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Land dispossession as continuum of violence: women's political agency in post-genocide Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

The article investigates how gender and class shape women's political empowerment in post-genocide Rwanda, where access to land creates gendered networks for women to exercise their political agency in the community, market, and state. It argues, based on interviews with Rwandan women, that after the genocide elite women with access to land obtained opportunities to participate in collective political activities that were denied to landless women who were more preoccupied with their daily struggles to survive. It calls for an intersectional examination of class within the continuum of violence against women in the aftermath of conflicts.

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1. Introduction

Since the millennium, Rwanda has been lauded as a prosperous country with the highest number of women in the Parliament (61% in 2018) globally. In 2003, as the milestone marking a successful political transition from the genocide against the Tutsi (the genocide), gender quotas for women's political inclusion were enshrined by the Government of Rwanda led by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in the constitution in 2003. Consequently, women's presence in parliament increased to 48.8% in 2003 compared to 4.4% in 1995. This number further increased to 63.8% in 2013 and 61.4% in 2018, placing Rwanda first in the world for the number of women represented in a legislative body (IPU 2017). Since then, Rwanda has become a success story for women's political inclusion in peace-making transitions. Furthermore, some scholars claim that war and conflicts, as shown in the Rwandan case, can provide political opportunities for gender relations transformation (Anderson 2016). Nevertheless, despite the great numerical success of women in political institutions, this institutional perspective fails to consider the unequal power relations among women from different classes in Rwanda, especially as it has materialised in land (dis)possession in post-conflict agrarian change. This is, at its heart, what this paper responds to.

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The paper seeks to rectify this neglect of land dispossession and its impact on women's political participation in post-conflict contexts in feminist security scholarship by drawing on feminist agrarian studies. The literature on gender and conflict is important as it provides pivotal insights on women's participation in post-conflict reconstructions, highlighting the ways in which conflicts serve as a 'window of opportunity' for women to make their demands and exercise their agency in peace processes (Anderson 2016). Meanwhile, Cockburn (2004, 43) argues that women are subjugated to violence 'from the personal to the international', and 'it is meaningless to make a sharp distinction between peace and war, prewar, and postwar.' Cockburn (2004) further elaborates on the three aspects of post-conflict situations: displacement, economic and social reconstruction, and aid and reconciliation, upon which the three empirical sections in the paper are built. This continuum of violence permeates all spaces of social relations. This paper is consistent with feminist literature on gender and conflict that foregrounds the continuum of violence based on the acknowledgement of women's structural subordination to violence and defines security in broad and multinational terms: encompassing human, social, and environmental security, domestic violence, as well as the security of the state (Cockburn 2013; Enloe 2000, 2004, 2014; Tickner 1992). Furthermore, does this literature produce a useful framework to analyse the gendered dynamics of political participation in post-conflict agrarian societies? This is an important question for understanding women's participation in contexts, such as that of Rwanda, where the dominant means of subsistence entails wage-work, non-wage work and cash-earning activities that are embedded in agrarian production.

To capture the gendered dynamism of political participation in agrarian societies, one needs to consider how women's political agency is shaped by conflict-related agrarian changes. While literature on gender and conflict problematised the victimisation of women in post-conflict societies, its mainstream approach to achieve gender justice after war is limited to an institutional one, including establishing gender quotas and gender machinery and reforming gender-related laws. This approach is useful but limited when trying to understand and transform structural barriers against women's accessibility to participate in post-conflict politics. Moreover, such an institutional approach based on the assumption of women being a monolithic group misses an opportunity to examine the intersectional differences of agency women can obtain and exercise after conflicts. Thus, I draw on the literature of feminist agrarian studies to investigate the ways in which land mediates gendered agency in post-conflict Rwanda. Particularly, this paper benefits from Agarwal's (1997) theorisation of women's bargaining power, which argues that ownership of, and control over, arable land is a privileged position which enables women's bargaining power within and beyond the household. However, Agarwal (1994b) states that women's struggle for land rights and gender equality manifests mostly in individual covert ways and it is crucial instead to build overt and collective resistance. Agarwal's work speaks to Rwandan women's post-genocide experience where those women from landed households had more and better opportunities to participate in the labour market and in NGOs, enabling them to eventually become new leaders. In comparison, women from lower classes struggled with everyday subsistence, finding it difficult to engage with larger community politics.

This paper brings together insights from two bodies of literature, feminist security studies and feminist agrarian studies, to construct an integrated framework for the

conceptualisation of women's political agency in post-conflict agrarian societies. The paper aims to address an overarching question: how is women's political agency shaped by post-conflict agrarian change? More specifically, following Agarwal's work (1994b), this paper asks what are the gendered networks determining women's political agency from an individual level to a collective one. The analysis shows that, even though the post-genocide gender politics provided Rwandan women at large more spaces and opportunities to engage with and contribute to politics, the class struggles materialised in land possession prevented most of the female population from gaining political power. In other words, such women's political inclusion reform only recognises women's rights to participate in politics yet fails to structurally redistribute resources and materials for marginalised women. As a result, women from landed households were able to consolidate their agency, becoming new leaders in post-genocide Rwanda. In contrast, women from lower classes were also able to exercise agency after the war, but it was limited to an individual level.

In this paper, I used a feminist and decolonial methodology for data collection and analysis (Chilisa 2019; Harding 1987; Hesse-Biber 2012; Wilkinson 2004). This approach involves prioritising the concerns and perspectives of gendered non-Western subjects, as well as respectfully recognising and comprehending theories and research from viewpoints that were previously marginalised or considered 'Other' (Smith 2012). As an East Asian researcher from a global north institution, I am aware of the politics of knowledge production in African gender studies and thus regard my interlocutors during my fieldwork as central knowledge producers. Precisely, it was their answers about their family history that informed the rest of many individual interviews, and largely directed this paper to take a feminist agrarian approach. As the primary knowledge producers in this project, the interlocutors signposted the significance of land in their political agency and directed me to centre class as the analytical framework, which dictates gendered lived realities. In ten months of fieldwork (2018–19) in Kigali, I conducted 70 individual interviews with women from different class backgrounds, including political elites, NGO directors, imidugudu (village)¹ leaders, street vendors, and domestic workers and focus groups with domestic workers – all of whom gave me their consent in participating in the project. For this paper, I include ten interlocutors' stories, seven are political elites, three from lower-classes employed in street vending and domestic work.² All seven elite women in this paper own land in Kigali bought with their own salaries, whereas the three lower class women, Sonia, Mutesi and Nise, had no access to land. To ensure the safety of the participants, all names have been anonymised.

