The Cooperative Role Model

A study of the Role Model Effect in rural agricultural cooperatives in Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

With the highest representation of female parliamentarians in the world, Rwanda is a frequently reoccurring case when studying the impact of increased female representation. In this debate, little attention has been given to symbolic representation and particularly to the concept of the Role Model Effect. To bridge this gap, the purpose is to provide insights to how the Role Model Effect operates in a rural, non-quota context, separated from high politics. Consequently, the thesis seeks to examine how female board members in Rwandan agricultural cooperatives affect the willingness of female members to obtain board positions. The data was collected through a qualitative field study where 44 respondents in three different cooperatives in Rwanda were interviewed. Respondents were chosen through a combination of strategic selection and snowball sampling. The thesis found that the Role Model Effect required two conditions to be fulfilled before it could be manifested: geographical proximity and trust. If these criteria were met, both female board members and female leaders of lower ranks were found to explicitly and implicitly increase the willingness to obtain leading positions among female members, thus altering ruling gender roles.

Key words: Role Model Effect, agricultural cooperatives, Rwanda, symbolic representation, leadership, gender roles
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1. INTRODUCTION

“Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.”

– Sustainable Development Goal 5 (UN A, 2019).

Having taken first place from Sweden in 2003 (Longman, 2006), Rwanda has the highest representation of female parliamentarians in the world (61 percent 2018) (IDEA, 2019). This can partially be accredited to the constitutionalised gender quota, that since 2003 reserves 30 percent of the seats in legislative branches on all levels to women (Constitution, Rwanda, 2003 article 9, point 4). The introduction of gender quotas has been claimed to have “reversed the colonial and postcolonial gender paradigm, where men worked in the public sphere while women managed the domestic sphere and remained financially dependent on men” (Burnet, 2011:329). However, this reversal is contended to have mainly benefitted urban, middle-class and elite women, whereas rural women did not profit from these improvements (ibid.). Meanwhile, agriculture occupies 76 percent of all Rwandan women (NISR, 2018). In Rwanda, a common way for farmers to mobilise is through agricultural cooperatives because of their significant benefits (see section 3.2). Nonetheless, despite the clear majority of women engaged in the agricultural sector, less than half (42 percent) of female farmers are members in an agricultural cooperative (Gender Monitoring Office, 2017). In addition, within the cooperatives, men still occupy the majority of decision-making posts (58 percent) whereas women get subordinate positions (ibid.).

Following the implementation of the legislative gender quotas, Rwanda is a highly debated case in the discussion about representation of women. Thus far, the main focus has been on parliament level and the debate of descriptive and substantive representation (see section 2.2). Nevertheless, the fact remains that most Rwandan women are farmers and live in rural contexts, far away from the political epicentre. Although agricultural cooperatives do not adhere to the gender quota regulations, the discussion about representation is yet of relevance, considering the vast majority of women that work in agriculture and how relatively few of those that possess a decision-making position within the cooperatives. Whilst a substantial amount of literature has been written about the importance of more women on leading positions, less has been written about how this can be achieved and more specifically, what renders women to want to attain such positions. It is therefore of interest to investigate if women on leading positions have any influence on other women’s propensity to also assume such a position. In other words, do leading women act as inspirations to other women?

1.1 PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Based on a qualitative field study, this thesis coherently with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 examines how the representation of women on leading positions within Rwandan agricultural cooperatives impacts female members’ willingness to obtain positions of leadership, which will be done through the theoretical prism of the Role Model Effect (RME) (see chapter 2). Thus far, previous literature of the RME is scarce. The earlier literature that does exist, treats it in the context of symbolic representation and has largely focused on (1) the RME from a
quantitative perspective, thus lacking a deeper understanding of how the effect works as a mechanism; (2) the RME and symbolic representation between national parliamentarians and the citizens, i.e. at macro level; (3) symbolic representation as a consequence of gender quotas. In contrast, the explicit purpose of this study is to empirically examine the RME in a rural, non-quota context, separated from high politics, where the role models are cooperative leaders rather than politicians and the recipients of the effect are the members instead of citizens. This takes the RME from macro to micro level. By studying the RME qualitatively at a micro level and separated from quotas, the thesis brings new perspectives to how the RME operates in a rural context, thus contributing to a growing body of literature on symbolic representation.

The research question for this thesis is:

*How do female board members in Rwandan agricultural cooperatives affect female members’ willingness to obtain board positions?*

1.2 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

The following chapter outlines the RME and its theoretical foundation, followed by an overview of previous research. Chapter 3 provides a contextualisation of the thesis whereas chapter 4 presents the methodology, including an exposition and motivation of the chosen case, the research design, operationalisations, data collection and limitations. The results are presented and continuously analysed, followed by a discussion in chapter 5. The concluding chapter 6 summarises the thesis and its findings and answers the research question and includes an outlook on future research.
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of the thesis is the Role Model Effect (RME). This concept is commonly associated with the theoretical sphere of representation, more specifically with symbolic representation. This chapter aims to firstly, present the RME and situate it in the theoretical context of representation and symbolic representation; secondly, present empirical evidence covering interpretations of symbolic representation and the RME thus far.

2.1 THE ROLE MODEL EFFECT

Whereas a unanimous canonical definition of the RME is lacking, it has been described as “the visible presence of women in public life [that] raises the aspirations of other women, the ‘girls can do anything’ effect.” (Sawer, 2000:362). The RME is commonly referred to as an expression of symbolic representation and as a possible outcome of gender quotas. In that context, this effect has been seen as when women raise the self-esteem of other women and encourage them to follow in the same footsteps, as a result of increased female representation. (Phillips, 1995). Similarly, in Rwandan society, it has previously been claimed that “… increased representation of women in the political system [has] encouraged women to take leading roles in other areas of Rwandan society” (Burnet, 2011:315). Differently put, seeing successful women in higher political positions, encourages other women to contest for higher positions as well (Shin, 2014). However, it has also been argued that the RME does not have any bearing on politics (Phillips, 1995). Contrariwise, others claim that the self-image of individuals indeed is linked to politics and consequently, political systems cannot deny citizens’ self-image but must rather be organized in such a way that they give “recognition and meaning to communal attachments.” (Goodin, 1977:259). This entails that the presence of the representative could have an impact on the self-image of the represented or the perception of their status in society (Zetterberg, 2012).

2.2 SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION

A milestone regarding representation dates back to Hanna Pitkin’s seminal work from 1967, The Concept of Representation, in which three frequently debated types of representation are identified: descriptive, symbolic and substantive representation. Pitkin defines descriptive representation as “a person or a thing [that] stands for others by being sufficiently like them” (Pitkin, 1967:80), further referred to as “compositional similarity between representatives and the represented” (Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005:407), which has been exemplified by “black legislators represent black constituents, women legislators represent women constituents” (Mainsbridge, 1999:629). Substantive representation is defined as “acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them.” (Pitkin, 1967:209), understood as the congruence of representatives’ actions in relation to the interests of the represented (Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005:407). In her definition of symbolic representation, Pitkin makes an analogy of a nation’s flag and argues that “the symbol is supposed to evoke or express feelings” (Pitkin, 1967:99). This has been interpreted as a representative’s possibility to function as a symbol that alludes to emotions and attitudes among the represented (Zetterberg, 2012) and more specifically as feelings among the represented of being represented in a fair and effective way (Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005). In the context of symbolic female representation, the RME
can thus be understood as female representatives who by their representational presence instil emotions of encouragement and inspiration, resulting in raised aspirations among women to attain similar positions.

Moreover, Pitkin describes descriptive and symbolic representation as *standing for*, whilst substantive representation is seen as *acting for* (Pitkin, 1967). She argues that what representatives *do* (acting for) is more important than who they *are* (standing for), as an “over-emphasis on the composition of the political bodies prevents a proper focus upon the activity of representation” (Celis & Childs, 2008). Whilst Pitkin has received criticism for having discarded the importance of symbolic representation too rapidly (Phillips, 1995), many scholars have agreed with Pitkin’s priority of ‘acting for’ (substantive representation) above ‘standing for’ (descriptive and symbolic representation) (Celis & Childs, 2008), as it is claimed to be in the ‘acting for’ that the actual representation of the represented’s interests is taking place. The discard of ‘standing for’ is liaised with the argument that mere numeric presence in parliaments does not suffice in order to achieve substantive representation (ibid.). Nonetheless, some scholars have put forward the link between the descriptive and substantive, whereby being female (‘standing for’) has been considered to be a condition that enables women’s substantive representation (‘acting for’). As argued by Mansbridge, the best way to achieve substantive representation is through someone “whose descriptive characteristics match one’s own on the issues one expects to emerge” (1999:644), in other words through descriptive and symbolic representation. Others claim the study of symbolic representation to be important in order to understand broader effects of “public attitudes and women’s political empowerment” (Franceschet et al., 2012:12)” and female politicians who act as role models for other women have been claimed to “encourage the erosion of traditional and rigid sex roles (Burell, 1996:152).

