CHAPTER-III
Rwandan Feminism

What is Feminism in Rwandan Context?

The main aim of this chapter is to contextualize the different theories of feminism in special context to Rwanda. Rwanda represents the unique case of feminist theory which explains the relevance of the ethnic induced displacement changes in gender and generational relations feminist theories, somehow in the different time & situation applicable to the country in specific. How did the Rwandan history take a different turn and changed everything for the women? The chapter seeks to explain the history of Rwandan feminism in pre-genocide, genocide and post-genocide society and its relational effects on women in feminist theories context. Feminism remains a positive, movement-based term, with which every woman is happy to be identified. It signals a refusal of oppression, and a commitment to struggling for women's liberation from all forms of oppression—internal, external, psychological and emotional, socio-economic, political and philosophical. We cannot understand Rwandan feminism without the context of historical background of ethnic conflict, Rwandan genocide, racial and colonial influence on Rwandan women. Feminism originates from the Latin word ‘femina’ which describes women’s issues. Feminism is about women activism, commitment, self believe, so that women can achieve equality, justice and liberty for herself. Woman can be able to analyze, describe and judged her own self and individuality in a society. Feminism is about the different story all together, it varies from person to person, country to country and situation to situation. We cannot apply any universal applicability to it. Feminism also has many aspects or dimensions of it, like social, political, cultural etc. In early Rwandan patriarchal societies, Women were depicted as saddled with home and domesticity; men were portrayed as enjoying the exhilaration of life in the outside world. By focusing on the roles of women as wives, scholars have characterized women as having ‘low’ status because of their obligations and deference to their husbands. We do not find historical roots of feminist movement in Rwanda as such. There are no solid evidences that reveal any feminist organization or women leaders in Rwanda. Moreover, the Rwandan society has been patriarchy
driven, ethnically divided, where each ethnicity accords subordinate position to women. In spite of all these historical facts, Rwanda is known for its appreciable feminism in contemporary era. By projecting the role of women in politics, economy, infrastructure, education in all the spheres of administration, the present day Rwanda appears to have embarked on creating history. Rwanda represents a very unique case for all feminist theories. In case of Rwanda, just like any other African polity, a uniform feminist theory does not appear to be applicable. Feminist theories, in their various forms and articulation can be applied to Rwanda. Depending on the prevalent socio-economic circumstances in which the analysis is made. In pre-genocide Rwanda, women's roles were limited by the idealized notion of women as child bearers. This ideal of woman as mother had effects across different aspects of a woman's life. In traditional Rwandan society, women are the dependents of males—whether father, husband or sons. A woman is expected to be protected and managed by the males in her family. Her life is centered around her position as mother and wife. Rwandan customary law designates men as the heads of households. And, under customary law, not only will a woman not inherit property, but she may even count as the husband's “belongings” after he dies. But, what happens when a woman has lost her husband, her sons and her father? What access does she have to her family's property? Because of the discrimination that women face in Rwandan property law, a woman is likely to find it difficult to impossible to reclaim her family's property without a male family member. This is particularly tragic when the woman is trying to rebuild her life. Gender roles in traditional Rwanda were structured around a household division of labor that allowed women substantial autonomy in their roles as child bearers and food producers but preserved male authority over other family affairs. Before the genocide, the Rwandan government estimated that one-fifth of women were victims of domestic violence. There is a Rwandan proverb that states that a woman who has not yet been beaten is not a real woman. If being subject to violence is the mark of real women, then (by some estimates) every woman in Rwanda is a real woman. Not only were women limited from owning property, but informal discrimination practices limited women's ability to obtain credit. Rwandan culture placed great importance on marriage, and married women and men were given special respect and recognition in society. As with other cultural practices, marriage,
in some ways, recognized and respected women’s independence and, in other ways, subordinated women within a patriarchal system of authority. Historically, women’s participation in politics and decision-making in Rwanda has been insignificant. The Rwandan society is characterized by a patriarchal social structure that underlies the unequal power relations between men and women, boys and girls. These unequal power relations are translated in male’s dominance and women’s subordination. The gender-based discrimination and consequent inequalities were exacerbated by changes in the economic and social structures that were ushered in with the advent of colonial rule. The abrupt shift from subsistence to a monetary economy based on paid employment and a formal education system, weakened women’s position relative to that of men. In particular, it weakened their bargaining position on matters concerning their access to, and control over resources and the degree of their level of participation in the development process.

Analyzing Different Feminist Theories

Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism advocates equal rights for women. It was the first feminism to develop, grown out of liberalism which originated in the eighteen century. The liberal feminist theory argues that women have the same inalienable rights as men. As a feminist theory, liberal feminism concentrates on rights in the public sphere such as equal educational opportunities, equal pay for equal work. Liberal feminists, who are the most active feminists in equal rights movements; seeks to eliminate gender differences, they argue that women are equal to men because they are essentially the same as men in regard to the capacities for aggression, ambition, strength and rationality. Feminist writers who are associated with this tradition are Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, second-wave feminists ie Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem; and the Third Wave feminist Rebecca Walker. Mary Wollstonecraft has been very influential in her writings as ‘A Vindication of the Rights of Woman’ commented on society's view of the woman and encouraged women to use their voices in making decisions separately (Encyclopedia of Feminism: 1986). Women
have the right to participate in all social and political roles (including war roles) without facing discrimination. Liberal feminism does not treat war very differently from other aspects of social life in which men dominate the high-paying, advantaged roles. From liberal feminist perspectives, women’s exclusion as soldiers resembles their exclusion through history as doctors, lawyers, politicians, and other high-status professionals. Liberal feminists argue that women have performed well when, under military necessity, they have been allowed to participate in military operations, but have faced persistent discrimination, including dismissal from such positions once a war ends. Critics of liberal feminism argue that women have manifestly failed to gain real equality with men in the worlds of work and politics (Whitworth, 1997: 12). This approach failed to address the structural inequalities in gender relations (Muhibbu-Din, 2007: 15). Liberal feminism, nonetheless, remained popular; it serves as a strong force for legal reform and women’s political participation.

