

Rwandan Women in Higher Education Leadership: Socio-cultural Challenges & Opportunities

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*Ryari mweukwata inzika, anyu
umwana gukwata inzika kandi.*

When you bear a grudge, your
child will also bear a grudge.

Overview



WHAT TO UNDERSTAND
ABOUT RWANDA

HOW TO THINK ABOUT
WOMEN LEADERS IN
RWANDA: CULTURAL
CAPITAL

HOW TO CONSTRUCT
THE NARRATIVE:
NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Background

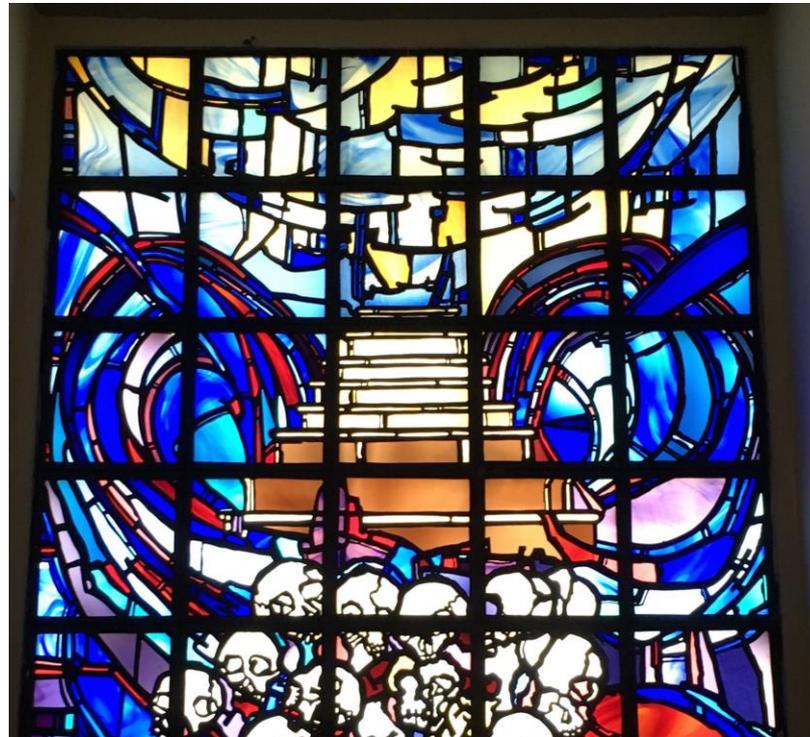


- ▶ Land-locked in Sub-Saharan Central-Eastern Africa
- ▶ Size of Maryland (10K square miles)
- ▶ Population over 11 million
- ▶ Catholic (60%); Protestant (26%); Adventist (11.1%); Muslim (4.6%); indigenous beliefs (0.1%); none (1.7%)
- ▶ English, French & Kinyarwanda



Sunset Over East Africa

Genocide, 25 years



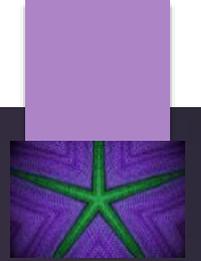
Rwanda Genocide Memorial Stained Glass Panel

One million perished



REMEMBER THE VICTIMS
PREVENT GENOCIDE

Background to the problem



- ▶ Gender equity memorialized in Constitution, cross-cutting issue in most policies & plans across country
- ▶ Some literature documents various gender issues in Rwanda, principally through UR's Centre for Gender Equity
- ▶ Progress in government sector; less progress in all other sectors of civil society
- ▶ No documentation on status of women in educational leadership in nation's history

Purpose

- ▶ To begin to remedy the lack of empirical data related to Rwandan women in educational leadership by providing insight into their status.
- ▶ African feminist theories that explicitly challenge Western theories of gender and focus on “post-colonial, indigenous...approaches” that emphasize agency, resilience, and persistence (Chilisa & Ntseane, p. 617-18).
- ▶ Highlight the voices of the women scholars and their experiences in navigating the policies of their institution as well as the cultural norms of society.
- ▶ Memorialize & understand the experiences of the women through “a recursive, reflexive process of moving from field (with starting points in telling or living of stories) to field texts (data) to interim and final research texts [that] highlight ethical matters as well as new theoretical understandings of people’s experiences (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 20).”

