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“THE BEST PLACE TO BE YOUNG AND A FEMALE”

A STUDY OF GENDER EQUALITY IN RWANDA

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SAMMANFATTNING

Fältstudiens syfte har varit att analysera och beskriva jämställdhets effekter på den unga generationen i dagens Rwanda. Min uppsats utfördes med en kvalitativ ansats där intervjuer har varit centrala som metod för att samla in mitt material och data. Jag har intervjuat unga vuxna kvinnor som är entreprenör eller i ledare position. Mitt resultat erhålls genom deras berättelser och upplevelser om jämställdheten i Rwanda.

Rwanda har haft en stor representation av kvinnor i parlamentet vilket har i sin tur påverkat dessa unga kvinnor. Genom mina intervjuer har jag kommit fram till att Kvinnor i Rwanda tar mer plats som aldrig förr. Sammanfattningsvis har Rwanda gjort en stor skillnad för deras kvinnor. Den stora representationen av kvinnor i höga positioner har haft en bra inverkan på nästa generation och har inspirerat dem att drömma stort. Även om Rwanda har kommit långt när det gäller jämställdhet, utmaningar finns fortfarande och hela arbetet är inte gjort.

Title: The best place to be young and a female

Keywords: Gender equality, Women in Rwanda, young adults

INNEHÅLLSFÖRTECKNING

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PRELUDE

In general, we always hear about a poor and underdeveloped Africa but it's not as often than we hear about the parts of that great continent with a huge wave of change and development. Under many years Rwanda has been linked to the genocide against tutsis (one of the ethnies in Rwanda) but today the country has been nominated as one of the best countries with a high gender equality in the whole world. Rwanda was second in the world according to the Social Watch Gender Equity Index 2009, where only Sweden had a higher position. Gender Equality has been established in the state's constitution and Rwanda was the first country in the world with more than 50% female parliamentarians.

"Study after study has shown that there is no effective development strategy in which women do not play a central role," says the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. He goes on and says that when females/women are involved the gain is immediate, families are healthier and their income, savings and investments increase. His theory is that what is applicable for families is also applicable for the society and in the long run for countries in the world (Mutume 2004).

The Quote above describes how a society in which a female's voices are heard, a state with a high representation of women gives a different kind of results and effects. I have chosen to write about the well known gender equality in Rwanda's parliament, if such a change has affected and impacted the female young adults and which effects it has on today's society. My interest for this topic was awakened of various reasons, firstly because of the great change in Rwanda and secondly because gender equality and the feminist revolution are the current most discussed waves all over the world.

1.2. BACKGROUND

Before 1994 , there were only a few people who knew much about Rwanda, a small densely populated country in East Africa, where more than 7.5 million people inhabited a very small area. Violent conflicts marked Rwanda's transition from colonial rule to independence in the early 1960s, and continued episodes of violence created a huge refugee population in surrounding countries. The genocide that took place in 1994 led to the murder of more than 500,000 inhabitants, and the great populations that followed resulted in a humanitarian crisis. The crisis was met by an enormous international response, although many criticized that the help came after the bloodshed.

The event that triggered the genocide in Rwanda was a crash on the night of April 6, 1994, which killed Rwanda's President Habyarimana, the President of Burundi and several members of the Habyarimana government. Although the perpetrators of the crash have never been established, different hypotheses have been developed. Rwanda's government in that time and military leaders blamed RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front, a party led by Rwanda's current president Paul Kagame), while international opinion has tended to accept the RPF perception that extremists in Habyarimana's own government eliminated him (Newbury & Baldwin 2000, 1).

1.2.1. RWANDAN WOMEN BEFORE THE GENOCIDE

“In a home where a woman speaks, there is discord “ and “a woman’s only wealth is a man”.

These are two examples of old Rwandan proverbs that describe how a woman was symbolized in Rwanda or simply what view they had on women before the genocide.

Many Rwandan and international organizations have detailed women's subordination to men in that society, where the Rwandan woman is a symbol of "fertility and weakness," while the

man is a symbol of strength and protection, in other words the man is the one who makes all of the important decisions " (Hogg 2010, 72).

Men and women had different duties according to the traditional Rwandan society, women's responsibility was to educate the children, welcome guests, take care of the household and to advise their men and they also helped to maintain the tradition. A division based on gender and stereotypes was introduced from the childhood in Rwanda, the boys were taught to defend their families and nation, they already were introduced to a technical battle as young boys, while girls were secondarily encouraged to help their mothers in the kitchen and household chores (Hogg 2010, 72). Historically, women's participation in politics and decision-making in Rwanda has been insignificant, especially when it comes to matters on a high level, even in the pre-colonial period; women in Rwanda played an important role in the country's rule through the Queen's institution (Mutumba & Izibiliza, 2005, 13).

1.2.2. WOMEN UNDER THE GENOCIDE.

Violence during the genocide was gender-based due to the fact that men and women were experiencing this violence in different ways. During the last months leading up to the genocide, the perpetrators included extremist propaganda about sexual stereotypes of Tutsi women, they were symbolized as beautiful, desirable and arrogant. There are also evidence that sexual harassment and rape, mainly of Tutsi women, increased during the months leading to the genocide (Pearson 2008, 17). Tutsi women were not the only victims of rape but also hutu women who had compassion on Tutsier and took them in and hid them from the perpetrators. Despite the agony and suffering, Rwandan women were still full of compassion, they took care of each other and their families. The women who survived the genocide immediately took care of the new orphans while the perpetrators took their parents' lives (Doan 2010, 38-39). These women under the genocide received no respect even when they were dying. They were like innocent lamb to slaughter but many women who survived the genocide tried to actively protect them as much as they could from death and injury (Doan 2010, 41).

The social tensions that occurred before the genocide were explained in some cases as a result of gender relations because women began to gain more freedom in the private and public spheres.

Gender-based violence in Rwanda remains a concern after the genocide. Although there is a general lack of statistical information on gender-based violence before, during and after the genocide, Amnesty International reports that there is evidence that the incidence of gender-based crime is now higher than before the genocide (Pearson 2008, 18).

