tremendously important, women’s

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influence is restricted because females are systematically excluded from formal processes of conflict resolution, such as in the United Nations, political delegations, and negotiating teams, where permanent and legally binding decisions are made. The underrepresentation of women is as unfortunate as it is detrimental, given that when women participate in peace processes, the resulting agreement is 35% more likely to last at least 15 years. This evidence that when women are involved in the peace processes, the resulting peace is more durable, has been met with burrowed brows. Scholars are still trying to uncover what exactly underlies this phenomenon. In other words, why is an accord more long-lasting when women are at the table signing, negotiating or mediating it?

Partly owing to this phenomenon is that women envision a more comprehensive peace that touches upon many areas of society and entails more than surface level solutions. In this sense, achieving peace involves more than simply ending war; sustainable peace goes one vital step further: it endeavors to change the culture of the society in which war was made possible in the first place. Changing the values of a society is the essence of transformational justice, which demands a transformation of society itself. This radical change that a society must undergo is made even more necessary if society members took part in the atrocities of war, such as in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

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While previous work has noted that women tend to raise a broader range of political and social concerns and that women’s involvement in peace processes is a key ingredient to a durable accord, I have not come across a paper that directly links women’s contributions to peace as conducive to transformational justice. Thus, in this thesis, I will be synthesizing various sources to make the argument that women should be included in peacebuilding because their involvement has the potential to enhance the social and political climate of a society. This leads to a deeper peace, and in turn, significantly reduces the likelihood of a cycle back into conflict. Ensuring that peace is durable is vital given that cycles back into conflict are often the rule rather than the exception. To put this into perspective, consider the following statistic: an alarming 50% of conflict resolution agreements forged during the 1990s failed within the first five years of their inception. Further, in the 2000s, 90% of worldwide conflicts arose in countries already affected by war, and the rate of relapse back into conflict has increased every decade since the 1960s.

Throughout this thesis, I integrate several theories that explain why involving women in peacemaking leads to more successful outcomes. They include: (a) female politicians tend to consult with civil society groups. As such, they become brokers

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who connect politicians with dynamics in local communities.\textsuperscript{11} (b) Women tend to address a wider array of issues, thus expanding the discourse and proposed solutions. (c) Women prioritize gender equality. While correlation does not equate causation, gender equality is a predictor of peace. Thus, women’s empowerment could indirectly contribute to peace both within and between nations.\textsuperscript{12} (d) Finally, women tend to adopt a collaborative approach, which allows them build bridges across political divides.\textsuperscript{13}

I begin by providing a historical overview of the growing awareness that women must be part of peace processes by outlining United Nation resolutions concerning women and peace. I describe formal and non-formal avenues of peacemaking, consider why women’s involvement in peace processes leads to transformational justice, and use Rwanda as a case study of a post-conflict society with women in decision-making bodies. Finally, I explain the positive relationship between empowering women and girls and the social and political development of a nation.


American novelist and social critic James Baldwin said “Know from whence you came. If you know whence you came, there are absolutely no limitations to where you can go.” Similarly, to understand the present place of women in the international domain of peacebuilding, it is necessary to review the growing consensus that women should be part of the peace enterprise. This budding awareness is a relatively recent phenomenon, and seems to be on the upsurge. In fact, the Nobel Peace Prize for 2018 rewarded activists working for gender equality; the prize has been given to Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad for their leadership in ending the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

The slow, albeit steadily growing consciousness that women’s leadership and protection is inextricably tied to peacebuilding is seen in United Nation resolutions that link women and conflict. The most salient is UN Resolution 1325, which was unanimously adopted in October 2000. What paved the way for this resolution was not only the mounting recognition of women’s consistent and historic contributions to peacebuilding measures, but also an acknowledgement of the way in which war disproportionally affects women. International conferences in the 1900s, including The Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, touched upon the prevalence of sexual violence used against women in times of conflict, and the Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing linked the advancement of women to

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sustainable peace. However, UN Resolution 1325 is the first resolution to explicitly address the distinct violence directed towards women in times of war and to acknowledge women’s historic and under-valued efforts in the face of conflict.\(^{17}\)

Additionally, key provisions of Resolution 1325 address the distinctive protection women and girls need in conflict, and mandate an inclusion of gender-perspectives in implementing and negotiating peace.\(^{18}\)

By recognizing the way in which women’s experiences grant them a unique lens in envisioning peace, Resolution 1325 expressed a resolve to capitalize on women’s untapped potential in peacemaking. Women’s efforts in peacebuilding have often been constrained to informal avenues, such as through NGOs and civil society movements. Although these efforts have been significant, women’s contributions have been limited due to their exclusion from formal avenues of peacemaking, such as in political bodies and delegations. By recognizing that women’s relegation to unofficial peacebuilding roles limits the scope of their impact, Resolution 1325 calls for the increased participation and representation of women at all levels of decision-making. Ensuring that women are included in all aspects of bringing peace will expand their contributions from “bottom-up” processes, and grant them more oversight in overreaching, “top-down” processes as well.


It is important to note that resolutions, including 1325, are mostly symbolic by nature, as words do not automatically translate to action. Nonetheless, this resolution was an important first step in revolutionizing the way in which peace has traditionally been established. Furthermore, not only does the resolution serve as a reference point for the goals that negotiators, mediators, activists, and all those striving for peace should aspire towards, but it also stands as a groundbreaking milestone in envisioning a society that strives for equality.