Third Wave Feminism

Proponents of third-wave feminism claim that it allows women to define feminism for themselves by incorporating their own identities into the belief system of what feminism is and what it can become through one's own perspective. In their introduction to the idea of third-wave feminism in Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future, Grassroots: A Field Guide for Feminist Activism written with Amy Richards, and Look Both Ways: Bisexual Politics suggest that feminism can change with every generation and individual( Heywood, Leslie; Jennifer Drake eds:1997) .Like all feminism, the Third Wave focuses on the economic, political, social, and personal empowerment of women. This newer form of feminism focuses more on the individual empowerment of women and less on activism. It celebrates women’s journeys to build meaningful identities in the complex contemporary world. Third Wave feminism encourages personal empowerment and action. Third Wave feminists like to think of themselves as survivors, not victims. Third-wave feminism deals with issues that seem to limit or oppress women, as well as other marginalized identities (Johnson, Merri Lisa, Ed:2002)
Postcolonial Feminism

Postcolonial feminism is critical of Western forms of feminism, notably radical feminism and liberal feminism and their universalization of women's experiences. Postcolonial feminists argue that cultures impacted by colonialism are often vastly different and should be treated as such. Colonial oppression may result in the glorification of pre-colonial culture, which, in cultures with traditions of power stratification along gender lines, could mean the acceptance of, or refusal to deal with, inherent issues of gender inequality. Postcolonial feminists can be described as feminists who have reacted against both universalizing tendencies in Western feminist thought and a lack of attention to gender issues in mainstream postcolonial thought. The main philosophers of this approach are Gayatri Spivak, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Uma Narayan, Kwok Pui-lan, Sara Suleri, Lata Mani, Kumkum Sangari. Postcolonial feminists criticize Western feminists because they have a history of universalizing women's issues, and their discourses are often misunderstood to represent women globally. Thus, one of the central ideas in postcolonial feminism is that by using the term 'woman' as a universal group, they are then only defined by their gender and not by social classes and ethnic identities (Postcolonial Feminism :http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki). Also, it is believed by postcolonial feminists that mainstream Western feminists ignored the voices of non-white, non-western women for many years, thus creating resentment from feminists in developing nations.

Difference Feminism

Difference feminism is a philosophy that stresses those men and women are ontologically different versions of the human being. Difference feminism often stresses a fundamental biological, emotional, psychological or spiritual difference between the sexes. Difference feminists believe that women’s experiences are fundamentally different from those of men’s. In this view, the problem is not that men and women are different but that sexist cultures devalue “feminine” qualities instead of valuing, celebrating, and promoting them (www.spiritus-temporis.com/difference-feminism). Regarding war, ethnic conflict, difference feminists argue that women,
because of their greater experience with nurturing and human relations, are generally more effective than men in conflict resolution and group decision-making, and less effective than men in combat. Some difference feminists see such gender differences as biologically based, where as others see them as entirely cultural, but they agree that gender differences are real, and not all bad (Goldstein, Joshua, 2001).

A second difference feminist argument holds that men and women think differently about their separateness or connection with other people. Boys construct social relationships in terms of autonomous individuals, interacting according to formal rules whereas girls construct social relationships as networks of connection. Men tend to see their position relative to others in the group- especially other males- in terms of a competitive hierarchy. Women tend to see their position within a group in terms of mutual support. Hierarchical organization is widespread- and generally male dominated- in the military, business, religion, and other spheres of social life. In this situation, men are especially attuned to how they look in the eyes of their fellow men. By contrast, women are seen as more practical, less concerned with rank or honor, and thus better able to cooperate within a group without letting intergroup tensions undermine the group’s work. Difference feminists would rather value women’s cooperative abilities than to encourage women to become more competitive, as liberal feminism sometimes does.

**Cultural Feminism**

Cultural feminism commends the positive aspects of what is seen as the female character or feminine personality. It is also a feminist theory of difference that praises the positive aspect of women. Early theorists like Jane Addams and Charlotte Perkins Gilman argued that in governing the state, cooperation, caring, and nonviolence in the settlement of conflicts society seem to be what was needed from women’s virtues (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_feminism). Cultural feminism seeks to understand women’s social relations in a society by concentrating on gender differences between women and men. This type of feminism focuses on the liberation of women through individual change, the recognition and creation of “women-centered” culture, and the redefinition of femininity and masculinity. Cultural feminism utilizes essentialist
understandings of male and female differences as the foundation of women's subordination in society. Early cultural feminists sought to reclaim and redefine definitions of femininity and masculinity through recognizing and celebrating women's unique characteristics. Cultural feminists believe that women are inherently nurturing, kind, gentle, egalitarian, and non-violent. These tenets can be traced back to the first wave of feminism. During this time, scholars such as Jane Addams and Charlotte Perkins Gilman stressed the superiority of women's values, particularly compassion and pacifism, believing that these would conquer masculine qualities of selfishness, violence, and lack of self-control in relation to sexual behavior. This was also a means to challenge the dominant cultural discourse that women were inferior and subservient to men. Efforts at fighting women's subordination included working for women's suffrage, women's right to free expression, and women's culture as well as outreach to poor and working-class women (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_feminism).