¹In this paper, I use 'Imidugudu' (capitalised) to refer to the national land reform policy, and 'imidugudu' (non-capitalised) to refer to villages, as the physical administrative entity. Moreover, I decided to use all Kinyarwanda words as non-italic, to challenge and problematise the imperial boundaries of English, the language, and the knowledge system, inspired by both African writers, including Amos Tutuola (2014) and Mariama Bâ (1989) and Chinese diaspora writers, including Yan Ge (2014) and Yiyun Li (2020).

²In this paper, I refer 'elite' and 'lower-class' to the Rwandan social-economic stratification system Ubudehe. Ubudehe, as one of the homegrown initiatives, categorises all households into four categories of poverty. Political elites who work in women's NGOs and consultancy, including Jane, Shakre, Megan, Lupita, Marisa and Hannah, are from category 4 'citizens classified under this category were Chief Executive Officers of big businesses, employees who had full-time employment with organisations', and the imidugudu leader Shemusa is from category 3 'citizens who were gainfully employed or were even employers of labour'. Lower-class, including Sonia, Mutesi and Nise, are from category 2 'Citizens who were able to afford some form of rented or low-class owned accommodation, but who were not gainfully employed and could only afford to eat once or twice a day' (Rwandapedia 2015).

This paper starts with a theoretical framework of gender and violence and highlights the intellectual lacuna of land as part of the continuum of violence in women's participation in post-conflict politics. Then, this paper delineates an overview of the Rwandan land policies with a focus on the Imidugudu (villagisation) policy during the political transition (1994–2003).³ The next three sections discuss the lived realities of women from different socio-economic backgrounds in three arenas where 'gender relations get constituted and contested within each' (Agarwal 1997, 34): the community, where displacement and estrangement took place during the genocide; the market, where landless women were compelled to live on precarious wages; and the state voluntary work in the reconciliation process, which provided different options for women from different class backgrounds. In these spaces, women embody various levels of agency: women from poor backgrounds have limited capability and accessibility to take part in politics; whereas, regardless of their returning status from exile before and during the genocide, elite women found more spaces and positions and became the new political leaders.

2. Framing gender, violence and land in post-conflict societies

This section lays out the theoretical framework of the interplay of gender, violence and land in post-conflict societies, with a focus on post-genocide Rwanda. It starts with a feminist security intervention in mainstream violence and security studies to scrutinise the stereotypical representation of women as passive victims. Amongst feminist security scholars, some assert the liminal effects of conflicts, in a sense transforming gender relations by carving out more public space for women. Building on this literature, I argue that the discussion on the transformative effect of conflict on gender relations missed the opportunity to examine the continuum of violence, especially such violence within land dispossession. Using land dispossession as a lens to examine women's post-conflict political agency allows one to see the limitations of institutional reform restrained to a recognition of women's rights without redistribution of material resources for marginalised political subjects. Thus, this integrated framework of gender, violence, and land signposts the importance of land ownership for women's empowerment beyond individual struggle to participate in collective resistance.

Feminist security studies have been leading the discussion of women's political participation, and a key insight from this scholarship has been to problematise the portrayal of women as somehow vulnerable, like children (Enloe 2014, 1). To reverse this victimisation of female actors in conflicts, feminist security scholars make the intervention that women in conflicts have various kinds of agency, including becoming new leaders in the aftermath of conflicts (Cockburn 2013; Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2014; Sjoberg 2010; Tickner 1992). With such agency, women survivors of conflicts demonstrate their visibility as '*thinkers and actors*' rather than the '*objects of those events*' (Enloe 2014, 33–34, italics in original).

For a similar purpose of examining women's subjectivity after conflicts, some feminist security scholars regard war as a liminal opportunity that provides means to disrupt

³This transitioning period is framed as 1994–2003 by the Rwandan official history account (Byanafashe and Rutayisire 2016). However, scholars like Filip Reyntjens (2006) and Jennie Burnet (2008) argue the Rwanda's transition started well before the 1994 genocide, with a political opening in 1989 when the multi-party-political system was established under the Habyarimana administration.

previous gender relations and break gendered cultural taboos (Bauer and Burnet 2013; Tripp 2015; Waylen 2007; Yadav 2016). Situated in the Rwandan context, scholars assert that gender relations were reorganised by the genocide (Brown 2016; Burnet 2008; Hunt 2017; Mageza-Barthel 2015; Powley 2006; Tripp 2015). Berry (2018, 85–86) argues that ‘women went from being farmers and housewives to being perceived by the state and the whole population as crucial for the country’s recovery’. Indeed, thanks to thousands of women assuming new economic roles in the labour market (including many roles previously seen as ‘men’s work’), such commercial activities transformed conventional social expectations for women after the genocide (Berry 2018, 85). However, the above-mentioned literature misses the chance to examine the class dynamics in women’s post-genocide experiences. Namely, some research only focuses on Rwandan female political elites (Devlin and Elgie 2008; Morojele 2016; Powley 2005); others only examine poor women’s experiences after the war (Burnet 2012; Sinalo 2018). None of the scholars compare the divergent experiences of women from different class backgrounds, or further signpost the significance of class in shaping women’s agency after the war.

Thus, the above discussion misses an opportunity to investigate any structural challenges in institutional gender reforms, which take a numerical approach and overlook the intersectionality of gender and class in constituting women’s political agency. Meredith Turshen (2000) and Jacqui True (2010; 2012, 6–7), offer a feminist political economy analysis of research and praxis in post-conflict contexts to highlight the role of ‘economic impoverishment and lack of opportunities in violence against women’. In a similar vein of feminist political economy, Lyn Ossome (2014) asserts that the key question for women’s rights to land in African plural legal systems is to locate ‘the types of social and political relations in which land is situated’. This paper is consistent with Lyn Ossome’s (2014) prompt that women’s political participation needs to be situated in these land ownership dynamics. In the Rwandan context, Ali, Deininger, and Goldstein (2014) find that with the land tenure regularisation (LTR) in Rwanda (discussed below), only women in registered marriages experience positive outcomes. Indeed, it is increasingly difficult to get married in Rwanda due to the fact that eighteen percent of male youth live in extreme poverty (Sommers 2012). As a result of the financial challenge for marriage, approximately thirty percent of women are in non-registered marriages, which undermines their rights and access to property (Ansoms and Holvoet 2008; Bayisenge 2018). This allows me to question gender institutional reform, which encourages women to run as candidates for elections and political parties, but only benefits a limited group of female elite candidates whose position grants greater access to the land than those from less advantageous economic backgrounds. In other words, the institutional approach does not ‘dismantle the gender binary and its hierarchical history’ nor ‘challenge the status quo and functioning of the institution itself’ (Heathcote 2019, 147, 150). Informed by the feminist political economy approach, this paper contends that the question of women’s agency needs to be understood as a structural one rather than merely counting the women in political institutions.