While remarking on Resolution 1325, United Nations Security-General Ban Ki-moon noted the inseparable link between gender equality and international peace and security. In fact, research has corroborated that violence against women is a predictor of whether a society is generally prone to violent conflict, with gender equality being an even stronger indicator of a state’s peacefulness than factors such as GDP. Levels of gender equality are associated with a tendency for conflict both within and between nations. The evidence that gender equality can abate the possibility of war, as well as the positive association between the empowerment of women and peace, suggests that more than just benefitting women, gender equality has dividends for all members of a society.

Since Resolution 1325’s implementation, studies have been undertaken to gauge its effectiveness. It has been concluded that while the impact of the resolution

should not be dismissed, it is far from being fully realized. The participation of women in official peace processes has been increasing only marginally. The numbers are disheartening: a study of 31 negotiations between 1992 and 2011 revealed that only 9% of negotiators were women; a UN study undertaken from 2000-2010 discovered that women served as 8% negotiators and 3% as signatories; a survey of 504 peace agreements signed in 2015, reveals that merely 27% of them mentioned women; lastly, most peace agreements signed from 1990 to today include zero female signatories, and the majority of them fail to reference women and address their concerns, such as gender-based violence.

It appears that the primary positive consequence of Resolution 1325 has been the awareness it has inspired regarding issues women face in the throes of armed conflict, as well as the conversations it has generated surrounding the need to include women in peacemaking. At a United Nations meeting, Alaa Murabit, one of the Global Sustainable Development Goals Advocates in the UN, stated:

““When the Security Council finds it unthinkable to address a crisis without addressing women’s rights; where humanitarian responders have full funding for their gender-specific services; when women grassroots leaders find their work fully funded and politically supported; when it is unimaginable that


peace talks be held without women’s full engagement; only then will the full potential of 1325 be realized.\textsuperscript{25}"

\textsuperscript{25} Nations, United. "Security Council Unanimously Adopts Resolution 2242 to Improve Implementation of Landmark Text on Women, Peace, Security Agenda"
What is Transformational Justice?

From an American perspective, it can be easy to think of justice in punitive or retributive terms, where an individual who transgresses is punished in proportion to the severity of their crime. This adversarial approach to justice, which assumes an “eye for an eye” mentality, undergirds the prison apparatus.

However, when it comes to peacebuilding, transitional justice has been the dominant global approach. Post conflict societies face profound challenges, and transitional, not punitive, justice has been the principal framework to address some of the inherent trials that come with state-building. For example, transitional justice entails replacing lawless and repressive regimes with fairly-elected governments, and busies itself with instituting new laws and governing bodies. In this sense, transitional justice primarily focuses on governments and institutions.

While transitional justice is essential to establishing peace, it is not enough. By failing to address the features of a society’s values and power dynamics that allowed conflict to take root in the first place, some argue that transitional justice is palliative at best, treating symptoms of a conflict without really addressing its cause.

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If the source of conflict is not attended to, then deterring a cycle back into violence is undermined.\(^{28}\)

Recently, more and more work is shedding light on the potential of a different notion: transformational justice. Transformational justice seeks radical change. It assumes that changing the values of society itself is the surest way to cultivate a peaceful culture and to eliminate conditions conducive to conflict. More than treating symptoms of conflict, transformational justice aspires to be preventative. President Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, “More than just an end to war, we want an end to the beginnings of all wars.”\(^{29}\) Transformational justice seeks to uproot the “beginnings of wars.”

There are a number of key differences between transitional and transformational justice. Where transitional justice emphasizes legal approaches, transformational justice focuses on multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approaches; the former elevates civil and political rights, while the latter gives equal importance to social and economic rights; the former addresses acts of political violence, whereas the latter considers collective experience of structural and systemic violence.\(^{30}\) The most notable distinction between the two is the following: while a nation in transition remains an unchanged nation with a new government, a nation in transformation is


\(^{29}\) "Franklin D. Roosevelt Quotations | Page 5 at QuotecTab." QuotecTab. [https://www.quotetab.com/quotes/by-franklin-d-roosevelt/5#a2A8vQ9QJ3mQY1h.97](https://www.quotetab.com/quotes/by-franklin-d-roosevelt/5#a2A8vQ9QJ3mQY1h.97).

one that is reinventing itself from within. For transformation to occur, a top-down imposition of new governments or legal frameworks will not suffice.

Bottom-up activism is named as such because it emanates from the ground; it stems from the local level, and entails grassroots organization. Divergently, a top-down approach entails the imposition of new policy at governmental or institutional levels. The key distinction between the two is that while a top-down approach aims to change behavior through policy, a bottom-up approach conversely seeks to influence laws through public opinion. Those who espouse top-down approach to social and political change argue that systems create values, while those espousing a bottom-up approach to change contend that values inform our systems. Ultimately, both approaches are necessary to realize significant political and social change; a government should elevate democracy and civil rights through its policy, and ideally, public opinion should steer a government.

