

ISCTE  **IUL**
Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

Escola de Sociologia e Políticas Públicas
Mestrado Internacional em Estudos Internacionais
2017/2019

*GENDERED CONFLICT: WHERE WERE THE
WOMEN DURING THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE?*

VICTIMS, PERPETRATORS AND PEACEMAKERS

Dissertação submetida como requisito parcial para obtenção do grau de Mestrado de

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Outubro de 2019

*Dedico esta tese aos meus pais, e
às minhas vovó Nené e Tia Lígia,
por me apoiarem sempre de forma entusiasta,
e me ajudarem a concretizar os meus sonhos,
à Professora Giulia, por me ter guiado por este desafio difícil,
com o seu vasto conhecimento, visão de mundo e amabilidade,
e, finalmente, aos meus colegas de Mestrado,
por terem tornado estes dois anos numa experiência memorável.*

ABSTRACT

The Rwandan genocide was a devastating conflict that took place between the Tutsi and Hutu communities for one hundred days in 1994 and which will be analysed in this Dissertation for having revealed a gendered dimension to it. Women were victims of gender-based violence and rape as a weapon of war, a strategic military tool of combat in which female bodies were used as proxies with the intent of spreading terror between women and eliminating the Tutsi community. Rwanda's women, however, played diverse roles also as engaged participants in the conflict as both perpetrators and peacemakers, who revealed reasons for engaging as varied as those of men.

The international community's observation of the conflict led into further development on the issue of gender and conflict and milestones on women's rights defence. Women's participation during the conflict and in the post-conflict country's reconstruction allowed them to enter Rwandan society and to enhance gender equality in the country, that is nowadays considered a leader in political female representation worldwide.

Keywords: armed conflict, rape as a weapon of war, gender, feminism

RESUMO

O genocídio do Ruanda baseou-se num conflito de grandes dimensões disputado entre as comunidades Tutsi e Hutu, ao longo de cem dias no ano de 1994. Este evento é abordado, nesta Dissertação como um exemplo de conflito com uma dimensão de género, onde as mulheres Tutsi foram alvo de violência e de violação como arma de guerra, uma estratégia militar de combate onde os corpos femininos foram usados como proxy, com o intuito de propagar terror entre as mulheres e eliminar a comunidade Tutsi. No entanto, o envolvimento das mulheres ruandesas no conflito foi variado, tanto como criminosas como pacificadoras, revelando motivos para as suas ações tão variados, como os dos seus restantes compatriotas.

A perspetiva da comunidade internacional sob o conflito levou a que se atingissem novos patamares de conhecimento no que toca a conflitos de género e direitos das mulheres. A participação ativa das mulheres no genocídio e na reconstrução do Ruanda, após o término do conflito, permitiu que estas entrassem na sociedade Ruandesa e que se dessem grandes passos para a igualdade de género no país, possibilitando que este se tornasse, hoje em dia, um dos líderes internacionais no que toca a representação política feminina.

Palavras-chave: conflito armado, violação como arma de guerra, género, feminismo

Glossary of terms

Gender: According to the United Nations, “gender refers to the socially constructed roles played by women and men that are ascribed to them on the basis of their sex”. Thereafter, any analysis on gender aims at defining the parallels and disparities between gender roles, not based on biological differences but instead on certain culturally and socially expected behaviours, which are frequently associated to a determined time and area, since they are based on varying social and economic contexts¹.

Gender sensitivity: According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), applying gender sensitivity aims at recognizing and taking into consideration the “societal and cultural factors involved in gender-based exclusion and discrimination” taking place at both the public and private spheres. Thus, a gender issue is “any issue concern determined by gender-based and/or sex-based differences between women and men”².

Gender mainstreaming: Concerns over gender roles may be expressed at the international level by gender mainstreaming, which is seen as a tool to achieve gender equality as well as to introduce a gender perspective and approach into policy making and programmes’ funding. It also addresses an equal gender representation in decision-making processes and policies’ beneficiaries. When there is a balanced participation of the sexes, there is a representation of different realities and standpoints that thus enhance the decision-making process and its results³.

Gender identity: Gender identities and concepts of masculinity and femininity may create and intensify or even dissuade violence, but, when trying to study and justify certain atrocities, “masculinity” as a form of social identity has constantly been neglected. In fact, certain

¹ Theidon, K. & Murray, E. (2011), “Gender, conflict and peacebuilding: state of the field and lessons learned from USIP grantmaking”, United States Institute for Peace.

² European Commission (1998). 100 Words for Equality: A Glossary of Terms on Equality between Women and Men.

³ EIGE (2019), “gender mainstreaming” (online), checked on 06.05.2019. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming>.

concepts of masculinity are intensively deployed in circumstances of violence and war, where the fusion of this concept with weaponry is as deadly as persistent. “Of all the sites where masculinities are constructed, reproduced and deployed, those associated with war and the military are some of the most direct”⁴.

Gender-based violence: According to the same source (EIGE), “gender-based violence [GBV] is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality” and one of the most “notable human rights violations within all societies”⁵. It is globally present in all continents, in different forms, and targets its victims due to their gender, with female victims being the most recurrent. The practice of Female Genital Mutilation in certain African countries is an example of GBV, but also the presence of domestic violence in several European countries. Only in the EU, since age of 15, every woman in three has experienced physical and/or sexual violence, and half of the women has experienced sexual harassment, amongst other offenses.

⁴ Morgan, D. (1994), *Theorizing Masculinities*, SAGE Publications.

⁵ EIGE (2019), “What is gender-based violence?” (online), checked on 06.05.2019. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-is-gender-based-violence>.

Table of contents

Abstract	4
Resumo	5
Glossary of Terms	7
Table of Content	9
1. Introduction	10
1.1. Gender and conflict	10
1.2. Research questions: Rwanda's genocide as a case study	12
1.3. Methodology	13
1.4. Historical background: Rwanda's genocide and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)	14
2. Framing gender and conflict	16
2.1. World Conferences on Women	16
2.2. Rape as a weapon of war	18
3. Women and conflict: perpetrators, victims and peacemakers	22
3.1. Women's social status in pre-conflict Rwanda	23
3.2. The anti-Tutsi propaganda	24
3.3. Women as perpetrators of genocide	27
3.3.1. Gender-based mitigation of trials	31
3.4. Women as victims	33
3.5. Women as peacemakers and in post-conflict reconstruction	40
4. Discussion of findings	47
5. Conclusion and final remarks	57
6. Bibliography	60

1. Introduction

1.1. Gender and conflict

In the 21st century, the World Economic Forum guarantees that there is no culture yet gender equal. Societies nowadays are still based on patriarchal values and display several forms of misogyny, and from that standpoint one can lean into analysing different circumstances, including the approach to warfare, armed conflicts and its respective gender-based violence. When thinking about wars, the collective societal imaginary around war and stereotypes of gender leads us into picturing “a uniformed soldier – male – lying dead in the field of battle”⁶ and other male actors, leaders and heroes of war. However, as Hudson et al. depicted, a more elucidated vision would “turn thoughts to the baby girl drowned in a nearby stream or the charred body of a young bride burned”. In sum, “might the security of women in fact influence the security of states?”⁷. Even recently, during the 75th celebrations of the D-Day, great emphasis and appraisal was given solely to male soldiers, and I was left wondering: where were all the women? What is the reason for the absence of acknowledgement of the tortures women endured during World War II and other conflicts? Why does it seem as women did not take part in history? Or does this perception steam only from the fact that history is told by men?

In public perception (although not in international humanitarian law), within the civilian population as a whole, women have tended to be classified in the single category of “women and children” (...); Yet the civilian population comprises many men who are of combatant age but have not taken up arms, as well as boys and elderly men who should not be recruited because of their age and specific vulnerabilities. This assumption also overlooks the fact that women are more and more frequently taking up arms. Furthermore, women certainly have needs, experiences and roles in war that differ from those of childrens.

I believe there is still little reflection on the ways in which women suffer and are targeted during armed conflicts, or how they are often deeply involved as combatants and key-elements for

⁶ Hudson, V. et al, (2009), “The Heart of the Matter: The Security of Women and the Security of Sates”, *International Security*, 33 (3).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Lindsey, C. (2001), “Women facing war”, International Committee of the Red Cross.

peace-resolution. Far away from the World War I conception of war, in which only 5% of the casualties were civilians, modern-day conflict “increasingly targets the civilian population”⁹, swelling civilian casualties up to 80%; most of these being women and children¹⁰. Triggered by this realization, I found it interesting and relevant to develop my research on women’s roles during armed conflicts.

As soon as I began my literature review, one of my first findings is how women have endured massive sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence during conflicts and how destructive the concept of “rape as a weapon of war”, used against women, is. As Elisabeth Wood, professor at Yale University and Santa Fe Institute, depicted, the incidence of sexual violence is not an inevitable consequence of war, but a strategy pertained by the army’s commander and relies on his and the soldiers’ principles, and on general cultural norms. She also defends that when sexual violence is considered avoidable, there are more chances that the offenders would assume the responsibility for their crimes. Jelke Boesten, researcher at King’s College in London, reinforces this idea by affirming how “sexual violence during political conflict is often framed by social codes and gender norms which make such violence acceptable, tolerated and often justifiable”¹¹. Fortunately, nowadays, there is a growing understanding of the need for employing a “gender perspective”¹² in peacebuilding operations, in order to achieve a “sustainable peace in post-conflict transitions”¹³; in the words

⁹ Bouta, T. & Frerks, G (2007: 7), “Women’s Roles in Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Literature review and institutional analysis”, Netherlands Institute of International Relations.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Theidon, K. & Murray, E. (2011: 21), “Gender, conflict and peacebuilding: state of the field and lessons learned from USIP grantmaking”, United States Institute for Peace.

¹² United Nations (2006), “No tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women’, says Secretary-general as Women’s Commission marks sixtieth anniversary”, Press release (online), released on the 10th November 2006, available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2006/wom1586.doc.htm>

¹³ Ibid.

of Kofi Annan¹⁴, “there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women and girls”.

1.2. Research questions: Rwanda’s genocide as a case study

In this line of thought, I believe it is important to opt for a gender-sensitive perspective when analysing several issues, including conflicts, in order to overcome gender disparities. The case of the 1994’s Rwandan genocide represents an interesting paradigm within this framework. On one hand, a quarter to half of the women were victims of sexual abuse during this conflict. On the other hand, women and girls massively took part in the killings of political adversaries¹⁵ and were engaged in “ethnic cleansing”¹⁶ practices as well. To make it even more particular, Rwanda nowadays ranks 6th amongst the Top 10 more gender-equal countries, displaying a female representation of 61,3% in the national parliament, surpassing the previous world leader in this parameter, Sweden¹⁷. Several international actors have applauded Rwanda for its quick post-conflict recovery and “economic growth, low corruption levels” and its “ambitious economic modernization agenda which aims to lift Rwanda from a low-income to a medium-income country”¹⁸.

For these reasons, I have decided to focus on the Rwandese case hoping to comprehend the dichotomy of this context, namely both the strategic intent behind the employment of sexual violence during the genocide and Rwanda’s attainments in gender equality in the post-conflict phase. This leads me into formulating the following research questions: where were the women during this conflict? Is gender-based violence, such as rape as a weapon of war, still

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Theidon, K. & Murray, E. (2011), “Gender, conflict and peacebuilding: state of the field and lessons learned from USIP grantmaking”, United States Institute for Peace.

¹⁶ Bouta, T. & Frerks, G (2007: 31), “Women’s Roles in Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Literature review and institutional analysis”, Netherlands Institute of International Relations.

¹⁷ World Economic Forum (2018), The Global Gender Gap Report – 2018 (Insight Report).

¹⁸ UNDP (2007), World Bank (2010), apud Debusscher, P. & Ansoms, A. (2013).

nowadays, a way to submit women to patriarchal values? Is there a linkage between Rwandese women's active roles during conflict and in the post-conflict society?

The relevance of these questions relates with notions of gender equality and sustainable development, and the following UN's Sustainable Development Goals: 3, Good Health and Well-Being, in this case, of the female population, by protecting their physical and sexual health; 5, Gender equality, by approaching topics through a gender sensitive lenses; 10, Reduced Inequalities, between men and women; and 16, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, which can be attained with the stronger female presence in Rwandan Parliaments and Courts. Subsequently, if this study successfully manages to answer the presented research questions, I will be closer to understanding which are the triggers of gender inequality and gender-based violence and how they can be avoided in the future.

