

Threatened Masculinities: Men's Experiences of Gender Equality in Rural Rwanda

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Abstract :

This article analyses how rural Rwandan men experience gender equality laws and policies in their everyday lives. Traditional Rwandan society had a patriarchal social structure that resulted in men's dominance and women's subordination. A new constitution, adopted after the 1994 Tutsi genocide, recognizes the importance of gender equality and includes specific legal provisions to ensure women's equal protection under the law. Working from focus group discussions in Kamonyi District, I explore men's experiences of shifting power relations in Rwanda. Men have two main stories to tell in this regard: they appreciate the right of inheritance that women have acquired, as it increases the family assets, and new employment opportunities for women that offer men relief from the burden of providing for the family. Yet they also believe that men's interests have been neglected in new laws, leading to problems in the family and community. The process of repositioning their masculinities today produces new forms of household conflict.

Key words: Rwanda, Gender equality, Masculinity, Men

Tehdit Edilmiş Erkeklikler: Ruanda Kırsalındaki Erkeklerin Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliği Deneyimleri

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Özet :

Bu çalışma, kırsalda yaşayan Ruanda erkeklerinin toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği kanun ve siyasetlerini gündelik hayatlarında nasıl deneyimlediklerini analiz etmektedir. Geleneksel Ruanda toplumunun, erkek egemeliği ve kadının ikincil konumda oluşu ile neticelenmiş ataerkil bir sosyal yapısı vardır. 1994 Tutsi soykırımından sonra uygulamaya konulmuş olan yeni anayasa, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğinin önemini tanıırken kadının korunmasını kanun kapsamına alan özel yasal koşulları da içeriyordu. Erkeklerin Ruanda'da değişen güç dinamikleri ile olan deneyimlerini Kamonyi bölgesinde yapılmış olan odak grup tartışmalarından hareketle analiz ettim. Erkeklerin bu bağlamda anlattıkları iki temel hikaye ortaya çıktı: ailenin mülkiyetini arttırdığı için kadının veraset hakkını elde etmesini ve erkeğin ailenin temel geçim merkezi olma yükünü hafiflettiği için kadının yeni iş imkanlarına kavuşmuş olmasını takdir ediyorlar. Buna rağmen, yeni çıkarılan kanunlarda erkeğin çıkarlarının göz ardı edildiğini ve bunun da aile ve toplum içinde sorunlara yol açabileceğini de düşünüyorlar. Erkekliklerini yeniden konumlama süreci bugün yeni ev içi anlaşmazlıkları üretme tehlikesini de beraberinde getiriyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ruanda, Toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, Erkeklik, Erkek

Even though gender equality has attained high importance in the global political agenda (Squires 1) in Rwanda, it is a new concept that emerged after the 1994 genocide. In the period before the genocide, men dominated much of the social, economic and political domain (Longman134), and gender inequality was a respected social norm (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion 8). The 1992 Family Code established men (husband, father, elder son) as the head of the household, the decision maker, the owner of the family assets, the breadwinner and the family protector. Women and girls were caretakers at home, responsible for childcare and domestic work of cooking, cleaning, fetching firewood and water and caring for the sick or elderly relatives (Adekunle 16). Women were expected to defer to men in decision-making and were discouraged from speaking in public and expressing their needs in the presence of men (Patra and Ansoms 1114). Men were to talk and think for women. A woman who dared to challenge men in public was considered insolent (Uwineza and Pearson 12). In brief, women were treated as minors who were not permitted to engage in economic transactions, control financial resources in the homes or own or inherit land (Carlson and Shirley 3). When a male head of the household died, property was passed to male heirs or to a man's brother rather than to the widow (Uwineza and Pearson 9). These gender imbalances left women vulnerable to various forms of household violence.

The 2003 Constitution marked the turning point for the country's gender equality. Rwanda established policies and programs aimed to increase the role of women in social-economic reconstruction thus overturning the country's long history of gender inequality. There had been attempts to enact gender-sensitive laws earlier, such as the 1999 Law on Inheritance and Marital Property Rights that establishes gender equality in land inheritance and ownership within formal marriage. But the new constitution accelerated the process, resulting in the land policy of 2004 and Organic Land Law of 2005, both of which contain provisions for gender equality in land rights. Also, a 2009 Gender-Based Violence Law gives a woman the right to report gender abuses whether these

occur in the household or outside the home. The same law sets out the definitions of gender-based violence and introduces penalties.