The feminist agrarian literature on women’s access to land in agrarian contexts provides illumination on land as a weapon in power struggles. This paper is greatly influenced by Bina Agarwal’s theoretical framework in two aspects. First, Agarwal (1994a; 1997) argues that rural women’s ownership of and control over arable land

holds a privileged position in determining their bargaining power. Similarly, in their discussion regarding women's access to land in African contexts, Whitehead and Tsikata (2003, 76–77) point out the 'social embeddedness' of African systems of land access in social relations via negotiation and socialisation. This gendered approach to land possession perceives land beyond a means of production for food. Thus, land as a natural resource creates not only a property relationship between people and things, but also various kinds of unity and community relations (Whitehead and Tsikata 2003). It is useful for this paper to conceptualise land ownership as the material condition for women to participate in post-conflict politics, beyond the realm of agricultural production. In a similar vein, this paper uses land as socially embedded property as the method to understand the gendered power dynamics after the genocide. Second, Agarwal (1997) pinpoints the significance of taking account of women's individual covert resistance in the form of everyday struggles into understanding their resistance against gender inequalities, while maintaining that organised collective resistance is crucial for systematic change. The framework of covert individual versus overt group resistance is useful in this paper to analyse Rwandan women from various class backgrounds who embody different levels of political agency and have achieved differently in political leadership after the genocide. Following Agarwal's framework of the community, the market and the state as three arenas of gender relation contestations (Agarwal 1997), the paper posits women's access to land as the social condition that provides kinship networks in the community, wage employment in the market and voluntary job experiences in the state peace-building projects.

The next section illustrates the history of land tenure systems in Rwanda and the gender relations embedded in each of the historical periods. It starts with land ownership in the Nyiginya Kingdom where Queen Mothers ascended to the reign thanks to their landed clan backgrounds. Then, the section moves to land tenure systems since Rwanda obtained independence in 1962 until 1994. The remainder of the section explains the ways in which RPF consolidated its political governance and legitimisation by introducing the Imidugudu land reform during this transitional period.

3. Historicising women's tenure rights and political participation in Rwanda

In this section, I delineate a brief account of the land reform history in Rwanda with a focus on the post-genocide land policy Imidugudu; these reforms were established to address the housing crisis caused by two waves of refugee repatriation after the genocide.

The history of women's political participation in Rwanda started with Queen Mothers in the Nyiginya kingdom, despite their presence as less than ten percent of all Tutsi royals (Codere 1973, 70).⁴ As land ownership was organised around a system of clan-based communal land tenure, Queen Mothers in monarchical history could not have evolved into

⁴From the eleventh to the nineteenth century, Rwanda was organised politically into kingdoms, which were dominated by the Tutsi Nyiginya clan in the mid-18th century. The Nyiginya clan (ubwoko) is one of the almost twenty clans in present-day Rwanda. By the nineteenth century, the Nyiginya dynasty – in what is today central Rwanda – had initiated a joint-rulership shared between the King (mwami) and the Queen Mother (umugabekazi). This joint form of power is essentially a result of the political negotiation between the two most prosperous Tutsi clans: Abanyiginya and Abeeega (Mamdani 2001, 21).

such powerful figures without their landed elite family backgrounds. Towards the late nineteenth century, the royal family under the reign of Rwabugiri (1867–1895) extended the existing rather autonomous clientship to *uburetwa*, where all Hutu men who are deprived of land were forced into servitude for Tutsi royal chiefs (Mamdani 2001, 65; Newbury 1988, 81–85; Pottier 2002, 13).⁵ If *uburetwa* was not carried out when required, the family's rights to their land, which were assured by the chiefs on behalf of the Mwami, would be forfeit (Huggins 2014a). In this patrimonial system, the *uburetwa* land system allowed a small number of Tutsi elite men to get involved in the court politics whereas the majority of Hutu and non-royal Tutsi men farm and live under the patronage of their local chiefs (Medard 1982, 166). With the arrival of European colonial power and the establishment of a powerful missionary order in the beginning of the twentieth century, the number in forced labour increased drastically due to the colonisers' demand for crops (Forges 2011, 246) and land became privatised, which significantly reduced women's rights to land.

Beyond this classed disparity of land possession and working conditions, women outside the royal courts struggled with increasing land scarcity. Outside the court, in the patrilineal society located in the Great Lakes region, women had no rights to inherit lands from their own lineage but could gain access to land through motherhood from their husbands' kin, and sometimes used their sons as instrumental power for a more comfortable life later (Schoenbrun 1998, 123). The significant majority of women lived on the periphery of politics, largely due to their dispossession of land based on their ethnic and gender identities.

Later during the mid-twentieth century, while the reign of the monarchy may have concluded with the creation of the independent Rwandan state, the interplay of class and gender continued to significantly impose on political realities. During the post-independence period between 1962 and 1994, a very small number of women were appointed as politicians (Holmes 2014, 106). The first and only female prime minister, Agathe Uwilingiyimana, came to power in 1993 despite being verbally attacked around her gender and sexuality constantly by Hutu extremist propaganda (Holmes 2013).⁶ In this period, land was 'abandoned, confiscated and redistributed' due to political instability (Polavarapu 2011, 111). Musahara and Huggins (2005) observe the process where elites accumulated land accompanied by the rise of a landless population. By 1984, approximately fifteen percent of the land-owners owned half of the land (Ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Élevage et des Forêts 1985). Land access and ownership continued to be limited to the male heads of the households. With land resources becoming increasingly scarce, brothers' and fathers' obligation to their sisters and daughters under the customary law became more contested (Polavarapu 2011, 110).

⁵Control over land before the reign of Rwabugiri (1867–1895) was usually vested in lineages. In the mid-nineteenth century, there were two kinds of land clientship: *ubukonde* ('land which had been cleared and settled by the lineage occupying it or their ancestors') and *igikingi* ('land held by cattle-owning lineage, granted by the king or another political official') (Newbury 1988, 79). These two practices were in a rather 'casual clientship obligations', compared with the later *uburetwa* control (Newbury 1988, 80). According to Newbury (1988, 140), '*uburetwa* was a residual category for the powerless' as Hutu were not only obliged to perform the most menial kind of labour without pay, but also subjected to mistreatment as well.