1.2.3 WOMEN AFTER GENOCIDE.

Following the destructive genocide in 1994, there has been a great need to mobilize and guide the Rwandan people to rebuild their own lives while building their communities and the state itself at the same time. With so many men who passed away, women took the role of caregivers for their families and extended their traditional rewarding role, including the care of thousands of children who became orphans (Doan 2010, 3). Rwandan women have seen their socio-economic role change and expand over the years since the 1994 genocide. Through hard work and with many adversities/challenges, Rwandan women became the main actors in the construction of a broken society and economy, they also became peacekeepers and providers of their country and families.

Rwandan women in different leadership positions played a major role in mobilizing their fellow women by encouraging them to live together. They challenged each other to seek common solutions to their own problems and also the to state's struggles and challenges. Rwanda's government demonstrated its willingness to give women the confidence and responsibility to build the nation by appointing them to leadership positions and responsibilities in society (Mutamba & Izabiliza, 2005, 13-14).

Women's leadership was demonstrated by setting new structures that became known as national women's council. The National Women Council provided the platform for enabling women to become visible and able to contribute to the national debate and affect policy development and democratic processes in the country. It mobilized the other women to

participate in Gacaca courts, decentralization, poverty reduction processes, etc. (Mutamba & Izabiliza, 2005).

The election in 2003 gave unexpected results where women received so many votes in Rwandan Parliament and pushed the country to the top of the world's ranking of women's involvement in the government and drove Sweden to the second place. Thus, women accounted for 45.3 percent of all Rwandan parliamentarians. The promotion of women as decision-makers and advocates of gender issues was an important part of post genocide politics in Rwanda, already before the 2003 election (Mutamba & Izabiliza, 2005)

1.3 AIM AND PURPOSES

The purpose of my study is to describe and analyze the effects of gender equality on the younger generation of women in Rwanda today. I am looking at how the female young adults who are entrepreneurs or in leadership role experience gender equality in Rwanda.

- What stories do these young women convey about their experiences of being a female leader or entrepreneur in Rwanda and to what extent do they experience themselves as being equal to men?
- Are these women facing challenges today in relation to gender equality?

1.4 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In Clair Devlin and Robert Elgie's article *the effect of increased women's representation in parliament: the case of Rwanda* (2008), they investigated the consequences of the high representation of women in Rwanda's parliament. They came to a conclusion that even if female in Rwanda's parliament are more sought and prone to unravel women's issues and bring them forward, the high number of female representation in parliament barely affects policy output and results (Devlin and Elgie 2008, 237). There are many female in the

parliament who put women's issues into the light of politicians and they also have the tendency to put more focus on the economic development of women compared to their male colleagues. However some women do their best to integrate a perspective of gender in their work, regardless of the issue or their official field (Devlin and Elgie 2008, 244-249).

Ida Pettersson in 2010 conducted a minor field study about how women in Rwanda experience the effects of the law about gender based violence, in relation to their acting space(s) empowerment. By using feminist theories together with the methods of participation observation and semi-structured interviews, the researcher came to the conclusion that women have been positively affected by the new law. Women talked how they felt appreciated, recognized and protected. Female parliamentarians were often referred to in terms of helping women and defending their rights. However, her conclusion also includes a possible conviction that the new law itself does not prevent people from committing crimes (Pettersson 2010, 3).

These are some of the theses that have studied the aftermath of the Rwanda's genocide. They have focused on women's rights, the new law of gender based violence, the effects of the high number of women in parliament but none of them have taken a close look to see the impact all of these women empowerment talks are having on the next generation of women, how they are experiencing the gender equality today.

The most prominent example is Lisa A. Doan, who conducted a study of Rwandan women and genocide. She examined the effects of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the Rwandan women's social and political roles. She analyzed the social and political roles of the Rwandan women before, during and after the genocide, by comparing and contrasting these relative roles, and then drawing conclusions on how the genocide changed the roles of Rwandan women (Doan 2010, 3). She begins by describing and analyzing what roles and positions Rwandan women had before the genocide. Traditionally, the Rwandan women's role in society has been centered on its position as wife and mother, and their options and basic rights were limited (Doan in 2010, 4). She continues and discusses the

women's treatment and role during the genocide. Women were subjected to brutal physical and emotional violence by the extremist Hutus perpetrators of the genocide.

After the genocide, women in Rwanda took on other roles, in addition to those already assigned to them. Women in Rwanda have increased their participation percentage steadily in the state's matters since the genocide until today. In 2004, Rwandan women had 49% representation in parliament and took the lead in the world's ranking of gender equality (Doan 2010, 72). This one is very relevant for my study because it gives me perspective, more of a background to lay on and understand the difference between the women in the old Rwanda and the new one. It also gave me an understanding of the before, during and after genocide view, which is also a ground foundation for Rwanda's history.

Almgren's thesis has also explored to what extent the period after the second world war can be characterized as a formative stage in terms of gender-relations. She says that, although Sweden has always been a neutral country and non-belligerent, one can still find similarities in terms of development with other warring states. Under and after the war, a need of labor hire increased strongly, the male labor force was reduced, which in its turn led to a greater demand for female labor forces, the female tasks were divided into more areas of work than before the crisis. The thesis has proved that alliances and networks were formed across all class, organization and party boundaries with the purpose of mobilizing its members (Almgren 2006, 231). This mobilization was called "kvinnointresserna" and the goal was to gain power over the public social debate by trying to win a voice that is heard for a women-friendly interpretation of relevant social problems (Almgren 2006, 239). These women's organizations stretched themselves to women, men and the state. Women Activists demanded their full rights, not only in a formal way, but also in real life and they justified this as a social responsibility (Almgren 2006, 243)

This research gives us a different view, we go from Rwanda's genocide to also analyzing the aftermath of the second world war, we find similarities when it comes to women getting more space after a war, we find that the aftermath of the second world war and the genocide kind of pushed both countries to the same extent, where they had to recognize women's capacity and put them in charge.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Tea Korkeakunnas has done a qualitative study aimed at creating some sort of understanding for women in leadership roles in today's society and working life in Finland. She watched what experiences these women conveyed through personal stories, but also while studying women's ways of leading. The problem formulation in her study was that women are underrepresented on society issues such as boards and management positions, and also in the private sector. Women face many different obstacles than men, which in turn leads to the fact that women find it more difficult to make a career. She uses a theory developed by Dahl & Solberg that men and women are different, which means that their development of identity also differs. A female leadership is basically more rational in its approach to the outside world than men (Korkeakunnas 2012, 12).