Analyzing Different Feminist Theories in Rwandan Context

Most feminist approaches share a belief that gender matters and is also critical in understanding war and ethnic conflict. They also share a concern with changing “masculinism” in both political–military practices, where masculinism is defined as an ideology justifying male domination. They see women as a disadvantaged class, unjustly dominated and exploited by men (Tickner: 1992). Beyond these points of agreement, there is hardly a concern among various feminist schools. Various authors describe feminist theories in terms of the different perspectives or schools of thought. Women can be understood only as part of a gender dyad, in which men and masculinity warrants as much attention as women and femininity. Beyond distributions by sex (men do this, women do that), we also need to observe the functioning of gender as a relation, and a relation of power, that further complicates other power dynamics. For women, the male is not ‘the other’ but part of the human same species. Each gender constitutes the critical half that makes the human whole. Neither sex is totally complete in itself to constitute a unit by itself. Each needs to be complementarity, despite the possession of unique features of its own. Sexual differences and similarities, as well as sex roles, enhance sexual autonomy and
cooperation between women and men, rather than promote polarization and fragmentation. Within the metaphysical realm, both male and female encompass life and operate jointly to maintain a cosmological balance (Obiom Nnaemeka:1998)

This is the main crux of the Rwandan feminism. But in the present context, Rwandan women’s lives are a balancing act indeed. Fighting on all fronts to contend with external and internal forces, bridge the fissures between public and private, link home and abroad and maintain sanity for which they requires great strength and imagination. African women are fighting against two colonialisms’ – that is, internally induced patriarchal structures and externally engineered imperialistic contexts. In this day and age of globalization with massive population and cultural flows that are increasingly blurring the line between the inside and the outside, Rwandan women do not have the luxury of contending with a distinct outside and grappling with a clear-cut inside. The internal and the external are ever evolving, always contaminated and contested, mutually creating and recreating each other. The complex nexus of transformations and shifts makes the balancing act more difficult and precarious (Sudarkasa, Naira: 1977)

In Rwandan feminist context it will be more accurate to argue not in terms of a monolith but rather in the context of a pluralism (African feminism) that captures the fluidity and dynamism of the different cultural imperatives, historical forces, and local context conditioning women’s activism/ movements in Africa-Such resistance and disagreements contribute to defining and explaining Rwandan feminism. However, what is crucial to note is how the definitions and explanations are contextualized. To meaningfully explain Rwandan feminism, it is not to the western but rather to the African environment that one must refer to. African feminism is not reactive; it is proactive. It has a life of its own that is rooted in the African environment. Its uniqueness emanates from the Rwandan cultural and philosophical specificity. Rwandan feminism’s cannot be grasped by drawing on the western feminism instead; they should be investigated in the context of their place and importance in the Rwandan environment. Rwandan women today are known by the qualities like balance, connectedness, reciprocity, compromise, African feminism sees power as negotiable and negotiated; it assesses power not in absolute but in relative terms- in
terms of power-sharing and complementing, accommodation, compromise, negotiation, and inclusiveness. These are the characteristics and important features of Rwandan women. The contemporary Rwandan women are a creation of historical and current forces that are simultaneously internally generated and externally induced-from indigenous socio-cultural structures and foreign influences. The present state of feminism in Rwanda needs proper reappraisal in the emancipatory nature of feminism. A major task facing the growth of feminism in the continent of Africa is how to appropriately bridge the gap which exists between the few elite who are concerned with feminist struggles on the one hand and on the other hand, the non-feminist elites and women at the grassroots, both of whom constitute a majority. The future of feminism on this continent depends on how the few feminist elites who are conscious of feminist concerns and these other groups of women, especially the women at the grassroots come together to fight for democratic rights. After the genocide in Rwanda, women are getting stronger, learning new skills, taking on new roles as heads of household, builders, workers and traders. Slowly, hesitantly, Tutsi and Hutu women are talking about reconciliation. The perception among survivors of both sexes was that women were better than men at forgiving, reconciling and building peace. Women immediately began finding homes for orphans, caring for survivors and rebuilding homes.

The women bore and still bear much of the burden of reconstruction. Half a million had been widowed. As subsistence farmers, most of them had to put their lives and families back together without men to help. In spite of, carry the physical and psychological after-effects of the violence, women have suffered (wounds, traumas, rape and the resulting HIV infections) they are still supporting Rwandan society. Women went to the orphanages and took children home. Hutu and Tutsi women have all taken children, regardless of ethnic background. It was the first step in reconciliation. The traditional Rwandan family structure has been transformed through necessity. (Jane Ciabattari: 2000).

Much of women’s advancement in contemporary Rwanda seems to have resulted from exceptional social and political factors in the post-conflict period rather than
from indigenous culture. Rwandan policymakers have successfully invoked gender-sensitive aspects of indigenous culture to generate support for new legislation that empowers women. In arguing for reforms to improve women’s rights in Rwanda, policymakers have referred to aspects of Rwandan culture that violate women’s rights and hinder development. The sustainability of women’s advancements and the permanence of a cultural shift depend on national leadership, legal reforms, progressive policies and mandates, institutional mechanisms, and a vibrant women’s movement. Rooting modern changes in references to tradition and indigenous culture can effectively promote and justify women’s political participation in post-conflict countries. Legal reforms are critical to institutionalizing gains by women in a post-conflict society; they guard against reversals of political will and help reinforce ongoing cultural shifts that reshape gender relations. In Rwanda, feminist activities and evolutionary concept can be traced, recalled, memorized and captured in writing by few feminist philosophers named as Peace Uwineza, Elizabeth Pearson, Elizabeth Powley, Newbury, Catharine and Hannah Baldwin, Nowrojee, Binaifer, Gretchen Bauer, Hannah Britton, Brown, Jennifer, Justine Uvuza, Pearson, Elizabeth, Jennie E.Burent, Newbury, Catharine, Lisa Sharlach, Tina Sideris, Turshen, Meredith and Clotilde Twagiramariya, Binaifer Nowrojee, Dorthy Q, Sarah Marie Blizzard, John Mutamba, and Jeanne Izabiliza, Diana Quick, Annu Pillay, Alana Erin Tiemessen, Sarah Marie Blizzard.