⁶Prior to Uwilingiyimana, in 1964, Madeleine Ayinkamiye was appointed as the minister of social affairs and public health, becoming the first-ever woman in a cabinet position in Rwanda; in 1965, A. Mukakayange was the first woman who was elected to the parliament; in 1992, President Habyarimana established the ministry of family and women's development.

The genocide in 1994 had a significant impact on land ownership and led to post-genocide reforms aimed at recognising and protecting women's land rights. In the aftermath, 34% of the households were headed by women and 60% of these were headed by widows (Newbury and Baldwin 2000). This demographic change presented an urgent need for the Rwandan government to intervene. Laws governing land (the Land Law of 2013, repealing the former of 2005) and inheritance (the Inheritance and Marital Property Law of 1999) enabled women to own land in their own right, gave daughters the same right to inherit properties as sons, and gave married women equal rights over joint property in marriages. Later LTR rolled out in 2012 was intended to increase tenure security but only benefited women in registered marriages (Abbott, Mugisha, and Sapsford 2018), with very few Rwandan women in rural areas adequately informed of such reform (Bayisenge 2018). Amongst the land reform policies, this paper focuses on the Imidugudu land reform, as a response to the most critical issue in post-genocide Rwanda: refugee returns.

The transition government established the Imidugudu programme as a political-economic response to the land emergency in the aftermath of the genocide, when an estimated 2.5 million refugees came back to Rwanda from 1990–1997 (Hilhorst and Van Leeuwen 2000).⁷ Inhabitants of rural areas were encouraged to move into government-built houses, which were allocated following a specific housing plan; these houses were built near the main roads to provide better accessibility to infrastructure services such as water and electricity. Meanwhile, this policy was also expected to improve reconciliation and cohesion among different ethnicities in the aftermath of the genocide.⁸

Earlier in the 1990s, there were two waves of returnees from diverse historical conflicts in Rwandan history. The two following categories of returnees are defined by the sequence of their departure from Rwanda. Old-case returnees were predominantly Tutsis who fled the country in 1959–1963 and 1973 following massacres against them carried out by Hutu peasants and returned to Rwanda without any organised repatriation in 1994.⁹ They moved back to Rwanda due to the RPF victory in 1994 and took the empty premises left by those who had fled (RISD 1999, 5). The old-case returnees have often been associated with the RPF, especially during the liberation war (1989–1994) when the RPF itself recruited soldiers and mobilised fund-raising among displaced Tutsis living in Uganda, as discussed in Jane's and Megan's story in the later empirical section. During their time of refuge, their right of return was denied by the regime of President Habyarimana (1973–1994). When old-case refugees returned to Rwanda in the immediate aftermath of the genocide, these returnees took whatever houses and lands they could put their hands on. This land-grabbing history contributed to some Tutsi

⁷This transition period is framed as 1994–2003 by the Rwandan official history account (Byanafashe and Rutayisire 2016). However, scholars like Filip Reyntjens (2006) and Jennie Burnet (2008) argue the Rwanda's transition started well before the 1994 genocide, with a political opening in 1989 when the multi-party-political system was established under the Habyarimana regime.

⁸The imidugudu settlements often mix people from different ethnic backgrounds, which aims to encourage interaction and help break down ethnic barriers. Shared amenities such as schools, healthcare facilities, and markets within an imidugudu promote regular interaction among residents, further facilitating social cohesion.

⁹The 1959 Hutu Revolution started in central Rwanda among rural Hutu peasants against the exploitative colonial taxation system (Newbury 1988, 194–98). In November 1959, the peasants' protest shifted into attacks against Tutsi political elites and their families: a few hundred were killed, and more or less, ten thousand Tutsi refugees left the country (Reyntjens 1985, 261 cited in Burnet 2012, 15). One cost of Tutsi fleeing into exile outside Rwanda, the Hutu Revolution 'marked the end of domination of the state by Tutsi and the accession to power of Hutu' (Newbury 1995, 12).

old-case refugee women's possession of land, which complicated the homogenising discourse of all women as victims of land reforms.

Compared with the predominance of Tutsi amongst the old-case returnees, most of the new-case returnees were Hutu. They fled the country in 1994, primarily seeking refuge in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Tanzania as the RPF overthrew the genocidal Hutu-dominated Habyarimana regime. After the country restored peace in most of the territory, the RPF repatriated these refugees to Rwanda in 1996 and 1997; yet most Hutu refugees feared returning to this newly Tutsi-led Rwanda, fearing retaliation. An estimated 1.3 million people came back to their hometowns only to find their houses either destroyed or occupied by some of the old-case returnees, an event described as 'land grabbing' by Christ Huggins. An estimated 250,000–300,000 houses were needed for homeless families who were predominantly Hutu refugees in exile since 1994 – a housing crisis which necessitated the transitional government enact emergency land reforms.

There is a significant agrarian relationship between the state land reforms (discussed below) in the aftermath of war and Rwandan women's social positions. After the genocide, many women lost both land and male relatives through whom they could claim access to or acquire new land allotments by the provision of customary law (Rose 2004, 201). According to the first national survey between 1999 and 2001 in the aftermath of the war, 32.1% of Rwandan families were headed by women, among which 78.5% of them were widows (NISR 2000, 35,38). Despite the fact that 70% of the agricultural outputs were produced by women, they did not have formal access to land (Rose 2004, 219). Consequently, women were compelled to assert greater land rights than mandated in the customary and modern laws. In the meantime, the unwritten rules of customary law failed to accommodate the complex needs of the newly constituted villages with multiple waves of refugee returnees. Due to this urgent necessity to reinvent the rules to be able to resolve the land conflicts and avoid the possibility of further ethnic killing, the new government, in 1997, introduced a land reform policy: Imidugudu.