Thereafter, I will begin my analysis by framing historically and socially the Rwandan genocide and the advancements made internationally regarding women's rights during the World Conferences on Women, and by developing the meaning of rape as a weapon of war. I will continue through a careful examination of Rwandese women's status in the pre-conflict society and the reasons that might have led them into engaging in the genocide, to better understand where their actions as well as their victimhood came from. Subsequently, I will lean over their positions during the genocide as political participants and crime perpetrators, as victims, mainly of sexual abuse, and finalise with an overview of the new status they acquired in the post-conflict context. I will conclude this analysis with a discussion based on my findings in order to better answer my research questions.

1.3. Methodology

In order to conduct this research, I used several methods to build a better general understanding of the Rwandan case. A substantial part of my investigation was based on the literature review of academic papers, scientific online magazines and books, encompassing

historical, sociological, medical and feminist views on the topic of women and conflict. With the intent of building a clearer picture of the ways in which Rwandan women endured the genocide in very particular and individual ways, I grounded my investigation over several researches conducted by anthropologists and sociologists and based on direct interviews and interactions with genocide survivors or local Women's Rights organizations. I also used journalistic pieces that covered the genocide in order to have a more comprehensive overlook on the topic and to avoid one-sided perspectives and relied on UN's standpoints and definitions of the conflict. Finally, part of my research was also based and inspired by my attendance to the 2019's Estoril Conferences, in Carcavelos, more precisely on the gender-equality related panels and on the speech of Dr. Denis Mukwege. This research was developed throughout on the basis of gender sensitivity and gender mainstreaming, which means that my approach to this historical event aims at identifying the aspects in which Rwandese women were specific targets of gender-based violence and discrimination and, also, how their contribution as women had a positive impact in Rwanda's society development.

The dissertation is structured as follows: the first chapter, *Introduction*, aims at familiarising the reader with gender-based concepts, especially when applied to conflict, and with the episode of the Rwandan genocide. The second chapter, *Framing gender and conflict*, intends to explore the outcomes of the World Conferences on Women and the related international debate about women's issues and women's rights, and also to elaborate on the phenomenon of rape as a weapon of war. The third chapter, *Women and conflict*, will be based in on-the-ground researches and interviews with female survivors, in order to understand how female stereotypes and conflict-related propaganda might have dictated women's fate in conflict. I will also build several profiles of female engagement in the conflict based on some authors' researches, from low and high-status perpetrators to victims of different forms of abuse, and to peacemakers and active members of society in the post-conflict reconstruction phase. In the last two chapters, *Discussion of findings* and *Conclusion and final remarks*, I will attempt to answer my questions and take my final position on the topic, as much as leaving

suggestions for possible future researches on the topic.

1.4. Historical background: Rwanda's genocide and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)

The Rwandan genocide has been described by the United Nations¹⁹ as follows: when it broke out in 1994, Rwanda's population was comprised of three main ethnic groups: the Hutu, who constituted the 85% majority of the people, the Tutsi, 14%, who held the higher social status in society, and a minority, 1%, of Twa. Interestingly enough, as debated at the Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA, Arusha, 1995), a Tutsi would most probably state that there was no noticeable difference between the two main groups, while the Hutu elite most commonly pointed ethnic and racial differences²⁰.

Mahmood Mamdani develops this idea by arguing that "if Hutu and Tutsi are *historical* identities, then we need to be open to the possibility that the definition of Hutu and Tutsi may have changed over time (...) [and], if Hutu and Tutsi are *political* identities, then their history is likely to be coterminous with that of the institutions of power, particularly the State of Rwanda". The author also states this division might have been aggravated by the Belgian colonial rule. These identities were "politically enforced through state-issued identity cards. The educational system separated Tutsi from Hutu (...). Hutu were effectively excluded from recruitment in local government and in the priesthood, both of which were completely *Tutsified*."

¹⁹ United Nations (sine anno), "Outreach Programme on the Rwanda Genocide and the United Nations" (online), consulted on the 25.05.2019. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/historical-background.shtml>

²⁰ Mamdani, M. (2002). *When victims become killers: Colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

More than ever in the history of Rwanda, the colonial world effectively sealed the Hutu into a servile status”²¹.

The tensions between these groups were deepened during the 1950’s European decolonization wave. Once that Belgium was about to concede independence to the Rwandese colony, under its rule since the end of WWI, a political debate started on who should take Rwanda’s rule. The Hutu majority was in line to succeed, however, the Tutsi community was not interested in losing its privileges. This led to the beginning of social clashes, as the 1959’s Hutu Peasant Revolution resulting in the killings of hundreds of Tutsi.

From 1962, when Rwanda gained its independence, until 1967, conflicts and violent attacks continued resonant, provoking more Tutsi deaths and people’s displacement. In the end of the 1980s, there were 480.000 Rwandese refugees in the neighbouring countries. This instigated the creation of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), founded in 1988 in Uganda, by a community of Tutsi refugees and a minority of Hutus: this movement intended to repatriate the exiled Rwandans and to reform the government. Later, in 1993, there were some signs of hope for reconciliation, with the signing of the Arusha peace agreement, supported by the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Nevertheless, the peace agreement was boycotted by some of its own signatories, Hutu extremists planning the extermination of Tutsis as well as of Hutu moderates.

The genocide finally broke out on April 6th ,1994, following the deaths of Burundi’s and Rwanda’s Presidents after the airplane they were travelling on was attacked, and continued for one hundred days. It is estimated that violence rose up to a number of 800.000 deaths and 250.000 raped women, with members of the presidential guard also involved in the aggressions towards Tutsi civilians. On the second day of violence, Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana was murdered by Rwandan government soldiers, alongside with other Hutu leaders and Belgian peacekeepers. The international community witnessed these happenings, shocked, but lethargically. The United Nations did not manage to offer great help

²¹ Ibid.

either, due to its own Member State's reluctance. In November 1994, the UN Security Council created the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), aimed specifically at war and genocide perpetrators. Several individuals were convicted by this Court for violations against international humanitarian law, including high-profile officials, politicians and religious leaders, and the Prime Minister at the time of the genocide, Jean Kambanda²². Besides, the Gacaca Courts extended the employment of justice at the local communities' level for smaller scale crimes.

2. Framing gender and conflict

2.1. World Conferences on Women

Fortunately, regretful wartime situations lived in the 20th century all over the world impelled greater development on conflict prevention, which quite recently started to look over its gender dimensions. This new linkage between research, gender studies and consequent policies resulted on a new area for inquiry, namely gender, conflict and peacebuilding. This formal approach and concerns over women and girls' protection are a recent event, a by-product of the women's rights movement. Prior to the second half of the 20th century, female mentions in war treaties and international conventions were basically centred on protecting their honour²³. "The security of civilians, especially women, was clearly considered of secondary importance"²⁴. In 1949, during the Geneva Conventions, when the first modern tools were created to safeguard women's integrity, it is written in its Fourth Convention, "shall be

²² United Nations (sine anno), "Outreach Programme on the Rwanda Genocide and the United Nations" (online), consulted on the 25.05.2019. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/historical-background.shtml>

²³ Theidon, K. & Murray, E. (2011), "Gender, conflict and peacebuilding: state of the field and lessons learned from USIP grantmaking", United States Institute for Peace.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 6.

especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution or any form of indecent assault”²⁵.

Thenceforward, the World Conferences on Women took place, the first being held in Mexico City in 1975, advocating for gender equality and additional involvement of women in world peace construction. Further development came with the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1979, which obliged all governments to take the political, social, economic and cultural necessary measures in order to support women in their emancipation and equality with men. Almost twenty years after the 1st World Conference on Women, during the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, the illegality of sexual violence during periods of armed conflict was finally taken into account²⁶. Nevertheless, one of the greatest advancements happened only during the 4th Conference on Women in Beijing, already after the Rwandan genocide, in 1995, which was called the Beijing Platform for action, and identified twelve critical areas of work, one of them being “Women and Armed Conflict”, taking one step further into gender mainstreaming²⁷. This platform was able to identify six key actions necessary, being amongst others: foster women’s participation in decision-making and conflict resolution; provide specific protection for women undergoing conflicts; incentivise women’s contribution towards building a culture of peace; assist and train refugee women. In the same year, the European Council passed a resolution stating that employing a gender perspective is essential in the prevention and resolution of crises²⁸.

Five years later, at Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st century, it was finally recognized how armed conflicts impact women and men in different ways, thus being necessary the employment of a gender perspective while planning development aid and humanitarian assistance. Also, the UN Resolution 1325 signalled the

²⁵ Ivi, p. 7.

²⁶ Theidon, K. & Murray, E. (2011), “Gender, conflict and peacebuilding: state of the field and lessons learned from USIP grantmaking”, United States Institute for Peace.

²⁷ Bouta, T. & Frerks, G (2007: 31), “Women’s Roles in Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Literature review and institutional analysis”, Netherlands Institute of International Relations.

²⁸ Ibid.

Security Council's first time addressing a resolution on *war on women* and women's inputs and contributions towards peace. Further on, the Security Council's 1020 Resolution of 2008, finally acknowledged rape as a weapon of war used to "humiliate, dominate, instil fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilian members". As a consequence, Women in Development (WID) framework was updated to Gender and Development (GAD), centred on gender relations and social gendered roles, helping women enter the decision-making process and giving birth to gender mainstreaming²⁹.

The international debate on war had finally reached the resolution of how women and men experience conflict on different levels: women in conflict areas live firsthand and with their own bodies the repercussions of war and violence. However, as the UN (2016) pointed as still "less visible than the headlines" is the role of women in conflict development and their effort in maintaining normality as much as possible by continuing their careers, caring for their families and for others, and pursuing education. Still, global leaders did not quite yet manage to close the gap between legislation and the implementation of "gender sensitivity"³⁰.

2.2. Rape as a weapon of war

A possible explanation for the systematic employment of rape and other forms of sexual violence as mechanism of war relies on the fact that, in many societies, women are still regarded as "symbolic bearers of caste, ethnic or national identity"³¹, representing, then, a token of the values to be targeted. Sexual violence against women is a strategic vehicle to demoralize the opponent, and it can be considered both an aggression towards the individual and towards a community or nation. These attacks on women are made possible due to the temporary cessations in the rule of law and in family unities or the scarce attention that is still given to this problem.

²⁹ Theidon, K. & Murray, E. (2011), "Gender, conflict and peacebuilding: state of the field and lessons learned from USIP grantmaking", United States Institute for Peace.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 6.

³¹ Bouta, T. & Frerks, G (2007: 7), "Women's Roles in Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Literature review and institutional analysis", Netherlands Institute of International Relations.

Throughout history, rape has been used as a “weapon of war”, as a tactic that is not “limited to a certain time or region”, and that eventually leads to “devastating consequences for millions of individuals and their communities”³². This type of violence escalates continually as many women have no other chance during conflict than to resort to prostitution in order to sustain their families, leading to an extremely high incidence of sexual transmitted diseases as HIV/AIDs among the female population. The global situation is a calamity, and these offences to human rights are the highest indicator of the disrespect for women’s rights and the objectification of women’s bodies that still takes place in modern-day societies, either it being palpable as during conflict times or latent during peaceful times.

To worsen it, this practice is not limited to military officials, but even peace officials and UN *envoyés* were accused of mistreatments against local women in certain missions. Some officials and peacemakers have been engaged in practices of sexual abuse and economic coercion, forcing women into trading their bodies to food or protection, which was the main responsibility of these officials to deliver in the first place. Ultimately, when faced with these accusations from journalists, UN’s defence was the “institutional equivalent of a ‘boys will be boys’ shrug of inevitability”³³, driving some scholars to accuse International Humanitarian Law to perceive law regarding women “as less important than others (...) drafted in different language than the provisions protecting combatants and civilians”³⁴. Similarly, Innocent Mazimpaka, chairman of the League of the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights in Rwanda (LIPRODHOR) at the time of the genocide, was charged by African Rights as having had great responsibility towards the genocide³⁵.

³² Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation (sine anno), “Rape as a weapon of war” (online), consulted at 17.06.2019. Available at: <https://www.mukwegefoundation.org/the-problem/rape-as-a-weapon-of-war/>

³³ Quénivet (2007: 660) apud Theidon & Murray (2011: 11).

³⁴ Gardam & Charlesworth (2000) apud Theidon & Murray (2011: 11).