**Different Feminist Theories Interpretation in Rwandan Feminist Perspective**

**Interpretation of Liberal Feminism in Rwandan context**

For decades, Rwandan women have been the victims of human rights abuses. Customary practices and sexist stereotypes have firmly entrenched a patriarchal society in which Rwandan women have been subordinated to men in all areas of social, political and economic life. Since the new constitution and amended laws have been enforced, Rwandan women have enjoyed some important victories in the struggle for women’s equality to rights. Earlier, ownership rights in Rwanda were generally unfavorable to women and access to land was governed by customary laws.
that only allowed inheritance of land from father to son only. Women can access land only through marriage. Following the deaths of their husbands during the genocide, many widows have been forced to undertake the work of farming on the family land. The government is reforming Rwandan property law in an effort to guarantee men and women equal access to land and ensure equitable inheritance rights. In 1999, the Inheritance and Marital Property law gave women and their daughters the right to inherit property from their husbands and fathers (Jane Ciabattari : 2000). The government has demonstrated commitment to gender equality. A Ministry in charge of Family Promotion and Gender is in place with a mandate of considering the gender dimensions of development and the promotion of women’s advancement. Rwanda has a constitution that guarantees gender equality and there has been a significant increase of women in decision making organs.

In 2003, Rwanda elected 48.8 percent women to its lower house of parliament, giving it the world’s highest percentage of women in a national legislature. Women achieved this dramatic increase, up from 17.1 percent just a decade earlier, in the aftermath of genocide. In September 2008 women in parliamentary election powerfully reaffirmed Rwanda’s top global ranking for female legislative representation. In that election, women earned 56 percent of seats in the lower house. The combined numbers of women in the lower house and the Senate made Rwanda the first country to have a majority-female legislature. Though women made remarkable gains in 2003, their 2008 success was even more dramatic because it demonstrated that women in Rwanda can sustain their gains from one election cycle to the next. Women increased their representation in parliament to 56 percent in the 2008 election. Women are beginning to consolidate their dramatic gains, with the new gender-sensitive constitution of 2003 and parliamentary powerful positions, women are performing all the functions which their male counterparts do (Constitution of Rwanda: 2003). Women in Rwanda’s Parliament have formed a caucus, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians, with international funding and support. This is the first such caucus in Rwanda, where members work together on a set of issues across party lines (Election Guide: 2008).
The different amended laws that favour women are as follows:

The Constitution of Rwanda (2003) affirms the country’s adherence with the principle of ensuring equal rights between men and women. Article 9 stipulates that women are granted at least 30 percent of the posts in decision-making organs. Article 76 provides that 24 of the eighty seats in the Chamber of Deputies (the legislature), roughly 30 percent of the total, are reserved for women. Likewise, Article 82 specifies that at least thirty percent of the seats in the Senate be occupied by women. Moreover the Constitution recognizes only civil monogamous marriages. It provides for the protection of the family by the State and stipulates the rights and duties of both parents for the care and upbringing of their children (Constitution of Rwanda: 2003).

The Law on Matrimonial Regimes, Donations, Succession and Liberalities (1999) is a key legal framework that stipulates equality in property and inheritance rights between men and women. Upon entering marriage, spouses have the options to choose one of the following matrimonial regimes: (i) community of property; (ii) limited community of assets; and (iii) separation of property.

The New Civil Code (Article 212) gives women full legal rights to open bank accounts, appear in court in relation to the matrimonial property regime, witness a legal act (Article 184), and use their own name in any administrative act in which they are involved (Article 63). It also lays the ground for divorce under the following conditions: (i) fault on the part of spouse; (ii) mutual consent, three years de facto separation; and (iii) desertion for twelve months. Despite the revision of the legal frameworks, there are still gaps in the Rwandan legal framework. The Ministry of Family Promotion and Gender is currently reviewing various laws to identify those that are discriminatory to women.

The Law on the Prevention, Protection and Punishment of Gender Based Violence

According to a study conducted by the Ministry for the Promotion of Family and Gender in 2004, GBV is a serious problem in Rwanda. The study indicated that 54 percent of the women interviewed indicated having experienced severe domestic violence.
violence from their spouses and partners. In view of this problem, a Law for the Prevention, Protection and Punishment of Gender Based Violence was approved in 2008.

In Rwanda, land and property laws have traditionally favoured men. Although a series of recent laws and policies have increased women’s rights to inherit land, own matrimonial property and take decisions in matters of family property. Women in Rwanda now top the world rankings of women in national parliaments, with 49 per cent of representation compared to a world average of 15.1 per cent. As the country undergoes a period of reconstruction, women are taking an active role. They not only head about a third of all households, but have also taken up many jobs that were formerly the preserve of men, as in construction and mechanics.

The 2003 constitution is a critical tool for sustaining women’s participation in politics; it legally protects women’s right to participation in decision-making positions at all levels of government. As the foundation of the post-genocide legal system, the constitution mandates a minimum of 30 percent representation of women at all decision-making levels (e.g., local government, parliament, cabinet). The preamble to the constitution formally states the country’s commitment to the rights of both women and men and to “ensuring equal rights between Rwandans and between women and men without prejudice to the principles of gender equality and complementarity in national development” (Constitution of Rwanda: 2003). Rwanda has also ratified key international protocols on women’s rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. The developments of various laws that increase and protect women’s rights in Rwanda have reinforced constitutional and international commitments.

During the transitional parliament, women parliamentarians pushed for the passage of a 2001 law that criminalized child rape. In 2009, the gender-based violence legislation became law. This law takes steps to clarify the vague definition of rape that existed in
the criminal code and establishes specific penalties for violence against women. By revising existing laws, lawmakers have codified women’s rights in the Rwandan legal system. These legal reforms provide a foundation to end harmful and discriminatory practices.