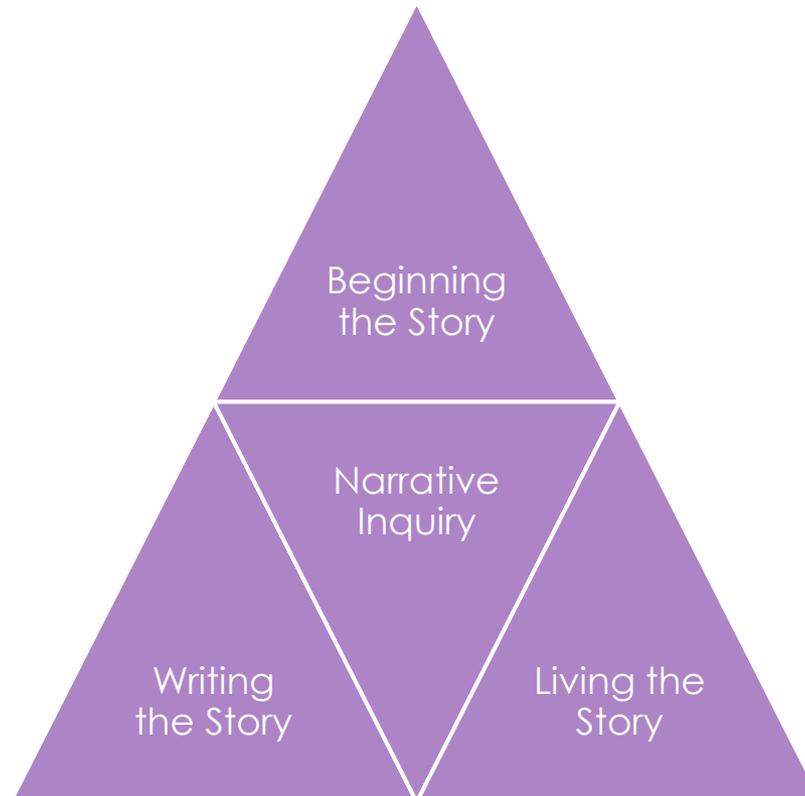
The Question & Protocol



What is the status of Rwandan women scholars in higher education in Rwanda?

- ▶ Document analysis ranging from federal government to University of Rwanda
- ▶ Semi-structured interviews inquiring into progress, successes, challenges & recommendations
- ▶ Contemporaneous field notes
- ▶ Through multiple interviews conducted in the Kigali region, their stories emerged to serve as a means of beginning a broader query that may lead to insights into the issues women leaders face and solutions they might use to address them

Narrative Inquiry



Connelly &
Clandinin, 1990

Beginning the Story



- ▶ Noddings (1986) wrote, "We approach our goal by living with those whom we teach in a caring community, through modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation. Again, we see how unfamiliar this language has become" (p. 502).

Living the Story



- ▶ “When one engages in narrative inquiry the process becomes even more complex, for, as researchers, we become part of the process. The two narratives of participant and researcher become, in part, a shared narrative construction and reconstruction through the inquiry” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990)

Writing the Story



- ▶ “When done properly, one does not feel lost in minutia but always has a sense of the whole. Unfortunately, this presents a dilemma in the writing because one needs to get down to concrete experiential detail. How to adjudicate between the whole and the detail at each moment of the writing is a difficult task for the writer of narrative” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990)

University of Rwanda & Associated Organizations



- ▶ UR administrators in mid-level & high-level leadership roles
- ▶ UR Principals, Deans, Department Chairs & Centre Directors with academic appointments ranging from lecturer to professor
- ▶ Deputies General & other leaders from federal government & associated organizations