Existing studies and reports portray Rwanda as a unique example in the Eastern African region of gender equality underpinned by a strong legal framework and progressive policy (Delay, Weeks Dore and Umuhuza; FAO 48; McAuslan 116-119). Research on women's experiences of the new laws shows that woman's empowerment programs and gender sensitive laws positively affect women marriages as well as gender relations in their communities (Petra and Ansoms 1112, Longman134; Hategekimana 237; FAO 48; Sentama, 86). However, very little is known about men's experiences of the new laws on gender equality in Rwanda. Multiple studies have shown that violence against women is increasing after the new equality laws and that the perpetrator of such violence is often a husband/partner (RWAMREC 11-18; Carson and Randell 10; GMO, 11 MIGEPROF, 10; NISR, 13). We also know that gender violence occurs mainly in 'family domains or homes' in rural communities (Rwanda Gender Monitoring Office 25). Studies on failed masculinity suggest that when a man is unable to fulfil his traditional roles in a dominant masculinity construction, a man feels threatened and lives under frustration and can use violence to attest his manhood (Cambell, 619; Connell 1812; Levant, 223, Sweetman, 5;Porter 488). Therefore, because masculinities change and are part of gender relations, listening to individual men about their lived experiences, can serve as analytical and political tool in making sense of gender relations, and can help understand the process of how men and women engage (Connell, 71; Haywood, 577). Men's narratives are essential to understanding how the new gender relations are constructed and how the shifting nature of power relations within the new legal framework affects gendered lives (Ferguson, 119). It becomes critical because gender is not all about women; it is about both men and women and produces knowledge about gender relations (Marks, 5). With the promotion of women's rights and gender equality in Rwanda, several studies focus on women's experiences. Men's experiences are rarely discussed in the current Rwandan discourse on gender equality. Against

this backdrop, it is important to focus attention on rural men and their experiences of gender equality.

Masculinities and Gender Relations

Masculinities are configurations of practice generated in particular situations (Connell 81, Campbell 534, Connell 81). They are not fixed or embedded in the body or personalities of individuals. Rather, masculinities are socially and historically constructed (Connell and Messerschmidt 836, Connell 1803, Porter 487) and achieved in front of others who evaluate and assess gender performances (Barker and Ricardo 4-5). Under a patriarchal society, the social construction of masculinities are mainly associated with a deep-rooted power of men over women where men are seen as the head of the family, the breadwinner, the decision maker and the family protector (Sleggh and Richters 6, Freedman and Jacobson, 6; Connell, 1813; Lwambo, 50, Levant 223). A real man earns his position of authority through protecting and providing for the family (Lwambo 52). For being a man –is some level of financial independence, employment or income (Barker and Ricardo 55). If a man does not comply with what is socially expected from him, society rapidly informs him that he has ‘failed to be a man’ (Porter 488). In other word, the inability to man up and become the successful breadwinners, family head and leaders of wider society which stereotypes of masculinity power and success demand of him, he experiences threats and lives under pressure of not meeting the social standards of being a man (Porter 497; Sweetman 4-5).

In most cases lack of access to income earning opportunity and larger scale of poverty become a source of insecurity for men; they feel that they cannot live up to their traditional roles of provider and breadwinner. Their authority comes under threat and as does their identity and self esteem (Silberschmidt, 195; Levant, 222; Freedman and Jacobson, 11; Sleggh and Richters 137; Connell, 1812-1813; Campbell 619; Hamber 82). The situation thus puts social and economic pressure on men who have grown up with the expectation of being breadwinners

(Connell, 1813). This failure cues the man to feel frustrated, humiliated, emasculated and displaced in his family as well as his community, and it is known that he often turns to drink and other women for consolation; or some resort to the use of violence (Campbell, 621). Not only do lack of employment and poverty challenge men's masculinity as breadwinners, but when a woman becomes more economically empowered, some men also react negatively and violently (Narayan 197; Thornhill 79; Lwambo, 50-55, Sweetman 5; Silberschmidt 196).

Similarly, the inability to protect one's family from attacks or armed conflict is also a source of shame and emasculation for male household heads (Freedman and Jacobson 6). The feeling of being unable to protect their families also leads men to become violent (Freedman and Jacobson 11; Baaz and Stern 505). The men's roles and identities become confused and contradictory, and many men express feelings of helplessness, inadequacy, and lack of self-esteem (Silberschmidt 195). Briefly, the changed gender situation initiates serious challenges to traditional masculine identity and can result in a masculinity crisis, which involves the collapse of the basic pattern by which men have traditionally fulfilled their masculine role as the good provider role (Levant 222). Gender humiliation thus becomes a key factor in prolonging aggression and violent actions to reassert masculinity (Lambon 50). The process of asserting masculinity then influences subsequent gender attitudes and behaviours (World Bank 4, Barker and Ricardo 26).

In short, masculinities are affected by historical and cultural changes. Moreover, gender relations also change dramatically throughout life, which leads to changing configurations of power relations as well as men and women's roles (Connell 89; Jackson 93; Connell 73). In addition, socially constructed behaviours vary across local contexts and interact with socio-cultural factors of class, race, poverty, ethnicity and age (Connell 77). In general, the roles of men and women in any particular society are based on perceptions that are shaped in the context of that society. In the new Rwanda, however, gender relations tell us very little about how new roles are experienced,

especially in the home. Most researchers inform us about what women and men do, in general, but not how their interactions and relationships are built and changed. One way to understand these interactions, as Carolyn Nordstrom argues, is to learn from individual experiences (Nordstrom 6).