Electoral systems, and, in particular, the “triple balloting” system that guarantees the election of women to a specified percentage of seats at the local level, have played essential roles in realizing commitments made in the Rwandan constitution. First introduced during the 2001 sector and district elections, and used again in the 2006 district election, the system presents each voter with three ballots for the local election: a general ballot, a women’s ballot, and a youth ballot. In each sector, voters select one person from each ballot, thus picking a general candidate (frequently, but not necessarily, a man), a woman, and a young person. In this way, we can say that this Liberal feminism approach is appropriately suited to Rwandan conditions (Election Guide: 2008).

**Interpretation of Third Wave feminism in Rwandan Context**

In Rwandan case, third wave feminism is related with all children especially age between 2-7 year old, helpless old women & men, orphan children, widows, young girls those who became the victims of rape & sexual exploitation and especially Tutsi community women. They have created a marginalized section of the Rwandan society during the genocide. After a year, it was only these women, who transformed the society and got socio-political and economic empowerment for their women-fellows. In post-genocide society, Hutu and Tutsi women are successfully handling the major challenges and utilizing the opportunities. They got success in creating their own identities with their own individuality in the fields like decision making, academics, judiciary, and politics. They are successfully handling psycho-therapeutic centers, NGOs project, sustainable development, survival strategies and security within Rwanda. Rwandan women have played an important role in the reconstruction and development of Rwanda. Making up 54 percent of the population, women were among those who suffered the most during the genocide, yet their organizations were
The first to rebound. They have a strong presence politically, and the Rwandan government has the highest percentage of women in the world. They are found in every area of Rwandan life, and dominate some sectors, such as coffee, exports and microfinance. In this way Rwandan women control the key areas of the national economy. Women have played a pivotal role in reconstructing Rwanda since the 1994 genocide and their leadership has been critical for the recovery of a nation that lost one-tenth of its population within 100 days. Women headed major institutions to rebuild the country and prosecute the killers. Rwandans believe that, in their victimization and endurance, women bore the brunt of the genocide and therefore deserve a significant position. There are few examples which remarkably depict the participation of Rwandan women participation and significant role in the nation’s recovery.

The Rwanda Flora is owned by a female entrepreneur who returned home after the genocide and is one of the success stories of private sector development in the aftermath of the conflict. Flora grows flowers in a green house over a six hectare land. The enterprise sells five tons of flowers at auctions in Europe weekly and has plans to double the production and export of flowers. It employs around 220 people, the majority of whom are rural women. Rwanda Flora has received recognition not only for its business successes, but also on its corporate policy that is socially responsible. The enterprise provides adequate pay and benefits to its employees. It provided vocational skills training for 40 youth who are orphans and affected by HIV/AIDS. The enterprise is on the verge of growth and diversification of its products (www.ask.com/.../what-are-the-flora-and-fauna-of-rwanda).

Following the 1994 genocide, the country faced unprecedented challenges to their judicial system. Hundreds of thousands of genocide suspects were in jail awaiting trial. The system of justice was so overburdened that it could not cope. The government of Rwanda undertook a restructuring of its justice system to include indigenous, traditional methods. In creating a national institution to revive and formalize Gacaca, the government of Rwanda indirectly contributed to the promotion of women’s participation. Women are represented in all Gacaca courts. An association for the promotion of the Rwandan women participation in decision-
making organs, the Rwanda Women Leaders Caucus was created in July 2002. It is worth noting that the President of the Supreme Court of Rwanda is a woman and the minister of justice is a woman as well. At the same time, the majority of executive secretary of the Gacaca courts are females. Of the 12 judges in the Supreme Court, 5 are women. Currently, the representation of women judges in these courts is 29%. This is an important achievement given that women did not traditionally serve as Gacaca judges or observers. The responsibility of settling community disputes was reserved for a community's wise and respected men (Inyangamugayo). This institution presents yet another opportunity which women have seized to advance their participation in the democratic process and governance. The skills they acquire and the experience later on used to be qualifying them for leadership when the duration of these courts expire.

Affirming the importance of women's access to safe and legal abortion, the Rwandan government has lifted its restriction to Article 14(2)(c) of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa (also known as the Maputo Protocol: The protocol was adopted by the African Union on 11 July 2003 at its second summit in Maputo, Mozambique. On 25 November 2005, having been ratified by the required 15 member nations of the African Union, the protocol entered into force. Of the 53 member countries in the African Union, the heads of states of 46 countries signed the protocol, and as of July 2010, 28 of those countries had ratified and deposited the protocol). The Maputo Protocol is the only international treaty that explicitly guarantees the right to legal abortion. Under the Protocol, the Rwandan government is now required to protect the reproductive rights of women by authorizing medical abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother or the fetus. This development comes on the heels of a significant reform to Rwanda's abortion law. The Rwandan Government recently signed into law a new penal code reducing harsh criminal penalties against women who terminate their pregnancies and doctors who perform abortions. Rwanda has taken a critical step forward in its efforts to respect women's fundamental reproductive and human rights by expanding the grounds upon which abortion is legally permitted. Women who become pregnant as a
result of rape, incest, or forced marriage - or whose pregnancy endangers their health - are now legally entitled to safe abortion services. With the passing of the law and the removal of its reservation to the abortion provision in the Maputo Protocol, Rwanda has made significant strides in ensuring compliance with its minimum obligations under international and regional human rights law (The Maputo Protocol: clear and present Danger: 2007).