Despite these indications of its importance, symbolic representation has not been given the same amount of attention by scholars as is the case of descriptive and substantive representation (Franceschet et al., 2012). This can partially be explained by the intangible expressions that symbolic representation takes, creating difficulties with operationalisations, measurements and effects (ibid.). This in combination with often being perceived as a mere prolongation of descriptive representation, rather than a separate theoretical concept in its own right, symbolic representation has found it hard to attract scholars’ attention. However, to the extent that symbolic representation has been discussed, the RME has been put aside in favour of other arguments such as principles of justice between the sexes; particular female interests that would be otherwise overlooked; women’s different relationship to politics and that their presence will improve the political life (Phillips, 1995:62-63).

Whilst being valid points, these arguments have resulted in that the relevance of the RME has been rapidly overlooked without any further explanation when approaching the complex concept of representation. However, this essay intends to highlight the bearing of the RME by providing new empirical evidence.

2.3 PREVIOUS EMPIRICAL RESEARCH
Due to the lack of specific research on the RME, this section presents previous empirical evidence, which focuses on symbolic representation in various forms, in order to further theoretically contextualise the RME. Since symbolic representation often has been closely
interwoven with the debate of gender quotas, most of the following examples are situated in the context of quotas. The intention is not to give an exhaustive literature review but rather to highlight how earlier research in various ways has approached symbolic representation and the RME.

In a qualitative study from Rwanda, Burnet (2012) examines how gender quotas have affected symbolic representation of women and girls in Rwandan society, by exploring the perception of women and their roles in politics and society. The key findings show that the increased female representation following the legislative gender quota has had a major impact on Rwandan society (ibid.). “Women have become ‘entrepreneurs’ in every arena” (Burnet, 2012:195), including advancements in politics; greater access to education; gained respect; improved assertiveness and authority in the household and to speak publicly (ibid.). The quota, reserving seats for women on all legislative levels (national, regional and local), paved way for greater involvement of women in governance at the local level, resulting in a noteworthy attitude change and increased acceptance by the local community (ibid.). The increased participation of women contributed to the legitimisation of women as political actors in the “popular imagination of rural people” (Burnet, 2012:196). However, the study also argues that the women’s increased autonomy entailed negative consequences, including discord between married couples, rising divorce rates and increased workloads for already overburdened women (ibid.). Additionally, the gender quotas were found to have a small impact on Rwandan women’s political engagement and on the perception of legitimacy of democratic institutions among electorates. Another noteworthy finding was that citizens did not distinguish between the impact of the gender quotas and other policies aimed to improve the status of women and girls. A possible explanation is that citizens have more contact with representatives of local-level government than with parliamentarians (ibid).

As a qualitative study that takes places in Rwanda, Burnet’s research is the closest to this thesis. However, her research stems from an anthropological analysis of the effects of gender quotas, in which the RME was one of several outcomes. Even though she includes the micro-level, the contextual focus remains on political governance and the impact of gender quotas. In contrast, this thesis consciously concentrates on the RME within a significantly smaller community, (i.e. agricultural cooperatives) in order to study how the RME operates in a purely rural context, in which most Rwandan women live.

In contrast to the findings in Rwanda, evidence from Mexico shows no support of symbolic representation. Zetterberg (2012) studies possible effects of gender quotas on electorates’ political attitudes in Mexico, which are addressed by looking at women’s political engagement and perceptions of legitimacy towards democratic institutions. The operationalisation consists of three perspectives of symbolic representation; political interest (addressing political engagement); attitudes towards the legislature; and towards political parties (addressing perceptions of legitimacy toward democratic institutions) (ibid). Two hypotheses claim that increased numbers of female legislators would increase 1) political engagement among women; 2) the electorate’s perceived legitimacy of democratic institutions. Zetterberg performs this analysis at federal and state levels. However, the findings show no general support of the hypotheses.

Wolbrecht and Campbell (2007), on the other hand, argue that although effects on political attitudes are significant, possible impacts on political involvement are even more
important. They look at twenty Western democracies and examine if female politicians functioned as role models by inspiring other women and girls to engage in political activities themselves. The authors develop three hypotheses; the discussion hypothesis; the role model hypothesis; and the socialization hypothesis. The discussion hypothesis is that female role models would inspire women to discuss political topics. The role model hypothesis entails that the presence of female politicians would encourage women to enter the political arena themselves (ibid.) “The expectation is that seeing others ‘like them’ active in political life may inspire women and girls to active political participation” (Wolbrecht and Campbell, 2007:924). The socialization hypothesis is built on the idea that the effect of increased representation of female politicians would be the biggest among young people (ibid.). They argue that since young people are in the process of learning about “the political world and their place within it” (Wolbrecht and Campbell, 2007:924), young people are more susceptible to influences in their surrounding than older individuals (ibid.). The study found that in countries where the representation of women in political office was higher, women of all ages were more prone to discuss politics and younger women were more likely to become politically active.

On a more local level, researchers exploited a natural experiment in India, in which Indian village councils were randomly assigned gender quotas. The instituted quota system obliged one third of village council leaders to be women. A study considered how the increased levels of leading women, as a result of the gender quotas, impacted the perception and opinions of electorates (Beaman et al., 2012). More specifically, the authors studied whether exposure to women in political office altered negative stereotypes among voters regarding women’s roles in politics and society in general (ibid.). Deriving from survey and experimental data about voters’ attitudes toward female leaders, the findings conclude that as a result of the quota, negative stereotypes about women are reduced, whereas traditional gender roles are not. Neither is increased female empowerment in the domestic sphere to be observed (ibid.). However, the authors argue that symbolic and substantive representation are closely linked in the Indian case, as they find that female leaders tend to “pursue different and sometimes more effective policies from those of men” (Beaman et al. 2012:209). In another study by Beaman et al. (2009) it is found that exposure to women in political office eliminates negative bias towards female leaders’ effectiveness as leaders among male villagers. Stereotypes regarding gender roles in the public and domestic sphere are weakened. Yet, the preference for male leaders remain intact (ibid.).

3. CONTEXTUALISATION
This chapter will provide a background to thesis and the context in which the study took place.

3.1 RWANDA AT A GLANCE
Following the Rwandan genocide in 1994, where 800 000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were brutally murdered on the command of the Hutu government, (Wallace et al., 2009) Rwanda has made noteworthy development and is often cited as a success story (Burnet, 2011), often in reference to the impressive representation of female parliamentarians. Whereas Rwanda has seen the passing of ‘women-friendly’ laws as well as the creation of state institutions devoted
to the improvement of gender equality, critics contend that these policies are mere tools for President Kagame and his party Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) to ensure a positive reception from the international community and to maintain power (Longman, 2006; Burnet, 2008). Rwanda is one of Africa’s least corrupt countries as number 48 out of 180 countries on Transparency International’s ranking on corruption (Transparency International, 2018). However, Freedom House classifies Rwanda as “Not Free”, claiming that whilst the government under the hand of Kagame has “maintained stability and economic growth, it has also suppressed political dissent through pervasive surveillance, intimidation, and suspected assassinations.” (Freedom House, 2019).

3.2 RWANDAN AGRICULTURE AND AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES
The Rwandan economy is dependent on its agricultural sector as it stands for a third of Rwandan GDP (Landguiden, 2016) and occupies nearly 70 percent of the total population (Gender Monitoring Office, 2017). Nearly 98 percent of the total land area in Rwanda is categorised as rural (FAO, 2011) out of which 73 percent is being used for agriculture (Landguiden, 2016). Even though most farmers work in subsistence agriculture, the government is pushing smallholder-farmers to merge their farming land, buy collective equipment as well as invest more in artificial fertilising, in order to make the production more efficient and improve the revenue (ibid.). The main export is coffee and tea (ibid.).