It is harder for women to make a career and climb up in hierarchies. There is a "glass ceiling" that prevents women from climbing upwards in the hierarchies, Korkeakunnas writes in her thesis' results. When we get more women to a managing and leading position, it increases the opportunities for other women to climb into hierarchies too she goes on and say.

She believes that it is not impossible for women to climb into their careers' hierarchies, for example to get a leader's position, but it's rather harder for women than it is for men. She also notes that maternity is also one of the factors that makes it difficult for women to climb and do their careers because they are constantly facing such a situation where they have to choose between family and career until today (Korkeakunnas 2012, 43) .

The researcher found that women had different ways of leading that are different from men. Women tend to promote democracy, leadership, communication and cooperation, none of the women interviewed wanted to emphasize its position as men usually do. Quotas system is a solution, the author also concluded, she mentions that all female leaders she interviewed found that quota gives better chances for women to climb up in their careers. She also notes that the women in her study also agree that it is better when there is an equal distribution between men and women (Korkeakunnas 2012, 41).

Pitkin writes in her book *"the concept of representation"* about why representation is important and she also lights up the different forms of representation. Pitkin addresses in her book the theory of "descriptive representation" . The latter means that the representation must be like a "mirror" that reflects people's thoughts and opinions. It is based on the idea that the i.e we speaking about women's representation that the democratic bodies should mirror the population.

" Should an exact portrait, in miniature, of the people at large, as it should think, feel, reason and act like them. " argues John Adams, one of the theorists of Pitkin's book. This means that the representative ought to look a certain way, so that the rest of us could read what he stands for and who it represents as soon as we see him. Pitkin, in her turn, argues against the theory above and says that it is our representatives' activities and not their characteristics that really matter (Pitkin 1967, 61). Pitkin adds that the meaning of representation someone is acting in his or her name and being accountable to her or him for every action that might be done (Pitkin 1967, 8-9).

Michael Ignatieff's theory of the rights revolution is also relevant for my study and he reflects on these rights and looks at whether they provide an opportunity for unity in the state or if they create some sort of breakdown, division and separation within the state itself. He says that the rights revolution represent the minority, for example, women or homosexuals, but the majority feel threatened by these new rights (Ignatieff 2000, 114).

He goes on and says that these rights are not only for a certain group of people but they are for the benefit of the entire state. Although these rights are a profit that is to be applied by a particular group of people, that gain can indirectly be beneficial for everyone because the political process becomes more inclusive and make it easier to meet the general and public needs (Ignatieff 2000, 117-118).

Mike Verloo writes in his book “ *Multiple meanings of gender equality*” and talk about the issue of defining gender equality on a political basis. He talks about the battle the feminist are still fighting for the definition of “political” which according to the feminist should include both the “private” and “personal” issues, such as violences against women, reproductive rights and the sharing of care work, which has been excluded from the public sphere. In other words the feminist argue that the private and public sphere should all be considered as equally important and therefore political. This is based on the idea that the two spheres cannot be comprehended differently because of the role each domain plays in supporting and maintaining the other. The feminists stand on the mindset that the division of the private and public is a way of contributing to the reproduction and maintenance of gender inequality. Verloo gives the example that women are put in positions where they are paid less than men and perform most of the unpaid work care. The latter shows that the feminists claim that work care is not seen as a collective responsibility for both men and women or simply for the whole society, it is rather seen as an individual responsibility of women (Verloo 2005, 28-29).

All of these theories mentioned above are going to be used to analyze my collected data, the results obtained through the interviews.

1.6 METHODS

I have conducted a minor field study in Rwanda for 8 weeks, I only stayed in the capital Kigali where I got to implement my interviews. Kigali is a very living town, where stores almost never close, there are a lot of activities even at nights. The first surprise was the fact that I saw that the city was alive at night, women and children walking alone at nights, it brought a feeling of safety.

The collection of material consisted of five interviews with five female young adults, these women as mentioned are in a leading position or in entrepreneurship. Since I wanted to find entrepreneurs and young women in the leadership role, I had to search on the internet to see if I could find some information about some well-known young women whom I might be able to interview. Social media has also been a great tool to contact some of them because emails are sometimes not answered and it's also a way of seeing their work before i get to meet them. I have contacted before an organisation that works with women called “*women*

for women”, their main work is to promote women to be professional. When I landed in Kigali they were not answering the email, - I tried to call a couple of times with no answer. In the end I decided to go there directly, I met the president of the organisation and a lot of information about their work. Through this organisation I got in contact with few of the women behind the work that I also got an interview with later on.

I have chosen to do my thesis with a qualitative approach where interviews are central as a method of collecting my material and data. A qualitative survey is a scientific strategy that gives a lot of weight to words, for example a description of how an individual experiences and interprets his social reality. The research is based on examining and trying to understand the world through the interviewees' perspective (Bryman 2011, 40). He also writes that the most widely used method of qualitative research are interviews and the interview method is attractive because it carries with it a flexibility.

Qualitative interviews are like a conversation that evolves in different directions and gives us more knowledge about what the interviewer thinks is important and relevant (Bryman 2011, 412-413). This means that qualitative interviews have a certain tendency to be flexible because the researcher can adapt the interview according to the response of the respondent. The focus of the study itself can similarly follow the essential answers that arise during the interviews (ibid). In this study, the purpose is to analyze how the participants I interviewed have experienced gender equality, that is, to see and understand it from their perspective. With such interviews as data collection, respondents' experiences of gender equality become a sort of challenge for me as a researcher because I have to understand and right after find interpretation of what they mean.

I have chosen to define my selection of interviewees to only female young adults between 20-30 years old and these young women are in a leadership position or entrepreneurship. My choice of entrepreneurs and women in leading position was based on the fact that gender equality is a wide subject. As a delimitation I have chosen to limit the age of these young women and to focus more on one domain which is the working area and a little bit of

education related to the working domain. These women will be sharing their experiences with gender equality on their working field .