Women continue to make some of their most significant contributions to governance work in civil society. Immediately after the genocide, with society and government in disarray, women’s NGOs filled the vacuum, providing a variety of services to the population. Women’s organizations have developed into strong networks. For example, the Association of the Widows of the Genocide (AVEGA) grew from an organization of 5 women who gathered to grieve and share their sorrow to its current membership of over 30,000. Professional associations have also flourished, such as HAGURUKA, the association of Rwandan women lawyers, which advocates for legal reforms, provides free legal advice to vulnerable women, and mobilizes other women’s associations to address women’s legal rights. Because most groups formed in the capital of Kigali, women strategically have recruited rural women to participate in the various organizations. In this way, a network of small associations throughout the country has formed and connected directly to larger, urban associations that advocate on its behalf, seek funding for projects, and conduct training for men and women. Formal networks of women’s organizations can act as important vehicles for facilitating women’s political activism. Women in Rwanda’s civil society push for policy processes that involve consultations with the local population, their grassroots memberships, and women serving in government. Civil society has also served as a conduit for future women government leaders. Women’s associations have encouraged members to attend meetings or trainings organized at the village level, to actively participate in local elections, and, more generally, to learn how to take charge of the affairs that affect them. Women’s organizations hold separate meetings with local women to identify the best female candidates, inspire them to stand for office, and support their bids for election. Women’s presence in all aspects of Rwandan economic and social life is a necessary element of re-shaping cultural attitudes about
women’s abilities and roles, which in turn will contribute to more sustainable prospects for women’s political participation. Through the Rwandan’s flora entrepreneurship, participation of women in Gacaca, Maputo protocol for safe and legal abortion, women initiatives in civil society, Rwandan women define their position, status for themselves. There are end numbers of examples present for Rwandan women which focuses on individual empowerment and development of women.

**Interpretation of Post-Colonial Feminism in Rwandan Context**

We cannot understand Post-colonial feminism in Rwandan context without the reference of German and Belgian colonial influence. They introduced the conflicting concept of ethnicity and create differences among Hutu & Tutsi community resulted in genocide. Rwanda, a nation the West seemingly affiliates only with the 1994 genocide, has a long history of colonial oppression dating back to the German (1893-1923) and Belgian rule (1923-1962). Notably, the Rwandan government maintains that the unity of Rwandans was destroyed by first German and then Belgian colonialism (Buckley-Zistel, 2009, p. 35). Hegemonic forces implemented a church dominated socio-political system, which created a sharp division in status among Rwandans. Further, colonial rule exacerbated perceptions of ethnic differences, relegating the Hutu and Twa as inferior to the Tutsi ethnic minority (Kubai, 2007). Despite national reconciliation efforts, the effects of neo-colonial trauma pervade Rwandan communities to present date. The Rwanda holocaust has been extremely difficult for survivors to overcome. Not only has the Rwandan language had to make room for the devastation the genocide left behind, but the survivors are now faced with the responsibility to heal the wounds of a bleeding nation. A new word entered the Rwandan vocabulary in 1994, ihahamuka, which refers to a variety of psychological manifestations thought to originate from the genocide. The word comes from bringing together two words: hana (lungs, respiration) and muka (without). Because 91 percent of survivors did not have a chance to bury their relatives or perform mourning ceremonies, and nearly as many had not yet seen the remains of
loved ones, the bereavement process has not been allowed to take its natural course (Brahm, 2004).

Rwandans have experienced centuries of oppression due to colonization and civil war. In Rwanda, the trauma was experienced as a group, therefore, adequate trauma interventions need to be collectivistic in nature and embrace the uniqueness of this small African country. Attempting to comprehend the deep wounds within Rwandan society and trying to find ways to assist in the healing process is a formidable undertaking (Staub, 2004; Umutesi, 2006). The work with community-level social agents-teachers, health workers, community and religious leaders-coordinated on the district level by trauma advisors and health centers, was promoted as the most effective and sustainable way to reach beneficiaries. It was suggested that a community-oriented approach should be implemented through the primary health care system to ensure better effectiveness of the interventions in the future (Chauvin & Comlavi, 2005). The mistrust, fear, and aversion to another along lines of ethnic differences catalyzes the potential for multigenerational transmission of trauma and runs counter to national reconciliation efforts (Logan, 2006; Kaitz, Levy, Ebstein, Faraone, & Mankuta, 2009). Feelings of insecurity of self and insecurity towards the other will have to be worked through carefully and extensively in the healing process. With the sexual violence embedded in the 1994 genocide, many Rwandan adolescent girls lost their virginity through rape. Loss of identity and social isolation experienced by Rwandan females in the aftermath of the genocide often related directly to the loss of virginity. By losing their virginity through rape, Rwandan females faced the social issue of not belonging to the in-group of women nor the in-group of girls (Cohen, d'Adensky, & Anastos, 2005; Chakravarty, 2007; Mukamma, et. al, 2008). Further, Rwandan women impregnated through rape faced the additive trauma of raising children born of rape. For some women, loving their children came naturally, however, these women often had to fight with relatives who could not understand loving an Interhamwe's (a member of a terrorist Hutu paramilitary organization) child. For other women, caring for a child born of rape was impossible, leading to the neglect or torture of hundreds of newborn or unborn children (Mukamana, et. al., 2008).
We have seen the negative influences of colonial generated ethnicity and its direct & fragmented influence on Rwandan women in post-colonial period. It is indisputable that colonialism in Rwanda had a devastating effect on the social, political and economic composition of the nation (Buckley-Zistel, 2009). The historical narratives of Rwandans include clear evidence of the traumatic influences of colonialism; therefore, a trauma intervention model that incorporates Rwandan psychology, liberation, and healing narratives is critical for Rwandan people especially women in Rwanda and Rwandan descendents throughout the globe, given their unique shared history of resistance and healing.