To mend a society’s social fabric, inclusion of civil societies in the peace process is extraordinarily valuable. Civil society activists have intimate contact with members of their groups, and consequently, they are exposed to realities of everyday life in an arguably more direct way than political figures are. For this reason, governments must bolster NGOs as much as possible, and civil society members should be included in peace processes. Involving individuals from a wide spectrum of society, including women, in peace negotiations has demonstrably made for a more


durable peace accord. In fact, the participation of civil society groups, including women’s groups, renders a peace agreement 64% less likely to fail. Perhaps this phenomenon is intuitive. In other words, because of the distinct suffering women and girls are subjected to during and in the aftermath of war, it is logical that they would be attuned to certain ills of war that their male counterparts may be oblivious to, and consequently, better suited to attend to these problems.

Research demonstrates that men comprise “the majority of combatants during conflict and are more likely than women to die from war’s dire effects. Women are more likely to die from war’s indirect effects after conflict ends from causes relating to the breakdown in the social order, human rights abuses, economic devastation, and the spread of infectious diseases.” As such, women who have had the opportunity to participate in negotiations often expand the range of topics addressed from ones of security, to more encompassing issues of human rights and development. While an important component of peace processes is negotiating armistices, diving territory, and outlining power-sharing measures, these elements of a deal are just the tip of the iceberg; robust negotiations must also address a society’s infrastructure, healthcare and education frameworks, judicial system, and so on. In touching upon these matters while crafting peace accords, women’s participation is essential because women have distinctive viewpoints based on their life experiences. An example of the unique way

in which women suffer during times of conflict is that during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, above 250,000 women and girls were victims of sexual violence. Even more sobering is that 66% of Rwandan women who were raped tested as HIV positive. Not only do women undergo unique abuse in the throes of conflict, but they are also left to carry many post-war burdens on their shoulders. This is because most of those who survive wars are women. In Rwanda’s case, this left the women in the country to assume a major role in its reconstruction.  

A study seeking to learn why it is that women’s participation in negotiation is a predictor of longer-lasting peace identified a possible explanation: the link between female politicians and women’s civil society groups. The investigation found that women signatories often consult with women’s groups, and as such, they become liaisons who connect politicians with the realities of their constituents. Contact with grassroots activists is crucial because civil society groups can shed light on issues that pave the way for provisions that touch upon not only political, but also economic and social reforms. Perhaps this input that female signatories receive from women civil society groups explains why agreements without female signatories “included more provisions with regard to military reform and withdrawal of troops, while agreements with female signatories included a maximum of provisions with regard to political, social, and economic reform.” Women expand the discourse from important topics, such as power-sharing and dividing territory, to equally important themes that focus on large scale inequalities embedded in society. Structural inequalities must be part of

the conversation, because these inequalities can fester frustrations and bitterness that can make a society more susceptible to war. Furthermore, inequalities are often a factor differentiating conflicting groups, as inequalities are often paired with distinguishing ethnic and regional identities. The reality that inequalities are often fall upon ethnic and regional lines makes it easier for politicians to mobilize large groups of people.\(^\text{37}\) For these reasons and more, tackling inequalities is part and parcel to the healing and transformation of a society.

If a government endeavors to reinvent society writ large, it should implement policies and initiatives with a transformative agenda. The following measures have an integrationist edge with the potential to promote reconciliation: (a) truth commissions, (b) memorials, and (c) educational reform. These three avenues are key ingredients for transformational justice, and have been employed by post-conflict governments.\(^\text{38}\) By elevating the importance of healing and truth-seeking, these socio-political interventions can shape the values of society members, and perhaps, they can bear the greatest impact on younger generations, who will be brought up with reference points and role models that champion equality and social cohesion. Later in this essay will be an analysis of transformative measures that have been implemented by Rwanda’s post-genocide government.


Gender Differences in Conflict Management

Gender differences emerge in conflict-management style. These differences are profound, and they not only influence the reasons men and women have for entering negotiation, but they also impact men and women’s behaviors and outcomes during conciliatory talks.  

Men tend to enter negotiations with task-specific motivations. As a result, they usually set higher outcome goals than their female counterparts, and they tend to be less risk aversive. While this competitive and ambitious stance in negotiation can yield favorable economic and distributional outcomes, a task-oriented emphasis can also lead to a zero-sum mentality. Furthermore, male negotiators envision a larger, more ambitious bargaining zone, and tend to negotiate more forcefully and confidently. Women, as opposed to men, tend to enter negotiations with interaction-specific motivations. This is in line with the finding that women display a higher interpersonal orientation, defined as “the degree to which individuals are interested in and responsive to the interpersonal aspects of their relationships.” In the negotiating room, this manifests in better, more harmonious relationships between parties.

Many negotiation studies have analyzed personal and corporate negotiations, rather than conflict resolution negotiations in political settings. Nonetheless, insights garnered from corporate negotiations could still prove useful in contextualizing

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phenomenon transpiring in peace negotiations. As there is limited data describing
gender differences in negotiating styles, due to limited female negotiators in both
corporate and political settings, it is important to consider all available knowledge. In
fact, only two women in history, Miriam Coronel Ferrer of the Philippines and Tzipi
Livni of Israel, have ever served as chief negotiators of peace processes, and only one
woman, Coronel Ferrer, has ever signed a final peace resolution as chief negotiator.41

Studies analyzing corporate negotiations found that when women negotiate on
behalf of themselves, they tend to devalue their worth, whereas men generally tend to
hold themselves more confidently. Some argue that this results in more favorable
outcomes for male negotiators. However, scholars have also identified a mechanism
that may level out gender differences in negotiation outcomes: mediation. This is
because when negotiations are mediated, a third party ensures that both sides have
equal air time, and this could eliminate power imbalances.