Agricultural cooperative is defined as “an organization in which many small farms work together as a business, especially to help each other produce and sell their crops.” (Cambridge English Dictionary A, 2019). In a resolution, the UN General Assembly stated that “cooperatives, in their various forms are becoming a major factor of economic and social development... and are increasingly providing an effective and affordable mechanism for meeting people’s need for basic social services (UN B, 2000). Research from Rwanda and elsewhere confirms this statement. In addition to providing members with agricultural equipment and means to sell the farmers’ crop, cooperatives are also found to assist farmers with credit facilities, insurance and transportation (Bibby & Shaw, 2005). A study from Ethiopia found that cooperatives generated noteworthy employment opportunities and ensured food security (Buysse et al., 2013). Findings from Rwanda claim that Rwandan smallholder farmers’ membership and participation in cooperatives leads to the “adoption of modern inputs, increased intensification, increased commercialization of farm produce, and higher revenue, labor productivity and farm income.” (Verhofstadts & Maerten, 2014). These examples illustrate the key role that agricultural cooperatives play for smallholder farmers.
4. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The data for the thesis was collected through semi-structured respondent interviews in Rwanda. This chapter will present the selection of case study, methodology, operationalisation and data collection.

4.1 SELECTION OF CASE STUDY

This section will motivate the choice of Rwandan agricultural cooperatives as the case study of the thesis.

The agricultural sector is often perceived as male dominated, because men remain the landowners; often are the ones to direct advice and credits; and they solely possess the access to planting seeds and equipment (Sida, 2017). Furthermore, leadership is also commonly regarded as a male-dominated domain (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The case of Rwandan agricultural cooperatives illuminates this male-dominance in agriculture and leadership in an interesting fashion. Contrary to the global aggregated scale where 43 percent of farmers are women (FAO, 2011; Sida, 2017), the vast majority of Rwandan women (76 percent) work within the agricultural sector (NISR, 2018). The equivalent figure among men is 54 percent (ibid.). Thus, in terms of occupational numbers, Rwandan agriculture is dominated by women. Nonetheless, official statistics show that not even half of all Rwandan female cultivators are members in a cooperative (42 percent), whilst being 58 percent among men (Gender Monitoring Office, 2017). Additionally, despite being fewer than women seen to overall employment figures, men occupy 58 percent of decision-making positions within the cooperatives, whereas women get subordinate positions (ibid.). This means that seen to the actual numbers of women and men that work within agriculture in Rwanda, this sector is heavily female dominated. Yet, when looking at who possesses the decision-making power within the agricultural cooperatives, men are dominating. As earlier mentioned, there are arguments claiming that symbolic representation is a condition that enables substantive representation (Mansbridge, 1999) and that female leaders seem to prioritise more ‘women-oriented’ policies than men (Beaman et al., 2012). Thus, in the Rwandan case, it is possible that measures that would especially benefit women, the largest agricultural employment group, are potentially being overlooked due to a male-dominated leadership in cooperatives. Consequently, a more gender balanced leadership could carry the potential of major improvements of many Rwandan women’s livelihoods. This discussion motivates the necessity to further explore potential components that could trigger women to assume leading positions within fields of work that traditionally are dominated by men. Hence the relevance of exploring the RME in the context of agricultural cooperatives in Rwanda.

4.2 SELECTION OF COOPERATIVES

The interviews were conducted at three different agricultural cooperatives, hereafter referred to as cooperatives A, B and C. This section presents the selection process of these three cooperatives.

The study sought to look at three contrasting cases of agricultural cooperatives in terms of the main variable: the number of women on the board (being in line with Wolbrecht & Campbell’s role model hypothesis (2007), see Operationalisation in section 4.4). Cooperative
A would have a female-dominated board; cooperative B would have a male-dominated board; and cooperative C would have a gender-balanced board\textsuperscript{1}. Other identified factors that possibly could have an impact on the results were found to be: type of crop, cooperative size and geographical location.

The type of crop denotes if the crop is a ‘cash-crop’ or not, i.e. the crop generates substantial money by being object for domestic and/or international trade (e.g. coffee, tea, rice, pyrethrum). In contrast, ‘subsistence crops’ are cultivated in non-commercial purposes, i.e. cultivated to be consumed by the farmers themselves, often as the main source of food provision (e.g. beans, maize, food bananas). Cash-crop cooperatives are generally dominated by men, whereas subsistence-crops cooperatives are dominated by women. Cash-crop cooperatives were preferred as understanding how the RME operates in a male-dominated environment, could at present contribute more than understanding the RME in domains already dominated by women.

Differences in geographical location had the possibility of skewing the results, if found that cultural perceptions and social norms varied from one province to another. Furthermore, the size of the cooperative could also have a bearing on the results, as members in smaller cooperatives could find it easier to personally engage with the board members than members of a larger cooperative. Greater contact with the board members could in turn result in better preconditions for the existence of the RME in smaller cooperatives and vice versa in larger cooperatives.

The selection of cooperatives was strategically made in consultation with the Rwandan Cooperative Agency (RCA), which is a governmental institution that monitors all cooperatives in Rwanda. When approaching the RCA with the criteria, the combination of variables could only partially be satisfied. The RCA proposed possible cooperatives and then took the initial contact with them. As a governmental authority in a country which is referred to as an authoritarian state, it is worth keeping in mind that the RCA might have had own interests, thus displaying the best functioning cooperatives. Conscious of this prospect, which would impair the validity of the study through systematically skewed results, the RCA was not given the full purpose of the study.

The key traits of each selected cooperative are summarised in table 1. Cooperative A had a high female representation on the board (more than 75 percent), whereas cooperative B had a low representation of female board members (less than 25 percent). Cooperative C had a gender balanced board (40-60 percent). Cooperative A had a female president, whereas both cooperative B and C had male presidents. Cooperative A was the smallest cooperative with less than 500 members. Cooperative B had between 500 and 1500 members, whereas cooperative C with 3000 to 4500 members was the biggest cooperative.\textsuperscript{2} Whereas the total number of women was between 30 and 40 percent in cooperative B and C, women constituted more than 98 percent of all members in cooperative A, which should be kept in mind as it might have

\textsuperscript{1} In line with Statistics Sweden’s definition of gender equality, a board with 40-60 percent women was regarded as gender balanced. A board with less than 40 percent women was seen as having a low female representation, whereas a board with more than 60 percent women was perceived to have a high representation of women (Statistics Sweden, 2018).

\textsuperscript{2} The unprecise numbers of cooperative members are intentional in order to maintain the confidentiality of the cooperatives and the respondents.
positively skewed the results in favour of the RME. Cooperative A and B were located in the same province, whilst cooperative C was situated in a different province. All cooperatives grew cash-crops. Although the actual crop was not identical, there were no indications that female members of a certain cash-crop (e.g. coffee or tea) would be more or less prone to assume board positions than female members of a different cash-crop (e.g. rice).

The variety of location and size among the cooperatives could be seen as problematic and as limitations of the study. However, they proved difficult to accommodate given the time frame and available resources. Nonetheless, there were no signs that the difference in location of cooperative C would have a paramount impact on the members’ views of female leadership, for example through significantly deviating perceptions of gender roles. Furthermore, the variation in size seems to have provided insights to how the RME operates, which will be expanded upon in chapter 5.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND SELECTION OF RESPONDENTS
The data of the study was collected through semi-structured respondent interviews. Respondent interviews aim to explore people’s subjective perceptions of a given field in order to develop and define concepts (Esaiasson et al., 2017; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). These perceptions can neither be claimed to be true nor false but are used to capture their world of ideas (Esaiasson et al., 2017:268). Since the RME revolves around individuals’ subject perceptions, the method of respondent interviews was found suitable for the purposes of the study. The two respondent groups were:

- Members without decision-making power
- Board members with decision-making power.

During eight weeks, three different cooperatives were visited in Rwanda. 44 interviews were conducted with female and male cooperatives members, as well as with female and male board members. The exact number of interviews was the result of respondents’ availabilities during the time I spent at each cooperative.
The selection of the respondents was made through strategic selection with the assistance of the cooperative board, as well as through snowball sampling, entailing that interviewees indicate potential other interviewees (Esaiasson et al., 2017).

The cooperative board’s assistance in finding respondents was useful in order to get an initial contact with respondents but risked impairing the results due to a biased selection. Thus, the snowball sampling proved valuable, partially as biased selection of the board was evaded, and partially as female members of certain cooperatives frequently indicated ‘role models’ who were not on the board and who thus would have been difficult to find otherwise.