**Interpretation of Difference Feminism in Rwandan Context (Violent men, peaceful women)**

In this view, women’s care giving roles and potential for motherhood best suit them to give life, not take it. Women are more likely than men to oppose war, and more likely to find alternatives to violence in resolving conflicts. Thus, according to difference feminism, women have unique abilities as peacemakers. At the time of Rwandan genocide, Hutu males were attacking on Tutsi community (on Tutsi males & females), whereas at that point of time Hutu and Tutsi females were trying to safeguard the old age people, young girls & children and pregnant ladies irrespective of their ethnic background.

Women started a campaign of convincing their husbands and relatives to disassociate themselves from the insurgency and return peacefully to their families. What women did here is considered by many as an act of heroism because it involved risks of their own lives. Women used different tactics to convince rebels to live the insurgency and became free again. One of the methods used was to collaborate with the government troops and negotiating the peaceful surrender on conditions that cooperated. This shows they were more concerned, less violent, more constructive and more connected with fellow females.

The critical role played by women leadership in championing the cause of promoting gender equity and equality cannot be underestimated. The favorable conditions
created by the government through the establishment of institutions such as the Ministry in Charge of Gender Equity, coupled with an emerging women leadership in the post genocide period became an impetus for promoting unity and reconciliation. Women leadership across the spectrum, from civil society, faith based organizations, and executive and legislative arms of government, contributed to the momentum of empowering women and increase their role in national reconstruction. The genocide has almost completely destroyed the agricultural base of the country with a large number of men killed or fled the country in prison. Women across the country revived numerous agricultural activities. They provided food to their families either under food for work programme or simply producing food from their own plots. Women have contributed a lot in terms of participation in repatriation of refugees’ right from 1997. Throughout the entire territory of Rwanda women were seen on building sites working side by side with men or sometimes women alone trying to cope with difficult challenge of constructing houses. ASOFERWA, a Rwandan NGO advancing women’s economic empowerment, was heavily involved in the resettlement programme (Imidugudu) aimed at resettling displaced people, widows, old and new case load returnees (1959 & 1994). This organisation is famously known for having built a resettlement site called The Nelson Mandela Village in Ntarama (Nyahata in the Bugesera region, Kigali Ngali province), a region that suffered tremendous atrocities related to the genocide of 1994 and this resettlement site is an integrated village model that has social services such as water, electricity, health centre, primary school, market, etc.

Interpretation of Difference Feminism in Rwandan Context (Autonomous men, connected women)

We have observed in Rwanda that women are working as a unit in which each trans disciplinary field and their experienced are taken under consideration whether woman belongs to academic, farmer, mechanic, shopkeeper, driver as well as how women are running successfully women NGOs, women groups, umbrella groups, Sustainable development and surviving strategies for women, developmental projects, and women projects etc in Rwanda. This approach enables Rwandan women making capable of
nourishing the emergence of a more equitable social order. In post-genocide Rwanda, income-generating activities in rural areas for the most part were dominated by women groups. In an era where Rwanda as a country was trying to rebuild herself in the aftermath the genocide that left the entire country destroyed, women were affected equally. Thousands of income generating activities were initiated either by women groups themselves such as the associations, cooperatives, NGOs and CSOs or by the government with the support of donors. This approach developed the critical thinking, confidence and contributes to the growth of strategies, policy-formation, and broad-based activism in Rwanda and how they conglomerate themselves, unite themselves and motivate themselves for the huge change in their ideology, thinking, and living pattern.

**Interpretation of Cultural Feminism in Rwandan Context**

Earlier, women in Rwanda did most of the agricultural work, but hunting and warfare were for the most part exclusively masculine activities. Many factors contribute to the transformation of gender relation in Rwanda. New laws have restored clan rights to land, but women still have limited access to land use in spite of their continued responsibility to provide for their household. The abolition of the feudal system placed all women (Hutu & Tutsi) at the same level in terms of their rights and production activities. In their different researches in Rwanda, Helen Codere and Villia Jefremovas assert that Rwandan women are now treated in the same way without references to ethnicity. Through the Ministry of Gender and Women Development, male and female have an equal right to inherit their parent’s property (Land and right to own private property). Although women still participate in agricultural production, basketry, pottery and others economic enterprises, their conditions have profoundly improved, compared to the gender gap that existed in the past. Although continues changes have made in the social status of the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa continue to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The previous means of measuring the social status of Rwandans by ethnicity or by the possession of cattle no longer exist. Instead, education, wealth, political position have now become the new indicators.

It should be noted that many aspects of the traditional culture, especially the taboos on women, are no longer applicable. The influence of Christianity, westernization,
modernization and women’s liberation are the reasons for the change. The change does not remove the cultural emphasis on politeness and respect, which are the integral parts of Rwandan culture and customs. Rwandan women are increasing their involvement in political programmes. At both local and national level, women are advancing in political participation. To upset, the gender inequality in politics, the 2003 constitution was amended to allow women to hold at least 30 percent of all position in government. Though this gender quota, women have the opportunity to participate actively in decision making at top government levels. Due of these changes, of course we can say that the transformation in Rwanda at each level is going to achieve the heights of success very soon without touching the original values and dignity of the Rwandan culture. Rwandan cultural feminists seek to remove the negative connotations such feminine traits as passivity, nurturance, emotionalism, and dependence and to redefine them more positively. In Rwanda, women are now self aware and self sustain in growing plants especially beans for their family, creating the concept of kitchen garden in every house especially for pregnant ladies nutrition. Now days female farmers have equal access to seeds, tools, animals, small stock and productivity inputs which are essential for setting the for equitable and sustainable agricultural growth .More than 60 percent of students in Rwanda doing agricultural training in gardening instead going for secondary school or university. By passing these farmers skills to younger generation Rwandan women are securing their children future and self sufficiency for food in their country.