I came into contact with three of the interviewees by asking my acquaintances if they knew some young adults who fits my criterias. The two other contacts were obtained by using the so-called snowball selection, which means that one gets hold of other participants by getting the recommendations of the participants themselves (ibid, p.141). I was recommended by the participants about other people who would be fit to participate based on the purpose of the study. Using these two strategies, ie comfortability and snowball selection, became a very effective way of reaching the area I wanted to investigate. These strategies together became a very good combination in the process of making my selections. The other contacts i have gotten were selected through the so called “bekvämlighetsurval” which I have chosen to call the “ comfortability selection”. The selection has been made partly on the basis of the so called comfortability selection, partly according to snowball surveys. Comfortability selection is described by Trost (2010, p.140) as a strategic selection that has practical function in finding interviewees. He also describes how to find interviewees who are suitable for a study through convenience selection and how this can be done, for example, through ads in newspapers or estimates. The selection thus occurs via self-selection.

A step in the data collection process was to develop appropriate interview questions. I chose to use semi-structured interviews because half-structured questions provide a high level of freedom for the interviewee to formulate responses more freely than structured issues (Bryman 2011, p.415). Semi-structured interviews were therefore conducted with all participants. Bryman (2011) believes that follow-up questions are something that should be put during the interview in order to gain a greater understanding of the interviewer's perspective on what is being investigated or what the interview is about. Even Hjerm (2014) points out that the more open interview structure is, the more the researcher needs to work on succeeding in getting the essentials (ibid, p.156). With this in mind, I reviewed the questions and wrote down additional questions on some questions, but most of the follow-up questions arose naturally during interviews with respondents depending on what we received for answers. In the formulation of the questions I got help from Hjerm (2014). He claims that the interviewer can plan and prepare for an interview in different ways. The first step is to start

with background issues as an initial phase that helps the individual, both the interviewee and the interviewer to relax, warm up, feel comfortable with the interview situation and communicate. In the second step, the essential questions are introduced. Hjern (2014) emphasizes the importance of formulating questions as openly as possible and avoiding leading questions (ibid, p.157). I took advantage of that knowledge in order to formulate questions as well as possible. I avoided having hypothetical questions because of the risk of leading the respondents to my way of thinking. As gender equality is a major subject and can be perceived differently, I wanted to hear how respondents relied on the concept of integration and how they perceive it.

After formulating questions, I divided them into different thematic categories in an interview guide and came from three themes. During the interview, I started from a completed and prepared interview guide. I chose not to include too many questions as I didn't want to bother my participants with too many questions, which is important to consider (Trost 2010, p.71). During interviews, I used relatively often some of the nine examples of question categories that are part of many different interviews (Bryman 2011, pp. 422-423).

Examples of the categories that I used was the follow-up questions that the interviewer asks the interviewees to develop their answers and I also used clarifying questions such as "How did you do?" Or "How did you react?". Other categories I also used were indirect questions to help the interviewees to develop their own opinions and silence that shows the interviewee that they have an opportunity to fill out or reflect on an answer as well as interpretative questions.

One of the components that is important for a successful interview is the place where the interview will take place. Both the participant and the interviewer should feel safe and comfortable at the place chosen (Trost, p.65). I therefore allowed my participants to choose the interview space themselves, but sometimes it was difficult to find a place, which meant that I made suggestions so that I do not put all responsibility on the participants. 3 of the interviews took place at a cafe with no visitors, when it was in the morning and the

participant thought it was nice to talk at a cafe, and one interview took place at a respondent's office.

All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent. The use of recording function during qualitative interviews enables study executives to listen through the conversation repeatedly and analyze what has been said (ibid, p.74). I recorded the interviews with two mobiles in order to avoid possible technical mishaps that could happen during the interview or after. I did not take notes, but instead focused on the questions and answers and the interviewee. Tholander and Cekaite (2015, p.197) explain how important it is to transcribe qualitative interviews verbatimly without excluding details as they may be important during the analysis of empirin. I chose to transcribe all interviews in detail and then analyze them. In the transcription I have made the choice not to include spoken language (words such as "then" , "like"and "you know").

Concepts such as reliability and validity are of great importance in quantitative research. Many discussions have been conducted by qualitative researchers where they believed that concepts such as reliability and validity may be irrelevant to qualitative studies and other authors have also suggested that these terms need to be reviewed (Bryman 2011, p.351.354). Creswell (2013) also notes that there are many different perspectives and criticisms have been directed against qualitative research regarding the application of the terms validity and reliability. Therefore, some researchers have used other terms to establish credibility in studies (p. 202).

In this study, I have chosen to use terms such as credibility, reliability and an opportunity to strengthen and confirm. In order to strengthen the credibility of the study, I have assured that the investigation has been conducted in accordance with the rules that exist. I asked the respondents if they wanted to take part in final results so that they can confirm that I had understood their answers correctly. Bryman calls this technology for respondent's validation (Bryman 2011, p.355). In qualitative terms, the concept of trustworthiness is recommended

as an equivalent to reliability, which means that the researcher really describes all stages of the research process (Bryman 2011, p. 355).

During the course of the study I have kept this in mind and thus avoided creating an incomplete account of the phases that exist in the research process. Therefore, I have described and motivated the study's choice of method, choice of subjects, approaches, ethical considerations and the other phases in a clear way to strengthen the reliability of the study. The ability to strengthen and confirm means that the researcher acted in good faith, it should be clear that the researcher has not influenced on the implementation and conclusions of an investigation, for example, by his personal values or understanding (ibid).

Because my study has a qualitative approach, it may be harder to generalize the conclusion based on statistical opinion. As the study also consists of five people, it can make it difficult or impossible for us to apply the results to the entire population (see Creswell 2013, p.101). In order to generalize my study, I have tried to find coherence in other factors and investigate whether there are similar effects in the context based on collected data and theoretical frameworks (see Sohlberg & Sohlberg 2013, p.150). By finding coherence in the participants' perspectives and stories gender equality, I have tried to generalize the empirical study in relation to my theoretical starting points and also previous researches.

2. RESULTS & ANALYSIS.

I am starting by the presentation of the respondents, i have interviewed 5 young female adults, my goal was to find women between 20-30 years old. Here,I am going to give a small presentation of each young woman.

Gania is 24 years old, she is currently pursuing a master degree in business and administration. She is working as a business development manager in one of the biggest event companies in Rwanda.

Kate is a 26 years old Author and entrepreneur, she is currently pursuing a bachelor degree in communication and journalism. She has just released her first novel where she share her experience as a cancer survivor and in her free time she works with different NGOs as a cancer advocate.

Irina is also 26 years old , she is a wife and a mother of two. She holds a master of business administration degree (MBA) and is currently working as a country manager of an international Human resources company.