The daily experiences can serve as the basis for talking about what is happening in a community and establishing knowledge that can help planners and activists rethink the appropriate strategies (Nordstrom 6). The purpose of this paper is therefore to explore and analyse men's experiences from the country that is internationally recognized as a model for promoting women's rights and equality of rights and opportunities between men and women. It addresses the following main question: how do men living in rural areas of Rwanda experience the new gender equality practices in daily household life? I am also concerned to learn whether the new laws and policies are actually producing gender equality. How do men and women interact now and how are their behaviours changing in the household? The study is premised on the idea that if empowerment is applied only to women in Rwanda, men will continue to be seen as a problem and women as victims who require assistance. It is vital to talk to men about how new gender relations are being built or resisted and whether there are new tensions emerging at a variety of levels. As Michael Kimmel (22) explains, any effort to further gender equality that does not include men as well as women's lives is doomed to failure because gender is both men and women's issue.

Interviewing Men in Rwanda

The study uses a standard interview methodology for gathering experiences on gender equality in 2014 from men in four villages in Kamonyi District, a rural area of Rwanda. A single case study methodology was appropriate because the emphasis was on gaining in-depth understanding of men's experiences with gender equality practices in the new Rwanda. Kamonyi District is ranked by the

Government of Rwanda as the best performing rural district in the country with respect to four pillars of development - justice, social welfare, good governance and economic development¹ -and the strongest in incorporating activities that advance rural gender equality. Although the study results are not intended to be representative, the conclusions drawn here could help formulate assumptions regarding the experiences of men in other rural areas of the country, where problems are likely to be more acute than they are in the best district.

Within Kamonyi District, four villages were selected as sites of interviews with men, and within each village, the interviews were organized around two focus groups, one with young married men aged 25-45, and the second with older married men aged 46 or older. The questions asked were the same to all groups. A total of 28 discussion groups were conducted and 122 men participated in the study. Contemporary laws provide land ownership rights only to women within a legal marriage, and so legally married men were selected². This ensured that men could discuss the full range of rights for women if the desired. The decision to separate men into two different generations arose during the pilot phase of the research, when younger men were reluctant to express themselves in the presence of the older generation. The groups of men shared generational and marital status characteristics, but were not homogeneous. Both groups consisted of men involved in agricultural work, small-scale sellers of goods in the open market and casual workers on construction and water irrigation sites -the main work activities of men in Kamonyi District.

Overall, the focus group approach worked well providing space and time for men to discuss their experiences with gender equality laws/policies. Similarities and differences in experiences came up and wider ranges of issues were discussed than would have been possible using individual interviews or questionnaires (Bryman 349).

This research is part of a larger project on experiences of gender equality in Rwanda that entails interviews with rural men and women and also gender agencies of government. During the interviewing

process, I lived in the communities and went out with people in Kamonyi District on several occasions. At the beginning of the discussion with men they asked me if I was going to broadcast on radio what they told me. I said, 'No, I will not' and asked why? One man said, 'These days many people from Kigali [the capital city of Rwanda] come to this community and ask women questions about their lives but no one has asked us any question about our lives as you are asking.' Another man continued '*Ubu abagore nibo bagezweho*' (during these days, all topics focus on women). Men's complaints gave me an understanding that men very much wanted to share their experiences but have not been given such opportunity.

As a young single woman, I found that some men were reluctant to discuss their personal experiences, especially in their sexual relations, with me. One man said '*Ntabwo urashaka nushaka uzabibona, abagore bahinduka nk'ibicu*' (you are not married, when you get married you will see, women change like the sky). As I experienced it, this created a sort of power relation between men and me, especially during the discussion groups for men in the older generation. Some men perceived me as a young person who should not hear about marital conflicts related to sex. Some men spoke about their stories using general examples, as if their experiences were happening to someone else in the community; yet they way they spoke indicated that they were speaking from personal-or at least close experience. Other men offered deep details and examples of their experiences in the new Rwanda, on the assumption that I was unaware of what married people were thinking. In some cases, my position as a single young woman actually gave me an opportunity to learn more about what goes on in the homes –perhaps more than maybe a married woman would have heard.

Moreover, as an educated female who works with the University of Rwanda and was born and raised in an urban area, people living in Kamonyi District often saw me as a knowledgeable person. During the two months of fieldwork, some men wanted to talk to me about on-going individual family problems, and some erroneously believed that I would have solutions to their complaints or offer advice. I interpret this

confiding behaviour as a sign of trust by the villagers; however, it could also have created some expectations on their part that I could not fully meet.