Female board members were interviewed to understand if they perceived themselves as role models and if they intended to act as such. These interviews were also used to get an outline of the organisational structure of that specific cooperative. Female members were interviewed to explore if they perceived the female board members as role models or not. Differently put, did the role model efforts of the board members in fact reach the members? However, if a female board member was to be perceived as a role model by both women and men, this would suggest that gender was not the determining factor. Hence, interviews with male members worked as a control group. Similarly, a female board member might claim to be a role model by specifically representing and acting for female members, but such actions could also prove to be taken by male board members. This would suggest other explanatory factors rather than gender and the RME, which motivated interviews with male board members as a control group.

The interviews followed an interview guide (Appendix A). However, given the nature of semi-structured interviews, the interview guide served as an initial outline of the interviews, but divergences from the guide were anticipated, dependent on the responses of the respondent (Teorell & Svensson, 2007). The main questions indicated in the interview guide were systematically followed by follow-up questions such as “can you give an example of that; can you expand on X” (Esaiasson et. al., 2017).

4.4 OPERATIONALISATION

The RME is operationalised as ‘willingness to obtain a board position’ as a result of female representation on the board. This operationalisation builds on Wolbrecht and Campbell (2007), role model hypothesis: the presence of female politicians increases other women’s tendency to be active in political life.

Before going into further detail, the definition of politics needs to be addressed. The Cambridge Dictionary defines politics as “the activities of the government, members of lawmaking organizations, or people who try to influence the way a country is governed.” (Cambridge English Dictionary B, 2019), which arguably is common understanding of the word politics. Similar to previous research about symbolic representation, Wolbrecht & Campbell focus on the RME that takes place between parliamentarians and citizens, i.e. the national level. In this context, the Cambridge’s definition of politics is appropriate. However, in order to achieve a sensible comprehension of the RME in the context of Rwandan agricultural cooperatives, a modification of the definition of politics is necessary. Alternative definitions describe politics as “the relationships within a group or organization that allow particular people to have power over others.” and “matters concerned with getting or using power within a particular group or organization” “(Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, 2019). These broader definitions of politics allow the focus of this thesis to fall on the dynamic between board
members and ‘ordinary’ cooperative members, instead of parliamentarians and citizens. Shifting the arena of politics from the state level to a local level, also allows a reading of politics as something that has to do with people in a community who participate, discuss and make decisions about interests that they have in common with others in the community.

With their role model hypothesis, Wolbrecht and Campbell (2007) argue that the presence of female politicians will encourage other women to enter the political arena. It is understandable that ‘entering the political arena’ is understood in a multitude of ways by the authors (i.e. discussion, role model and socialization hypotheses). There are many ways to express political engagement. Standing in elections to become a national parliamentarian (which would be the equivalent of becoming a board member in the cooperative context) has been described as the most demanding form of political engagement (Lundin et al., 2016). At national level, this necessitates other less demanding forms in order to achieve meaningful understandings of political engagement. Contrariwise, in the case of agricultural cooperatives, being substantially smaller communities than a society, the idea of an ‘ordinary’ member becoming a board member is likely to appear less abstract, challenging and intangible than for an ‘ordinary’ citizen to become a parliamentarian. Considering that the geographical and perceived psychological distance between cooperative members and the board is likely to be shorter than between the citizens and the national parliament, would further support the possibility that female members find it plausible to become a board member. Henceforth, considering the thesis’ broader definition of politics, this motivates why ‘entering the political arena’ is interpreted as a female member’s willingness to become a board member.³

In the interview guide, it was assumed that respondents needed to know who the female board members were in order for them to be able to be perceived as role models, which prompted questions such as “can you name any of the women on the board”. Furthermore, it was also relevant to examine members’ level of trust towards the board members. The assumption was that the willingness to obtain board positions would increase if the member felt trust towards the board. Henceforth, not knowing who the board members were could also be seen as an indication of low trust. Another indication of trust could be who members went to for advice. Further questions addressing members’ level of trust included “when you face a problem or need advice, is there a person that you particularly trust and go to”; “do you think the board is operating in the best interest of the cooperative” (Zetterberg, 2012). The main question was if female members felt inspired by one or more female board members (whom had been mentioned in the interview) to become a board member herself. The order of the questions was adapted to the responses of each respondent, making difficult to say if a reoccurring order of the questions systematically skewed the results.

4.5 EXPECTATIONS
In cooperative A, female members were expected to display a prominent willingness to obtain board positions, given the high rate of female representation on the board who were expected to be perceived as role models. This rests on the assumption that if more women are on the

³ Whilst Wolbrecht & Campbell (2007) studied the correlation between female representation and electorates’ political engagement, this thesis examines the mechanisms of the RME by studying how it operates in the different cooperatives.
board, the likelihood that the board members are seen as role models increases, thus leading to greater willingness to obtain a board position. Partially as a result of more potential female board members functioning as role models, partially as a female-dominated board sends an overall signal of women’s abilities (if well managed). An opposite outcome, where more women on the board incites less willingness to obtain board positions is possible if the female-dominated board fails to fulfil its duties. A somewhat more contrived argument for such an outcome would be that when female members see an existing majority of women on the board, they would question the necessity for them to become board members since so many women already have reached board positions. Hence, a board position would not be worth the effort. Although possible, this line of reasoning is highly improbable. Thus, the conditions for the RME were beneficial in cooperative A. Contrariwise, the low representation of female board members in cooperative B prompts the expectation of no support for the RME. The assumption being that few women on the board makes it more difficult for the female board members to be perceived as role models by other women. They are regarded as tokens rather than influential players in the decision-making processes as they are at numerical disadvantage. However, a contrasting outcome suggests that a woman can still be a role model even if she is the only woman on the board. It is even plausible that because she is the only woman on the board and thereby stands out, female members know who she is and takes her example. Though not the most likely scenario, this outcome is possible and not implausible. The conditions for the RME were the least beneficial in cooperative B. The expectation for cooperative C, with its gender balanced board, was that the RME would find a support somewhere between cooperative A and B. Differently put, as opposed to cooperative B, support for the RME was expected to be found, but not to the same extent as in cooperative A.

4.6 DATA COLLECTION

The interviews were conducted in Kinyarwanda with translator Pierre. They normally lasted 45-60 minutes and were recorded (after informed consent was given). Interviews with members were mainly conducted in the homes of respondents, alternatively in the field where they were working. Interviews with board members commonly took place in the facilities of the cooperative (e.g. the cooperative headquarters). Limitations were connected to the interviewer effect, which entails that the answer from the respondent changes depending on certain attributes of the interviewer, such as age, ethnicity and gender (Esaiasson et al., 2017). The effect can also arise as a consequence of sensitive topics (ibid.). In this case, the addressed topics were not regarded as sensitive topics. However, given that the majority of interview situations featured us two men (of whom one was a foreigner) and one woman, made the risk of interviewer effect prominent. However, Pierre, had previously been working with women in vulnerable situations for Women for Women International, which had taught him ways of communicating with women that enabled him to build a certain trust in interview situations. Although, interviewer effects are difficult to solve (Esaiasson et al., 2017), there were indicators that Pierre and I were found trustworthy by the respondents, which at least could improve the possibilities of honest and unbiased answers. For example, topics such as women’s menstrual period are generally are associated with a certain stigma in rural areas but were (unprovoked)

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4 Pierre is a fictitious name and is in reality called something else.
reoccurring items among several respondents’ answers, which would indicate that respondents felt comfortable enough to discuss such matters when it was found relevant.

Furthermore, although I presented myself as a student from Sweden, respondents tended to think that I was a representative of the RCA, since the initial contact was made by the RCA. Consequently, it is plausible that respondents would give biased responses in order to present the cooperative as favourably as possible. This would be most noticeable in questions regarding members’ trust for the board. In that regard, additional questions addressing if members went to the board for advice or when facing problems were valuable.

4.7 TRANSCRIPTION AND PROCESSING
All interviews were transcribed. A field diary was kept throughout the conducting of the study, which was consulted during the process of transcription. The transcriptions have been kept as close to Pierre’s translations as possible. The gathered material was then categorised in NVivo\(^5\) (the categorisation was performed by the author and not by NVivo) according to key themes that were reoccurring in the interviews; willingness; encouragement/inspiration; board; education; social norms; differences women/men; trust; geography; equality/inequality; and challenges. The operationalisation and the interview guide naturally shaped the content of the interview and thus ultimately also the themes.