**Concluding Observation**

Feminism in Rwanda signals women’s desire to play a role in determining the direction of development. Thus, Rwandan feminism looks forward to women’s new goals, as well as backward to statuses and roles that women leaders have played in the past. Rwandan women are voicing their opinions about the failed elections, displacement, military coups, political upheavals, refugee movements, economic recessions, structural adjustment, and other crises that severely affected their lives since the 1980s. They are affirming their own identities while transforming societal notions of gender and familial roles. Rwandan feminism is highly political, and it is a response to Rwanda’s social and political developments. Rwandan women know that
women and children have borne the brunt of the recent crises, as measured in high child mortality rates, lowered female literacy rates, the continuing confinement of women to agricultural work, and their exclusion from modern, technical, and scientific fields. Many Rwandan women (and some Rwanda’s men as well) are committed to correcting these disparities and forging new relationships between state and society, even though Western powers and global institutions still exercise tremendous influence over the economic and political conditions of Rwanda. Rwandan feminism differs from Western feminism because it has developed in a different cultural context. Today, A Rwandan women are seeking to redefine their roles in ways that allow them a new, culturally attuned activism. This is not a totally novel challenge, since there is evidence of gender hierarchy, female subordination, and women’s struggles to reshape their statuses and roles within traditional African cultures in earlier historical periods. Gender asymmetry and inequality, particularly the distinction between public (political) and private (household) spheres, certainly existed in indigenous Rwandan social life. Rwandan women’s experiences of the hardship of economic restructuring and the growing democratization of their societies have pushed them toward greater boldness in voicing their grievances and focusing attention on women’s status within their societies. Thus, Rwandan feminism builds upon a solid tradition of female inclusion in a wide variety of social roles in African cultures. The crises in African economic and political life have caused serious hardship for women since the 1980s, but this has also generated a new burst of African feminism. Previously, African states were hesitant to discuss women’s issues and grievances publicly. However, they were not hesitant to accuse women of subversion or a lack of patriotism when their organizations demonstrated against state policies or when they lobbied international organizations to improve conditions for women. Much of women’s feminist activism in the 2000s is designed to focus state and public attention on the welfare of women and children, and to create new economic policies that are beneficial to the entire populace. Rwandan women today have taken a leadership role in setting new economic and political agendas. One of the legacies of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women is that Rwandan women are determined to shape the policies of their countries. They have pushed for an additional support for girls’ education, including training for careers in industrial
fields, the sciences, agriculture, or the professions, and for greater gender sensitivity in government and private-sector hiring policies. Women are stepping up their campaign against sexism and exploitation. Rwandan feminists have opposed practices such as early marriage, female genital mutilation, women’s exposure to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) through unsafe sex practices, and various forms of medical neglect. Rwandan feminists today have fostered a greater awareness of the connections between gender and the political economy of the state by openly discussing the links between the public and private experiences of African women. They have challenged the reluctance to talk about gender conflicts, and they have prompted women to collectively address political actions that affect their lives. Rwandan feminists have generated a new model of what feminism is all about and new feminist views of civil society, the family, and the state. They have stepped forward to defend their views in international gatherings of policy makers and feminists in the conviction that their approaches will yield more positive results for Rwanda’s local, regional, and national development. In Africa, contributions to transnational women's rights activism have been especially important concerning violence against women, women and conflict, the girl child, financing women’s entrepreneurship, resistance against female genital cutting, the role of government versus NGOs in service provision and, increasingly, in discussions about women and political decision-making. Continental and sub-regional influences serve as a critical conduit for changing international norms. The growth of the new continental and sub-regional networks, especially after 2000, followed the rise of the new domestic women's movements. A cadre of better-educated women then emerged with new leadership and organizational skills, further facilitating the growth of the NGOs. Changing donor strategies targeted NGOs and women's NGOs in particular, as states appeared increasingly corrupt and unaccountable. New funding was directed both towards domestic NGOs and towards regional networks. Cell phones and e-mail sped up communication between women's organizations within Rwanda and beyond, facilitating their growth and their capacity to carry out advocacy. Women have been challenging laws and constitutions that do not uphold gender equality. In addition, they have increasingly moved into government, legislative, party, NGO and other leadership positions that were previously almost exclusively the domain of men.
Rwanda became the country with the largest percentage of women parliamentarians in the world after women claimed almost 49 per cent of the seats in the country's 2003 parliamentary elections. Rwanda has applied affirmative action for the promotion of women, for example, 30% of decision-making positions at all levels is allocated to women, women communal funds (micro-credit) were set-up, women forum structures like the National Women Council were formed and constitutionalised by the 2003 Rwandan Constitution, article 187 and the establishment of a Gender Monitoring Office, article 185 of the constitution which is yet to be established - to enable them participate in and benefit equally from development efforts. From the above, women have managed to participate publicly other than staying indoors and behind the curtains. A number of women in decision-making have increased for example 48.8% in the chamber of deputies, in cabinet the number has successively increased and even at local levels. The micro-credits schemes have also boosted women’s independence, respect from their male counterparts, and above all women have managed to meet their basic needs and sending children to school. Micro-credits are vital in as far as most Rwandan families are headed by women and female children. To crown it all, Gender is one of the major goals of development that the Government of Rwanda has identified for development. It is crucial in a way that it empowers more than a half of the Rwandan population to participate in development. It does not only gear at economic development but also it promotes human rights as far as equality. A lot has been done to promote gender equality in Rwanda but still there is a long way to go.
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Similarly, Brah (1996) uses the concept of Diaspora, border, and the politics of location as a “conceptual grid” for historically analyzing “trans/national movements of people, information, cultures, commodities and capital”.


Trinh T. Minh-ha, with her essay "**Infinite Layers/Third World?**" (1989), and her book "Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism" (1989)

Uma Narayan, with her book **Dislocating Cultures (1997)** and her essay "Contesting Cultures".