Using a few open-ended questions to elicit participants' stories, I found men loquacious on the topic of gender equality, one talking after the other, supplementing each other's views. They gave their own testimonies as well as examples of their neighbours and the larger Rwandan community. On the whole, the time I spent listening closely to men speak of gender equality helped me to identify several themes in their narratives and these appear in the next section.

Men Narrate Gender Equality

Five themes emerged from the discussions about gender equality experiences: (1) economic benefits for the household; (2) changes in traditional family practices; (3) women working outside the household; (4) problems of infidelity and abandonment; and (5) the man as a victim.

Economic Benefits for the Household

Participants recognized that gender equality laws have created clear economic benefits for the household. One benefit is that men can now share the family financial burden with women. One man explained this as follows:

Life is getting better in my home. Before [gender] equality came I was working alone. Everyone in the family was looking at me. Today, both my wife and I work and earn money. We have two incomes and the stress of providing food for the home by myself is gone (Age 44).

Historically, paid work was mostly done by men. The Rwandan Family Code pronounced the man head of household thereby giving men the primary responsibility of supporting the family, a responsibility that became heavier when children enlarged the household. Today, some of the men interviewed appear to be pleased with the new labour law of 2009 for giving women rights and opportunities to work for cash and thereby contribute to family survival. Many of the men said they were happy to be relieved of this burden by sharing family financial support with their wives:

A woman was supposed to stay home, clean the house, cook for the husband and children, fetch water and do agricultural labour near the house. She was not allowed to sit or speak where men were gathered. It was culturally prohibited. Today, with [gender] equality laws, we sit with women and they give their views, we eat together and we socialize. A woman goes out and works for cash as a man does (Group discussion 3).

Though women had their own work at home they were not earning cash. Men tended to consider women's sphere of work in the household as far less important than theirs. The earnings women bring home are what are appreciated. As men explained, this appreciation is due to the fact that men feel relieved from their traditional duties of securing food for the family. For some of the men, life as a couple is no longer a relationship of dependence of a woman on a man. It is metamorphosed into more of a win-win situation, with men's traditional burden eased and women's assignment of work only in the household lifted. Earning outside income also gives women a stake in family decision-making around managing family assets.

Life today is better. We are not supposed to shoulder the family burden alone. In the past, the household was for men but now it is for both the wife and husband. One can look for sweet potatoes while another one is looking for

vegetables to make dinner, which was not the case before [gender] equality [laws] came (Group discussion 7).

Many narrators express the idea that as women earn money and contribute to family betterment, they acquire new status in the household. In fact, the household becomes a unit for both husband and wife and, as their interactions become easier, new dynamics take hold at the core of the households, and communication and collaboration improve. Indeed, the narrators perceive equality as building interdependence between wife and husband. However, this experience cannot be taken for granted because, as many men explain, if a woman is not contributing to the family she does not gain entry to the 'core' aspects of the new relationship.

To be honest, if a woman does not bring anything home how can you really plan together? About what?

When she also brings money, we can sit and bring what both of us have earned and then plan for it.

We are not lying if she brings something home, it even adds something good in our relationship. It reduces conflict because you plan together and accounts for each other. Otherwise, everyone does his or her own thing (Group discussion 8).

It appears that the earnings a woman brings home create happiness in the house and mitigate the spousal conflict. Although such claim seems obvious, later sections indicate that the picture is far more complex. Men also recognize another benefit of the equality laws concerning inheritance: the plot of land that women can now bring to the family.

In the past, a man owned all assets in the household. Today because of equality women also own assets. For example I have a plot inherited from my parents and my wife has one from her parents. This means that our family assets are from both sides and our say has the same magnitude when it comes to any decision related to management of our

belongings. Before equality came a woman had no right to decisions about assets at home. What could she say if she did not bring anything? (Age 56).

The narrator reports that equality law encourages women as well to bring assets to the family. In fact, land in Rwanda is one of the primary livelihood assets of rural citizens. It is more than a source of food production. According to the Rwandan culture, land is a set of relations, a sense of belonging and a symbolic relationship between people mediated by symbolic and material value (Shearer 23). Getting land from wife's side, according to men, not only increases the family possessions but also indirectly adds social recognition to the man's position in the community. On the other hand, men claim that the law has diminished their traditional rights to make land decisions in the home. The 2005 Organic Law Determining the Use and the Management of Land gives legally married women equal ownership rights to the family land with men. If a man sells a plot of land without his wife's agreement, the wife has the right to inform the local leaders or the police. Before the law passed, men disposed of family land as they pleased. Today if a man does not negotiate or communicate, he can be in trouble, as men said:

As a man we could even give a friend a plot of land without informing a wife.

We only tell them, 'Do not cultivate the particular land we gave it to a friend.

As a woman she could not say anything. Today we cannot do that without her agreement since we will need her approval, as it is a family asset.

The problem is that women are not cooperative, it feels bad when you tell her –let sell a plot of land and she refuses, as a man you feel devalued.

If you even try to do it without her agreement, and she calls the police, men can be in trouble. These days we (men) are very careful.