Mediation is particularly helpful for female negotiators because it safeguards
them a platform to fully express their views, while allowing them to comply with
normative expectations for female communal behavior. Social norms dictate that
women not be aggressive nor selfish, and mediated negotiations may help women
overcome a preoccupation with appearing too domineering. It is also possible that
perceiver’s bias influences women’s behavior amid negotiations; women are expected
to behave a certain way, and this expectation may culminate in a self-fulfilling
prophecy through subtle cues, where women conform to a given stereotype.

41 "Tracing the Role of Women in Global Peacemaking." Council on Foreign Relations.
Mediation may combat perceiver’s bias and stereotyping, by side-stepping features of negotiation that are perhaps less inviting to women. Recently, Norway has emerged as leader in international mediation to conflict resolution.42

In a 2003 study exploring the motivations men and women had for entering business negotiations, most men reported that their primary motivation was to further their own interests, while the majority of women reported that their primary motivation was to further their acceptance by others.43 This could explain the differing conflict resolution styles that men and women adopt. The five major approaches to conflict resolution are the following:

(1) Competing – satisfying one’s own concerns at the expense of another’s
(2) Accommodating – sacrificing one’s own concern for the sake of another’s
(3) Avoiding – neglecting both parties’ concerns by postponing a conflict issue
(4) Collaborating – attempting to find a solution that satisfies both parties’ concerns
(5) Compromising – attempting to find a middle ground, which satisfies only partly both parties’ concerns44

Women tend to adopt more cooperative conflict resolution styles, such as collaborating, compromising, and avoiding, while men veer towards competing and avoiding approaches.\textsuperscript{45} This suggests that women may be powerful assets in ensuring relational gains, while men may have a higher propensity to ensure resource-related gains. Perhaps if men and women were both at the table, leveraging different strengths, this would optimize negotiation outcomes.

Some make the argument that women’s positive impact on peace is a product of women’s peaceful nature. These arguments are rooted in essentialist assumptions that women are inherently more peaceful than men. One should be wary of putting forth essentialist claims because essentialist arguments can create binary thinking that tether people to certain qualities, and bar others from possessing those qualities, based solely on inborn characteristics. Instead of focusing on traits that males and females may be more genetically inclined towards, more attention should be heeded to socialization. It is arguable that the differing conflict resolution styles that men and women espouse are informed by gender role expectations. In other words, women are socialized to be accommodating to others and to define their sense of self within the context of a group relationship. Men, on the other hand, are socialized to be more assertive, and grow up learning to define themselves in terms of how much power and

capital they possess. With this in mind, it is not surprising that women tend to be more collaborative than men.

Collaboration is of great significance in conflict-resolution because it generates more harmonious, lasting relationships between disputing parties. In fact, that women are likelier to embrace collaboration could explain why accords with women signatories include more agreement provisions, and after 10 years, there is a higher rate of provision implementation among accords with female signatories in comparison with accords lacking female signatories. Perhaps resolutions created with the participation of women include more agreement provisions precisely because women tend to build bridges, and promote cooperation across ethnic, sectarian, and political divides. As peace accord and implementation rates are stout predictors of peace durability, by increasing both fronts, it could be that women’s involvement in negotiation is an indirect way of preventing a society’s regression back into violence.

A review of 130 major peace agreements forged between 1990-2014, found that women signed only 13 of them. Despite the meager data, the following tables illuminate key differences emerging from comprehensive peace agreements with and without female signatories.

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Comprehensive Peace Agreements 10-year Implementation rates

Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) data set
Share of Accords in Peace Agreements

- National Reconciliation
- Disarmament
- Elections/Electoral Reforms
- Ceasefire
- Commission oversee implementation
- Peace Keeping Operation
- Return
- Release of Prisoners
- Interim
- Amnesty
- Return of Refugees
- Autonomy
- Integration in Army
- Cultural Freedoms
- Political Party (Rebel Group)
- Withdrawal of Foreign Forces
- Outlining Peace Process
- Local government
- Border demarcation
- Regional Development
- Local Power-sharing
- Independence
- Federalism
- Power-sharing in government
- National Talks
- Integration in Civil Service
- Integration in government/Civil Service

Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) data set
Share of Provisions and Provisions’ Implementation Rates for Comprehensive Peace Agreements with and without Female Signatories

Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) data set
Survival Estimates for Peace Agreements with and without Female Signatories:

Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) data set for female signatories

The figures reveal that not only do implementation rates differ when peace agreements are signed by women, but that the themes of the provisions also change when women are involved, since men and women seem to endorse different focuses. ⁴⁹

It could also be that women bolster agreement provisions because they are perceived to be more honest brokers than men. An evaluation of peace accords in the Philippines discovered that women were more likely to be trusted in comparison with their male counterparts, and that they were also more apt than men at preserving interethnic alliances. The Council on Foreign Relations postulates that women are

perceived as more honest negotiators because they are often excluded. In other words, women are perceived as operating outside of power structures, and this makes others perceive them as impartial, in comparison with men. Historically, this has allowed women to create back channels with disputing groups.50

Rwanda as a Case Study

Rwanda has been selected as a case study for a few reasons. Firstly, the Rwandan genocide is unique, not only because of the overwhelming amount of violence displayed throughout its short span, but also because of the innovate responses implemented by Rwanda’s post-genocide government in its aftermath. Secondly, Rwanda was the only post-conflict society I found with a powerful presence of women in governmental decision-making bodies. At present, women are so disproportionately absent from peace talks that there is simply a shortage of case studies to draw upon.