4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS
The integrity and confidentiality of respondents is a crucial objective of the study and this thesis. The ethical suggestions by Kvale & Brinkmann (2014) were followed throughout the study. Before starting each interview, I presented myself and the general purpose of the study (in order to avoid biased answers impairing the validity, respondents were not given the exact details of the study), that participation was voluntary and that respondents would remain anonymous. Respondents were asked if the interview could be recorded with the option of refusing, should they have felt more comfortable. The respondents were also given a consent form (available in English and Kinyarwanda) to sign (Appendix B). At the end of each interview, respondents were always given the opportunity to ask questions and/or add unaddressed information to the discussion. Time was particularly spent to inform the respondents of the protection of their privacy and integrity. Accordingly, information that could lead a reader to recognise the participating cooperatives and/or respondents has been anonymised according to a coding system in this thesis. Respondents have randomly been allocated respondent numbers and did not have any other position than being a member unless otherwise indicated (e.g. board member, zone leader). For example, a female board member with respondent number 10, in cooperative B would be called R10FB, board member, where R10 = Respondent 10, F = Female, B = cooperative B, and the specification board member.

\(^5\) A software program used to categorise and analyse qualitative data.
5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents and analyses the results of the study. To facilitate the reading, the chapter is introduced with a summary of the key findings, followed by a more detailed outline with exemplifying interview excerpts. Instead of providing multiple quotes which with little variation state the same thing, priority has been given to quotes that capture the general sense of respondents’ answers. When applicable, respondents who gave similar responses are indicated together with the quote. After the outline of the main findings, a brief display of additional findings is presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the results in relation to the theoretical framework.

5.1 MAIN FINDINGS

The study finds conditional support for the RME. As expected, female members in cooperative A showed most willingness to obtain board positions, whereas such an effect found no support in cooperative B. Contrary to expectation, female members showed no willingness to obtain positions in cooperative C either. Common reasons as to why female members did not want to be on the board were lack of education and lack of time due to household responsibilities. However, although no RME was found at board level in cooperative B and C, it was found that female leaders of lower ranks (e.g. zone leader) acted as role models instead and explicitly and implicitly increased female members’ willingness to attain leading positions. Seen that the board was geographical far from the members, whereas the female ‘local’ leaders were in the proximities of the members, these results suggest that geographical proximity was a condition for the RME. This was particularly found in cooperative C, which was the biggest cooperative with the most complex organisational structure. Trust was found to be a similar condition. Predominantly in cooperative B, notably low levels of trust towards the board due to allegations of economic mismanagement, even proved to have a negative impact on female member’s willingness to obtain board positions. These two relevant conditions of the RME could further explain the outcome of the results (see section 5.3.1)

When these conditions were fulfilled (both at board and zone level) female members’ willingness to obtain leading positions increased. This can be explained by three factors; (1) knowing that the lives and conditions of the female leaders were similar to the ones of the female members; (2) personally seeing and experiencing positive action and performance of female leaders (e.g. public speaking and conscious encouragement from leaders); (3) seeing that it was possible to combine leadership responsibilities with household responsibilities.

Furthermore, findings suggest that the RME can counteract respondents’ unwillingness to obtain leading positions caused by household responsibilities and overrule doubts caused by lack of education. Female leaders’ (both at board and zone level) explicit and implicit efforts to encourage the abilities and competences of female members, were found to not only increase the latter’s willingness to assume leading positions, but also to challenge ruling gender roles.

5.1.1 The Role of a Role Model

In cooperative A, female respondents were well-informed of who the board members were (all female respondents were able to name all board members) and as per expectation, they displayed clear willingness to be on the board for the cooperative. This inclination was
commonly motivated by the example that female board members constituted to the female members. Seeing how the women on the board acted and performed in the cooperative was perceived as an inspiration.

_I can see how they lead us, I can see how they perform in the cooperative so if I have the chance to be elected I too can be a leader and go in the board._

R40FA (R32FA; R33FA; R37FA; R39FA; R43FA)

_They [the women on the board] inspired me very much, that is why I also want to be a leader. Because I saw my fellow women, they are leaders and they are like me, there is nothing special with them which means that I can also be a leader._

R43FA (R10FC; R11FC; R12FC; R31FB; R32FA; R33FA; R37FA; R39FA; R40FA)

Being able to relate to the board members, knowing that their situation in terms of for example household responsibilities and level education was similar to the members was a motivating feature. This was further reinforced by two weekly meetings where all cooperative members and the board were gathered. The board informed the members of on-going events in the cooperative (e.g. visitors, new or leaving members) and the members were given the chance to raise questions or problems. These meetings enabled members to directly interact and connect with the leadership. In addition, the board members worked together with the members in the plantation, thus sending a clear signal of collective participation regardless of position. This arguably contributed to the feeling of similarity between members and board members, which in prolongation turned a board position into something tangible and even appealing among female members. Differently put, ‘if she can be on the board, I can be on the board’. The fact that most members in cooperative A were women is likely to also have contributed to the overall sense of women’s capabilities. This suggests three factors explaining how the RME operated. Female members perceived female board members as inspirations, which increased their willingness to obtain a board position as a result of (1) knowing that the female board members share similar life conditions as the members (e.g. educational level and household obligations); (2) seeing and experiencing their positive action and performance in the cooperative; (3) seeing that they manage to combine work on the board with responsibilities in the home.

In contrast, members (both men and women) in cooperative B and C did generally neither know how many women there were on the board, nor their names. Female members revealed doubt in their capabilities to become board members and subsequently, no willingness to obtain a board position was displayed. The most frequent explanations were lack of education and lack of time due to time-consuming household responsibilities.

_Being a leader I don't think I can... I didn't go to school, for sure that's beyond my capacity so I think no... I don't think that a woman can be_
the president [of the cooperative] because women are always caring for their homes, caring for the children and for the husband.
R30FB (R4FC; R6FC; R13FC; R18FB; R21FB; R33FA).

I'm always busy at home... so to participate and being a leader at the same time as I'm caring for this home, I don't think I can be a leader.
R19FB (R4FC; R18FB).

With very few exceptions, the general level of education among both female and male respondents (including board members) was low. Whilst most respondents had gone to school for at least two or three years, few had the chance to go to high school and some also reported not being able to read or write. The lack of education was a reality shared by most respondents, both women and men, in all cooperatives. In addition, attending to time and energy consuming household chores after working in the plantations was shared by the women in all cooperatives.

Yet, female members in cooperative A demonstrated a clear willingness to assume a board position, despite responsibilities in the household and having the same level of education as women in cooperative B and C, who refused the idea of being a board member because of household obligations and/or lack of education. In other words, the preconditions were the same, but the outcome was different among the cooperatives. A possible explanation to this could be that women in cooperative B and C were not in contact with the female board members, given that they did not know who the female board members were. In other words, female members did neither (1) experience the actions of the female board members; nor (2) see women similar to themselves manage to combine work on the board with household responsibilities. Consequently, due to lack of known counterexamples, female members in cooperative B and C found their lack of education and household duties to be unsurmountable obstacles, rendering a board position to seem unmanageable. Furthermore, this implies that RME can counteract respondents’ unwillingness to obtain leading positions caused by undertakings in the home and overrule doubts and feelings of inaptitude caused by lack of education.

As seen thus far, contact and interaction following geographical proximity between female members and board members appear to be essential components in order for the RME to take place. Further implications of geographical proximity between female members and female members will be discussed in the next section.

5.1.2 The Role of Proximity
Female members in cooperative B and C tended not to express willingness to obtain board positions. Apart from fewer women on the board compared to cooperative A, the geographical proximity between the board and the members could have had an effect.

Because of their considerable sizes, sub-divisions of leadership had been created in both cooperative B and C (see figure 1). Both cooperatives were divided into zones (of which there were between ten and fifteen in each cooperative) and each zone had a leader. In cooperative B, the zone leaders (in contrast to the board) were not elected but appointed by members of the board and the management. Among the zone leaders, only one was a woman.
In cooperative C, the smallest unit of members was called ‘group’ and consisted of twenty to thirty members. The next unit was the zone, consisting of approximately ten groups. Unlike cooperative B, leaders of all levels were elected by the members. Even though the cooperative board was relatively gender balanced, only three zone leaders were women.