Gerda is 29 years old , she also holds an MBA and is the owner of a fastfood restaurant. She is also an influencer on the side that works with different projects in Rwanda.

Alda is 30 years old, she holds a degree in journalism and communication and is currently pursuing a master degree in international relations. She works as the head of operations for an NGO in Rwanda that advocates gender based balance and prevention.

2.1 BEING A WOMAN IN RWANDA

All respondents initially started by telling me about who they are, what they do for living, they gave me a little insight on what they spend most of their days doing. We then went straight to the main subject of how it is to be a young woman in Rwanda today. All of the ladies agreed on the fact that being a woman in today's reality in Rwanda is the best thing to be. They shared their perspective and definition on gender equality.

Kate expressed herself and said that for gender equality is being able to do anything, whether you are a man or woman you can still do it all without being restricted by gender. If a man can do it, I can also do it kind of thinking. For her gender equality is to be given an opportunity to do anything just as men, to not be limited by your gender to have access to everything without being stopped because you might have been born a certain way. Gerda goes on and say that gender equality is when a woman can also be the provider of her home just as men do. She lifts up the fact that in the Rwandan society women are being lifted and taken care of, more than men are. According to her it's not because they want to undermine the men but women have been undermined for so many years, the country is just giving back to the women their own rights. she emphasizes that it's not a discrimination on men but it's a way of giving back to the women what they have been deprived for so many years.

Gerda's expression of giving back to women what they have been deprived for so many years aligns to the thinking of Ignatieff (2000,114), When he argues about rights revolution, his analysis was to see if these new rights might bring all of the groups in state closer or if they will be tearing the country apart. In this case gender equality obviously can be good and bad according to who judges, the men might feel frightened and undermined while the women might experienced it as a way of gaining more ground, of getting back what should have been theirs in the first hand. Gania in her turn said that gender equality for her doesn't only represent women, but it's an equal opportunity for men as well. Her opinion was that each time she hears talking about gender equality there is always this conception that it means some type of female favoritism but for her equality is a positive change that is favorable for both men and women. Gania's statement confirms what Ignatieff talks about in his book, that this revolution does not only have negative effects that it promotes democracy instead of breaking apart the state. He claims that all of the battles fought by the minority would not merely enrich the group they belong to, but that it would be a win that would benefit everyone. An example he gave was the women who fought for their rights, it's not only for themselves but also for their children and even the men in their lives (Ignatieff 2000, 117-118). While these rights are a profit to be applied by a particular group, that profit can

indirectly benefit everyone because the political process becomes more inclusive and makes it easier to meet the general need.

Irina has also expressed her understanding of gender equality as such:

“I think that equality is giving opportunities to male and female and when the opportunities are given not to reduce a female to a less than. where I come from men and women on the same positions will still get different salaries, they are treated differently but with gender equality they should treat us all the same way. we still have a long way to go. Otherwise I think that in rwanda female are really given opportunities sometimes even beyond expectation.”

Irina means that gender equality is when all of the people despite their gender are treated the same in all positions and get the same outcome when they have provided the same services. She gave an example of her being a country manager of a Company of human resources and that the male in the company even though they are few , they get paid more than the women in the company. For her gender equality is not only about giving equal opportunities but also equal remuneration. Alda Also expressed herself similarly by saying that gender equality for her is the respect of rights regardless of the gender, in all kind of opportunities (jobs or education) men & women are equal. Verloo (2005, 28) gave the same example while arguing about the role of gender equality in a political sphere, he talked about how men and women are not given the same payment and that certain tasks are also reserved for women and that the latter is one of the great contribution to the gender inequality.)

The respondents have share their experiences of being a woman in Rwanda and they all lifted the fact that the government have put in place strategic measure to give the women in the country the possibility of evolving as much as possible.

Kate was so excited to share her experience and mentioned that she felt like being young and a woman was the best thing that happened to her in this new generation in Rwanda. She said

that she always tells people that Rwanda is one of the best place to be two things, young and a woman , because when she was starting to follow her dreams and start her own business, she was very much supported by women empowerment organisations. Other people supported the idea of her starting her own company and 80% of the reason was because i was young and a women. There are a lot of women empowerment groups and it made it a very exciting journey for her. She went on and said that most of the women in Rwanda are proud of being rwandans and women. Gerda shared the same mindset as Kate, she feels like Rwanda is a changed country that if she were to compare the Rwanda her grand mother talks about and the one she is living in today , she is very proud of the progress.

“In this country we are in, rwanda is putting women out there, we get a lot of opportunities than we won’t get often in other countries. Women here voice their opinions, if you look around in public or private sector there are a lot of opportunities to do so. some women have grasped their opportunity and they even voice the opinion of others. The fact that they are not shy about whatever is going on in their life and they embrace their work environment sets the ton and a platform for other women to come and join.” says Irina.

Both Alda & Gerda expressed themselves in a similar way, They said that with a lot of women put in high positions, in the parliament and other public sectors, other women have been inspired that they can do it all as well. All of the respondents emphasized that Rwanda is different than the other countries, they are all fully aware that this country is doing good things for their women. Irina talked about the platform given for women and by women, she stated that when other women are rising and are talking for the sake of all women, it inspires other women to rise up and find their place in the world. Korkeakunnas (2012, 43) argues that When we get more women to the leading and managing positions, it increases the opportunities for other women to climb up into hierarchies. Her theory matches all of the stories told by these young women about being a female in Rwanda. They all talked about being represented, about having other women speaking on their behalves which confirms that having women in higher positions will pave the way for the other women to join.

Pitkin's bok (1967,8-9), theory of "descriptive representation" is also accurate in this case, these women feel represented and therefore inspired because they recognize themselves through the representers, the great women in Rwanda's parliament, the women empowerment organisations are like a mirror to the younger generation of women in Rwanda. The latter results to the women feeling like they can do anything, the young women are brave enough to embrace their gender and dream big because the representation matches the population.

Gerda also gave me an example of one of the things the system has put in place for the women, they are for example some banks that gives a special loan to girls more than men. That's how she started her business, she went to the bank and presented her idea and women were the first ones to be granted a loan because of the gender equality. Korkeakunnas (2012, 41) also concluded in her study that Quotas system was the solution to putting women in a higher position, this system gives women better chances of climbing into their careers. Rwanda has obviously put in place such a system where they implemented rules that would help this specific group(in this case women) to also climb up, to start their own companies and simply find their places in the Rwandan society.