To begin, a brief overview of the demographics and history of Rwanda: in Rwanda, there is a majority Hutu population (80%), and minority Tutsi (20%) and Twa (1%) populations. For many years, Hutus worked as agricultural laborers, while Tutsis were landowners. Though the minority, Tutsis have historically held the power in Rwanda. This stems from Belgian colonization of Rwanda, where Belgium privileged Tutsis, and introduced identity cards to distinguish ethnic origins. This established a framework where the few oppressed the many, and it aggravated ethnic tensions between Rwanda’s Hutu and Tutsi populations. Even before Rwanda gained its independence, there were outbursts of violence between the two groups. When there was an upset in power and Hutu extremists gained control of the government, they eventually attempted to displace the Tutsi minority. This was made possible through legislation, where in 1994, the interim Hutu regime coordinated the

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systematic killing of Rwanda’s Tutsi populace. This would mark the 1994 Rwandan genocide, and in the mere 100 days it lasted, three-quarters of Rwanda’s Tutsis, along with Hutu citizens that opposed the government and its murderous agenda, were slaughtered. In only three months, between 500,000 and 1 million Rwandans were killed. The atrocities were largely carried out by civilians, meaning that the genocide saw neighbors murdering neighbors, and that many victims and killers knew each other firsthand, perhaps intimately. The Rwandan genocide ended when the Tutsi militia, called the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), triumphed over the genocidal Hutu government, which was sent into exile in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Soon thereafter, the RPF formed Rwanda’s new government, which renamed itself the Government of National Unity.

Given the scale of violence, it is remarkable to consider Rwanda’s reconciliation process since 1994, especially taking into consideration that the atrocities were mostly carried out by civilians. It may also be relevant to note that Rwanda is one of the most densely populated countries in Africa, and suffers from environmental scarcity.

In addressing the formidable post-genocide challenges ahead, Rwanda’s new government undertook ambitious and dramatic measures. These measures extended

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beyond the realms of economics and governance- they were also aimed at changing Rwanda’s social fabric. To begin, gender equality was high on the agenda; Rwanda’s post-genocide constitution mandated that there be a 30% minimum representation of women in decision-making bodies. In 2003, not even a decade after the massacre, Rwanda’s President of the Supreme Court, Executive Secretary of the Gacaca court, and Minister of Justice, were all women. In addition, in 2003, 41% of those in Rwanda’s Supreme Court were women, and 26% of women held posts on the executive councils of Rwanda’s provinces.\(^{57}\) The implementation of quotas stipulating women’s participation is an example of a direct approach to confronting structural inequalities.

Further, in effort to cultivate a post-ethnic society, the Rwandan government has outlawed ethnic identification in the public sphere. The government hopes that Rwandans will cease to affiliate as Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa, but rather, that they will find affinity in a Rwandan national identity.\(^{58}\) The genocide in Rwanda was made possible by structural and historical inequalities, where power was concentrated in the hands of one ethnic group. For this reason, the RPF’s endeavor to cultivate a post-ethnic society was an attempt to address Rwanda’s structural and historical vulnerabilities. For a deep peace to transpire, the root of what made conflict possible in the first place must be addressed.

Rwanda’s government also introduced measures with a transformative dimension. Most prominently, these socio-political interventions include *gacaca* and

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ingando, both designed to increase social cohesion among Rwandans. Gacaca and Ingando are just two of several home-grown interventions undertaken by Rwandans, and in large part, they owe their success to their indigeneity. Indigenous innovations are so important because they are tailored to the attributes and needs of the society, and as such, they are responsive to the specific ills of a society. This underlines the reality that in implementing solutions, context is key; there is no “one size fits all” solution that can be prescribed to post-conflict societies. 59

In Kinyarwanda, an official language of Rwanda, gacaca can be loosely translated to “justice among the grass.”60 Rwanda’s gacaca courts, also referred to as community courts, were confronted with an unusual dynamic. Here was a court serving a population in which a sizeable segment of the population had carried out mass violence, and a sizeable segment of the population had been the victims of that very violence.61 This made the gacaca courts a space where victim and victimizer were brought face to face. While the gacaca courts did see to it that offenders were prosecuted, the purposes of the gacaca courts extended beyond the delivery of punishment; the ambition was also to heal a divided society. The gacaca courts, first piloted in 2002, created a platform for Rwandans to talk about incredibly sensitive issues.62

For victims of violence, particularly those of sexual violence, punishment can often be perceived as an integral component of justice. It is devastating to see someone who so heinously wronged you exonerated for their crime, and it is vindicating to see your perpetrator suffering for the pain they inflicted upon you. That said, it is questionable whether prosecution is conducive to societal transformation. In other words, consider the question: is it productive to imprison individuals, place them in an environment that fuels the flames of bitterness and hatred, and then release them back into society? In this vein of thinking, it may be sensible for lawmakers to consider alternative avenues of dealing with those who pervert the law. This is not to advocate impunity, but to suggest that lawmakers rethink whether the current law enforcement system adequately prevents a cycle of crime. Perhaps lawmakers should consider creative ways to adjust the way in which society grapples with convicts, such as widening educational programs for them, or perhaps mandating that they engage in fitting community service.