Members in these two cooperatives tended not to know the names of the board members, particularly not the names of female board members. Members also stated that they never or rarely went to the cooperative board for advice when facing problems. In cooperative C, this was partially explained by the organisational structure, whereby a member who faced a problem first had to go to the group leader. If the problem could not be solved at group level, it was then addressed with the zone leader, who in turn addressed it with the cooperative board if the problem still remained unsolved. The board also had ‘office hours’ twice per week, during which any cooperative member could come and see them. However, the cooperative board had its seat at the cooperative headquarters, which was geographically distant to many members (up to 50 km) who did not possess any means of transportation other than walking and taking a moto⁶ was costly. Hence, going to the cooperative board was not logistically a relevant option. The same applied to members in cooperative B, with the only difference that members were free to go to the board whenever they wished. Moreover, it is worth noticing that female board members of all cooperatives claimed to be seen as role models by the female members, providing examples of efforts specifically aimed at women. Nonetheless, the consequence of distances in combination with the organisational structure in cooperative B and C was that female members never or rarely were in contact with female board members. This prevented them from (1) interacting and connecting with the board members; (2) personally experiencing how the female board members acted as leaders; (3) seeing examples of women who successfully combined the role of leadership with household work. In turn, this seemed to have created not only a geographical distance between the members and the board, but also a

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⁶ A motorcycle taxi, also known as pickie-pickie, which is a common way of transportation in Rwanda. Although, relatively cheap in bigger cities, prices in rural areas tend to be significantly higher.
psychological distance rendering the board into something intangible and remote, which further motivated these members’ unwillingness to obtain board positions.

Contrariwise, leaders of lower ranks (i.e. group and/or zone leaders) were well known among the members. Whereas the cooperative board appeared to be distant both in geographical and psychological terms, the group and zone leaders were geographically close to the members as they lived in the same village. These were the leaders that female members tended to go to for advice. Interestingly, although being significantly fewer than their male counterparts, female leaders of lower ranks demonstrated clear and aimed efforts to encourage female members to believe in their capabilities and skills, contrary male leaders.

Women tended to be home wives, they didn’t work, their job was to cook and to make the bed for men, they used to feel that they are useless. They used to feel that they weren't able to do anything, they used to think that business was something that wasn't meant for women. They felt that they should just remain at home and cook, that's why I put more effort in raising women up. I have the spirit to empower them... that they can also do something profitable.

R6FC, zone leader (R28FB, zone leader; R1FC, group leader)

As a woman I know how women are. In our culture a woman is somebody who is weak... I tell them not to be shy, not to look down in front of men, not to feel uncomfortable because they are girls, not feeling inferior, the culture tells us to look down in front of men, to be shy as a girl. So I told them to stop all of that and become sharp and to take the lead... tomorrow they will be leading the zones. So I sit with them and tell them all of that, that they are the leaders of tomorrow, that they are capable, that they can, so that they in the future can replace me.

R28FB, zone leader (R6FC, zone leader; R13FC, zone leader)

These aimed efforts were also perceived by the female members, unlike those of female board members.

When I see how she's [R28FB, zone leader] a leader, I feel that I can also be a leader. She enjoys being a leader very much, to the extent that you feel jealous and you always want to be a leader, because you see how she does a good job... Even though I didn't go to school, I think that one day I will be a [zone] leader.

R31FB (R4FC; R10FC; R11FC; R12FC; R20FB)

I always see how she [R6FC, zone leader] stands in front of us, in front of like 200 people and speaks to them. I always imagine why can't I be like her, I feel like I can also stand in front of people and talk like she does.

R12FC (R11FC)
In similarity to cooperative A, the RME was present in cooperative B and C, however with a slight modification: female members were inspired by female leaders of lower ranks rather than female board members. The geographical proximity between local leaders and female members allowed the modified version of RME to take place similarly to cooperative A, whereby seeing the actions of female leaders as well as being able to establish a personal connection to the leader, resulted in an increased willingness to obtain a position of leadership. It is worth noting that the position that these female members expressed willingness to assume were not board positions, but rather leading positions corresponding to the positions that the local female ‘role models’ occupied (e.g. zone leader). This would imply that female respondents’ idea of the level of leadership that they felt apt for, reacted to the level of leadership that they had experienced other women in their direct surrounding to have obtained. When female members daily experienced leadership from women who had similar background to themselves, the idea of leadership appeared tangible and possible, although at an even more local level. Interestingly, female members in cooperative A who had geographical proximity to the female board members generally displayed no concern regarding the idea of being a board member and in some cases even the cooperative president.

This discussion shows that geographical proximity is a condition that needs fulfilling in order for the RME to take place. As demonstrated, female members were only willing to assume leading positions when they personally experienced the leadership of female leaders and saw that it was possible to combine leadership responsibilities with household accountabilities. Given the large distances in combination with lack of transportation, geographical proximity appears imperative for female board members in order to be perceived as role models by the members.

Moreover, these excerpts highlight the central role of social norms and gender roles, which will be further discussed in section 5.3.2.

In addition to geographical proximity, findings suggest that trust could also have an impact on female members’ willingness to obtain board positions, which will be discussed in the next section.

5.1.3 The Role of Trust
In certain cases, both female and male members expressed notably low levels of trust regarding the cooperative board (both female and male board members) in cooperative B and C. Members expressed feeling discarded by the board members when addressing problems that they faced. Some members indicated a link between their low display of trust vis-à-vis the board and their willingness to obtain a board position.

"On the board... there are five people but they are thieves... the board is just fetching money for themselves. They are now targeting their interests, not the people's interests... They go home with money but that money is the cooperative's money, it's like stealing. I don't trust anyone. When you approach Mr. President asking him about it, he replies in a bad way for you to stop because he thinks that you want to know better than him. In fact he becomes harsh for you to keep quiet."

R18FB (R2MC; R4FC; R24FB; R30FB)
I can wish to be a leader when my leaders lead me clearly, but according to how they lead me it discourages me, it doesn’t encourage me to be a leader at all… For example, you are doing a study… you want to become something else in the future, but if you are being disappointed in this study, do you expect a good future? Of course not! The same applies to me, what I see today doesn’t encourage me to become anything in the future.

R18FB (R2MC)

This suggests that distrust towards the board due to (alleged) mismanagement, lowers the motivation and the general spirit of members to the extent that any type of involvement or association with the board is inconceivable, thus affecting the willingness to obtain a board position negatively. The mismanagement was associated with the whole board, women as well as men. As the level of trust was at a considerable low point, all traces of RME had disappeared and gender representation appeared completely irrelevant. All that mattered was to have a trustworthy leadership. Members indicated that the most basic level of trust would be created through a leadership that followed rules and regulations, acted with transparency and in the interest of the cooperative members.

… leading the cooperative, you need to follow those rules and regulations, not just do whatever you like… That is where Mr. President fails, there are some ways they [the board] don’t follow rules and regulations. They are doing their own things. If I were the president, I would respect my duties and responsibilities, following the rules and regulations that govern the cooperative.

R24FB (R18FB)

Anyone who is a president and acts clearly and aims at profit maximization on the side of the participants, that's what you want, we want someone who can make a change… whether a man or women, for me both are ok.

R18FB (R24FB, R2MC)

Furthermore, indications of a link between geographical proximity and trust was found. Geographical proximity allowed members to personally go to the female leader when facing a problem. The leader’s availability together with problem solving skills enabled further trust to be built between the leader and the member. This was then also seen as a motivation to obtain a leading position.
When I have a problem I go to [R6FC, zone leader], so I don't go to those people in the board. [R6FC, leader] also comes to us in the group or at home for visiting so normally we solve our problems there so I don't go there [to the cooperative]... If get the chance to be elected, I can also give very good service like she does.

R10FC (R12FC; R7FC; R1FC, group leader)

Thus, geographical proximity served the double purpose of allowing female members to personally experience how female leaders performed as well as enabling trust to be built between female leaders and female members. In addition to geographical proximity, it appears that a certain level of trust, or at least the absence of distrust, is required before the RME can take place. This suggests that trust is another condition that needs to be met before the RME can be manifested.

5.2 ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

Additional findings of the study include that women face different and more problems than men, with an aggregated burden of biological factors (i.e. menstrual periods and pregnancies); double work due to remained full obligations in the household; having to justify long workdays to the husband. Other problems that at first seem gender neutral, are in reality intensified for women due to gender roles (such as transportation and poverty). The most intriguing additional finding, however, is that female and male leaders appear to act differently regarding problems that happen outside the cooperative (e.g. in the household) and whether these issues should be addressed by the cooperative or not.