Women are the ones guiding us (discussion group 13).

Reading such statements, it seems men are again pleased about some aspects of the inheritance laws and also concerned about its effects on their historic rights as men. The men say it is good that women bring a plot of land from their inheritance that increases the possessions of the family; yet that new right diminishes men's decision-making power. But now, men and women must negotiate decisions concerning family land, and this requires even greater degrees of communication in their relationship (Giddens in Ferguson 126). The men express that they experience the change of decisional power as disempowering –a loss of one element of their masculinity. To recover this loss, men can use violence against the ones over whom they do have power within household (Sweetman 5-6).

A real man should be able to make a decision on his own.

Imagine if you are gathering with your peers and there is a decision to be made, and you tell them -Let me go and ask my wife. It is so shameful.

You lose your integrity with your peers. You cannot even be considered as a wise man in the community (Group discussion, 24).

You even become a subject of jokes in the community. Whenever you pass, other men will be talking between them- look at him; he is no longer a man. He asked! Don't you think it is a problem? (Age 44)

Equality laws are bringing good things but we men are losing value indeed; not only in our families but in the community as well. Equality is taking away our culture.

The problem is that in the future, we will find ourselves without a culture (Group discussion, 20).

It seems that the men are more concerned about their social position in the community than anything that positive gender equality may provide. They worry that their peers will see a subjected man, not a real man able to make his own decisions. He experiences fear of not meeting the right social standard for a man, the only standard he has lived with in the past. And the culture does little or nothing to support the idea that a man should actually negotiate with his wife before making a decision that involves the family property.

Men appear to be worried about losing a culture of authority over land and over women. They appear to be living with the fear of not meeting the social expectations of men, and the fear of not knowing what the future will bring. The positive aspects of gender equality seem to disappear into their anger about culture and masculine privilege. Though women are contributing to the household income and possessions, men tend to put more emphasis on their feelings of losing influence. Below, we explore what men do to challenge and cope with these experiences of fear and ambivalence.

Changes in Traditional Family Roles

Many of the men interviewed described the intervention of the police and local authorities into family privacy as causing more problems. Women now have the right to report violent husbands to the police, something the men see as misuse and abuse of women's rights. Before the 2009 gender-based violence law was endorsed, spousal conflicts and fights were handled by family elders, who listened to arguments on both sides and tried to reconcile husbands and wives. Today, most cases of what is called conjugal abuse are brought to local leaders or to the police. Men view this new practice as undermining family roles and further devaluing men:

Some men nowadays are seen as irrelevant or motionless pylons in family. The power of a respected man is no more a reality. "*Abagore babahaye intebe aho kuyicaraho*

bayihagararaho". Women have been given a chair and instead of sitting on it they stood on it.

Some women are nowadays very aggressive, as they know that the laws overprotect them.

No woman wants family intervention in case of conflict with her husband. They call the police (Group discussion, 13).

In Rwandan tradition, both wife and children should respect a man in the household, for a man is the provider, the protector and the household head; his privilege is connected to responsibility. A 'real man' earns his position of authority through protecting and providing for the family (Lwambo 52). He therefore expects respect and admiration. With the new gender-based violence law, men can experience loss of respect in the house, which is tied to the fact that women no longer must submit to them. They narrate further that equality gives women rights but women misuse and abuse those rights by rejecting all traditional obligations. Traditionally, women were not allowed to reveal what was happening inside the household. Where sexual violence occurred, it was treated as a private matter and subject to a culture of silence: women were not allowed to speak out about their experiences (Uwineza and Pearson13). If they spoke, they would be considered arrogant or disrespectful (MIGEPROF 8). Today with gender-based violence law, women speak out, to the extent, men say, of revealing family matters by calling the police. Men narrated this new fact of life in Rwanda as though the police were invading men's privacy and taking over their family role.

Listening to men, it would seem that women are reporting their husbands to police in great numbers. National statistics show that only 28 per cent of cases are reported to police. Most men are not living this particular experience of being caught by the police; instead they are living with the fear of police intervention into their lives. A survey conducted by the Rwandan Men's Resource Centre shows that in most cases across the country, the police only learn about gender-based violence when the victim is badly injured and requires medical care (RWAMREC 26). What really seems to worry the men is their loss of

autonomy. Their options are now restricted more and they chafe under the controls. Their anxiety of getting in trouble with the police is perhaps due to the fact that the gender-based violence law stipulates clearly that any act that results in physical, psychological, sexual and economic harm should be reported to police; and men and women are mobilized by state gender agencies to file reports with the police on these matters (Rwandan Gender Based Violence Law, 3). The men feel diminished and live with confusion and frustration, which is manifested as exaggerated fear that their wives will go to the police.

These days the role of the family is taken over by the police.

Any minor misunderstanding between you and your wife is reported to the police. This was not the case before. In the past the larger family had the responsibility and role of mediator in cases of conflict in the household.