³⁵ Mamdani, M. (2002). *When victims become killers: Colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

The fact is that the industries revolving around the military and defence often display deeply rooted and aggressive sexism, expressed through language and “wartime constructs and propaganda”. There is a widely spread discourse on how the adversary will “rape and murder ‘our’ women” and how soldiers must fight in order to protect “‘our’ mothers, daughters and wives”. This is a discourse that objectifies women and normalizes their use as, on one hand, weapons and targets of war and, on the other, victims that need protection: “the same military bases installed in the name of security lead to an increase in sexual violence or prostitution, underscoring the degree to which security itself is a gendered good”³⁶, making this dichotomy between protection and abuse from soldiers incongruous. Frequently, in these scenarios, misogyny and homophobia go hand in hand. Young male soldiers may be pressured by their colleagues to prove their heterosexuality, which once again, targets women as sexual objects and victims of rape ³⁷.

Cynthia Enloe, a feminist theorist and Professor at Clark University, brilliantly exposed another dichotomy between the military and women abuses, this time over the increase of prostitution, usually justified with the argument that “men having uncontrollable sexual needs, thereafter prostitution is the only way to stop them abusing local women”. “It is striking that across regions, militaries plan for sexual provisioning as much as they do for supply needs”³⁸, dealing with women as possessions at military’s disposal. Depicting women as commodities helps constructing patterns of sexual violence in conflicts and gender stereotypes. This mentality is also used for post-conflict justice, when violence against women and girls keeps rising through the “domestication of violence”³⁹.

Reinforcing this idea, Dr. Denis Mukwege’s, founder of the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation, which treats and helps women victims of war rape in Congo, claimed that, as gynaecologist,

³⁶ Theidon, K. & Murray, E. (2011: 14), “Gender, conflict and peacebuilding: state of the field and lessons learned from USIP grantmaking”, United States Institute for Peace.

³⁷ Rowe, C. (2009), “‘That Whole Gender Paradigm’: Iraq War Veterans Embodying Feminist Approaches to Dissent”.

³⁸ Theidon, K. & Murray, E. (2011: 18), “Gender, conflict and peacebuilding: state of the field and lessons learned from USIP grantmaking”, United States Institute for Peace.

³⁹ Ivi, p. 6.

he understood how his patients who were victims of rape were abused in very specific characteristics, which led him to believe that such abuses “took place on a methodical matter”, and that “rape isn’t [just] sexual intercourse, is a weapon used massively”. He continued by pointing out that the raping of little girls is only possible with the dehumanization of the female body and how “rape is the ultimate expression of a world where men try to make a point of their power and domination on women, a way of crashing and dominating women”⁴⁰.

Even not so long ago, in the early 1990s in Europe, during the conflict in former Yugoslavia, sexual violence was so brutal and extensively practiced that caught international notice unprecedentedly, driving the UN into creating an ad hoc International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY). This tribunal managed to categorize rape and other forms of sexual violence as war crimes and genocide. Later, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998), following the ICTY, succeeded in breaking the honour paradigm associated with women’s rape, that would no longer be associated to morality but instead to a crime against humanity⁴¹. As Judge Navanethem Pillay, the ICTR’s only female judge, wrote, “rape has been regarded as the spoils of war (...), now it will be considered a war crime”⁴².

History of abuses on women continues hidden in the shadows. Going back to the already mentioned 75th celebrations of the D-Day, I went into investigating where women were when it all happened. Ann Mah exposed through her research how the most vulnerable women, “unmarried, widowed or married women whose husbands were prisoners of war”, were being victims of the so called “wild purge” by the Allies’ soldiers who, with no “legal mandate or court-given authority” accused them of “horizontal collaboration”. Their female-only victims were “publicly humiliated (...) their heads were shaved, they were stripped half-naked, smeared with tar, paraded through towns and taunted, stoned, kicked, beaten, spat upon and

⁴⁰ Mukwege, Denis (2019), “Sexual violence: a weapon of war and armed conflict”, panel at Estoril Conferences: Empower Humanity, Change the World, Carcavelos, May 2019.

⁴¹ Bouta, T. & Frerks, G (2007: 7), “Women’s Roles in Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Literature review and institutional analysis”, Netherlands Institute of International Relations.

⁴² Theidon, K. & Murray, E. (2011: 8), “Gender, conflict and peacebuilding: state of the field and lessons learned from USIP grantmaking”, United States Institute for Peace.

sometimes even killed”. When Ann Mah started studying World War II, she was “expecting to find horrors that took place during the dark years of the Nazi Occupation”. However, what she found instead was that “for thousands of women, the Liberation marked the beginning of a different nightmare”⁴³. Similarly, during the same period, the enforced prostitution of the Japanese “comfort women”, for the military’s supposed convenience, has not been, until the present time, properly addressed. Acknowledging all these women “is an important step in acknowledging the long history of gender inequality. (...) It is time to ask why the women paid the price for the sins of men (...); It is time to remove their story from the shadows”⁴⁴.

3. Women and conflict: perpetrators, victims and peacemakers

However, it would be a mistake to categorize women’s roles in conflict merely as passive victims since, “contrary to the dominant narrative of women as victims and bystanders, Rwandan women played a central role”⁴⁵ during this episode of Rwandan history, even as dangerous instigators. In the year of 2010, two thousand Rwandan women, ranging from “illiterate farmers to former political, religious and military leaders”⁴⁶, were still serving their sentence for genocidal acts. It is thus important to address these diverse cases and to understand what the motivations of these women were for engaging in the genocide in the first place, as much as their context in Rwandan society at the time the genocide broke out, and what may have led them to engage in the conflict in such significant numbers.

Therefore, I will begin this chapter by analysing the ways in which propaganda might have influenced and prepared both women and men to voluntarily engage in the bloodshed and to justify their actions and hatred. In the second part, I will analyse the actions led by female

⁴³ Mah, Ann (2018), This Picture Tells a Tragic Story of What Happened to Women After D-Day (online), TIME. Consulted on the 20.05.2019. Available at: <https://time.com/5303229/women-after-d-day/?fbclid=IwAR1aIPfxEfRLsgVF1llyw8yxq8j4RXDuamwjZirnz9XJnAiBnfgMAEBmsz0>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Brown, S. (2013: 448), “Female Perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide”.

⁴⁶ Hogg, N. (2010: 70), “Women’s participation in the Rwandan genocide: mothers or monsters?”, International Review of the Red Cross, vol.92, n° 877.

perpetrators and how they can be categorised in two different types, according to their background and overall impact in the genocide: "ordinary women"⁴⁷ and "women in leadership positions"⁴⁸; their actions and reasons to actively join in the war are as diverse as those of men, however, these reasons depend substantially on their social status, hence, the presented categorization of the female actors. A section of this chapter will focus on the phenomenon of gender-based mitigation of trials and how stereotypical ideas of gender are exposed even in the Rwandan court rooms. I will continue by ascertaining the ways in which women suffer as victims and, finally, how did they contribute for peace-making and Rwandan society reconstruction in the post-conflict, mainly through their work in grassroots local organizations and lobbying close to the right stakeholders.

3.1. Women's social status in pre-conflict Rwanda

In order to understand women's several forms of participation in the genocide it is crucial to understand their positions in Rwandan society prior to that event. Before 1994, there was a clear societal division between sexes in terms of responsibilities and roles. Women were responsible for household related tasks, raising the children and keeping up with traditions, eventually being welcomed to advise and support their husbands in their decisions. Their value was usually weighed over the number of children they could bare, with the pre-genocide average being 6,2 children per woman. Men, on the contrary, should decide over all the major situations at home, and stand for strength and leadership.. Education for gender-related roles started from a very young age, when boys "were taught to defend the interests of the family and the nation", whereas girls "were groomed to help their mothers in the household chores (...)", being taught "obedience, respect, politeness, submission and resignation"⁴⁹. Women also held an inferior position in terms of education and financial independence, encompassing

⁴⁷ Ivi:76.

⁴⁸ Ivi: 86.

⁴⁹ Ivi: 72.

70% of illiteracy in rural areas by 1991, 20% above men, according to the UNFAO, and 65% to 70% of the country's agricultural, and low skilled labour force⁵⁰.

Women were also under-represented in politics and decision-making bodies. By 1990, women only counted up to 1% of the leaders at sector level and, by 1992, there were only three female ministers and twelve female members in Parliament. In 1994, there were no female prefects or mayors. In addition to this, physical and sexual gender-based violence against women was also a reality, even before the conflict erupted⁵¹. Furthermore, the frivolity and indifference which was given to domestic violence in Rwanda also helps explaining how violence against women escalated the way it did during the genocide. A local proverb which says that “a woman who is not yet battered is not a real woman”⁵², clearly illustrates this mentality. The Rwandan government reported that one-fifth of women in Rwanda have been victims of domestic violence.

3.2. The anti-Tutsi propaganda

To better comprehend how the apparently passive and segregated female members of Rwandan society got mobilized for genocidal acts, it is important to carefully examine the anti-Tutsi propaganda campaign carried out by the Hutu elite during the years leading up to the ethnic war, with the intent of stirring up fear and hatred towards the Tutsi community. Discriminative ideals towards this community were diffused mainly through two main media channels: *Kangura*, a popular journal, and the RTLM (Télévision Libre des Mille Collines) radio station, which was MRNDD's (The National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development), a Hutu-led political party in rule from 1975, and related to right-wing extremists, tools of choice for dissemination of radical visions⁵³. The propaganda spread the idea that Tutsi should be considered as foreigners who had invaded and managed to dominate Rwanda

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Human Rights Watch (1996), “Shattered Lives: sexual violence during the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath”.

⁵³ Brown, S. (2013: 448), “Female Perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide”.

and its Hutu majority in a cunning way and were intending to claim their power and social status back, lost during the 1959's Rwandan Revolution (*muyaga*): this period of violence confrontation between Hutu and Tutsis took place during the transition from the Belgium colonial rule to a final Hutu-dominated republic. Some of the most racist and particularly vicious anchors of this radio station were women.

But who were the architects behind this propaganda campaign? The Rwandan intellectual elite, also designated by *Akazu* or "little house"⁵⁴ or, according to Claudine Vidal (1991) the "Fourth Ethnic Group"⁵⁵ of Rwanda, were considered as such for sharing some European-like lifestyle and attitudes, practicing Christianity and accepting the European version of colonialism in the region, perpetuating the racist mindset of the former colonial powers. In fact, nowadays, numerous historians came to the agreement that societies in Africa, although always patriarchal, were more gender-balanced before the European colonialism and reform over laws referring to marriage and land possession, and that these alterations to the gender dynamics "led to greater inequality"⁵⁶. Rwanda shares with other African countries a heavy colonial heritage of racist mentalities, economic instability and high levels of corruption, often leading to such events as ethnic confrontations.

The masterminds of this hate campaign also created quite an emotional base to it, taking advantage of human fears and insecurities with the intention of manufacturing a deeply-rooted Tutsi-hatred amongst the Hutu citizens, stimulating the feeling of inferiority perceived by Hutus and disseminating the idea that Tutsi were the "enemies of the state", agents employed to intrude "Hutu ranks"⁵⁷. An account by a Tutsi civilian during an interview in Kigali (1996) illustrates this situation: "no military man could marry Tutsi women, or they would have to leave

⁵⁴ Hogg, N. (2010: 91), "Women's participation in the Rwandan genocide: mothers or monsters?", *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol.92, n° 877.

⁵⁵ Vidal, C. (1991: 28-44), *Sociologie des passions: Rwanda, Côte d'Ivoire*, Paris, Éditions Karthala

⁵⁶ Pankhurst, D. (2003), "Women and Politics in Africa: the Case of Uganda", *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 55, n1.

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch (1996: 12), "Shattered Lives: sexual violence during the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath".

the military; Tutsi women were considered more beautiful, which bred hate against them (...). It led to jealousy, to a hate that I can't describe (...); I was told that I couldn't work in certain places because as a Tutsi woman I would poison the others". The stereotypical idea also encompassed an arrogant and sexually-predative Tutsi woman, dismissing all Hutu suitors for being of an inferior status: "These women are very sexual, and they sleep with their Tutsi brothers; You will be deceived by them"⁵⁸. In 1990, the above mentioned *Kangura* journal published the infamous "Ten Commandments of the Hutu" piece, by the journalist Hassan Ngeze who listed several guiding rules towards the Tutsi community and in particular towards Tutsi women, stating beliefs such as "every Hutu should know that a Tutsi woman, wherever she is, works for the interest of her Tutsi ethnic group; as a result, we shall consider a traitor any Hutu who: marries a Tutsi woman; befriends a Tutsi woman; employs a Tutsi woman as a secretary or a concubine"⁵⁹.