You find that the woman has worked and made money, but the man takes the money to the bar and spends the money buying beer... Even if it's a problem, I am less concerned about that, because that is outside the cooperative... For me I just deal with the cooperative, when it comes to someone's home I'm not concerned.

R29MB, board member

Our role is not to make [crop], have a high production and get much money no. Our role is to solve the problem of our people... There was one woman here who wanted to leave the cooperative because she had a lot to do at home... The lady came to say goodbye to me and said "I am no longer a cooperative member". I tried to tell her that she should continue to be a cooperative member but try to reduce the work at home and what she does at the cooperative. Try to balance the two and she did it. The lady is still here at the cooperative.

R35FA, board member

The male board member in cooperative B did not perceive issues outside the cooperative (i.e. in the home) as problems that concerned the cooperative. Contrariwise, the female board member in cooperative A stated that their role as a board was to solve the problems of their
members, which for female members includes the double work of the public and private sphere. This female board member saw it as her responsibility to address and solve the problem, although the problem was not strictly happening in the cooperative. The female leader acknowledged that the challenges the woman was facing in the household (i.e. outside of the cooperative) were not isolated to the household, but ultimately also had an impact on her performance in the cooperative.

5.3 DISCUSSION

5.3.1 Geographical Proximity and Trust

Symbolic representation refers to the expression and evocation of feelings between the representative and the represented (Pitkin, 1967). Explicitly and implicitly, many female leaders in agricultural cooperatives expressed emotions of encouragement which, among other feelings, evoked inspiration and willingness to obtain leading positions among female members. They perceived this expression of encouragement by (1) knowing that the lives and conditions of the female leaders are similar to the ones of the members; (2) personally seeing and experiencing positive action and performance of female leaders; (3) seeing that it is possible to combine the responsibilities of leadership with the responsibilities of the household. This ‘role model process’ was, however, conditioned by geographical proximity and trust. This provides significant nuances to Wolbrecht & Campbell’s role model hypothesis and can explain the different outcomes in the cooperatives. The findings in cooperative A and B were in line with the expectations: the greatest willingness among female members to obtain board positions was found in cooperative A and the lowest willingness in cooperative B, supporting the conclusions of Wolbrecht & Campbell (2007). However, different from the expectation, the willingness to obtain board position was also low among female members in cooperative C. In cooperative A, the conditions of geographical proximity and trust were fulfilled, which jointly enabled the role model process, which in turn contributed to the overwhelmingly positive results. In stark contrast, none of the conditions were met in cooperative B. Distrust in combination with lack of geographical proximity contributed to the absolute absence of female members’ willingness to assume board positions. In cooperative C, although there were signs of low levels of trust towards the board among certain members, the significant lack of geographical proximity between members and the board emerged as the key explanation as to why the efforts of the female board members did not reach the female members.

Whereas proximity in earlier research has been understood as a more abstract component of how public opinions can be shaped by public policies (Soss & Schram, 2007), the geographical proximity found in this thesis denotes a hands-on closeness between leaders and followers. The logic behind this is intuitive: female members are influenced by the leaders that they personally meet on a regular basis. Whereas no support was found for the RME between female board members and female members in cooperative B and C, a ‘modified’ version of the RME, where board position was exchanged for leading position (e.g. zone leader) found convincing support among female members. Their role models were not the board members, but the zone leaders who lived and worked close to them, which evoked the RME. Despite its simplicity, geographical proximity proved to be of utmost importance in this rural context, where means of transportation were limited. Thus, the RME operates at a very local
level for women living in this type of rural context, which is the case for the majority of Rwandan women.

Whilst true that the willingness to obtain board positions was the lowest in cooperative B, which also had the fewest female board members, the level of trust towards the board (or the lack thereof) seems to have affected member’s willingness to obtain positions. The absolute refusal of association with the board among certain members in cooperative B and C, speaks to Zetterberg’s findings (2012). The hypothesis that increased female representation would result in increased legitimacy towards democratic and political institutions found no support (ibid.). As an explanation, he argued that mistrust caused by for example corruption (‘informal practices’) has been found to create a disbelief towards the political system in Mexico, thus resulting in negative impacts on electorates’ political attitudes (ibid.). Similarly, in cooperative B members expressed strong distrust towards the board due to alleged mismanagement, rendering them unwilling to have anything to do with the board. Contrariwise, trust was built when leaders followed rules and regulations and managed to solve the problems of the members.

The additional finding of different leadership between women and men as a result of perceiving women’s issues differently, alludes to the findings of Beaman et al., 2012, whereby female leaders prioritise policies differently from their male counterparts and supports a link between ‘standing for’ and ‘acting for’ representation (Mainsbridge, 1999). This difference in leadership is interesting seen that a main reason to women’s unwillingness to obtain board positions was household responsibilities. As displayed, seeing leading women who successfully combine leadership with the household work is essential. Women without such role models would not find leading positions plausible until the contrary is demonstrated. However, if male leaders do not see it as their responsibility to support female members with their problems in the household, since it is outside the cooperative, fewer women will be able to assume board positions and thus constitute role models demonstrating that it is possible to combine the two tasks. The perpetuated outcome is few women on leading positions.

5.3.2 Gender Roles, Role Congruity Theory and Representation

The results also displayed the central role of social norms and gender roles. In the past, Rwandan women were regarded as weak, not suitable for work and as someone who’s given place was in the home, looking after the children and serving the husband (e.g. R6FC; R28FB; Burnet, 2011). Since then, women have joined the labour force but the mentality of being less valuable than men seem to dwell. In similarity to women elsewhere, joining the work force has not entailed less work in the home. Female members repeatedly brought up the double burden of working and at the same time carrying the full household responsibility as problems that differentiated them from men. Together with biologically bestowed differences, such as pregnancies and menstrual periods, these problems resulted in an aggregated burden among female members, which their male counterparts did not meet. This motivated female leaders’ specific support of women in the cooperatives. These efforts were aimed to primarily encourage and raise the aspirations of cooperative women, but at the same time, stereotype ideas of gender roles were also being fought. Explicitly, female members were being told and reminded about their competences and potentials and encouraged to defy certain behaviours which had root in traditional gender roles (e.g. being shy and looking down in the presence of men). These gender roles were combatted more implicitly by the fact that these women possessed leadership
positions, which in itself was contrary to what female gender roles dictated. That female leaders also spoke publicly in front of large numbers of people was an example of actions that inspired female members to assume leadership (supports earlier findings by Burnet, 2012). Seen that women who spoke publicly used to be perceived as a taboo, this also appears to change the internal image of a woman’s public role among female members. Accordingly, female members in the direct surrounding of these local female leaders expressed willingness to obtain a leading position as a result of being inspired by the local female leader. In short, the RME contributes to the change of gender roles and social norms. This is in line with findings from India where quantitative studies have found that negative stereotypes about women were reduced as a result of gender quotas (i.e. increased female representation in political office) (Beaman et al., 2012) and that negative bias towards women’s effectiveness as leaders are heavily reduced when exposed to female politicians (Beaman et al., 2009). Such changes in gender attitudes have also found support in Rwanda as a result of gender quotas (Burnet, 2012).

Moreover, the findings of the RME:s impact on gender roles allude to Eagly & Karau’s Role Congruity Theory (2002). The key postulates of this theory are that (1) women find it harder to obtain leading positions because of discordan ces between the female gender role and the leadership role; and (2) women on leadership positions risk being evaluated less favourably because their behaviour as leaders is incongruent with the female gender role (Eagly & Karau, 2002). They argue that gender roles, defined as “consensual beliefs about the attributes of women and men” (Eagly & Karau, 2002:574), dictate women’s close association with traits such as affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, nurturant. Men, on the other hand, are associated with traits such as assertiveness, dominant, forceful, independent, self-confident, inclined to act as a leader (agentic traits) (ibid.). Gender stereotypes derive from typical social roles, where men are the breadwinners and occupants of higher status roles, whilst women are the homemakers and occupy lower status roles (ibid.). The prejudice against female leaders is thus explained by the incoherence between the female gender role and the general expectations about leadership roles, which are commonly associated with agentic qualities (ibid.).

Cooperative female leaders’ explicit and implicit actions did not only inspire female members to obtain leading positions but did also seem to counteract the gender roles by gradually altering the members’ internal and external idea of women’s role in the public sphere. Differently put, the female gender role was being challenged by the fact that female leaders acted to bring the female members outside the expected norms. Interestingly, this shift in thinking seemed to happen faster in cooperative A, where women dominated the board (and the cooperative), whereas the female members without proximity to any female leaders in cooperative B and C, tended to remain in the old ways of thinking regarding women’s capabilities as leaders. This discussion suggests that the RME stands with one leg in the sphere of symbolic representation, and with the other leg in Role Congruity Theory. This combination provides a psychology-oriented understanding of the RME, which emphasises the further implications of the effect.