Today things have changed. The police manage most of the families. Do you think the police are resolving problems in families? No. Instead, they create them.

Let me ask you, if a woman is taking you to jail at the police station, you spend days or weeks there and then you are back to your family, do you think you will speak to that woman again? When you come back you come with other strategies (Discussion group 26).

Household conflicts were traditionally resolved in a family council headed by a chief of the extended family (always male). If a man was found responsible, though this was rare, he was fined by the family council. Today, the national police take the mediation role; however, the men interviewed view the police more as troublemakers than mediators. The man is punished in public now, whereas before he was punished by paying fine and it was all kept in the family. Now, family privacy has disappeared and everything can be public. The woman who once kept family secrets is now enabled by the state to put the man's mistakes on view. To some men, this public policy interference in the private

household causes problems. In the past, men believed in elders and senior clansmen as the only wise and competent people to turn to in any case of conflict with their wives. Scrutiny by the police humiliates some men, who feel their household powers have been seized. There is a saying in Rwanda that *'Amafuti y'umugabo nibwo buryo bwe* (man's mistakes are his capability). A woman speaking out about her husband's mistake loses her dignity as a woman, according to men. Respondents said that when a man is jailed at the police station, he becomes angry with his wife, and when he gets home he adopts new strategies of controlling her. In most cases men describe acting quiet in the house as an alternative strategy, so the police will not intervene. He does not beat the wife or harm her physically; instead he uses silence. The participants explained this in their own words: Can she call the police if we did not fight? *yahamagara police se ntarwanye nawe?* Men justified their use of silence in the homes as a strategy that helps them to carry on. Silence disciplines wife and gives husband a passive-aggressive form of power and authority. As a consequence, psychological abuses in the household continue. And, silence may indicate a new way of undermining gender policies and laws without openly challenging them (Kronsell in Parpart 6). Silence is a reflection of what is excluded from daily exchange (Smyth 583). The state's claim to enforce gender equality by monitoring men's behaviour in their homes has spawned men's new practice of privately resisting without saying a word.

Women Working Outside the Household

Men explained that they appreciate the earnings women bring home but at the same time those earnings become a source of conjugal conflicts:

When the woman knows that she generates income, she wants to know how much you were paid and how much you spend on a daily basis.

Some women think that economic and financial capabilities involve added value in terms of respect. They are no longer obeying or respecting their husbands.

In the past a woman was the heart of the family but today they are becoming crazy because they have money, and as a man you have to keep quiet. Otherwise she will call the police.

There is no space at all; there is no margin for maneuver. For the sake of peace you keep quiet, what can you do? She has her own money and she has the police toll free number (Group discussion 11).

Now that women bring income home, some men think that women disobey them and do not perform their traditional roles. Though men seem to be narrating their stories as if all women earn money and therefore became disrespectful to their husband, the integrated Household Living Conditions Survey contradicts the men's claims. The survey shows that women in Kamonyi District are more occupied with small-scale farming (83 per cent are farmers) than males and are actually less involved in types of employment that provide high income, like independent non-farm (business) or waged non-farm. Agriculture is the main industry taking up 78 per cent for the population aged 16 and above, followed by Trade 7 per cent and Construction 4.2 per cent (Rwanda National Institute of Statistics 29-52). Women engaged in agriculture do not earn income at the end of the day unless they do casual labour, most of which is in government projects for road construction and water irrigation (Kagaba forth coming 7). The survey thus refutes men's stories depicting women with cash in hand controlling their husbands. It is more likely that men fear the possibility that women will no longer depend on them. This creates anxieties that turn up in their views on gender equality.

In the past before equality arrived, wives were nice people but today they are just crazy because they have money.

Have you seen a woman who enters the house after six in the evening? Have you seen a woman going to bars? What can you say? Can you beat her?

The state has made women crazy. I as a man I do not have any say. I cannot touch her. We (men) keep quiet. It is now time for women. Women do not know any more that they are women (group discussion 19).

The narrators above are telling us that when women get money they change their behaviours, which becomes problematic to men. It seems that men blame the state for giving women rights, as it has caused women to behave differently and 'forget' that they are 'women'. Some men believe that the state is giving more importance to women now than men: '*Abagabo ntamategeko aturengera tugira. Leta irikuduteza abagore.*' men do not have laws that protect them; the state has devalued us by focusing more on women. Before the gender law, the family was clearly structured in such a way that men and women's social spaces were differentiated (i.e. the kitchen for women and bars for men). Today men see the presence of women in bars and pubs as a violation of culture. The narrators' experiences may indicate concern that women are now exposed to different realities by interacting and sharing opportunities that may exist outside home.