While the initial period of Imidugudu was to group the entire rural population and facilitate their movement towards areas served by or just near the main roads, it is important to tease out the gendered distribution of housing in Imidugudu. The primary beneficiaries of this shelter construction policy were genocide survivors and old-case returnees (RISD 1999, 13). In the distribution of housing, policies made it explicit not to discriminate against women, and female-headed households were given preferential treatment (Government of Rwanda 2001, 75,85). Many of the genocide survivors – who were predominantly widows and orphans (especially in rural areas) – preferred to live in a new, communal area such as the new imidugudu rather than going back to their old houses which were scattered across the countryside: this was mainly because they feared coming back to the place where they had witnessed how their families were slaughtered (RISD 1999, 6), and they felt safer when staying closer to each other in their new imidugudu (Rose 2004, 142). However, there is a class disparity between elite and lower-class women's opportunities for land access. It was very challenging for female-headed households given that not every household had the resources to build their houses in the new imidugudu, despite significant financial help from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the absence of greater support from the state (Burnet and RISD 2003). In the face of such challenges, the resettlement project of imidugudu was

implemented through 'umuganda'¹⁰ or community self-help, which meant to serve the ethnic reconciliation purposes by ensuring all Rwandans' rights of land and properties via communal support (Newbury 2011). By contrast, women who were 'wealthy, well-educated and well-connected' had more chances to claim their access to land (Rose 2004, 226). This intersection of gender and class in relation to land distribution will be further discussed in the next section.

In summary, from the customary land law underpinned in the Nyiginya Kingdom to the patrimonial clientelist system in the colonial and postcolonial times, women endured decades of disadvantage with their lack of land rights. Since the genocide, in 1997, the transitional government established Imidugudu for the housing crisis due to refugee repatriation and the destruction of properties during the genocide. Imidugudu first was a land planning project to provide shelters for the genocide survivors who were left homeless and old-case returnees who had no home to return to (RISD 1999, 5). Entering the new millennium, the Rwandan political elites projected their ambitious economic development plan in Vision 2020 and introduced decentralisation with the specific poverty reduction target via mobilising its population to be employed in non-farm economic activities in the urban areas. In the wave of urban migration, some women who are dispossessed of land moved to the city only to find precarious jobs, such as street vending and domestic work, which is an essentialised extension of women's household work. With the backgrounds of Imidugudu, the following sections based on Agarwal's framework (1997) lay out the empirical data of lower-class Rwandan women's lived experiences after the war: land dispossession and family estrangement in the community, precarious informal positions in the labour market and missed opportunities to participate in state politics, which creates distinct contrast to elite women's experiences participating in politics. The comparison between these two cohorts of research participants highlights the role of access to land in shaping women's individual and collective forms of political agency in post-conflict Rwanda.

4. Displacement and gendered family network in the community

With the integrated framework of Cockburn's 'continuum of violence' (2004) and Agarwal's work on 'the community, the market and the state' (1997), the paper explains three gendered social dimensions in the continuum of violence, including displacement and gendered family network in the community, informal employment and gendered labour network in the market, and participation in voluntary reconciliation projects and gendered political networks in the state. The discussion based on women interlocutors' lived experiences in post-genocide Rwanda demonstrates that due to different experiences of land dispossession during the genocide, women from different class backgrounds gained different opportunities to engage with post-conflict politics in Rwanda.

Before I explain the lived experiences of Rwandan women's displacement during the genocide, I illustrate a brief history of displacement based on ethnic tensions in Rwanda. The Belgian colonial legacy of ethnic divisionism led to forced migration and

¹⁰Umuganda is a form of community service that is held every last Saturday of the month. Members of the umudugudu comes to umuganda to build infrastructures such as houses for poor or old people, bridges, roads and so on. After the collective labour work, a meeting is often organised to sensitise essential latest government policies to the village members.

displacement in post-independence Rwanda (1962–1994).¹¹ In 1959, Hutu revolution erupted and millions of Tutsis, especially in the south, migrated to neighbouring countries. After this first wave of Tutsi exile, Hutu political leaders harnessed and accumulated their authority until 1989 when the RPF, comprised largely of the exiled Tutsi community in Uganda, invaded the north of Rwanda. Compared to the predominantly Tutsi old-case returnees, the majority of the new-case returnees were Hutu. They fled Rwanda in 1994, primarily seeking refuge in DRC and Tanzania, as the RPF overthrew the genocidal Hutu-dominated Habyarimana regime. Since the Hutu revolution in 1959, forced migration manifested in a diverse way based on one's social-economic status, where it was easier for well-off Rwandans to buy land and find a job when they arrived in a new country after their displacement, whereas for the poor, they ended up in refugee camps or orphanages, as demonstrated by the research participants' experiences below. That said, forced migration exacerbated patriarchal oppression and material impoverishment upon poor women.

In my fieldwork, most of my female interlocutors across different ethnic identities became displaced in the long ethnic conflicts since the 1960s in Rwanda.¹² This section draws evidence from two categories of interlocutors: (1) Elite Tutsi women as old-case returnees, (2) Landless women from both Hutu and Tutsi backgrounds as new-case returnees. First, in my fieldwork, some activists and politicians who are elite Tutsi women though displaced in neighbouring countries obtained schooling opportunities among many other privileges thanks to their family's ownership of land in Rwanda before exile and later in their country of exile. Immediately after the genocide, some Tutsi returnees settled in the sparsely populated Eastern Province of Umutara, and others claimed their old land back, while most chose 'conveniently located properties vacated by fleeing Hutu' with support from the government (Huggins 2014b, 145; Todorovski and Potel 2019, 1). These Tutsi returnees solidified their leadership after the genocide against the historical land-grabbing background. Jane and Shakre were among them. In 1959, Jane's grandparents moved to Burundi with twenty cows, which they used to get money with which they bought land and built a new house for the family.¹³ While both of her parents found jobs in a school in Burundi, Jane also went to school there. Likewise, Shakre's grandparents moved to DRC in 1959 and her parents were born there.¹⁴ After 1994, all Shakre's family moved back to Rwanda. Shakre described the importance of land to her family when returning to Rwanda:

¹¹The political violence between the Hutu and the Tutsi in Rwanda was historically constructed by the Belgian colonial rule (Mamdani 2001). In other words, the Belgian colonial administration manipulated the Rwandan population to believe that Tutsi was a foreign race, hence superior to 'the indigenous' Hutu. Therefore, during the independence struggle, Hutu extremist leaders mobilised the mass to fight against foreign colonial rule, from both the Belgians and the Tutsi. In essence, the violence against the Tutsi since the Independence of Rwanda was conducted against the foreign race (Tutsi), other than a commonly known civil conflicts. In addition to Mamdani's approach (2001) to study the genocide via political institutions, anthropologist Pottier (2002, 20–21) argues a historical scarcity of land and a drop of international coffee price in 1989 was the main cause of 1994 ethnic violence.