2.2 EDUCATION AND WORK

Both Men and women are equally allowed to go to school and get any educational level according to my respondents. Gerda says that as a woman she always knew that she could study, she gave her own example, she says that obtaining her master's degree wasn't enough she also was aiming for a PHD, because she has always known that she could get as far as she would want. Alda seconds her by saying that for her getting a degree has never been optional, but it has always been a must have. She also mentioned that she is also pursuing a master's degree in international relations.

Gerda also said that the difference between male and female , when it comes to education used to be huge before. She underlines that the culture is still a challenge, because the men tend to do sciences and IT while women do social work. When it comes to education the opportunities are the same for everyone, some of the programs tend to have more male than

female but it's a matter of choice, lately we've seen more female going into IT sector and engineering. Equality when it comes to education male and female have the very same opportunity says Irina. Opportunities are the same according to her, she says that it hasn't always been like that in Rwanda but in her generation they haven't known a lot about a gender discrimination when it comes to education. Kate also agrees that the opportunities to attend school are the same for the male and female according to the government and the system. She also mentioned that there is a difference between the system and the culture, some of the families especially the ones in rural areas might still have an old mentality when it comes to education. Gania expresses herself in this way:

“when it comes to education , of course if you go to the rural areas some families still have that mentality of “ boys have to go to school and the girls have to stay home and cook. “But I have heard of so many organisations , they are NGOs that are breaking up that culture. They teach the parents to send both the boys and the girls to school and the government has also put a punishment for parents who don't send their girls to schools but only send their boys. There is a sanction for that too.

Gania in agreement with all the interviewees talks about the change in Rwanda, they acknowledge that going to school for girls haven't always been on the table but they also talk about it as a far away phenomenon, that didn't affect any of the ladies on a personal level. In the previous research done by Lisa A. Doan (2003,4) , she closely examined the roll played by women in Rwanda's society before genocide, and she underlines that they were set up for household activities, being mothers and wives. Her research shows that women got to be seen after genocide and took on new rolls than the ones they had before, they had to step up and lead, build and save their country , fellow women and children (Doan 2010, 3). As Gania expressed herself by saying that Rwanda today is breaking that old culture and they are sanctions for the families that still send only their boys to school is also a proof that women are being pushed by the system to also get an education.

When it comes to work , the government has enforced a lot of women in power, women in jobs and there are so many CEOs who are women and they have created that habit that even

when the international companies come to establish their own company, they also feel the pressure of hiring women and put them in great position in their work field. Alda says that she feels like there is more favor on women than men. Rwanda has understood that the women have been oppressed for so long, now they are paying back their debts and that they are even overdoing it. According to her Rwanda has established a system that promotes women to get into great positions in their careers. She calls it a habit and a lifestyle, women in Rwanda work hard and that system has also put a pressure on foreigner companies to also hire some women for the high positions. Gerda was not against the conception of Alda but she also wanted to clarify some of the issues, she underlined that Rwanda has made it a very long way, it has put its name on the map when it comes to gender equality but she argues that her dear country is still a work in progress by saying that people in Rwanda are starting to understand though it is still a struggle, that it's not like the old times when the fathers were working and mothers stayed at home. Today in Rwanda both men and women get to work and it's a big change they have had. She says that in her mind she couldn't see her see herself being a stay at home mother because of the mindset she grew up with, she saw her mother work hard, she was also going to be as hardworking and get one the highest educational level.

Listening to what Gerda had to say, it was in agreement with some of the theories I have chosen to use for this study. The first one is Pitkin's theory about representation where she says that the representation should be like a mirror, it should reflect the population and the ones represented should also be able to recognize themselves (Pitkin 1967,60-61). In this case Gerda talks about seeing her mother working hard and it planted a seed in her, she talked about her mother because she recognizes herself in her, as a woman, as a mother she might also be.

Kate in her turn mentioned that she has always felt like she could do anything as a woman, she lost her parents to the genocide and she was raised by her grand mothers and aunts. She shared her story and said that she has never seen a man doing anything for them in their household, the ladies raising her worked to get their own money, they started their own businesses and it planted a seed in her. Kate has never felt the absence of a man either

because she couldn't tell the difference, the women in her home were doing it all and she always knew that she can also do and have it all as a woman.

Kate's story aligns to the theory of Verloo (2005, 28) when he states that the public and private sphere cannot be understood without the one or the other. Kate was formed but what can be conceived as a private and personal sphere, where she saw the female in her family step up and it also led her to now be a successful writer in Rwanda and a business owner which becomes a benefit in a public sphere.

We can also find similarities in Almgren's (2006, 231) research about the Swedish women after the world war 2. The researcher talked about the need of labor hire and with all of the men gone, the women took over and started to get assigned in different areas than before. Rwandan women have been pillars in building back the society and the country, the representation of women in parliament and different work areas have also been a foundation for the new generation according to my interviewees. These young women have all agreed on the fact that they have all seen great female leaders and entrepreneurs, CEO's of great companies that have inspired them to also get where they are today. Another great factor that came back a lot in this chapter of work and Education, is the great system put in place by the government that pushes women to also get an education and also a chance of getting great jobs as men do.

2.3 CHALLENGES OF RWANDAN WOMEN TODAY

Rwanda has been good to their women but it hasn't been easy, some challenges arose and most of them are a cultural clash. All of the respondents have mentioned that culture has been a hinder and an obstacle for the gender equality to fully take place. Irina expressed herself and said that she has felt limited because of the fact that women have to justify every move that they take, whatever risk she takes as a female leader someone else is going to question it, and that is somehow a barrier. She also talked about the natural responsibilities that limit women as well, let's say for instance if she has to travel for a whole month for business, while pregnant it's also a challenge. It all blocks women sometimes in their careers, for

example as an HR firm sometimes they have clients, who precisely say that they don't want women, that they would prefer male in order not worry about their new employee getting a maternity leave. Irina here talked about an inside issues both as woman and as an HR firm, women are perceived as a burden in few cases, when a company has to hire a women it feels like taking a risk or simply more costs on the company just in case they get pregnant. Irina also said that the hardest thing with being a female leader is when you want to balance both family and work, it's not possible to give it all a hundred percent. You either tend to give you children more time than your work or vice versa. She talked about the balance as one of the biggest changes she had to face as she stepped into her new position, bringing her work home was one of the things she felt guilty for and she constantly has to fight to find balance.