Arguably, this also carries importance for the debate of representation. As displayed in this thesis, gender roles directly and/or indirectly dictate women’s possibilities to assume leading positions, and consequently their possibilities to represent. The debate of ‘standing for’ versus ‘acting for’ addresses how female representatives act when leading positions in office already have been obtained. This thesis has provided empirical insights to the RME that show
the equal importance of looking at mechanisms that render women able or unable to assume such leading positions in the first place.

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to study the Role Model Effect in a rural, non-quota context, separated from high politics, where the role models were cooperative leaders rather than politicians and the recipients of the effect were the members instead of citizens. Based on a qualitative field study, the thesis has examined the RME in the context of three contrasting Rwandan agricultural cooperatives. With a modified operationalisation of Wolbrecht & Campbell’s *role model hypothesis* (2007), the research question was “*How do female board members affect female members’ willingness to obtain board positions?*”. In answering this question, the study found varying levels of willingness to obtain board positions among female members. As per expectation, this willingness was the most prominent in cooperative A (female-dominated board), whereas such an effect found no support in cooperative B (male-dominated board). Contrary to expectation, the RME did not find any support in cooperative C either (gender balanced board). As significant nuances to the RME and as answer to the research question, the study found two conditions that needed to be fulfilled before the RME could take place: geographical proximity and trust. Geographical proximity denotes a hands-on closeness between the leader and the follower, allowing a daily interaction between the two. Additionally, distrust towards the board proved to have negative affect on the willingness to obtain board positions. Consequently, a certain level of trust (or at least the absence of distrust) is required. This is achieved when rules and regulations are respected, and leaders address and try to solve members’ problems. When these conditions are fulfilled female members’ willingness to obtain leading positions increased as a result of (1) knowing that the lives and conditions of the female leaders were similar to the ones of the female members; (2) personally seeing and experiencing positive action and performance of female leaders (such as public speaking, conscious encouragement from the leaders); (3) seeing that it was possible to combine the responsibilities of leadership with the responsibilities of the household. Subsequently, although no RME was found at board level in cooperative B and C, female leaders of lower ranks (e.g. zone leader) acted as role models instead and explicitly and implicitly increased female members’ willingness to attain leading positions.

Furthermore, it is clear that ruling social norms and gender roles continue to burden rural women in ways that the male counterpart do not experience, some of which appear as key obstacles preventing female members from wanting to obtain leading position, such as combining full household responsibility with work in the field. The RME was found to challenge ruling gender roles by changing the internal and external idea of women’s role as leaders and in the public sphere generally. This thesis has provided new empirical insights to how the RME operates in a rural, non-quota context. The found impact of geographical proximity and trust on the RME needs to be researched further, both in other countries, contexts and in large-N studies. The findings also highlight important gender-role processes that can be understood through the RME in combination with Role Congruity Theory. The found link between symbolic representation and Role Congruity Theory provides further interesting scopes for future research. An integrated analytical framework of the two concepts can offer
new perspectives on underlying psychology-oriented processes that motivate political representation. Further understanding such processes is arguably of importance in order to ensure women’s full participation and equal opportunities to all types of leadership, as stipulated by SDG 5.
7. References


**INTERVIEWS**


Respondent interviews in cooperative C (R1-R15). 13/10 – 24/10 2019, Rwanda.
8. Appendices

APPENDIX A
Interview guides

Interview guide – members

Warm up questions
1. What made you become a farmer?
2. Why did you decide to join the cooperative?
3. How long have you been a member of this cooperative?
4. What is your level of education?
   a. Did you join the cooperative after finishing school?
5. You said that you’ve been a member since year X, were there many women in the cooperative then?
6. Is it easier to be a woman in the cooperative today than it was in 2003?
   a. Can you give an example of problems that you had when you started that you don’t have today?
7. Do you know how many women there are in the assembly? (total members in the cooperative)
8. Do you know how many women are on the board?
9. Can you name one of the board members? (woman or man?)
   - If yes, what is your relationship with that person?
     o If yes and woman; (it’s not so common with women on boards), seen that X is one the board, has that ever made you feel that you want to be on the board one day?
     - If yes, how? Examples of inspiring actions?
10. Is there someone in particular on the board that you trust?
    - If yes and woman; (it’s not so common with women on boards), seen that X is one the board, has that ever made you feel that you want to be on the board one day?
      o If yes, how? Examples of inspiring actions?
11. Have you ever contacted that person?
    - If yes, what for?
    - If no, would you be able to if you wanted to?
      o If yes – that fact that that person is on that position, would that encourage you to get involved in the same way?
12. Do you have trust in that they operate in the best interest for the cooperative or do they only try to get benefits themselves?
13. Do you and your friends often discuss what’s going (decisions being made at the cooperative?) on at the cooperative?
14. What according to you are the main problems for cooperative members?
15. Are there challenges that women face that men do not?

**Interview guide – board members**

*Warm up questions*
1. What made you become a farmer?
2. Why did you decide to join the cooperative?
3. What is your level of education?
4. How long have you been a member of this cooperative?
5. How long have you been on the board?
   - Have you been on the board for other organisations before?
6. Why did you choose to run for the board?
7. How were you nominated?
8. You said that you’ve been a member since year X, were there many women in the cooperative then?
9. Would you say that the attitudes toward women in the cooperative have change over the years?
   - Is it easier to be a woman on the board today than it used to be when you joined?
10. How are decisions taken within the board?
11. Do you feel that you can influence the decisions being taken on the board?
   - Can you give an example of when you have influenced a decision?
12. Do people often come to you for advice?
   - Examples?
13. What are your strengths/qualities as a board member?
14. In your work in the board, who would you say that you mainly represent?
   - Examples of situations?
15. As a woman, do you see yourself as a role model for those women who are not on the board?
   - Examples, how?
16. Do you do something in particular in order to instil trust for you amongst the members?
17. What according to you are the main problems for cooperative members?
18. Are there challenges that women face that men do not?
19. Do you know of the quota in the parliament?
   - What are your thoughts on that?
APPENDIX B

Consent forms

English version

Permission Form for Interviewees

Interview with_________________________________________(the Interviewee)
Conducted by_________________________________________(the Researcher)
on __/___/_____ (the Interview)

The Researcher, Joel Andersson, have a policy to ask all interviewees to give their written consent to the interview.

By signing below you are confirming that you consent to take part in the Interview; that you have the full power and authority to give the interview without obtaining the consent of any person and that, so far as you are aware, your contribution does not infringe any third party rights and is not otherwise unlawful.

By signing below, you also confirm that you agree to the information from the Interview being used as empirical material – for research purposes – by the researcher. The researcher do not need to consult with you or obtain your consent before each publication.

Signed by the Interviewee:

.................................................. .................................................. Date .................

☐ Tick this box if you request anonymity.
INYANDIKO Y’ URUHUSHYA RW’ UBAZWA

Ibazwa rya .......................... (ubazwa)
ubaza .......................... (umushakashatsi)
kuwa .......... (ubazwa)

Umushakashatsi Joel Andersson, yaka ababazwa bose inyandiko yemeza ko yabazwa.

Mu gushyira umukono kuri ibi uremeza ko uzagira uruhare mw’ ibazwa no kumva ufite ubushobozi bwose n’ ububasha bwo kubazwa bidasabye kubisabira uburenganzira k’ umuntu uwo ariwe wese, mubyo ushobora kumenya uruhare rwawe, kandi ntirubangamire uburenganzira ubwo aribwo bwose bw’ umwunganizi kandi bitanyuranyije n’ amategeko.

Mu gushyira umukono kuri ibi, urahamya ko wemaranya n’ amakuru azava mw’ ibazwa kuburyo byakoresheshwa mu buryo bufatika - kubw’impamvu z’ ubushakashatsi - bikozwe n’ umushakashatsi umushakashatsi ntazakenera kukugisha inama cyangwa ngo agusabe uburenganzira mbere ya buri shyirwa hanze ry’ ubushakashatsi.

Umukono w’ ubazwa
...............................................................
Itariki.....................................................

Shyira umukono muri aka kazu niba ushaka ko umwirondoro wawe ugifwa ibanga