¹²As part of the reconciliation process, the RPF introduced the post-genocide traumatised population to a new Rwandan identity through Ndi Umunyarwanda (in Kinyarwanda, 'I am Rwandan') encompassing Hutu, Tutsi and Twa with an aim to completely erase the 'genocide ideology from the past' (Burnet 2009; Benda 2017). Against such background, I decided not to ask my research participants' ethnic identities in the interviews. However, due to different ethnic groups' experiences during colonialism and the genocide, I could figure out which ethnic identity they are most of the time. For example, as shown in this paper, Rwandans displaced in the 1950s are mostly Tutsi due to the Hutu Revolution and later the independent liberation movement led by Hutu.

¹³Jane, born in late 1970s, is a gender activist in Rwanda. Interview dates: July 15, 2019.

¹⁴Shakre was born in the 1990s and is a feminist activist in Kigali. Interview date: April 05, July 8, 2019.

The first thing is grandpa's house ... when they come back after the genocide, grandpa moved in like this jungle place. He has helped my uncles and my aunts to build their houses as well ... The city kind of built itself around that place. That is why he became quite influential. There was a time one actual street was named after him. (Shakre, Interview by the author, April 5, 2019)

In comparison with the elite women, other women from difficult economic backgrounds experienced tremendous material hardships and family estrangement while being displaced from Rwanda. Lower-class women, regardless of their ethnicities, were forced off their land during the genocide. Within the second category of my research participants, those who were landless women, is Sonia – who first lost her father in their hometown in East Rwanda and then her family were abruptly forced from their land and displaced in refugee camps in Tanzania.¹⁵ After two and a half years, in 1997, Sonia's family finally moved back to Rwanda, where Sonia lived with their grandmother under extremely difficult conditions:

In the beginning, we could not immediately return to school. We lived in my grandmother's brother's house. This is because a Burundian man took grandmother's land during the genocide when our grandma was in Tanzania with us and lived there ever since. (Sonia, Interview by the author, March 9, 2019)

Sonia's grandmother had reported this land dispossession to the local government repeatedly since 1997. Competing claims to land due to war-induced displacement are very complex as according to the customary land tenure, one's land boundary is based on land marks (often destroyed during wars) or memory of elder customary leaders (often dead or displaced) (van der Haar and van Leeuwen 2019, 3). After three years, in 2000, some leaders from the local office gave the land back to Sonia's grandmother.

Another interlocutor, Mutesi, a young Tutsi girl from East Rwanda, lost her parents at the age of five in April 1994.¹⁶ Mutesi stayed in the orphanage until July 1995, when the organisation found her two siblings and she moved in with them. In the aftermath, the land previously owned by the grandparents was claimed by and distributed amongst Mutesi's two uncles and two aunts. They only left a small part for Mutesi and her two siblings. Mutesi's two uncles even said to her that since Mutesi's mother married off, she did not have anything to claim from this family. 'You know that we have divided the land, the one who was not here, we didn't know how your mother could claim that land.' This is the response Mutesi heard from her aunts when she and her sister went back to their mother's hometown in 2005. The uncles told Mutesi and her sister to claim land properties from their father's side, according to the patrilineal tradition in Rwanda. Since 1997, Mutesi's sister, at the age of fourteen, became the carer for young Mutesi and their little brother. I asked Mutesi if any of her uncles or aunts helped them, and Mutesi said to me:

Aunties have their children to take care of and at that time, they did not have a way to take care of other children and even during those days – children took care of themselves. (Mutesi, interview by the author, May 28, 2019)

¹⁵Sonia, in her 30s, born in 1990, is a domestic worker. Interview date: March 09, 2019; there are two other interviews with her sister Jeannette: March 31, 2019, May 25, 2019.

¹⁶Mutesi, in her early 30s, was born in the 1990s and is a domestic worker in Kigali. Focus group date: March 15, 2019; Interview date: July 12, 2029.

This absence of support and care from older family members resonates with Sinalo's (2018) findings that young children were forced to become independent due to fragmented social relations during the genocide.

Despite the fact that the life histories of these four research participants seem to travel across different countries in the region, it becomes apparent that in their shared experiences of displacement, gendered family networks serve as a crucial factor in terms of their rights to land after the genocide. Similar to Jane's and Shakre's grandparents, the 1959 refugees are better categorised as political exiles, as only a relatively small number of Tutsi elites fled Rwanda (Lemarchand 1970, 3). As Katy Long (2012, 213) demonstrates, the Ankole district in Uganda was hosting 850 Rwandan Tutsi refugees and 4000 cattle in December 1959. Cattle served as a great asset for this group of refugees trying to settle in this foreign country in 1959–1963. When Jane's and Shakre's families repatriated to Rwanda, their close relationships to male relatives enabled them access to land. In comparison, in the cases of Sonia and Mutesi who each lost their father at the beginning of the genocide, they found it difficult to claim their lands back from the male relatives in the family. Due to their displacement in refugee camps or orphanages, they lost familial and individual land ownership rights due to land-grabbing by the new-caseload returnees or senior male family member's occupation.

I argue that, as one of the central dimensions of social embeddedness of land, gendered kinship fabrication and support were torn for many by forced displacement during conflicts, and it seemed difficult to resume such familiar relationships after conflicts due to land scarcity and extreme poverty. As discussed in the next section, due to fragmented gendered family networks in the community, dispossession of land in these women's younger lives forced them to engage with informal employment for survival, which led to further fragmentation of their labour network, creating structural barriers for them to engage with larger group political activities.

5. Informal employment and gendered labour network in the market

As Cockburn (2004) states, the second dimension of the continuum of violence is located at the economic reconstruction, while Agarwal (1997) asserts that the ownership of land properties shapes women's bargaining power in the market. Lower-class women from the rural areas, due to their land dispossession, are compelled to migrate to the city where they are usually employed in precarious conditions. Although new houses and infrastructure were established in rural Rwanda under the instruction of Imidugudu, very few residents became engaged with non-farming activities (Hitayezu, Okello, and Obel-Gor 2014; Isaksson 2013). Average population density is now more than 400 people per square km by some estimates (the highest in Africa) (MINAGRI 2012), whilst over 90% of the impoverished population live in rural areas (National Institute of Statistics Rwanda 2006, viii). Out of this poverty, due to limited capital and land they owned, some rural dwellers were compelled to migrate to urban centres to find a job. This section draws on lived experiences from Rwandan female street vendors in Kigali and shows that land dispossession contributes to gendered urban migration and further fragmented gendered labour networks, ultimately preventing lower-class women from participating in collective resistance beyond their individual struggles.