It seems that surest way to deter conflict is to deal with its root, including but not limited to structural inequalities between different groups. In this sense, justice must be “treated as inseparable from broader concerns about the wellbeing of communities.” The philosophy underlying the gacaca courts reflects this concern with wellbeing, as the ambition of the court was double-pronged: it involved both punishment and reconciliation. By mandating the participation of Rwandan society, and making the courts accessible for all, with a gacaca court case being cheap and

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63 Coomaraswamy, Radhika. Preventing Conflict: Transforming Justice Securing the Peace. (UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWOMEN), 2015).
rapid, the *gacaca* courts opened the floodgates of confession, and brave women had to testify before their communities.64

The gravest crimes committed during the Rwandan genocide, such as organization of the massacre and acts of violence committed by those who held high public office positions, were dealt with in ordinary civilian and military jurisdictions. All other crimes were managed by the *gacaca* courts.65 Unlike standard courts that may occupy popular imagination, the *gacaca* courts did not use lawyers. Rather, those suspected of treason were compelled to confess for want of a more lenient sentence, and they were judged by *inyangamugayo*, or local community leaders elected by citizens. *Inyangamugayo* executed punishments “according to a set of regulations based on confession and plea-bargaining, in which suspects could reduce their sentence by at least half by confessing their crimes.”66 By making confession part and parcel to prosecution, the *gacaca* courts endeavored to punish, expose, and heal. Likely, the opposing objectives of punishing and healing may have undermined one another.

It is uncertain how much the *gacaca* courts succeeded in mending the divides across Rwandan society. Some argue that co-existence among Rwandans is enforced from above, instead of genuinely internalized among Rwandans. However, perhaps

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absolute social cohesion was never a feasible endeavor for the *gacaca* courts. After all, building trust takes time. Arguably, the most that could be expected of the *gacaca* courts, at least in their time, was to bring perpetrators and survivors together in a local space. Even if true reconciliation will not be possible for those who lived to see the genocide unfold before their eyes, there is hope that survivors’ children will form a more united society. If parents make the difficult compromise of ensuring that they do not pass down their pain generationally, a foundation of trust can be laid. In an interview on *The Promised Podcast*, Reverend Doctor Gary Mason, an activist who devoted many years to building peace in Northern Ireland, said “Even 20 years after the signing of the Good Friday agreement we are still painfully, I want to underline the word *painfully*, developing trust.”67 This implies that perhaps, time may be the best doctor.

In addition to the *gacaca* courts, the Rwandan government implemented another institutional innovation to address the wounds of the past. This indigenous measure is called *ingando*, which translates to “camp” in Kinyarwanda.68 As the definition suggests, *ingando* was a measure undertaken by Rwanda’s government that entailed placing Rwandans together in residential camps across the country. Rwandans lived together in these camps for periods spanning days to weeks, and the focus was to learn about various topics pertaining to Rwanda’s past. In this sense, the primary goal of *ingando* was to educate Rwandans with the hope that this would encourage interethnic reconciliation and national unity. Several groups participated in

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ingando, and it was organized based on the backgrounds of different participant communities, so that the program would differ depending on whether participants were lawmakers, released prisoners, university students, community leaders, Rwandan exiles, survivors of the genocide, et cetera. In this sense, for some ingando was a “solidarity camp,” while for others, an “education camp.” Ingando was first conceived in 1996, and executed on a national scale beginning in 1999.69

Through ingando, Rwanda’s government espouses a narrative of Rwandans coinciding peacefully until the advent of Belgian colonialism, and they disseminate this narrative to all Rwandan citizens. Although this depiction may lack accuracy in its rosy simplicity, it is nonetheless a narrative that aims to stitch Rwandans together. Further, this education has the power to meaningfully shape Rwandan society, especially the younger generation, whose “political consciousness had not already been activated by the time of genocide.” It will be curious to see what the political imprint of rising generations will be. However, while education has immense transformational value, state-sponsored education treads a slippery slope, as it can often take the form of political indoctrination. Further, if there is a transfer of power in the future, such state-sponsored education can be dangerously manipulated, with integrationist narratives being replaced with inciting ones.70

Rwanda legislated transformative measures such as the gacaca courts and ingando with the influence of Rwanda’s female lawmakers. Aloysie Cyanzaire, who

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served as Chief Justice of Rwanda’s Supreme Court from 2003-2011, was one of the pioneers of the gacaca initiative when it began in 2000. She was aided by Aloisea Inyuma, who held numerous leadership posts including Minister of Gender, Head of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, Governor, and Senator. The following quote is attributed to Inyumba:

“Women understand most the importance of peace. In conflicts, women are the ones hurt most, so each will participate in the recovery some way. Look at the key institutions in our country today. Women are providing leadership. There’s no way you can talk about the transformation of a society unless that group is involved. Much as we want to benefit from this process, we also want to be part of it. There’s no way you can avoid 55 percent of a population and think they’ll just be recipients. We can’t just have peace delivered to us on a plate.”