Korkeakunnas (2012,43), agrees with what irina stated, through her theory that says that it is not impossible for women to climb into great position but harder than it is for men. She mentioned also that one of the barriers women have is maternity, women are constantly having to choose between work and family. This shows that this cultural or traditional habit that women are made to be mothers and caregivers in the family still is a struggle despite the great development and change Rwanda has made. Women are put in high places more than ever before, the chances are given for them to get a career but the old mentality is still a challenge indirectly. This leads to what also Verloo(2005, 29) argues in his book, about the feminist fight of making the private and personal issues of women political. Though maternity might seem as personal as it can be, it also affects the public work which should also be considered if women are also going to equally climb up in their careers. In this case quotas system might be the solution as Korkeakunnas (2012,41), concluded in her study, it would give women a fair chance and opportunity to get to their goals and dreams, because of the equal distribution between men and women.

Gerda also gave a typical example of the harsh words she heard from a lot of people right before she started her business. She said, that there are some fields that you still cannot find a lot of women in it. She owns a restaurant and it's something that's normally done by men. They told her that she won't make it because it's tough, she'll have to think like a man and she had to fight to prove them wrong. In the rwanda culture people tend to remind her that

she might not get a husband if she is too successful, or earn a lot of money. The culture requires that a woman has to be a certain way for her to get married, in Gerda's case it's not to be too successful so that she won't have more success than the men she'll meet. As mentioned before the culture has been one of the biggest challenge these women still have to face. Lisa A. Doan (2003,3-4) talked about the image and the role of a rwandan woman, before and under genocide. It was to care for the family, to get married and take care of their home. Women after the genocide they were given other tasks according to the system and the development taking place in Rwanda but through Gerda's we can see that women are to be successful as long as they are not more successful than men.

Ignatieff (2000,114) also talks about how the majority is threatened when the minority is claiming their own rights, because they are not used to the change. In this case the majority are the men and the old ways of thinking and the minority are the women claiming their rights. From the majority's perspective, the rights revolution are somehow breaking the state apart because of the very feeling that they do not recognize the state they once had, which means for them that the state is breaking apart. The rights revolution authorized this minority (female) group it's rights, at a price to counteract the majority and it is natural for the majority to think that if they are weak then the state is weak. The minority has gained a profit that is the recognition of their rights, which in turn leads the majority to take a look around and not recognize itself and that is what arose the idea that their country becomes more difficult to control. The rights revolution changes the majority, which means that it also breaks the association that holds the state together. Ignatieff's theory gives an explanation to the challenges these women are facing, the state wants them to go forward in their career, the system put in place strategies to give them their own right but the women are rejected when they get too successful, or when they start taking new territories, for example in Gerda's case owning a restaurant as a young woman.

The male in the country or even the other's who once knew Rwanda cannot recognize their own state, and they are afraid of the change even though it might be for the profit of the whole state. That in its turn leads to making sure that women are always below the men, when it comes to salary, which areas they work in and how high they can climb in their careers.

Another accurate issue was given by Irina in this way:

“Sometimes there are several tasks that are left for women, for instance it would be good to know that men can also take a paternity leave to go and care for the family. The system and culture are the same, women get 3 months of maternity leave and the men only 5 days. This means that taking care of the child is a task that is more given to the women than the men. There are few women that would like to go back to work earlier, especially when they are not breastfeeding and it’s impossible in our culture because men cannot take care of kids. The conception or the stereotype is that the men brings the money home and the women takes care of the families. I am hoping that over the years this culture will change, the men are getting more involved , I see them walking their kids without the moms on sundays and it’s something good.”

Rwanda still has a long way to go when it comes to implementing all of the right tools and strategy for the men and women to be equal in all of the needed areas. According to the Rwandan culture, men are unable to do certain things on their own such as taking care of the children or some of the households activities.

Verloo(2005, 29) in his book , he writes about reproductive rights and sharing care work as excluded from the public sphere, these domains and areas have been labeled as private and personal even though they do affect the public directly and indirectly. As the feminist argues according to Verloo’s book, we can not talk about the private without the public and vice versa. Irina’s saying about the men being able to take paternity leave in Rwanda would be a great change and a very huge step into implementing the equality fully but as long as these issues are conceived as just private and personal the equality might not take place fully.

Alda gave also an example of the culture clash and talked about how she felt limited when they are having some field work or trips and she gets to stay behind when they are working late , because girls are not supposed to work at nights. It’s not safe for them according to the Rwandan culture and tradition. She talked about the late night curfew that applies to all the Rwandan girls who still care about the culture and that culture also plays a huge role in some

of the jobs they do. As Alda has mentioned not being able to experience her field work at anytime just like men do makes her feel like less than and it also stops her growth as an employee.

All the respondents have shared their own stories and experiences about the challenges they have met as young female entrepreneurs and leaders. They shared different challenges according to the different fields they work in, which gave me a clear view of the different challenges women meet in their fields today.

Gania talked about how hard it is for her to be a young woman in her position (business development manager), she gave examples of how she can be easily rejected by the clients by saying that they would like to meet the boss assuming that her boss might necessarily be a man. Sometimes she goes to meet clients and they assume directly that she is the assistant because of her gender and age. They do not think that she might be the one making all of the decisions, which in its turn puts pressure on her to perform very well in order to prove them that she is fit for the job. She went on and said that although women might not be seen as capable, they are more fit to do the job she does, because women tend to pay more attention to details than men which makes them the best at what they do.

This can be interpreted as Korkeakunnas (2012, 12) says in her study that the obstacles met by women differs from the men, many of them are only met by women which becomes a setback in the building of their careers. Women find it really hard to build a career more than men. Gania's experience shows that these challenges and obstacles occurred just because she is young and a woman. The fact that some people still find comfort in having a male manager and leader can also be interpreted as Ignatieff (2000, 114) says that the majority doesn't like the change, these new rights of revolution are bringing into the country a great change and the feeling of not recognizing their old ways and their old country, leads to the rejection of the women in the leading roles, managing positions or entrepreneurs.

Alda works as a supervisor of the field work, she records the gender based balance cases and dialogues about gender base balance prevention.