In my fieldwork, female street vendors are self-employed informal labour. Almost all of them had to migrate to the city due to dispossession of land based on gender discrimination and family estrangement during the genocide. They were often forced off the land, having no alternatives but to sell their labour-power and participate in the urban informal labour market. Like many other informal workers, these street vendors struggle with extremely irregular employment, and the economic activities are usually untaxed, unregistered and unregulated. Due to their disposability among the reserve army of labour, street vendors are vulnerable to be transformed into wage workers, in other words, coerced into the formal economy controlled by the state and capitalists. This is exactly what happened to street vendors in Kigali, they were forced to join city council markets with taxation. Nise, one of the street vendor interlocutors, displayed her living struggles since the moment she moved to Kigali: she was raped at her first job as a domestic worker, and then as a single mother with limited capital, she managed to establish her individual entrepreneurship as a street vendor.¹⁷ In the meantime, under Imidugudu, the Government of Rwanda was in a rush to build an environment conducive to international investment. In 2017, a by-law designed to punish street vendors for being an 'unfair competition for store owners and retailers with legitimate businesses paying rent and taxes' was enforced (Ntirenganya 2017). Vendors were compelled to either join the formal markets set up by the city council or be shackled in prisons. Most of the vendors that I interviewed opted for employment in domestic work rather than within more formal markets due to limited financial capacity to pay taxes.

Urban informal employment conditioned by rural land dispossession further fragments female street vendors' gendered labour network, which limits them to their individual struggle and isolates them from participating in group political activities. While Agarwal (1994b, 95) argues that gainful women's employment outside the household is good to 'facilitate group formation and enable women's resistance to take overt shape', Ossome and Naidu (2021) argue that for the labouring population in the global South under neoliberal economic regimes, all productive activities became an act of survival, or in Cole's description of young female sex workers in Madagascar – 'making oneself, one's spouse, and one's children living' (Cole 2010, 52). Similarly, for street vendors like Nise, not only can they not afford to participate in imidugudu committees in a voluntary unpaid capacity, but also, they face considerable challenges to make a living in the city. Nise's story echoes the voices of peasant women in Burnet's research, where they found their unpaid service to the local governance as an added burden on their already loaded daily routine (Burnet 2011, 22). In addition to the financial advantage for grassroots political participation, more stable access to employment also confers social membership for imidugudu leaders to establish their leadership among villagers. Ferguson and Li (2018, 2) argue that the anxiety of underemployment is not just 'about paychecks, but equally about issues of identity, gender and family, national membership and so on that we have suggested were long anchored by the social ideal of the "proper job"'. Shemusa, an imidugudu village leader, demonstrated that thanks to her access to employment, in her grocery store at the centre of the village, she succeeded in sustaining social and affective ties with her fellow villagers, who eventually voted

¹⁷Nise, born in the late 1980s, is a domestic worker and street vendor in Kigali. Interview date: February 4, 2019; Focus group dates: March 15, April 29, May 1, May 3, 2019.

her to be the community leader.¹⁸ Like Shemusa, the elite women interviewed in this paper managed to buy their land with their own salaries, which contributed to their social reputation. As Ferguson and Li (2018, 8) argue that 'entrepreneurship may be understood as liberatory' in contrast to 'spending time on dirty, dangerous, or pointless jobs', ownership of stores, in the case of Shemusa, signifies a great level of livelihood skills and achievement of independence, and eventually led to villagers' growing trust in her leadership in the community. In summary, compared with elected imidugudu leaders, street vendors, as a large population in the informal labour sector, have limited financial means and under-valued social membership to participate in imidugudu meetings and leadership, due to the precarity constructed by the state's neoliberal developmental agenda.

Female street vendors face an intersectional struggle of gender and class when participating in politics. Due to feminised poverty based on land dispossession, women usually have a weaker fallback position in migrating to the city for non-farm employment. Statistically, the city of Kigali has a slightly lower female population (48%) than the other four less urbanised provinces (average of 55% female) (National Election Commission 2019, 19), and the female population is slightly lower in urban areas (46.0%) than in rural areas (48.3%) (National Institute of Statistics Rwanda 2015). Moreover, this demographic imbalance represents different levels of gendered accessibility to the urban job market. For example, a greater percentage of women in the city (16.85%) are unemployed than in rural areas (5.26%) (National Census Commission 2012, 20). According to research conducted by Ndikubwimana et al. (2020, 90), during their study in Nyarugenge District, 66% of street vendors were women, with a significant proportion of them being widowed. Lower-class women are not only subjugated to material impoverishment based on their dispossession of the land but also structural gender inequality in the urban labour market. Consequently, poor women had to fight for their individualistic practical interests, whereas women with stable employment have better financial means and trusted social membership to participate in imidugudu work.

Landless women have to sell their labour-power in exchange for a wage as informal workers in the city, such as street vendors, who were forced to the social margins by repressive development policies, whilst the landed women had opportunities to engage with collective political activities. One's employment condition serves as a crucial role in determining the scope of one's political membership in a social network.

6. Voluntary work at humanitarian aid and gendered political network in the state

As Cockburn (2004) observes, the last dimension of the continuum of violence is situated in international humanitarian agencies in post-conflict societies, where women are more visible than in other employment sectors. Drawn from the Rwandan interlocutors, I argue that in the aftermath of the genocide, landless women had to advocate for their individualistic practical interests, including rights to inherit the land and find jobs. In contrast, some elite women joined NGOs in the 1990s and established their political networks,

¹⁸Shemusa, born in the early 1980s, is a grocery shop owner in Kigali. She is also a umidugudu leader. Interview date: July 25, 2019.

which eventually facilitated their work in political institutions. Both groups of women played a significant role in disrupting traditional gender roles after the war yet exercised their political agency on different levels.

In my fieldwork in Kigali, I observed that many of today's feminists and key female officers of governmental bodies and NGOs in Rwanda were involved in humanitarian aid organisations tackling the ensuing crisis, in the wake of the genocide. Morojele (2016, 98) finds that all women MPs in her research had at least undergraduate degrees, and the majority had postgraduate degrees; moreover, most women MPs began their professional careers in civil society (Devlin and Elgie 2008; Uwineza and Pearson 2009). As such, women with higher education are more likely to establish or join women's organisations. A fair analysis of women's political inclusion must consider any class privilege from family land possession which women's engagement with post-conflict aid work is built upon.