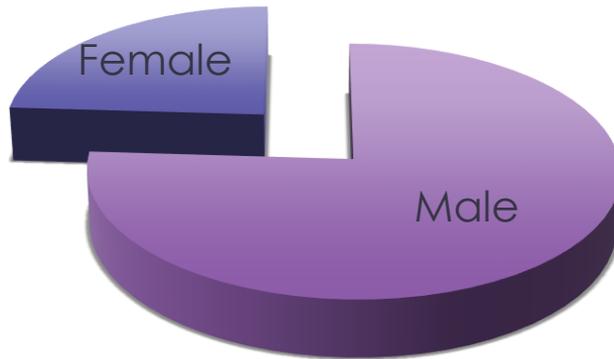
University of Rwanda



- ▶ Established by the Government of Rwanda through Law, #71/2013 of 9 May 2013
- ▶ Seven public higher education institutions merged into a single institution
- ▶ Overseen by Board of Governors & Academic Senate with student & staff representation
- ▶ Appointed Vice Chancellor as the Chief Executive Officer
- ▶ Multi-College & multi-campus institution comprised of 6 Colleges & 14 campuses throughout Rwanda



University of Rwanda Faculty



	Number	Percent
Male	1216	76%
Female	385	24%

UR Academic Staff

Source: UR Statistics Office

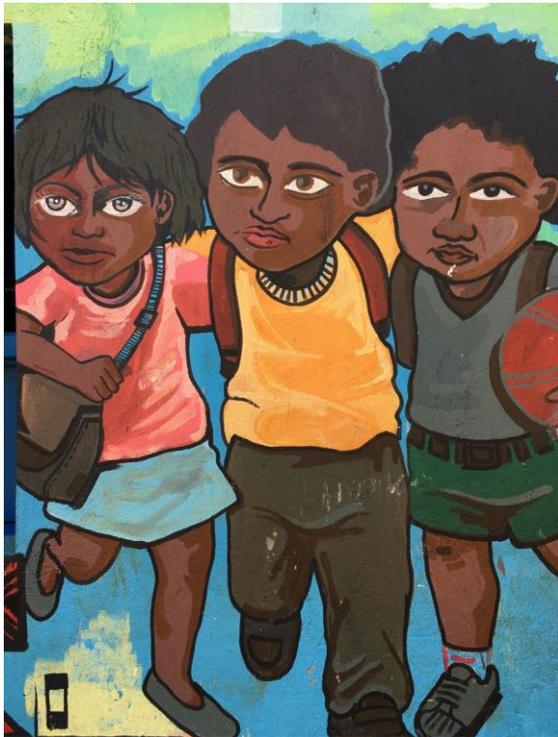
Faculty Ranks



- ▶ Professor
- ▶ Associate Professor
- ▶ Senior Lecturer
- ▶ Lecturer
- ▶ Assistant Lecturer
- ▶ Tutorial Assistant



Findings: *Jeannette's Narrative*



- ▶ Limited Pipeline: few eligible to become leaders because of fewer academics
- ▶ Country's lack of Ph.D. programs compel women to leave country to obtain terminal degree
- ▶ Essential elements: Dreams attained through Persistence, resilience, commitment

Additional Findings



- ▶ “The diploma of the woman is a husband”
Society’s expectation for women’s responsibilities as wives and mothers regardless of career responsibilities or status
- ▶ Governmental control of faculty as “civil servants” & impact on career trajectory



Kigali National Park

Discussion

- ▶ Promotion of feminist principles for all of civil society
- ▶ Development of a strategic plan to address the lack of opportunities for women to enter graduate level education leading to the Ph.D.



More discussion



Kigali National Park

- ▶ Broader university & national policies that support women academics
 - ▶ Attention to child care
 - ▶ Mentoring for promotion
 - ▶ Fewer moves out of tenure line
 - ▶ Professional development focused on scholarship
 - ▶ Collaborations across countries



We cannot turn the clock back nor can we undo the harm caused, but we have the power to determine the future and to ensure that what happened never happens again.

Paul Kagame
President of Rwanda