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Elite patriarchal bargaining in post-genocide Rwanda and post-apartheid South Africa: women political elites and post-transition African parliaments

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2016

http://hdl.handle.net/10539/21339

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ABSTRACT

This study comparatively interrogates the representative parliamentary politics of women political elites in the sub-Saharan African states of post-transition Rwanda and South Africa. It analyses the relationship between women political elites and gender equality outcomes through the theoretical framework of the pre-supposed positive relationship that is said to exist between high levels of women's descriptive representation and women's substantive representation. It specifically explores this relationship through the lens of legislative outcomes passed in each state. In South Africa, this legislation takes the form of the 1998 Recognition of Customary Marriages Act and in Rwanda, the 2008 Gender-based Violence Act. This study locates the outcomes of women's parliamentary politics in these states to the different articulation of elite patriarchal bargains negotiated by women political elites within the opportunities and constraints of parliamentary institutional contexts and the political parties represented in these regimes. I show that the higher the degree to which a ruling political party needs to privilege and emphasise women's interests in the reproduction of political power and legitimisation of its own authority, the more favourable the terms of the elite patriarchal bargains that women political elites tacitly negotiate within political parties will be for pursuing gender equality legislative outcomes in patriarchal institutional contexts. I illustrate how political institutions located in the state never present conclusive gains or losses for women and gender equality but are contextually ambiguous and contradictory in the ways that they foster representation and locate gendered political accountability.

Word Count (excluding footnotes and bibliography) – 99 872 words