This hatred campaign resulted in an immense Hutu men and women mobilization fuelled by their biggest fears. In fact, this Hutu-led media campaign was extremely well premeditated if one takes into consideration, as noted by Nederven Pieterse (1992), how "prejudices are often said to be emotionally based" and how effective it was in spreading the racist message. As Sharlach⁶⁰ explained, "a woman's loyalty to her ethnic group almost always overrode any sense of sisterhood to women of the other ethnic groups", compelling them to act against Tutsi fellow-citizens. A testimonial from a Kigali Central Prison's female detainee illustrated how propaganda influenced and convinced Hutu women to be engaged in the genocide. She confessed that she trusted the propaganda and believed she had to kill Tutsis since all Tutsi were working for the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and Tutsi women provoked jealousy for

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ Ivi: 13.

⁶⁰ Sharlach, L. (1999: 388), "Gender and Genocide in Rwanda: Women as Agents and Objects of Genocide", *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol 1, n° 3.

their beauty and wealth. However, amid war she began second-guessing those dogmatic assertions when witnessing so many innocent men, women and children being killed⁶¹.

3.3. Women as perpetrators of genocide

A testimony from a genocide's survivor revealed how women "were killing like men (...); they were hunting, telling where people were hiding or going, taking jewellery from the bodies (...); but they didn't even help to hide"⁶². As previously mentioned, there were two types of female actors involved in the conflict. In detail, Nicole Hogg described "ordinary women", who held no position of power in Rwandan society and were not involved in the planning and orchestration of the genocide but were caught in the mist of it, and "women in positions of power", who were part of an influential elite that took part of all stages of organisation and execution of the genocide. The first offenders were tried by the local justice systems of the *Gacaca* courts of crimes up to "Category 2", which maximum sentence was life imprisonment. The latter category of perpetrators were usually charged of "Category 1" offences under the Organic Law, whose penalties encompassed life imprisonment in isolation and, until the year 2007, the death penalty. Also, these suspects were tried at the national level, instead of the local *Gacaca* courts⁶³. The crimes committed by both perpetrators can also be classified as either acts of direct or indirect violence: the first referring to acts of violence which involved murder, torture, sexual assault and beatings, whilst the second referring to burglary, providing information to the militia about hiding places of certain individuals, general incitation for violence and planning or facilitating acts of brutality⁶⁴.

⁶¹ Hogg, N. (2010: 91), "Women's participation in the Rwandan genocide: mothers or monsters?", *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol.92, n° 877.

⁶² Sharlach, L. (1999: 391), "Gender and Genocide in Rwanda: Women as Agents and Objects of Genocide", *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol 1, n° 3.

⁶³ Hogg, N. (2010), "Women's participation in the Rwandan genocide: mothers or monsters?", *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol.92, n° 877.

⁶⁴ Brown, S. (2013), "female Perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol 16, n° 3.

According to Hogg, there is a “general consensus” that “ordinary women” were mainly involved in indirect acts of violence, such as robbery, revealing Tutsi hiding shelters to the militia, and providing general support to male combatants, behaviours which “conformed to gender expectations of women”⁶⁵. They would refuse to protect and hide Tutsis in their houses but deliver provisions to men at roadblocks and, mostly, a lot of information to the *Interahamwe* militia, a Hutu-led far-right movement formed in 1994 and active in Rwanda, Congo and Uganda. “Women knew a lot; their eyes were open”⁶⁶.

It is also important to note that some of these acts were forced or instigated by the militia over threats of death or torture. One example was described by a woman whom the *Interahamwe* requested to collect large rocks and throw them into a well where a Tutsi man was trapped in; she claimed that if she had not complied, she would have been killed. This is a case where a woman became a killer by direct coercion to, subsequently, be found guilty of a genocide-related crime and detained. As Josée Mukandamage, former Vice-President of the Rwandan Supreme Court, indicated, “women’s participation in the genocide was more subtle than men’s”. He continues arguing how women did not appear in the dead squads’ ranks, and only took part in the killings, directly or indirectly, to safeguard themselves or others. Also, “women’s willingness to hide Tutsi children, for example, probably partly explains the high number of orphans in Rwanda today”. Nonetheless, women’s social and political manoeuvre and capability to induce any change in the course of the war was definitely restricted by “gender dynamics and the atmosphere of violence”⁶⁷.

After this analysis, one may wonder if ordinary women took, in fact, part of the genocide. Here lies an incongruity: most female detainees do not assume they had indeed committed acts of genocide, when comparing to men. “Overall, very little moral responsibility was attached to

⁶⁵ Hogg, N. (2010: 78), “Women’s participation in the Rwandan genocide: mothers or monsters?”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol.92, n° 877.

⁶⁶ *Ivi*: 79.

⁶⁷ *Ivi*: 88.

these ‘women’s crimes’⁶⁸. On the other hand, under the Gacaca Law, there is no question that even not having committed direct crimes, accomplices were indeed part of the genocide and should be penalized likewise. Victor Karega, Minister of Gender, Family and Social Affairs in 1998, shared his perspective on the whole episode of women and genocide. He explained how, in Rwandan culture, women have been always seen as a bond for peaceful cohabitation, since they have been married with men of other ethnicities. Nevertheless, during the genocide such a reality did not linger. “Because the genocide that occurred in Rwanda was planned and organized by the national machinery, it was the government, so it was somehow a duty, to the people who believed in the government, to implement. That’s how they came to kill, these women⁶⁹”.

In relation to “women in positions of power”, by 2010, there were forty-seven Rwandan women accused of Category 1 type offences, which signifies how they were deeply tangled in orchestrating the genocide and the deaths of many. In the next section, I will give the example of two of the most prominent female characters of this group, but also the example of one of the most benevolent female leaders in Rwandan history. Agathe Kanziga Habyarimana, member of the Hutu elite, was the First Lady of Rwanda during her marriage to the former President Juvénal Habyarimana, from 1973 to 1994. She was one of the creators of the previously mentioned propaganda platforms *Kangura* and the RTLM radio station, and a responsible for *Interahamwe*’s conception and training. Besides, she also selected several political personalities to be eliminated, including the Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, and was referred to as a “centrepiece of a system of repression”⁷⁰. She contested all charges against her before the French Refugee Commission, stating how her role was limited to protocol and representation and how she was a loving mother whom spend the genocide looking over her family. However, enough proofs were found against her.

⁶⁸ Ivi: 80.

⁶⁹ Sharlach, L. (1999: 393), “Gender and Genocide in Rwanda: Women as Agents and Objects of Genocide”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol 1, n° 3.

⁷⁰ Hogg, N. (2010: 919), “Women’s participation in the Rwandan genocide: mothers or monsters?”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol.92, n° 877.

Pauline Nyiramasuhuko is the former Minister of Family Affairs and Women's Development who, during her mandate, kept close ties with the First Lady Agathe Kanziga. She was the figure behind several acts of severe genocidal violence comprising conspiracy, captures, killings and torture carried out by the *Interahamwe*. Considered to be one of the "big fish"⁷¹, she was the first woman to be prosecuted of rape, as she drove the militia to carry out rape as a weapon of war at a genocidal scale. In 2011, she was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Yet, not all prominent figures of Rwandan politics were in favour of the genocide. Agathe Uwilingiyimana became Prime Minister of Rwanda in 1993, the year before the war broke out and was constantly contradicting the President's extremist visions. She is known for her work promoting the rights of women and girls, fighting against sexual discrimination and addressing ethnic prejudice. Unfortunately, she was one of the first victims of the Presidential Guard when the genocide detonated, on April 7th, 1994. She is now regarded as a "national hero"⁷².

Similarly, in other institutions such as the military or the Catholic church, women took advantage of their positions of power to intensify their participation in the genocide. Major Anne-Marie Nyirahakizimana was sentenced to death penalty before the Kigali Military Court, in 1999, for several crimes including encouragement to genocide. Rose Karushara, councillor in Kigali, "took and extremely active role in the genocide, wearing military uniform throughout⁷³", beating refugees herself before the militia came to terminate their lives. Also infamous as member of the Church, sister Gertrude, former Mother Superior of the Convent of the Sovu Monastery in Butare, and sister Maria Kizito were convicted of murder in 2001 by the Belgium Court of Assizes for neglect of asylum-seeking refugees and other forms of violence against them. It is, then, clear how all dimensions of society were working together and how women in positions of power had a crucial part in this project.

⁷¹ Ivi: 92.

⁷² Ivi: 75.

⁷³ Jones, A. (2002: 83), "Gender and genocide in Rwanda", *Journal of Genocide Research*.

3.3.1. Gender-based mitigation of trials

Furthermore, an additional interesting aspect of female-perpetrated crime in Rwanda worth analysing is the way in which the portrayal of women as pacific actors and loving mothers interdicted fair trials for female perpetrators. For example, the case of Beatrice Munyenyezi, a Rwandan citizen who let certain fractions of the Interahamwe to abduct women for sexual slavery and organized killings. Even facing such accusations, her trial defence alleged that “as a woman and a mother, she was incapable of committing mass murder (...); the defence relied upon a patriarchal interpretation of genocide (...); [her lawyers] erased her from the picture entirely”⁷⁴. An illustrative example of this mindset is depicted by Janvier Forongo, Executive Secretary of IBUKA, an umbrella organization for several other survivors’ associations, when confessing how it is “difficult for us to understand how a lady can become a killer, as a mother”. This mentality results in several indicted women being seen as gender outliers and monsters, “stripped of their gender and humanity”⁷⁵.

This rhetoric contributes for certain cases of female-perpetrated sexual assault to be omitted from the genocide’s narrative. However, this form of crime has been reported in several occasions when, according to J. Forongo, women “forced young Tutsi boys to have sex with them out of a desire for revenge”⁷⁶. There is a description of a male victim stating how he was dazed and raped over the course of three days by several women. Evidently, the stigma around female-perpetrated rape and their male victims makes it unlikely for cases like this one to be reported, since it is difficult to find victims that are willing to provide their testimonies, leaving little clear evidence of what the real numbers may be. This gender-biased mindset is particularly noticeable when the perpetrators hold political power and a high social status. In total, 96,653 women were tried until the Gacaca Courts were closed, which accounts for 10%

⁷⁴ Brown, S. (2013: 463), “Female Perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide”, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol 16, n° 3.

⁷⁵ Ivi: 449.

⁷⁶ Ivi: 459.

of all the trials. Nevertheless, the statistics referring to the percentage of women actually convicted are more elusive and many women may have been spared from fair trial simply for being females⁷⁷.

Interestingly, “within literature and the media there is a remarkable difference between the portrayal of female perpetrators compared to male perpetrators, [with the first] often described as mentally insane sadists who are crueller than their male counterparts”⁷⁸. This fact, in line with the previously referred testimonies, seems to show that where there are such narrow gender stereotypes, people struggle to accept reality and display different judgements of people’s character depending on their gender. Researchers Sjoberg and Gentry developed an interesting study on this topic and reached the conclusion that women would only be portrayed in media and public opinion either as “mothers, monsters or whores”⁷⁹; the monster narrative refers to female perpetrators by rejecting “rational behaviour, ideological motivation, and culpability (...), instead, they describe violent women as insane, in denial of their femininity, no longer women or human⁸⁰”. Also interesting to mention is the “whore” narrative, present before and during the genocide, which “blames violence on the evils of female sexuality⁸¹”. The stereotypes and prejudices towards women have generally revolved around their sexuality and capacity to bare children. However, in several cases, women have complied with this narrative, especially during court trials, advocating those same female stereotypes as an alibi for their crimes.

Although Rwanda has been consistent in involving women in the post-conflict society, female perpetrators are seldom referred in the national debate, which allows them to “re-join society

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Smeulers, A. (2015: 228), “Female Perpetrators: Ordinary or Extraordinary Women?”, *International Criminal Law Review*.

⁷⁹ Sjoberg, L. & Gentry, C. (2015: 139), *Beyond Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Thinking about Women’s Violence in Global Politics*, Zed Books Ltd, London.

⁸⁰ Smeulers, A. (2015: 228), “Female Perpetrators: Ordinary or Extraordinary Women?”, *International Criminal Law Review*.

⁸¹ Ibid.

smoothly, regardless of their past misdeeds”⁸². It is necessary to assume that female offenders are “ordinary women, [who] just like ordinary men can become involved in mass atrocities for a number of reasons and under a number of different circumstances⁸³”.