With 64% of its government comprised of female parliamentarians, Rwanda’s parliament boasts more women than any other in the world. In this sense, Rwanda fares better than not only its African neighbors, but also better than most of the globe

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in ensuring that women have a place in decision-making bodies. In fact, in the 2016 Global Gender Indices, Rwanda scored as one of the top five countries in gender equality, trailing just behind Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The United States ranked number 45.\(^2\)

As soon as the RPF came into power, women’s empowerment was high on the agenda. Since the RPF’s ascent to power in 1994, almost half of Rwanda’s government has been comprised of women. In this same short time span, Rwanda has spearheaded reforms in progressive health, education, gender equity, and sustainability. It is not a coincidence that these measures were instituted with more women at the table. More than focusing on military and political reforms, these initiatives exemplify a holistic approach that has the potential to mold public consciousness. Several additional advancements include instituting compulsory ninth-grade education, increasing literacy, and combating aids and malaria.\(^3\) Further, Rwanda’s economy is one of the fastest growing in Africa, with Rwanda’s GDP having grown an average of 8% per year between 2011 and 2014.\(^4\) Finally, while Rwanda remained in the low human development category in the 2016 UN Human Development Index, Rwandans’ life expectancy has increased by almost 32 years in

\(\text{\(^2\) The Global Gender Gap Report. (World Economic Forum: 2016).}\)


\(\text{https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2018/03/former-ambassador-says-rwandas-lesson-is-empowering-women/}.\)

\(\text{\(^4\) Hutt, Rosamond. "5 Things to Know about Rwanda's Economy." World Economic Forum.}\)

\(\text{https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/04/5-things-to-know-about-rwanda-s-economy/}.\)
the past three decades, and Rwandans spend almost twice as long at school as they did before the genocide.\textsuperscript{75}

What makes Rwanda’s impressive stature in gender equity so remarkable is that before the genocide, the culture in Rwanda was by no means a progressive one that encouraged women’s enfranchisement. In fact, the opposite could be said. Prior to the 1994 genocide, women were largely subordinated to men, with women being discouraged from speaking in public if men were present.\textsuperscript{76} The culture was very much patriarchal, and extraordinarily, it was the genocide that lead to a paradigm shift, where women began to fulfill roles traditionally carried out by men.\textsuperscript{77} In the words of Swanee Hunt, founder of Inclusive Security, an organization that advocates for the inclusion of women in peace processes, “it was chaos that cracked open the culture of Rwanda.”\textsuperscript{78} In other words, Rwandan women, with their astonishing resilience, rebuilt the country simply because there was no other choice. With the male populace greatly reduced after the genocide, women were left to care for not only those who survived in their families, but also for the many orphans left in the genocide’s wake. When the RPF resettled internally displaced persons back into Rwanda, Rwandan women took on an immense role in the resettlement effort, with

between 400,000 and 500,000 children being fostered largely by women-headed households. Such an effort required the wherewithal of survivors to invite individuals previously perceived as enemies into their homes.

Ultimately, the rupture in Rwanda’s leadership created a power vacuum, and this left a stratum for women to fill. While women’s advancements in Rwanda do not justify the horrors of the genocide, it is often catastrophes that pave the way for change. Applying similar logic, it is curious whether United States President Donald Trump could be the “chaos” that inspired so many Americans to get involved in politics. In the United States 2018 midterm elections an unprecedented number of women ran, and won seats, in Congress.

Rwanda is by no means perfect, and should not be regarded as a model of a transformed society. Poverty remains widespread in Rwanda, and notwithstanding the economic leaps Rwanda has made since the genocide, most of the country’s wealth is concentrated in urban centers. Furthermore, Rwanda’s constitution, though championing ideals such as ethnic and gender equality, also upholds laws that serve the regime’s end of securing its political survival at the cost of diminishing freedom of speech. For example, the constitution outlaws “propaganda deemed to be discriminatory on ethnic, racial, and regional grounds.” While this description sounds harmless, in actualization, what the government considers to be propaganda is

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ever-expanding, with the aim of repressing political opposition. This has meant that since RPF has assumed power, prominent political opponents have fled the country, including Rwanda’s new Hutu Prime Minister, Faustin Twigaramungru, in 1995. RPF has abused such laws to masquerades attempts to eradicate sectarianism with its ultimate agenda to retain power. This has allowed the RPF to remain in power since the genocide, and essentially, it means that activism in Rwanda can be criminally punished.82

It is noteworthy to mention that the way in which Rwandans conceptualize civil society may differ from understandings of civil society in the United States. While Americans envision civil societies as functioning alongside governments to step in where the government falls short, or to keep a government in line when necessary, Rwandans often see civil society as an extension of the government.83 The RPF tightly manages civil society in Rwanda because it fears that if the country opens up too much too quickly, ethnic extremism will surface. Given the immediacy and severity of the 1994 genocide, the government is eager to retain the survival of a Tutsi-majority government, and worries that liberalization the country could lead to its destabilization.

The Rwandan government’s assault on freedom of speech could eventually work to sabotage the remarkable progress that Rwanda has made in the last few decades. Rwanda’s government would be wise to heed to the following

recommendation proposed by Dr. Omar McDoom at the London School of Economics:

“it is important to realize that stability based on economic growth and strong leadership is not sustainable in the long-run as economies will fluctuate and leaders must change. It is in its strategic long-term self-interest therefore to reverse the current trend and increase political space in order to permit civil and political society to evolve into responsible and independent counterweights to its own power. The ruling party cannot stay in office indefinitely and strengthening the independence of both state institutions and civil and political society improves the chances of a constitutional and peaceful change of regime one day.”

