

# **Threatening & Appropriate Bodies in Nation-building: Paths to World's First Female Parliamentary Majority in Post-Genocide Rwanda**

av

**Christopher Kayumba**

Akademisk avhandling för filosofie doktorsexamen i Freds- och Utvecklingsforskning, Institutionen för globala studier, Göteborgs universitet, som med tillstånd av Samhällsvetenskapliga fakultetsnämnden läggs fram för offentlig granskning tisdagen den 18 maj 2010, klockan 14.00 i sal 420, Annedalsseminariet, Campus Linné, Seminariegatan 1.



**UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
SCHOOL OF GLOBAL STUDIES  
Peace and Development Research**

## Abstract

Christopher Kayumba (2010). *Threatening & Appropriate Bodies in Nation-building: Paths to World's First Female Parliamentary Majority in Post-Genocide Rwanda*. PhD thesis, Peace and Development Research, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Box 700, SE 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden.

Language: English with a summary in Swedish

ISBN 978-91-628-8117-7

Internet-id: <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/22216>

While Rwanda first attracted the world's attention for the genocide that took place in 1994, 16 years later the country is capturing interest because it now has the highest number of women in its parliament than in any other country in the world. After the first post-genocide legislative elections, in 2003, about 49% of elected legislators in the lower house of Parliament were women. Five years later, women constitute over 56% of elected legislators following the subsequent elections in September 2008. This success of women at the ballot box is unprecedented in the history of representative and electoral politics anywhere.

Women politicians' success in elections is so far attributed to the 30% reserved seats for women. However, the electoral outcome for women far exceeds this constitutional quota. This thesis, through methodological triangulation explores the factors and conditions that can help us develop a better contextual understanding of how and why women managed to perform relatively better at elections. Following an explorative and descriptive approach, I seek to understand and explain electoral outcome for women through the subjective understandings and interpretations of women politicians who experience, affect and are affected by the electoral process. I also learn from political party leaders as gatekeepers of who gets to represent parties in elections and why they select the candidates that they do. This approach is supplemented by reading documentary evidence such as electoral laws, published works and dominant elite discourse as they are discerned from political speeches addressing how presence in sites of power is constructed and justified.

Overall, findings show that women's success at the ballot box is neither accidental nor a consequence of one single factor such as quotas. Instead, the high numbers of women in Rwanda's Parliament can be understood to be a consequence of varied factors and conditions embedded in the country's violent political past and the recent socio-political changes driven by the elite. In this thesis, I suggest that this change, where the dominant political elite are trying to shape the political environment away from the Tutsi-Hutu politicised and dichotomised differences towards commonness under the politics of gender equality and homogenising political categories through the rubric of *Rwandan-ness* can also be better understood when one comprehends the effects of the war and genocide. This also calls for comprehending the historical, political and institutional contexts within which electoral politics takes place as well as how political power is organized and legitimised rather than focusing on one single element such as reserved seats. In this regard, the role of dominant elite discourse in constructing and justifying presence in sites of power is highlighted.

Keywords: women, opportunity structures, representation, presence, war, genocide, political systems, electoral systems, gender, nationalism, ethnicity, ideology, missing men, reserved seats, quotas, parliament