She expressed herself and said that it's not easy because men are not comfortable when a young woman is teaching them about gender based balance & prevention. Sometimes they tell her that they want a man so that they can be comfortable telling him their problems and current challenges. They also thought that she didn't have enough knowledge to teach any of the men, just because she is young and a woman. She talked about how hard it is to be taken seriously as a young woman and that the men in rural areas were really hard on the women. As a young woman she had to shout to be heard, she had to prove them that she was carrying knowledge with her, which would in its turn catch their attention.

She goes on and talks about another challenge that other respondents also agreed on, that It's very hard to separate emotions and the work in everything she does. She tends to be overwhelmed with emotions and compassion while leading. Which can affect her decisions especially when she has to make a quick decision in a vulnerable and emotional work environment as hers. What she meant with this, is that she tend to lead with the heart, it's hard for her to keep her work as a profession but it's the kind of profession that she easily takes home with her.

Korkeakunnas (2012,11) talks about theory developed by Dahl & Solberg that men and women are different in the development of their identity. They claim that men and women leadership differs a lot. A female leadership tend to be more rational than men in it's approach, female also tend to lead with more democracy and communication.

Korkeakunnas has found that none of the women she interviewed wanted to emphasize their position, to exercise their power as men do. The interviewees have also agreed with this theory by saying that their way of leading differs, they put heart, compassion and emotions while leading which can also be a challenge because men do not lead the same way. Alda gave a great example that she has to shout and prove to the men in rural areas that she has something to bring to the table, that she carries with her knowledge and capacity. Gerda also as mentioned earlier had to prove to the society that she could be a woman and start her own restaurant though they told that she will have to think like men do. The female leadership is obviously a new way of leading in Rwanda, another touch of leadership that is not common

yet and can easily be rejected. The softness of the women, their way of acting rational might be taken for a weakness as Alda has said, she had to fight to be taken seriously in her work field.

Kate in her turn had another way of seeing things, she is an author and an entrepreneur with a lot of new projects on her hands. Her experience in her field is totally different than the others. She said that she thinks that her challenges are general challenges and that she couldn't say that she has specifically met them because she is a woman. She talked about the challenges she faces in her field and underlines that she has never felt like the challenges were faced because of her gender. Her challenges were directly linked into her field, men and women were facing the very same obstacles and hinder.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of my study has been to analyze through the story conveyed by young Rwandan female adults about their experiences with gender equality. As it's well known Rwanda has more women in the parliament than men, which has led Rwanda to one of the greatest positions when it comes to gender equality. My aim was to watch closely how the new generation experiences this equality on a daily basis. Based on the stories told by all the respondents, it was easy for me to notice that all of the women were proud of being women in Rwanda. As soon as the interviews started I could see that they all knew that Rwanda is the best place in the world to be a woman, they were conscious of the great work done by the country through establishing a system that would also push women to build careers and get degrees.

The results have been that women are comfortable with being women, they feel like so many doors are open for them to the extent that some of them mentioned that Rwanda might be taking care of their women more than men. Finding a job lately has been easier for women more than ever before, the women are taking more space and invading new sectors. I have interpreted the confidence of these women as a result of a great representation and a good support system as some of the theories named before has confirmed. By representation I mean all of the women who represent them in the high places have paved the way for these young women to feel like they can also do anything. The good support system is from the government, it has put in place strategies that covers women and also creates space for them to also sit on the table. One of the strategies I have named above, it is about making sure that some of the seats in the Rwanda's parliament are reserved for women. This can also be comprehended as the quotas system that Korkeakunnas (2012, 41) has concluded as the best solution for the women to be given more chances to reach their goals. The interviewees kept mentioning the same factor on which they all agreed, that Rwanda has made it possible for the women to climb, they are protected and supported by the government which I have come to conclude as the foundation of the equality taking place.

Another factor that was also of great importance as the respondents have said in their stories is the challenges they are still facing even though the country have made major changes and great steps into development. Rwanda has made a great impact in the world with the well known gender equality but it also carries with it tradition and culture. According to the results most of the challenges these women are facing are a cultural crash due to the fact that women in the old rwandan society were not assigned to do anything else that take care of their homes and families. This new wave of women working as much as men do, providing for themselves and filling other functions have been rejected by some of the population. What I could conclude through the stories is that the rejection is not based on the fact that women should not work, but rather on women not getting too much space and getting way too successful than some men. The rwandan culture consists of the mentality that there is a special place for men and another for women. In this case the women's place is below the men, which in its turn lead to making women feel like they should not be better than men, they should not earn more than men do, because it is the men's job to provide for the family. One of the examples given in the results was that one of the interviewees was told that she might not get a husband if she becomes too successful. Based on this example we can notice that a part of the rwandan society still thinks that getting married for a woman is more important than having a great career after all. Women are still stamped for marriage and household activities no matter how successful they are in their careers.

In conclusion, Rwanda has made a big difference for it's women, this younger generation have been fully aware that being a woman is not being less than. The representation of women in high positions have had a good impact on the next generation and have inspired them to dream big. Though Rwanda has come along way it is also a work in progress, challenges are still there, the work is not done. Women are still claiming their rights in certain areas, such as reproductive rights women and men are treated differently when it comes to the care of their children. A mother doesn't have the opportunity of going back to work early so that the father stays at home with their children. Some tasks are still for men and other for women and I have also come to conclude that such mentality is one of the keys and contribution to promoting inequality between men and women.

A realisation that i personally have made is that due to the limitations i had to do while conducting this study, i limited myself to analyzing gender equality through work and education. These two sectors seem to be the most successful when it comes to gender equality, they are the areas that the government has started on while establishing the gender equality mentality Then my question is would gender equality be found as high and well established in other areas such in households, in mariages, in the culture and tradition.

All of my interviews was also made in Kigali which is the capital of Rwanda people here are open minded, multicultural, they have traveled and have a different perspective. If i was to do the same study in rural areas would I get different answers? I might also find that the challenges also differs. The results of the challenges met by these women today has also awakened another thought in me, I found that most of the challenges are related to the culture. I wonder if gender equality is even a right the women in other areas of Rwanda care about, they might not know better and therefore reject the new wave coming their way.

As a Suggestions for continued research, I would like to compare the gender equality experience from the point of view of women living in kigali and those in rural areas. I would also want to learn more about the importance these women see in gender equality.

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