Infidelity and Abandonment

Several narrators named infidelity and abandonment as another potential consequence of equality in relationships. One participant explains these concerns as follows:

When a woman gets money she becomes unfaithful to the husband. We have seen so many cases here in our community. For example, at P's house there is a bar and they show movies in the evenings and weekends, my wife is working at the construction site as a helper, she goes in the morning; I do not know whom she spends the day with. In

the evening from the site she goes with her colleagues in a bar, I cannot say anything because I did not give her the money. She has her own. She comes home in the night if I try to ask something in bed she refuses saying she is tired. Two to three times saying she is tired. I looked for another woman (Age 48).

This man expresses the view that as a result of women's autonomy, women no longer feel compelled to have sex with the husband as traditionally expected; men had expectations and the women were to fulfil them. But women are no longer as submissive as before, so some men find ways of restoring their manhood by looking for another wife. Traditionally, polygamy was socially accepted and not linked to household conflicts as it is today. Although a newly formed family becomes a refuge for man, it creates problems for the separated wife, who has to carry the abandoned family responsibilities.

At the same time, men's narratives reveal the fear that women socialize now with different people and could be getting into intimate relationships with other men:

In our days *uburaya* (infidelity between couples) is increasing. Now that women have money they go out with other men. If you try to ask her where she was, she says she has the right to share a beer with her colleagues at work. She is no longer responsible at home (Group discussion, 25).

According to men's perceptions, equality laws interfere with marital fidelity. Women's interaction with other men at the workplace and in bars, according to men interviewed, creates a form of infidelity in which women have access to multiple partners. This situation is totally opposite to Rwandan traditional culture, which recognized an instrumental sexuality whereby the woman is expected to procreate and sexually satisfy the husband. Now that gender-based violence allows women to refuse to engage in sex with their spouses, many men of the district are of the view that this refusal confirms their partners'

infidelity. This puts men in a situation of uncertainty because they do not know the outcome of their wives' interactions outside home.

The Man as Victim

Some men feel lost in the new Rwanda with its emphasis on gender equality. They explain that they are unable to fulfil their traditional gender roles, making them feel disempowered in their community. They are also ashamed and emasculated when women occasionally beat them. The men are reluctant to contact the police for fear that they will be seen as weak or defenceless, which is again contrary to the social expectation of being a man in Rwanda. There is a saying in Rwanda that a man never screams or cries. His tears never come out but rather flow towards the stomach. *Umugabo ntataka. Amarira y'umugabo atemba ajya mu nda*. One-man in a focus group seemed to concur with this view:

I cannot go to the police station crying that my wife has beaten me as women do. You look stupid in the eyes of your wife, children and the community at large. So, instead of looking ridiculous to everyone, it is better to keep quiet (Age 29).

No man will bring his complaints to the police and tell them that his wife beats him. The police will laugh and make jokes about him (Age 53).

Men feel loosing their manhood if they report their abuses. The Rwandan Gender Monitoring Office also reports that men do not report household violence against them because they want to keep their reputation. To be respected, a real man keeps his victimhood a total secrecy: if you report abuse, *abandi bagabo baguca amazi*. This is a popular term that means somebody is useless. Men who try to report abuse are mocked and ridiculed; they are embarrassed and feel a loss of their manhood. This is in line with Porter's suggestion that not meeting local standards of manhood can cause feelings of shame, humiliation, frustration and loss of

dignity (Porter 488-497). These feelings and beliefs position men interviewed as existentially threatened people:

When you are in open conflict with your wife you are surrounded by a wall of troubles.

Your wife makes sure that your children hate and do not trust you.

She alerts local authorities so as to ensure that you will never dare take any repressive action. You are on your knees; you are no longer the genuine chief of your family. You live under fear that she may call the police at anytime (Group discussion, 16).

Many narrators appear to be saying that as a result of gender equality laws and women's changing practices, a man perceives himself as a victim. In cases of family conflict, the woman not only alerts local leaders, she also turns the children against him. In this respect, men then lose their authority and prerogatives as the head of the family. They feel incapable of fulfilling their family status and obligations and also humiliated by their peers:

When you are obedient and submissive to your wife, you are no longer a true man leading your family. You look ridiculous in the eyes of your peers.

You cannot even give any idea in the community between other men as everyone will question the soundness and usefulness of an idea of a subjected man commonly branded *ikizibahu* (housecoat).

You cannot feel comfortable when in public. *Ubaumezen'uwapfuyeahagaze* (you feel like a dead standing person) (group discussion, 23).

Narrators further indicate the danger of respecting and obeying the wife. According to men, if they are nice to their wife, they attract social disapproval and are called *ikizibaho*³. If they are not nice to the wife,

they live with the fear that the police will punish them. The man is puzzled. Besides being silent in their homes, men describe leaving home as another way to cope with the new challenges. Weakened from inside and outside the home, one-way strategy is to run away from the family. Some men justify this by arguing that the state has caused women to disrespect men, and those who do not want to be disrespected leave their homes. In extreme cases, men told stories of some men who have killed their spouses:

In these days spousal death is common. In the past, there were no such cases. Have you heard any man killed by the wife or wife killed by the husband? These days it is becoming a fashion. If you think we are lying to you, listen to the news in almost all radio stations; all the time there are announces of a man or a woman killed by his or her partner. Why do you think it is happening? He asked! It is due to these equality laws (Age 56).

