

The Shifting Balance of Gender Roles in Rwanda, and the World

I'm listening to an Invisibilia podcast called "Outside In". So far it is an okay podcast, but there are some underlying gender ideas that I find problematic, but that should be somewhat obvious in its own presentation to someone with a critical mind.

It presents Rwanda's gender dynamics pre- and post- civil war. It shows how it was a strong "patriarchy" before the civil war, but in the civil war a very high disproportionate amount of men were killed off. After the genocide/civil war over 70% of the left over population were women. From there, society's gender dynamics radically shifted to offer women more political and economic leverage.

An interesting thought to consider: pre-civil war-would you prefer to be a woman or a male in Rwanda? Which gender is more privileged?

I tend to be anti-ideological towards gender issues in a given society. I believe societies respond to the actual incentives they are faced with and usually respond in such a way that makes sense. The only thing that can stand in the way of the natural shifting incentives is rigid ideology. Today we see the rigid ideology of Islam in the Middle East and feminism in the West, for example, but that is a bit of an oversimplification.

What I see presented about Rwanda pre-civil war is a natural gender balance. Higher risk and higher reward for men, lower risk and lower reward for women. Both genders are stuck in very rigid roles due to scarce resources. Physical strength is a very strong resource with high risk and reward in a more tribal pre-industrial society.

After the warfare occurred, radically different incentives occurred. With women outnumbering men more than 2-1, everything needed to change.

Would you rather be a woman or man post-civil war? Women have higher risk and reward with a vastly smaller chance of being a stay-at-home-mom (SAHM), finding a mate or being taken care of. Men have vastly lower risk, responsibility and a vast dating market.

Without rigid ideology and a government to enforce it, the gender dynamics radically shift, but I tend to think they don't shift to be better or worse for a given gender-only better or worse given a person's sensibilities.

What is wonderful about abundance and decentralized culture is that it gives us the opportunity to have flexibility within gender roles. If a woman wants to be taken care of and be a SAHM, hey get that opportunity; if they want to work and pursue career ambitions, they have that option. Men also get more options.

Rigid gender dynamics are a result of high scarcity and, to a lesser extent, centralized culture. It is rigid for both genders. While we will often see men have political and economic power in these societies, they also have vastly more risk. I tend to believe, most women in these societies are happier taking the low risk / low reward side while men are happier to take the high risk / high reward end.

The men who die or fail to attract a mate get the worse deal of them all, but people don't care enough about these men to even regard them in the equation of gender dynamics in pre-industrial societies. Our culture compares the status of women in general to the men who achieve places of success among men. In that analysis, of course it looks sexist. I just think it is too simplistic and inaccurate.