3.4. Women as victims

The one-hundred-day-long genocide in Rwanda is considered to be “one of the most vicious series of war crimes” that ever took place⁸⁴. Women, in particular, viewed as central in “family and cultural reproduction”, became the crucial targets to be eliminated when the goal of the conflict was to ethnically exterminate a certain community. Since rape was committed on a such country-wide scale, “the social fabric of family and community” was completely destroyed, undermining people’s resilience⁸⁵.

Women’s susceptibility came in different shapes. Frequently, periods of violence do not create new paradigms around women, but only “exacerbate the already existing gender imbalances and inequalities”⁸⁶. For instance, since women are predominantly responsible for caring for children and the elderly, they are more constrained in terms of mobility to escape from zones of higher risk. Women and girls end up being targeted as victims of increased sexual and gender-based violence which, as previously discussed, are not a by-pass of wars but the sole weapons through which war is itself conducted⁸⁷.

⁸² Brown, S. (2013: 462), “Female Perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide”, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol 16, n° 3.

⁸³ Smeulers, A. (2015: 225), “Female Perpetrators: Ordinary or Extraordinary Women?”, *International Criminal Law Review*.

⁸⁴ Donovan, Paula (2002), “Rape and HIV/AIDS in Rwanda”, *THE LANCET*, vol. 360.

⁸⁵ Madre (2004), apud Mukamana & Brysiewicz (2008, p: 379).

⁸⁶ Izabiliza, J. (sine anno), “The Role of Women in Reconstruction: Experience of Rwanda”.

⁸⁷ Parr, A, & USAID (2017), “Empowering Women in crises and conflict” (online), checked on 17.07.2019. Available at: <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment/addressing-gender-programming/crisis-conflict>).

In this chapter, I will also analyse the main implications of sexual violence experienced by Rwandan women: undesired pregnancies, deep gynaecological injuries, sexual transmitted diseases such as HIV, post-traumatic disorder and other mental conditions, leading to suicidal behaviours (WHO). Estimations from The Widow's Association pointed towards 80% of female survivors having been sexually assaulted at least once during the conflict, with half of them being, nowadays, HIV-positive⁸⁸. Following WHO's definition, rape as a weapon of war used during genocidal episodes should be considered as "collective and sexual violence" (CSV)⁸⁹, which short- and long-term health penalties and medical needs of its victims are very difficult to meet on conflict environments⁹⁰.

This was the biggest threat that women in Rwanda faced during the genocide, the terrorism against their physical integrity, the planned attacks on their bodies. These attacks encompassed "rape, gang rape, sexual torture, sexual slavery and forced marriage"⁹¹ and targeted up to 350,000 women and girls. Not even children or pregnant women were spared, since eliminating children meant a full stop in their families' lineage⁹². "When perpetrated on a massive scale, rape provokes maximum terror by damaging and destroying multiple aspects of human life including social bonds, cultural practices, bodies and psyches"⁹³. Several victims said there were "no words powerful enough to transmit the magnitude of the humiliation they experienced"⁹⁴.

⁸⁸ Hilsum, Lindsey (2004), "World View" (column), *NewStatesman*.

⁸⁹ Zraly, M. & Nyirazinyoye, L. (2010: 1657), "Don't let the suffering make you fade away: An ethnographic study of resilience among survivors of genocide-rape in southern Rwanda", *Social Science & Medicine* (Elsevier).

⁹⁰ Ward & Marsh (2006) apud Zraly & Nyirazinyoye (2004: 1657).

⁹¹ Zraly, M. & Nyirazinyoye, L. (2010: 1657), "Don't let the suffering make you fade away: An ethnographic study of resilience among survivors of genocide-rape in southern Rwanda", *Social Science & Medicine* (Elsevier).

⁹² Sitkin, Rachel et.al (2019), "To destroy a people: Sexual violence as a form of genocide in the conflicts of Bosnia, Rwanda, and Chile", Elsevier.

⁹³ Zraly, M. & Nyirazinyoye, L. (2010: 1), "Don't let the suffering make you fade away: An ethnographic study of resilience among survivors of genocide-rape in southern Rwanda", *Social Science & Medicine* (Elsevier).

⁹⁴ Mukamana, D. & Brysiewicz, P. (2008: 381), "The Lived Experience of Genocide Rape Survivors in Rwanda", *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 40:4.

During this slaughter, Tutsi women were being particularly targeted since, culturally, they have always been regarded as social and sexually superior beings whom Hutu men could not aspire for. Once given the chance to these men, they would use it as revenge. A victim, Ingrid, shared how “the men who raped me were dirty hooligans, a kind of men who under normal circumstances would not be able to propose to you”. Another victim, Fatuma, detailed how the militias’ chief who caught her said that “everyone who needed to test how Tutsi women were sexually sweet could have a test”. This exemplifies how the anti-Tutsi propaganda aimed also at Hutu’s fragilities, whom, feeling constantly abashed, expressed their resentment through extreme violence. Fatuma, amongst other women, was raped by pre-adolescents in front of her entire community, including her family: “With the experience of rape I lost my value, my dignity as a mother and a woman (...). It is worse to be raped by the kids who were supposed to respect you”. She also shared how difficult it was to be recognized as a survivor of rape in her community, and how she felt disrespected and judged by others⁹⁵.

Due to this stigma, several women felt pressured to lie to their partners in regard to the fact they have been raped, under the fear of rejection and abandonment. Some witnesses shared that: “Sometimes he [her husband] asked me if I was raped (...) I said that I was not raped. I didn’t tell him the truth because I was scared that he would reject me”; “I have lost hope in the future. How could life have meaning without kids, without a husband?”; “I used to cry a lot and thought about suicide (...). It was better to die rather than to stay alive with my condition”⁹⁶.

The perpetrators came from every segment of society, from Hutu citizens to the *Interahamwe*, the militia, Rwandan soldiers and officers, the National Police and even the Presidential Guard⁹⁷. The repercussions of sexual abuses on women were various and long-lasting, ranging from physical incapacities to psychological trauma. “Sexual violence disintegrates a woman’s sense of self (...), women are in a state of shock and frequently experience deep

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ivi: 382.

⁹⁷ Sitkin, R. *et. al* (2019), “To destroy a people: Sexual violence as a form of genocide in the conflicts of Bosnia, Rwanda, and Chile”, Elsevier.

emotional trauma”⁹⁸. They had their sexuality and reproductive organs destroyed and were not able to bare any children again, which, as previously mentioned, was the ground for women’s value in pre-genocide Rwanda. According to the stress accumulation theory, “the repeated and prolonged exposure to severe traumatic experience, such as genocide-rape, may exceed an individual’s threshold level of stress and may result in compromised individual capacity to readjust”⁹⁹.

Overall, victims of genocidal rape find it hard to go back to their normal lives and communities, since they often struggle with the execution of simple daily tasks due chronicle pain and, in societies such as Rwanda where rape is a taboo, victims end up being excluded from their own communities and families, which leaves them feeling “broken, ashamed and subhuman”¹⁰⁰. The victims are often targeted as accomplices of the militia and are “deemed unable to marry, abandoned by their husbands”¹⁰¹. This fact goes perfectly in line with the post-WWII accusations towards women in Europe, revealing how widespread is the concept of women as scapegoats for their male counterparts’ actions.

The annihilation of families due to the abuses on women subsequently led to the destruction of whole communities, which was the offenders’ intention to begin with: “when men and women do not engage in intercourse because of organized sexual violence, or when victims are physically unable to procreate as a result of organized sexual violence, the perpetrators have halted the continuation of the genetic line”¹⁰². These planned penalties clearly indicated how this level of sexual violence against Rwandan women might have been “used as a proxy for violence towards the group as a whole”¹⁰³.

⁹⁸ Ivi: 2.

⁹⁹ Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, (1974); Panter-Brick & Worthman, (1999), *apud* Zraly, M. & Nyirazinyoye, L. (2010: 1658).

¹⁰⁰ Sitkin, Rachel et.al (2019: 2), “To destroy a people: Sexual violence as a form of genocide in the conflicts of Bosnia, Rwanda, and Chile”, Elsevier.

¹⁰¹ Zraly, M. & Nyirazinyoye, L. (2010: 1657), “Dont let the suffering make you fade away: An ethnographic study of resilience among survivors of genocide-rape in southern Rwanda”, Elsevier.

¹⁰² Sitkin, Rachel et.al (2019: 2), “To destroy a people: Sexual violence as a form of genocide in the conflicts of Bosnia, Rwanda, and Chile”, Elsevier.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Many women were forced to marry their rapists and their family's murderers. Sexual slavery also reached a genocidal dimension when an unmeasurable number of women died or were deeply aggressed at both the psychological and physical level, due to this exploitation, or being "forcibly impregnated, [which] prevented births within their group"¹⁰⁴ and "divided families, while they and their children were culturally ostracized"¹⁰⁵. The number of children of rape, also known in Rwanda by *children of hate* or *enfants mauvais souvenir*¹⁰⁶, is very high, with an estimated 2000 to 5000 children having been born of sexual assaults¹⁰⁷. Unfortunately, these children are seen as an "unwanted genetic element" and a "reminder of the trauma"¹⁰⁸, and their mothers are frequently pressured to neglect them in order to safeguard their family from prejudice and ostracization.

Many women confessed how they begrudge their children as a beacon of the suffering they endured and as a prorogation of discrimination faced during the conflict to the post-conflict time. Carine, a survivor interviewed by journalist Flora Drury¹⁰⁹, shared how her son insisted on knowing who his father was and how she could not give him an answer due to having been a victim at the hands of circa one hundred men. Carine suffered indescribable violence on the hands of the militia and, later on, at the Hutu-run hospital where she was supposed to get treatment, only to continue being assaulted, with no physical capacity to escape. Fortunately, other victims have shown better coping mechanisms and managed to develop loving bonds with their kids, as one survivor stated, "If I hate my daughter, I am no different than the murderers who wanted to destroy us and our country with their hatred". On the other hand,

¹⁰⁴ Ivi: 4.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Human Rightst Watch (1996: 3), "Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence during the Rwandan Genocide and its Aftermath".

¹⁰⁷ Donovan, Paula (2002), "Rape and HIV/AIDS in Rwanda", *THE LANCET*, vol. 360.

¹⁰⁸ Sitkin, Rachel et.al (2019: 2), "To destroy a people: Sexual violence as a formo f genocide in the conflicts of Bosnia, Rwanda, and Chile", Elsevier.

¹⁰⁹ Drury, Flora (2019), "My father, the rapist: Hidden victims of Rwanda's genocide", BBC News Online, checked on 07.07.2019. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48673713>

children have suffered from the absence of a family structure and, frequently, they have inherited both their mother's HIV and trauma¹¹⁰.

When the genocide came to an end, several female survivors briefly believed their suffering was over, only to realize they had been infected by HIV, signifying the end of a penitence but the beginning of a new, as Paula Donovan pointed, "slow torture"¹¹¹. "Even the most apocalyptic forecasters of doom could not have anticipated that HIV/AIDS and ethnic hatred in that tiny country were travelling on a collision course, headed for 100 ghastly days of genocidal carnage and rape"¹¹². Hand in hand with genocidal rape, the planned widespread of HIV/AIDS was employed by the perpetrators who, acknowledging the fact to be portrayers of the virus, informed their victims of their intentions to infect them as a long-lasting sentence. Some programmes in Rwanda are trying to employ ARV treatment, yet, they do not treat rape survivors as a priority¹¹³.

In Rwanda, the merging of genocide and HIV/AIDS in such dimensions may have driven humanity to stop regarding rape "as an unpleasant but unavoidable by-product" of war, to start regarding it as an "insupportable war crime". However, the rapists still reached their goal: their victims will bear the virus for the rest of their lives, as much as their descendants and respective sex partners, provoking more deaths along the years to come; "in effect, the genocide continues"

114 .