In the aftermath of the genocide, many educated elites were recruited into the humanitarian aid organisations.¹⁹ For example, one of my interlocutors Megan, after her university education, volunteered for an international institution and is now the director of a women's NGO since 2003.²⁰ Megan, whose grandparents bought land for resettlement when they went into exile in Burundi in 1959, had access to education from a young age. This privilege continued after she relocated to Rwanda in her teenage years thanks to her landed family support there. In 1995, Megan's family drove over the border to Bugesera, in Southern Rwanda. On the way, they found an empty house, and her mother opened one room and 'found more than 500 people killed in the room ...' (Megan, interview by the author, June 4, 2019). After searching for several other houses, they found another one and settled there in the South. Like Megan, many senior female political actors started their careers as voluntary social workers for post-conflict humanitarian aid organisations. For example, Lupita graduated from university and got involved in UNHCR in 1996.²¹ She joined a Rwandan women's NGO in 1999 and works on various women's programmes in the country now. Marisa volunteered for an NGO located near her university and started working on campaigns for women's reproductive rights in Rwanda.²² She is now the founder of a feminist network for young Rwandans. Another feminist activist, Hannah, is an independent consultant on gender. She, like other women involved in feminist networks, volunteered for an NGO during university.²³ Hannah told me the current ongoing opportunities granted by her previous relationships with key officers in her voluntary experiences:

The people that I started engaging at the age of eighteen during volunteering are probably today ministers. I am sure it's difficult for someone who starts the activism now. What credibility do they have? What experience do they have? Is this new person really into this gender

¹⁹Although the number of women's NGOs rose dramatically after the genocide, less than ten notable women's organisations operated nationally, including PF/TH, Duterimbere, Association des Guides du Rwanda (AGR), Haguruka, Association de Solidarité des Femmes Rwandaises (ASOFERWA), Association des Veuves du Génocide Agahozo (AVEGA), and Association des Femmes Chefs de Familles (AFCF) (Newbury and Baldwin 2000). Such women's organisations centred their programs around peacekeeping whereas support for women's land disputes were only part of their work (Mwambari 2017, 72).

²⁰Megan, born in late 1980s, is a women's NGO director. Interview dates: March 4, April 9, April 22, June 4, and July 1, 2019.

²¹Lupita, born in late 1970s, is a gender activist working in a women's NGO in Rwanda. Interview date: May 29, 2019.

²²Marisa, born in late 1970s, is a gender activist and consultant in Rwanda. Interview date: August 7, 2019.

²³Hannah, born in late 1970s, is a gender activist and consultant in Rwanda. Interview date: August 3, 2022.

issues or different? This is a small city. In life, we know each other. (Hannah, interview by the author, August 3, 2019)

Voluntary social work did not only require one's patriotism to contribute to nation-building after the war but also one's material capacity for self-subsistence. These volunteering experiences built up their career profile, which enabled some of them to work in the public sector. In contrast, Sonia struggled to get as much education as she could in the refugee camps in Tanzania. Sonia's family lost their lands while fleeing for survival in Tanzania, and when they came back, they had no lands to provide means to survive at all. As a result, she waited until 2000 when the lands were claimed back, and then she went to school for a fairly short period. Sonia said: 'The leaders are the ones who studied and have their own diploma. You cannot compare those educated ones and illiterate ones. We are not in the same group' (Sonia, focus group by the author, March 2, 2019).

In summary, humanitarian work, as a specific occupation emerging from post-conflict societies in dire need of reconciliation, provided opportunities for relatively well-off women to take part in state reconciliation projects, which led some educated young women to political appointments. In such public working opportunities, educated women were able to practise their professional skills in social work and make personal connections with political officers and peers, who now joined the elite political arena. In comparison, due to the estrangement of family networks during war displacement and fragmented labour networks during precarious employment, lower-class women often found it difficult to participate in the post-genocide community building process due to their limited material conditions and consequently established their agency in a rather individualistic way.

7. Conclusion

Since the millennium, Rwanda has been lauded as a prosperous country with the highest number of women in parliament in the world. In this paper, I first critiqued the institutional approach to women's political empowerment as this fails to consider the unequal power relations among women from different classes, specifically materialised in one's relation to land. With an integrated framework of feminist security and feminist agrarian studies, against the background of Imidugudu land policy, this paper compares elite women and working-class women's political engagement in Rwanda, specifically how their (dis)possession of land impacts their political participation in the aftermath of the genocide. Drawn from my fieldwork in Rwanda between 2018 and 2019, this paper looks at three dimensions of the continuum of violence embedded in land dispossession in three spaces where gender relations are constitutive and contested (Agarwal 1997): displacement during the genocide, participation in a precarious labour market and marginalisation of voluntary work in institutional reconciliation processes. First, women from different social-economic backgrounds shared displacement experiences of fleeing for survival at a young age yet had different refugee experiences. The elite women, though displaced in neighbouring countries, obtained land and schooling opportunities, among many other privileges. The less privileged women found themselves in more challenging living situations: orphanages and refugee camps. Women who are dispossessed of land have limited capability and access to take part in institutional politics. In

contrast, elite women found more spaces and positions to occupy, becoming the new political elites regardless of their returning status. Eventually, women's political participation in post-genocide Rwanda became another way for elite women to reproduce their class power, which originated in their possession of land.

In summary, I argue that despite that Rwandan gender policies providing women more opportunities to engage with public civil activities, class struggles remain entrenched in Rwandan society, and accessing land persists as a significant barrier for women's political participation. Women from poor backgrounds have limited capability and accessibility to take part in collective politics, whereas elite women (regardless of their returning status) found more opportunities for empowerment, becoming the new political leaders.

The major contribution of this paper lies in the investigation of the ways in which land possession among other class struggles dictates gendered realities, including women's political participation. This investigation goes beyond the institutional analysis of women's inclusion into political institutions and disentangles the social embeddedness of land (dis)possession for women's engagement with politics after conflicts. In this case, this paper hopes to suggest two future research directions: First, for future research of this kind, attention can be directed towards developing methodological approaches, especially regarding investigating the class divisions among those who own or have various forms of access to land. Second, using access to land to examine women's political agency is not limited to the discussion of Rwandan women's political participation. For example, in the beginning of the British suffragette movement, only women who met certain property qualifications had the right to vote. In this case, land serves the foundation for one to obtain political agency across contexts in the global North and South. The agrarian reflection from the global South can advance one's understanding of transnational women's movements, thus reversing the colonial paradigm of knowledge production.

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