Before equality comes, we were living well. Women were nice people, now they are becoming foolish because laws overprotect them. They do whatever they want because they know the law is on their side (group discussion, 2).

These men's experiences reflect a growing problem in Rwanda. The Rwandan national police report shows that in 2009 and 2010, the number of murder cases related to domestic violence doubled. According to the report, 38 women were killed by their husbands in 2009 and the figure rose to 83 in 2010. These statistics may indicate the confusion and controversy around the situation of gender equality in Rwanda today. This situation reflects a genuine challenge that need to be addressed by policy makers: new laws regulating gender-related modern practices seem to be creating problems for men that can result in new problems for families.

Concluding Thoughts

The aim of this research was to listen closely to the voices of Rwandan men and understand their stories about everyday experiences of gender equality practices in light of the new legislation. I learned that men had two types of stories to tell. On the one hand, men believe that gender equality laws have enabled women to contribute both materially and financially to their families. On the other hand, the same laws have negatively affected the relationship of spouses. Men perceive a loss of power and control over their partners and a loss of authority to invasive police powers over areas of traditional family privacy. Women enjoy outside resources and socialize now in ways that may result in infidelity. Family abandonment by men becomes a mechanism of regaining some perceived losses of power and prerogatives.

Men in the district of this study express relief from the burden of being sole breadwinner for the family and appreciate the inheritance law that gives women the right to land from their families of origin. Both new practices increase family assets and lift the man's socio-economic position in the community. However, men had another story to tell, which emerged as the more dominant story: in the new Rwanda, men are not well catered for by the gender equality legal provisions, and this has a negative effect on social relations in the family and the community. At the end of the fieldwork, I realized that men across the four villages studied in Kamonyi District think their status is being ruined by the new gender equality promoted by the Government.

Their stories reflect fear of punishment by the local leaders or the police if they commit violence against their female partners. Gone is entitlement to beat their wives and forced sex with them. Gone, therefore, are the old warnings and punishments for women who do not fulfil their culturally determined roles in a proper way. Men experience fear and the anticipation of being disciplined without recourse to assistance. Their overarching experience is extreme humiliation, which

encourages them to exaggerate the empirical extent of problems such as women reporting men to police or turning up in bars after work.

The narratives paint a picture of a man who does not know which path to take. This uncertainty thus creates a new rural masculinity in Rwandan society that resides in imaginary and nostalgic scenarios and in fears and worries. Previous studies have shown that men in Rwanda are becoming more violent in the household as they resist gender equality practices (Carlson and Randell 10; RWAMREC 16; Sleggh and Richters; 131-139). However, the narratives from interviewed men here indicate that men are mostly confused and do not know what to do and how to behave in their homes and community. This state of confusion causes dilemmas for them: collaborating with their wives will lead to loss of recognition by peers, and not collaborating can lead to the abuse of gender sensitive laws which is punishable. Arguably, the men are experiencing a masculinity crisis.

However, this crisis cannot be interpreted as persistent over time or a flaw in gender equality policy and laws; rather it indicates a transitional period of confusion that suggests the need to develop strategies for gender equality that can reconcile conflicts between tradition and equality practices. Reading from men's narratives, it appears that it is still difficult to achieve gender equality in the family. However, it is possible in rural families to do so if men's concerns receive recognition as legitimate experiences. There is significant fear among men of not meeting their usual masculinity requirements as well as fear of not knowing what the future of equality will bring to men, and worries about what women can now do outside the home. If planners of gender equality do not take these experiences seriously, the usual binary of men as perpetrators of violence in the home and women as victims will remain or could even worsen. Gender equality laws and policies thus will operate in vain until men's expressed pain, complaints and worries are heard and addressed. If men are to practice equality life in their daily interaction with women in homes, then it is important to listen and to legitimate their daily experiences with an empathic approach.

Men's narratives therefore reflect the demand for public space where traditional perceptions can be discussed, evaluated and modified in order to reconcile old and new practices, roles and responsibilities; otherwise men's narrative indicate that change in the traditional gender norms worsens gender relations and may abet the breakdown of the family. It would be useful to balance future research on women and gender equality with considerations of men and masculinities in a changing society.

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¹(See Districts Performance Evaluation Report 2011-2012)

²Under the Constitution, only civil monogamous marriage between a man and a woman is recognized. For instance the rights to land property are protected only for legally married women in Rwanda. So it is for children when it comes to inheritance. Other family properties beside land are conditional to the matrimonial regime and to whether marriage is registered or not. (Rwandan constitution Art.26).

³Ikizibaho is a traditional long dress that women use to wear around the house.