Doris Buss conducted an analysis based on the testimony of some survivors of sexual rape in Rwanda which illustrates the way in which women endured violence in very particular and

¹¹⁰ Monks, Kieron (sine anno), "Rwandan rape survivors and their children, 25 years later", CNN Online, checked on 07.07.2019. Available at <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2019/04/africa/rwandan-daughters-cnnphotos/>

¹¹¹ Donovan, Paula (2002), "Rape and HIV/AIDS in Rwanda", *THE LANCET*, vol. 360.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Hilsum, L. (2004), "Rwandan genocide survivors denied AIDS treatment", *The BMJ* (published 15 April 2004)

¹¹⁴ Donovan, Paula (2002), "Rape and HIV/AIDS in Rwanda", *THE LANCET*, vol. 360.

individual ways¹¹⁵. Seraphine was interviewed by Jennie Burnet, an anthropologist, in Rwanda's capital in 2000¹¹⁶. Her Tutsi husband was one of the first victims of the genocide, having suffered irreversible brain damage over the course of physical aggressions on the first day the genocide erupted. Seraphine had no other choice then to hide him in order to protect his life; however, not having a mentally-able male guardian made her vulnerable to the harassment and abuses of governments' soldiers. After the conflict, she did not receive any financial support, firstly, because she was a Hutu and her husband did not die and, second, because she was accused of being the soldiers' abettor. Seraphine was a Hutu, exemplifying how all women were in great danger of sexual assault. When it came to this ethnic group, these women were targeted for other reasons, such as their "presumed political opposition", for being married to Tutsi men or for having helped Tutsi escape. The "violence surrounding the genocide made all women irrespective of their "ethnic" identity or political affiliation, vulnerable to rape"¹¹⁷.

As mentioned in previous chapters, the idea of rape as an effective weapon of war based in pre-constructed ideas of women's purity in such societies is confirmed by Shanks: "It is this perception of public ownership of women's sexuality that makes it possible to translate an attack against one woman into an attack against an entire community", effect which proliferates quickly when women get forcibly pregnant¹¹⁸.

Furthermore, women were also kidnaped and detained by the militia for sexual slavery, concept which has been addressed in Rwanda by "forced marriages". To escape unwanted pregnancies from these men, women often performed or engaged in clandestine abortions,

¹¹⁵ Buss, Doris (2009), "Rethinking Rape as a Weapon of War", *Feminist Legal Studies*, Vol. 17, pp. 145-163.

¹¹⁶ Burnet (2009) apud Buss (2009).

¹¹⁷ Buss, Doris (2009: 159), "Rethinking Rape as a Weapon of War", *Feminist Legal Studies*, Vol. 17, pp. 145-163.

¹¹⁸ Shanks (2010) apud Mukamana, D. & Brysiewicz, P. (2008: 383), "The Lived Experience of Genocide Rape Survivors in Rwanda", *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 40:4.

resulting in very serious physical conditions. Doctors have been able to help several women; however, under the current stigma around rape, women have found it hard to look for help¹¹⁹.

Even the most resilient survivors of the conflict have faced several other difficulties after the genocide ended since men, their only reliable source of income, were deleted from their lives and, in such a patriarchal society, they struggled to “make ends meet, to reclaim their property, to rebuild their destroyed houses, and to raise children”¹²⁰, in the midst of a chaotic post-conflict society and with very little resources. Men died but women were kept alive in the conditions of semi-humans with no conditions to resume their lives.

3.5. Women as peacemakers and in post-conflict reconstruction

As Rwandans started with their attempts of rebuilding a devastated country as the conflict was over, the heavy burden fell on the female population since, in 1996, they comprised 70% of the total country’s population and 50% of household heads¹²¹. The genocide resulted in a drastic demographic transformation in Rwanda which pushed women to assume new responsibilities and control over areas previously male dominated, from construction workers to high administrative positions¹²², making them “the engine of socio-economic growth and development”¹²³.

Women all around Rwanda were cast to activities they had never done before, working “bank tellers, cab drivers and mechanics”¹²⁴ or “side by side with men” when house reconstruction, collecting feedstock for the house and providing support to the civilians by disarming the

¹¹⁹ Human Rights Watch (1996: 2), “Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence during the Rwandan Genocide and its Aftermath”.

¹²⁰ Ivi: 3.

¹²¹ Ivi: 2.

¹²² Burnet, J. (2008), “Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in post-genocide Rwanda”, *African Affairs*, 107/428, 361-386, Oxford University.

¹²³ Issifu, A. (2015: 68), “The role of African Women in post-conflict peacebuilding: the case of Rwanda”, *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. 8, n°9.

¹²⁴ Enda (2003), *apud* Issifu, A. (2015).

population and providing “reproductive health care for refugees and internally displaced persons”¹²⁵. Women served, for the first time, as judges in the Gacaca courts, a position that previously was reserved for “wise and respected old men”; “interestingly, in areas where women served as presidents in the local Gacaca court, they performed better”¹²⁶. Women also managed to guarantee a house and a family to up to 500,000 orphan children.

In September 2003, nine years after the resolution of the conflict, the first elections for a national Parliament took place and 48% of the elected members were female, surpassing Sweden as the worldwide leader with the most gender-balanced legislature¹²⁷. In the same year, the new Constitution granted that women would represent, at least, 30% of the positions in decision-making ¹²⁸. In 2008, this milestone was surpassed by a 56,3% female representation in the lower house; Rwanda was, then, the first country in the world presenting a female majority at a national legislation¹²⁹.

In fact, since 1994, the ruling party (RPF) made great advancements on gender equality at the governmental level by electing women for high-ranked positions as ministers and secretaries of state of judges, with the creation of a Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Affairs (MIGEFASO), after renamed as Gender, Women and Development (MIGEPROF) and women’s councils at all strata of society and by establishing gender quotas for the national parliament¹³⁰. This was partially attained due to these grassroots women’s councils, which created several leadership opportunities for women and focused on instigating women’s

¹²⁵ Ivi: 69.

¹²⁶ Ivi: 71.

¹²⁷ Bauer, G. & Britton, H. E. (2006), ‘Women in African parliaments: a continental shift?’ *apud* Burnet, J. (2008).

¹²⁸ Government of Rwanda (2003), *apud* Debusscher, P. & Ansoms, A. (2013).

¹²⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union (2011), *apud* Debusscher, P. & Ansoms, A. (2013).

¹³⁰ Burnet, J. (2008), “Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in post-genocide Rwanda”, *African Affairs*, 107/428, 361-386, Oxford University.

participation and interest in societal development, to provide assistance on women's issues, and to create a platform through which women could learn and engage with politics¹³¹.

Above all, the multiplying of women organizations in Rwanda in the late 1990s was, in the words of Newbury and Baldwin¹³², "nothing short of remarkable", once they were crucial in the reconstruction of Rwanda and in assisting victims and survivors of the genocide with restructuring a life from scratch. These local-level societies "served the needs of thousands of individual women" by helping them with the most basic survival necessities in a time where societal fabric was torn apart. This associations' boom was possible due to four aspects: the challenging situation women faced in the post-conflict, the international financing, the gender policies adopted by the government and the sole "historical" strength of these grassroots NGOs¹³³.

A transversal and interesting aspect about these Rwandan organizations in the post-conflict was their uncorrupted character. They were not managed and controlled by their external donors and always managed to keep their focus and find local solutions for local problems and, even with donations as USAID which summed up 3\$ dollars, "the majority of the local organizations did not allow the agendas of international partners to drive their work plans". Also, since gender issues were one of the flagship aims of the RPF, the party did not interfere with these associations as they did with other human rights NGOs¹³⁴.

According to Burnet¹³⁵, some of the most symbolic organizations were:

- "Duterimbere, women's banking and micro-lending;
- Haguruka, an advocacy group for women and children's legal rights;

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Newbury & Baldwin, (2001) "Confronting the aftermath of conflict: women's organizations in post-genocide Rwanda", *apud* Burnet, J. (2008).

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Burnet, J. (2008), "Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in post-genocide Rwanda", *African Affairs*, 107/428, 361-386, Oxford University.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

- Réseau des femmes oeuvrant pour le développement rural, which provided technical assistance to rural women's organizations;
- Association of the Widows of April 1994 (AVEGA), which began as an umbrella organization for groups of genocide widows by greater advocacy power and allowed international NGOs and bilateral aid organizations to channel humanitarian and development assistance to genocide widows and their children;
- Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe, focusing on peace-building and inheritance rights for women", that worked as an umbrella organization for several other local-scale ones.

Véneranda Nzambazamariya, president of Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe, was a leading element of the 1996's Peace Action Campaign, besides being one of the pioneers in negotiating the 1999's Inheritance Law which led a series of other gender proposals culminating in the 2009's proposal on gender-based violence¹³⁶. Nzambazamariya won the UNIFEM's Millennium Peace Prize for Women 2001. This Law is one of the most striking examples of the success of women's organizations and will be explained in detail.

Prior to the conflict, women were not allowed to inherit or possess any property in their name, being left in a very precarious condition in case they would lose their husbands. Several remarkable women, including the MIGEPROF Minister, leaders of local organizations and the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, got together to carefully draft the text of the bill and brilliantly lobbying close to right stakeholders in order for the controversial proposal to be approved. It was specially remarkable how the civil society leaders, "in the course of their organizing and providing services to members, had gained enough experience to know how to manipulate the state (...) to achieve a common goal"; "women are increasingly moving from resisting the state to using the state"¹³⁷. This new bill was game changer and made it possible for women not only to inherit property and seize it in their names, but also gave women the

¹³⁶ Debusscher, P. & Ansoms, A. (2013), "Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda: Public relations or real transformations?", *Development and Change*, 44 (5), Institute of Social Studies, The Hague.

¹³⁷ Bauer, G. & Britton, H. E. (2006), 'Women in African parliaments: a continental shift?' *apud* Burnet, J. (2008).

right to start new contracts, to get paid jobs and to open bank accounts by their own, without the necessity of their husbands or fathers' approval¹³⁸.

There has been criticism around the real purpose of these organizations, and how there is lack of funding and participants are expected to work on a voluntary basis¹³⁹. However, the fundamental civil service and the tangible results these organizations provided in Rwanda's reconstruction exalted these grassroots movements and legitimised several actions that followed in the conquest of further rights for women, paving the way for greater gender equality. Besides, these NGOs served as political training and learning centres for women, preparing and helping them enter higher positions in governance and administration¹⁴⁰.

Nevertheless, in rural Rwanda these councils were frequently criticized for existing only "in name", "or simply served as a channel to disseminate government directives from the top to the bottom", as "mere symbols of inclusion"¹⁴¹. Even so, several government policies have stimulated women to be active participants in their societies and governments and to create fluid interaction between local, national and international components of society. On the other hand, gender-friendly policies granted RPF the support of determinant personalities from the international community, as the 24th President of Liberia, Ellen Sirleaf. Still, one might question how easy it may be for several personalities to develop a "one-sided view" and become great endorsers of president Kagame and the RPF, when little of the internal authoritarian attitude is permeable. Additionally, policies employed towards gender-equality and the modernization of the country enshrouded the party's despotism and human right's violations¹⁴².

¹³⁸ Burnet, J. (2008), "Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in post-genocide Rwanda", *African Affairs*, 107/428, 361-386, Oxford University.

¹³⁹ Debusscher, P. & Ansoms, A. (2013), "Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda: Public relations or real transformations?", *Development and Change*, 44 (5), Institute of Social Studies, The Hague.

¹⁴⁰ Longman (2006) *apud* Debusscher, P. & Ansoms, A. (2013).

¹⁴¹ Burnet, J. (2008), "Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in post-genocide Rwanda", *African Affairs*, 107/428, 361-386, Oxford University.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

In order to create a better picture about women's participation in politics and society, it is not possible to ignore how the Rwandan regime has become "increasingly authoritarian under the guise of 'democratization'", which has led to an incongruence: even if there is a higher female representation in government, their political weight and manoeuvre have simultaneously decreased. In particular, the RPF has repressed independent and human rights civil society organizations, which constitute an important pillar of democracy, and annihilated any source of political opposition, with the excuse of stabilizing "good governance"¹⁴³. Likewise, freedom of expression and the press independence also decreased.

Nevertheless, RPF and President Kagame were from day one committed to the gender cause and, in great part, their acceptance of the topic allowed all the gender-based laws to be ruled into practice. But which factors contributed for this attitude from the political elite? This might be explained by the fact that a large number of these government officials have been refugees in exile in the neighbouring country Uganda, where they might have had contact with the country's gender agenda¹⁴⁴. Marking a clear differential line between RPF and MRND, Kagame and his officials followed Uganda's NRM tactic gender mainstreaming amongst its political and military stances. Additionally, the return of refugees hiding in several other countries opened up the country to external mentalities and advancements.