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Empowering Women and Girls Benefits Society At Large

It is unconscionable that women, who comprise approximately half of the world’s population (as of 2017, 49.6% to be exact)\(^8\), do not have equal access to health, education, economic participation, earning potential, and decision-making power.\(^6\) However, leaving aside the moral imperative of advancing the rights and protection of women and girls, the reality is that empowering them benefits society at large. While indirect, the link between female empowerment and the political and social development of a nation is indisputable, with women’s rights and the overall peacefulness of a nation being positively associated.\(^7\) Furthermore, gender equality seems to be particularly interlaced with a country’s economic development, as there is a robust negative correlation between lack of women’s rights and GDP per capita.\(^8\)

The labor market would merit from women’s skills, and it is logical that when women are excluded from the workforce, an enormous amount of human potential is wasted.

In addition to promoting favorable economic outcomes, gender equality has far-reaching impacts that ripple to seemingly unexpected domains such as nutrition, agriculture, and development. An optimal example is the outcome of educating girls. Educated women have fewer children, experience lower child mortality, generate more income, and are far more likely to provide better nutrition for their families in

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85 "Population, Female (% of Total)." Data, data.worldbank.org/indicator/sp.pop.totl.fe.zs.
comparison to women with little or no schooling. These outcomes, in turn, generate a beneficial cycle for communities and countries at large.\textsuperscript{89}

An extensive literature review published by the Oxford University Press found that women’s and girl’s empowerment is associated with a wide spectrum of better health and development outcomes. Researchers concluded that in addition to education, (a) equitable control over income/assets/resources, and (b) equitable decision-making power, also are broadly correlated with health and development outcomes. Equitable control over assets and equal decision-making power share one important feature: they elevate women’s agency. While these association do not prove causality (with exception to education), they do suggest that promoting women’s equality broadly improves health and development for women, which inadvertently results in better health and development for women’s families and communities as well.\textsuperscript{90}

For all the above reasons and more, women’s and girl’s empowerment must be prioritized, and an effective means of bolstering gender equality is to include more women in the peace enterprise. Peace agreements with female signatories fare more generously on scores of women’s rights\textsuperscript{91}, as women tend to champion for women’s


empowerment. A review of data from 159 developing countries discovered that countries that have a higher share of women in parliament are more likely to pass gender-sensitive laws regarding sexual harassment, rape, divorce, and domestic violence.\textsuperscript{92}

Only when women are thriving as equal citizens, can a society truly flourish. As Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said:

“In a real sense, all life is interrelated. All men are caught in an escapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be… This is the inter-related structure of reality.”\textsuperscript{93}


\textsuperscript{93} "Washington State University." Famous Quotes | Martin Luther King Program at WSU. https://mlk.wsu.edu/about-dr-king/famous-quotes/.
Conclusion

Transforming a post-conflict society can be conceptualized in the same way one would approach a medical ailment. Like the body, with its various systems that are all interconnected, a nation is a multifaceted entity, with various institutions that all invariably influence one another. In addition to its political and legal institutions, a nation encompasses its economy, healthcare and education systems, and its own unique culture.

To establish lasting peace, both within a nation and between nations, one must implement wide-ranging provisions that speak to various domains of the nation. A peace resolution is incomplete if it only protects civil and political rights. Rather, an accord must give commensurate consideration to social and economic rights. Just as the body is one organ, so too is a nation, and both should be treated as holistically as possible. To see truly remarkable results, one must address the conditions that are allowing the disease to manifest in the first place. As one should nourish their body with healthy foods and exercise, one should foster a society with principles of equality and democracy. Furthermore, just as medical treatment should be tailored to a person based on their age, sex, and medical history, peace accord needs to address the unique features of a nation. In conflict resolution, there is no “one size fits all” solution. This is precisely what renders indigenous innovations effective at mending conflicts; they speak to the specific dynamics of a country.

There are two types of peace resolutions: “thick” peace accords and “thin” peace accords. While “thin” deals mainly involve the armed sectors and are far less likely to hold throughout the tempest we call time, “thick” agreements involve
various segments of society, and thus, they tend to be more durable. Women are conducive to “thick” peace accords, and including their invaluable perspectives in the discussion has been shown to create resolutions with a more successful prognosis.

True peace entails so much more than just ending war, and excluding women from parliament and other decision-making bodies ultimately does everyone in society a disservice. By adding new dimensions to policy agendas, women perspectives are key in addressing various political and social issues that would otherwise be neglected. Ultimately, all of society’s stakeholders, with their own experiences and vantage points, should be part of the discussion that will shape their futures. This is not only a matter of morality, but inclusion of various perspectives leads to solutions that are more comprehensive. The more minds at the table, the merrier, especially when those minds belong to individuals with a breadth of differing experiences. How can a government speak for a society if it does not represent that society in all its fullness?

While Rwanda was used as a case study of a society undergoing transformation, Rwanda is by no means a transformed society. In fact, no society is completely “transformed,” because this would imply that there is no room for growth. Rather than existing as a reachable goal, transformational justice is an ideal that societies should continuously strive towards. If the world were viewed through these lenses, perhaps societies could collectively sow the seeds for peace in the future.


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