Another possible explanation for the President's attitude can be represented by an economic recovery agenda relying on women's labour force, as noticeable under the National Gender Policy umbrella in which there are numerous clauses regarding economic growth. In reality, and as the President seems to be aware of, in such a stage of financial rescue and having a sustained development in sight, "would be unwise to waste 'more than half of [Rwanda's] capital investment'"¹⁴⁵. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning has reinforced the idea that a gender agenda "facilitates economic growth and fast tracks poverty reduction".

¹⁴³ Ivi: 363.

¹⁴⁴ Longman (2006) *apud* Debusscher, P. & Ansoms, A. (2013).

¹⁴⁵ Iwinesa and Pearson (2009: 16), *apud* Debusscher, P. & Ansoms, A. (2013).

Nonetheless, gender policies not always go hand in hand with economic policies. As an example, in 2009, the paid maternity leave for women employed by the private sector was reduced by half, with the intention of “attract foreign investment and reduce costs for the private sector”¹⁴⁶. This may reveal how gender policy in itself was not a major government aim but only a mean towards an end, and that “gender equality is promoted as long as it coincides with or advances the main objectives of the government (...); if this is not the case, it is ignored”¹⁴⁷. Notwithstanding, in a post-conflict environment like this when effective growth and reconstruction are the priorities, a balanced middle socio-economic ground may be the best possible scenario.

All in all, with all the advancements and setbacks, it is clear that gender equality became a priority in the Rwandese political agenda in the post-conflict. There were three main aspects that allowed for greater gender balance and acceptance of women’s rights: first, gender roles drastically changed in the post-conflict phase and women became much more involved actors in society; second, the grassroots became such pivotal elements for positive change for women; third, the political elites faced this changes with positive attitudes and supported the process, making it achievable. As Burnet¹⁴⁹ highlighted, and with no intention of disregarding the terrible violence that women in Rwanda were victims of, the post-conflict succeeded to open doors usually closed to them and to allow them to rise within the Rwandan society. In particular, Bop added how the “the expansion of families headed by women have created situations where women had either to participate in decision making or to make decisions themselves”¹⁵⁰ and Bauer and Britton emphasised this idea noting the way in which the

¹⁴⁶ Debusscher, P. & Ansoms, A. (2013: 1120), “Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda: Public relations or real transformations?”, *Development and Change*, 44 (5), Institute of Social Studies, The Hague.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Burnet, J. (2008), “Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in post-genocide Rwanda”, *African Affairs*, 107/428, 361-386, Oxford University.

¹⁵⁰ Bop (2001: 23) apud Debusscher, P. & Ansoms, A. (2013).

restructuring of gender and families created “significant opportunities for transformation in post-conflict periods”¹⁵¹.

4. Discussion of findings

This dissertation aimed to shed light over the issue of women and conflict and to bring back women and their key roles in conflict to the “front-page” of discussion. In order to do that, I developed my research over the concept of gender, conflict and peacebuilding, by means of a feminist and gender sensitive perspective. By doing so, it has been possible to look beyond the male-centred point of view in which history is usually presented and to identify the gendered ways in which women engaged and were targeted during episodes of armed conflict simply for being women, or for being seen as “carriers” of detrimental stereotypes. The idea for this dissertation occurred to me after the realization of how women are frequently erased from history, especially around the war narrative, even when the majority of the casualties of war nowadays are civilians and not the military. The choice of the 1994’s Rwandan genocide as the case study related to the fact that, after such an internecine event, the country managed to recover socially and economically and to become a worldwide example in advancing gender equality.

The Rwandan genocide was an ethnic conflict between the two major ethnic groups, the Tutsi and the Hutus, following the European decolonization wave and the rise of racism between the two groups. One of my first and most relevant realizations, described in academia as one of the “most significant shifts in current thinking on war and gender”¹⁵², is how rape is not a bypass of war (“since the first military conflicts, men have treated women as spoils of war”¹⁵³), but a planned military tool employed against women as a strategy of war. All around the world,

¹⁵¹ Bauer and Britton (2006: 11) apud Debusscher, P. & Ansoms, A. (2013: 1114).

¹⁵² Buss, Doris (2009: 145), “Rethinking Rape as a Weapon of War”, *Feminist Legal Studies*, Vol. 17, pp. 145-163.

¹⁵³ Tomaseli & Porter (1986) apud Mukamana, D. & Brysiewicz, P. (2008).

and not only in Rwanda, sexual violence is “routinely directed against females during situations of armed conflict”¹⁵⁴. I wish, through the second chapter of this dissertation, *Framing gender and conflict*, to understand if this practise may be a manifestation of already existing misogynist values and not a sporadic incident, and intended to develop a timeline of events regarding advancements in women’s rights and protection against gender-based violence.

In fact, throughout the 21st century, many events like this one have opened the eyes of the international community to, gradually, start making progress on the area of gender, conflict and peacebuilding, as well as at women’s rights. It was interesting to realize how the consideration for women’s rights as human rights is such a recent event that has been developing over the last decades, and how the decisions taken on the World Conferences on Women and diverse other international events have played such an important role in addressing the issue of gendered conflicts. The paradigm around women’s protection in war treaties evolved from simply protecting their honour, showing a disregard over female rights and integrity, to the acknowledgement, in the Security Council’s 1020 resolution of 2008, of rape as a weapon of war as a military strategy aimed at spreading horror and submitting entire populations. Crucial steps taken into this direction were: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, signed in 1979 and clearly defining the need for all countries to take up measures to close the gender inequality gap; the realization of the illegality of sexual acts of violence, during the 1993’s World Conference on Human Rights; and the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, which firstly addressed the concept of women and armed conflict, promoted women’s engagement in decision-making and peacebuilding, and detailed specific forms of protection against gender-based violence during conflict.

In chapter three, *Women and conflict: perpetrators, victims and peacemakers*, I attempted to expose how women’s social status in pre-conflict Rwanda, their submissive position to men and the lack of significance given by the State to the persisting issue of domestic violence, along with the anti-Tutsi propoganda, escalated the outcome of the genocide once it broke

¹⁵⁴ Mukamana, D. & Brysiewicz, P. (2008). The lived Experience of Genocide rape survivors in Rwanda.

out. Also in this chapter, I had the intent to develop the profiles of several female actors during the genocide, ranging from gendered-victims to perpetrators and peacemakers, and to understand how women's engagement during and in the post-conflict phases have cleared the path for women's emancipation in modern-day Rwanda, leading the country to surpass European countries when it comes to certain gender-equality statistics.

The answers to my research questions will be subsequently analysed.

Where were women during the Rwandan conflict?

Children and women are neither war instigators nor violence provokers, but they become the most affected. In fact, they are the most vulnerable and deeply affected by violent conflicts for which they have had no role in creating¹⁵⁵.

Rwandese women's roles in the genocide were classified based on these women's social status and power of influence. Women who held a low social position, considered by Nicole Hogg¹⁵⁶ as "ordinary women", were limited to being victims of extreme acts of physical and sexual violence, forced into marriages and prostitution, or coerced to engage in killings and in providing information, although some of them were also proactive perpetrators of war crimes for believing in the anti-Tutsi propaganda and in the ideals of the conflict; their acts were mainly indirect acts of violence as burglary and providing knowledge and support to the militia. However, these women seldom assumed responsibility or self-determinedness over their actions or define themselves as war perpetrators, probably due to the Rwandan belief that women, as mothers and caregivers, cannot engage in brutal actions. On the other hand, described as "women in positions of power" by Hogg, women who held a high political or military status and decision-making powers, were, among others, Agathe Kanziga, Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, Major Anne-Maria Nyirahakizimana, Councillor Rose Karushara and Sister Gertrude. They were part of the Rwandan political elite and proactively participated in all

¹⁵⁵ Agbalajobi (2012) apud Issifu, A. (2015).

¹⁵⁶ Hogg, N. (2010: 919), "Women's participation in the Rwandan genocide: mothers or monsters?", *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol.92, n° 877.

stages of planning and executing the genocide, led the militia and instigated several forms of violence and the killings of Tutsi, being charged by the most severe crimes at the ICTR.

Yet, some of the trials of these female criminals were shrouded by what I described, in this dissertation, as gender-based mitigation of trials, which occurred independently of the accused social status. In this context, the theory of Caron E. Gentry and Laura Sjoberg¹⁵⁷ about the constant portrayal of women in media as “mothers, monsters or whores” seems particularly relevant: it manifests, through media channels, a generally accepted mentality of strong female stereotypes. In Rwanda, some judges could not accept that women, as “mothers”, were actually guilty of the crimes they were accused of, leading them into restraining their convictions and penalties. On the other hand, higher status female criminals, whose actions could not be denied, were considered by the general civilian opinion as “monsters” who displayed mental problems, undermining the self-determination over their own actions. Once again, this assumption matches Gentry and Sjoberg’s theory, revealing a dichotomy where women do not hold any authority or self-rule over their actions and, when they do, are stripped of their femininity and womanhood, which helps perpetrating the concept of women as eternal victims, to “construct women as a particular type of victim whose suffering denotes a communal narrative of pain”¹⁵⁸.

Is gendered-based violence a way to submit women to patriarchal values?

Likewise, women’s sexuality is envisaged as a threat and source of evil that justifies the employment of violence against them, fitting the “whore” depiction. When it comes to women as victims, their bodies and sexualities were targeted either as a form of revenge or as a way to prevent the Tutsi community to reproduce and continue its lineage, with the number of war rape victims swelling up to 80% of Rwandese women. The consequences were diverse and included unwanted pregnancies, long-lasting gynaecological injuries and infertility, physical

¹⁵⁷ Sjoberg, L. & Gentry, C. (2015: 139), *Beyond Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Thinking about Women’s Violence in Global Politics*, Zed Books Ltd, London.

¹⁵⁸ Ross (2003) apud Buss, S. (2009).

incapacity, post-traumatic syndrome and several diseases and infections as HIV. In fact, HIV-spread constituted another intentional strategy of war to destroy Tutsi communities, as a way to perpetuate the genocide for the generations to come. It is regretful to assume how, if the international community had paid attention to the indications, the genocide and the HIV pandemic could have been limited to “a conflict” and a “controllable infection”. However, if even during peaceful times violence against women can be easily overlooked and, as Maria Olujić¹⁵⁹ argues, the roots of gendered violence are actually “well established in peaceful times”, it is easy that these situations fall out of control in conflict and that “men raised in cultures of gender-based subordination vent their violence and rage on women without restraint”¹⁶⁰.

When the rules of peace classify forced intercourse within marriage and widow inheritance as men’s entitlements; when domestic violence against women and girls is quietly condoned as a necessary means of behavior modification; when female genital mutilation is defended as an acceptable precaution against promiscuity; when domination by males is seen as the natural order of the universe, rape exists in a limbo of mixed perceptions, viewed neither as laudatory nor especially loathsome¹⁶¹.

The effectiveness of rape as a weapon of war is only possible due to the “concepts of honour, shame and sexuality that are attached to women’s bodies”¹⁶². Overall, there were no new conducts or conceptions being formed during conflict around women and the way they were treated in society represented only an exacerbation of pre-existing patterns of aggression, violence and humiliation: “from a young age, the [Rwandan] girl experiences different forms of violence that she does not discuss (...); the inferior status of the woman, her ignorance

¹⁵⁹ Olujić, M. (1998: 31), “Embodiment of Terror: Gendered Violence in peacetime and Wartime in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina”, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, vol. 12, n1.

¹⁶⁰ Donovan, P. (2002), “Rape and HIV/AIDS in Rwanda”, *The Lancet*, vol. 360.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Olujić, M. (1998: 31), “Embodiment of Terror: Gendered Violence in peacetime and Wartime in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina”, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, vol. 12, n1.

encourage her into submission and expose her to rape and sexual services”¹⁶³. As in the words of Maria B. Olujic,¹⁶⁴ “roots of violence against women pattern social order during both peace time and war time”. The general perception of “public ownership of women’s sexuality”, as Leslie Shanks and Michael J. Schull¹⁶⁵ stated, consents this type of violence to increase in the ways it did. “Sexual violence as a deliberate strategy in war and political repression by the state is connected in a range of ways to sexual violence in all other contexts”¹⁶⁶, concept reinforced by several other authors as Susan Brownmiller¹⁶⁷ who defined rape as a “message passed between men – vivid proof of victory and loss and defeat for the other”, a weapon of war “used against women by men in both peace and war times”¹⁶⁸. However, during war times, it represents also an attack against a personified enemy: women’s bodies were used as a proxy in a war between two ethnic groups, conceivable by a society which objectifies female bodies. The genocide survivors continued facing new challenges after the resolution of the conflict since they found it hard to return to their previous lives and to be accepted in their communities as victims of rape due to the taboo around this issue.

Unfortunately, the Rwanda Tribunal’s record on “prosecuting sexual violence is disappointing”, having failed in pursuing the perpetrators: by December 2008, only five men were effectively convicted. Even with the general acknowledgement of how rape was used massively against women, the defence in courts of these victims as individuals “has been largely absent from the record of convictions”¹⁶⁹. Chriseche Mibenge stated that rape “was heard and made

¹⁶³ Hogg, N. (2010: 919), “Women’s participation in the Rwandan genocide: mothers or monsters?”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol.92, n^o 877.

¹⁶⁴ Olujic, M. (1998: 31), “Embodiment of Terror: Gendered Violence in peacetime and Wartime in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina”, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, vol. 12, n1.

¹⁶⁵ Shanks, L. & Schull, M. (2000: 1153), “Rape in war: the humanitarian response”, *Canadian Medical Association*, 163 (9).

¹⁶⁶ Kelly (2000: 45) apud Zraly, M. & Nyirazinyoye, L. (2010).

¹⁶⁷ Brownmiller, S. (1975), “Against our will: Men, women and rape”, Simon and Schuster.

¹⁶⁸ Buss, Doris (2009: 148), “Rethinking Rape as a Weapon of War”, *Feminist Legal Studies*, Vol. 17, pp. 145-163.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

available but only as a discourse about ‘the bestiality of the Hutu extremists who masterminded and committed the genocide’¹⁷⁰, leaving women and girls lives, once again, in the oblivion of (planned) indifference.

Another failure of the Tribunal was in addressing female-perpetrated sexual abuse. There was no evidence, by 2009, of anyone being tried for sexual abuse on men, which, from my point of view, indicates the stigma around acknowledging how women can become perpetrators as much as men can become their victims; gender stereotypes keep these stories in the shadows and avoid the effectiveness of fair trials. “The rape script that explains the mass rape of Tutsi women as the gendered component of a genocide against the Tutsi people almost requires the erasure of raped men and Hutu women who undermine the narrative coherence of the script”¹⁷¹. This constraint on who can be regarded as a victim of rape limits our knowledge about sexual violence and all the ways in which it could have been played during the genocide; although the majority of the crimes were indeed those of Hutu men against Tutsi women, it does not portrait a full picture of the complexity of the issue as much as it “also removes from consideration the range of social, political and economic structures that determined why some women were particularly vulnerable to attack¹⁷²”.

Is there a linkage between Rwandese women’s active roles during conflict and in the post-conflict society?

As previously mentioned, at present Rwanda displays one of the highest percentages of women in Parliament, but how did the country get there so quickly after such a devastating event? A possible explanation is the fact that the genocide impacted Rwandan demographics in such a way it created gender-unbalance in the number of men, opening doors for women

¹⁷⁰ Mibenge, C. (2008), “Gender and ethnicity in Rwanda: On legal remedies for victims of wartime sexual violence”, *Gender, violent conflict, and development*, Dubravka Zarkov, 145–179. New Delhi: Zubaan Books.

¹⁷¹ Buss, Doris (2009: 160), “Rethinking Rape as a Weapon of War”, *Feminist Legal Studies*, Vol. 17, pp. 145-163.

¹⁷² Ibid.

in management and political positions that had always been closed for them; “with a population that is seventy percent female, it will be the women who will rebuild the country”¹⁷³. In this case, violent social clashes provoked “major disruptions to gender relations”, fomenting the liberty to “debate about gender politics, as well as for individual women to live in a different way”¹⁷⁴. Also, the Gacaca courts created an opportunity for women to break prejudices and work, for the first time in Rwanda, as local judges. Nonetheless, these progresses would not have been attained if the RFP’s government would not have been on board with it. Influenced by neighbouring countries’ initiatives, the new Rwandan government took measures to promote gender equality as much as it granted space and approval for women’s own initiatives to take place, even creating quotas for a higher female percentage in legislatures and a new Ministry of Gender, Women and Development. Notwithstanding, several scholars, as Longman¹⁷⁵ and Reyntjens¹⁷⁶, are sceptical about Rwanda’s government commitment to gender equality due to the increasing autocratic regime. There is a belief that “there is a lot of marketing”¹⁷⁷ in trying to depict the new Rwanda as a country which values gender equality in order to be appraised by the international audience. Several activists deny women statistics as advancements for being nothing beyond numbers to display but failing into building a true gender equal society.

Another fundamental pillar of women’s advancements in Rwandan society has been undoubtedly the work of the female-led and civil grassroots organizations. Besides the work developed in order to endorse positive development bills for women’s rights and

¹⁷³ Mukamana, D. & Brysiewicz, P. (2008), “The lived Experience of Genocide Rape Survivors in Rwanda”, *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, vol.40, n4.

¹⁷⁴ Pankhurst, D. (2002: 6), “Women and Politics in Africa: the Case of Uganda”, *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 55, n1.

¹⁷⁵ Longman, T. (2011) ‘Limitations to Political Reform: The Undemocratic Nature of Transition in Rwanda’.

¹⁷⁶ Reyntjens, F. (2006) ‘Post-1994 Politics in Rwanda: Problematising “Liberation” and “Democratisation”’, *Third World Quarterly* 27(6): 1103–17.

¹⁷⁷ Debusscher, P. & Ansoms, A. (2013: 1114), “Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda: Public relations or real transformations?”, *Development and Change*, 44 (5), Institute of Social Studies, The Hague.

empowerment (in particular, the milestone of the 1999's Inheritance Law), these associations managed to create a ground for political participation and engagement for women, preparing them to enter politics in bigger numbers. Furthermore, they provided support for thousands of women and girls to rebuild their lives¹⁷⁸ and to become financially independent through micro-financing programmes. Without the right incentives and opportunities for women to get involved over issues that interest and impact them, this linkage between pre and post-conflict scenarios could not have been so successful. Summarily, as Brunet¹⁷⁹ and Brauer and Britton¹⁸⁰ defended, the genocide and the restructuration of families and of society over a new gender paradigm allowed women to defy stereotypes and to employ their potential and ideas into their country's reconstruction: "without empowering Rwandan women, the overwhelming majority of the population, to rebuild their lives, the political and social transformation necessary to rebuild the country cannot succeed"¹⁸¹. Although women have entered politics and produced efficient results, there are still several challenges to overcome, as female politicians have fallen short in making gender equality a political priority and in being respected and supported by their male colleagues and their own organizations¹⁸². Hopefully, in the long term, women's empowerment and participation in democracy will eventually lead Rwanda into a modern, functional and "genuine democracy"¹⁸³, where both halves of its population's potential are harnessed and where both gendered perspectives are equally represented.

That occurrence would be self-reinforcing of women's emancipation, since the still existing female and male voices of sexism will "no longer [be] met with social silence or tacit approval",

¹⁷⁸ Cohen et al., (2005) & Turshen (2002), apud Zraly, M. & Nyirazinyoye, L. (2010).

¹⁷⁹ Burnet, J. (2008), "Gender balance and the meanings of women in governance in post-conflict Rwanda".

¹⁸⁰ Bauer, G. & Britton, H. (2006), "Women in African Parliaments", Women in African Parliaments 1-30.

¹⁸¹ Mukamana, D. & Brysiewicz, P. (2008), "The lived Experience of Genocide Rape Survivors in Rwanda", Journal of Nursing Scholarship, vol.40, n4.

¹⁸² Pankhurst, D. (2002), "Women and Politics in Africa: the Case of Uganda", Parliamentary Affairs, vol. 55, n1.

¹⁸³ Burnet, J. (2008), "Gender balance and the meanings of women in governance in post-conflict Rwanda"

but instead, as a part of “old Rwanda”¹⁸⁴. The success and effectiveness of women as politicians and leaders will, likewise, alter the mindset around women’s rights and participation in all other aspects of life, because the “mere presence”¹⁸⁵ of these women in such positions “helped to develop confidence among other women”¹⁸⁶. “The contribution of women in peace-building and reconciliation efforts can become most effective by increasing their participation in decision-making organs and in the implementation of policies at institutional and community levels”¹⁸⁷, which, consequently, will pave “the way for sustainable development”¹⁸⁸. Thereafter, it is necessary that Rwandan governments (and, in general, governments around the world) opt for a gender-sensitive perspective on society and policies in order not to overlook women’s issues.

5. Conclusion and final remarks

Throughout this work I discovered that Rwandan women were deeply involved in all stages of the conflict, starting from the political elite who planned the genocide up to some of its executors and main instigators. However, women were also the main targets of this conflict through sexual violence in a way in which their bodies were used as a proxy between ethnicities in dispute, revealing the sub-intended conception of women’s bodies as objects at the disposal of men. The war on women’s bodies is indeed a war of terror and a way of keeping them submissive. It also shows clearly the existing connection between Rwandan women’s emancipation (even if forced) and leadership during and in the post-conflict phase and women’s rights advancements in the country, especially in the eyes of the international community.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Izabiliza, J. (sine anno), “The role of women in reconstruction: experience of Rwanda”.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

I believe that there are still several women's and gender inequality issues that continue hidden in the shadows, being ignored by the indifference and inherent sexism of our societies, which retard the development of women in society and, consequently, of their own countries. If we wish to enter a modern, fair and equal stage of Humanity, where both women and men will not be discriminated against over their gender, women need to be brought to the frontline of their countries, to be given political and decision-making powers, to have access to education and be granted appropriate rights, including maternity leaves, in order to advance in their careers and match their potential as half of the world's labour force and intellectual capacity. Then, it would be fundamental for governments to grant quotas of female representation in political and decision-making bodies, but also to invest in education about gender inequality: on one side, among young school pupils in Rwanda, since many girls are not yet aware of their rights and, on the other side, among high-ranking politicians and military officials who still propagate detrimental behaviours and mentalities. Furthermore, the UN, the African Union and other prominent donors should lead by example and provide financing for movements, NGOs and activists fighting for women's rights and gender equality¹⁸⁹, in order to close the gender gap not in 200 years¹⁹⁰ but as soon as possible.

These findings may have helped answering some questions regarding gender and conflict, but there is still a lot to do on gender equality research in order to lift up the veil over this issue. The Rwandan genocide, the Yugoslav War and the Japanese comfort women are only some of the most well-known cases of gender-based violence but every day, worldwide, women and girls suffer horrific similar episodes. When it comes to women's security in wartimes, it is, first and foremost, essential to address women's security during peaceful times: women need to be able to protect themselves from situations of physical and sexual violence, harassment and intimidation. Furthermore, cases of rape, domestic violence, gender-based discrimination and gender pay gap need to be addressed by the governments as central and urgent issues and the perpetrators charged accordingly, independently of their social or economic status. Also,

¹⁸⁹ Issifu, A. (2015), "The Role of African Women in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: The Case of Rwanda".

¹⁹⁰ World Economic Forum (2018), "Global Gender Gap Report".

gender stereotypes need to be eliminated so they do not interfere with a fair and impartial functioning of governments and justice. For that reason, the EU should invest more in fighting gender inequality worldwide, starting from financing research in order to identify women's common enemies, and to pressure its member countries to lead by example and make the gender equality agenda a top priority in their governments: it is urgent to unanimously agree that women's rights are human rights and not an arguable topic of discussion between the left and right political wings.

Another question, however, raised from the conclusion of my research, based on Maria Olujic's "Embodiment of Terror" theory, which advocates that the roots of gender violence in conflict are "well established in peacetime"¹⁹¹, and following the gender conceptions of Yuval N. Harari¹⁹² and how none of the existing available theories manages to fully justify the origin of gender inequality in Humanity's evolution: can the intent behind the level of sexual violence applied during the Rwandan genocide, as well as in other already mentioned episodes of gender-based violence all around the world (the Yugoslav Wars, the Japanese comfort women, the D-Day happenings), have a single-rooted origin? Can these episodes be generalised to other regions, conflicts and eras, to help explaining the common origin of gender inequality and gender-based status societies in all societies in the world? In order for this research to be completed at a deeper level, it would be interesting to develop field research in Rwanda and several other countries, employing tools of gender-sensitivity, psychology, anthropology and history, aiming at linking all these episodes of history. It would be a relevant question to explore in the future, for example in a related PhD opportunity.

¹⁹¹ Olujic, M. (1998), "Embodiment of Terror: Gendered Violence in Peacetime and Wartime in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

¹⁹² Harari, Y. (2011), *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Elsinore.

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