

The post-politics of aid to education: Rwanda ten years after Hayman

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ABSTRACT

Education aid in Rwanda is often portrayed as a success story. Based on original fieldwork, this article explores the governance arrangements that underpin performance in the sector. The paper follows up on developments since Hayman's pioneering 'aidnography' a decade back and adds new theoretical layers by employing theory of post-politics. The paper argues that while old tensions lurk beneath, a largely depoliticized environment has been created that facilitates everyday work in the sector. These post-political strategies can be understood as logical responses to the conflictuality that is constitutive of both international development and Rwandan society.

Keywords: Education; Governance; International Aid; Post-politics; 'the Political'; Rwanda

1. Introduction

Rwanda has laid out an ambitious development agenda, seeking to transform the country into a globalized knowledge economy (RoR, 2000). In spite of some concerns over the Government of Rwanda's (GoR) harsh political leadership, the country has also often been depicted as 'donor darling', due largely to its ability to demonstrate impressive progress on a range of development indicators (e.g. Browne, 2006; Beswick, 2010; Grimm, 2013). More specifically, Rwanda's education sector has been held up as an 'example' of good international development cooperation in operation (e.g. Hayman 2006, p. 75; Holvoet & Rombouts, 2008). The aim of this article is to explore the technocratic governance arrangements that underpin this alleged success story. Hence the paper is concerned with how the GoR and its partners in the education sector have managed to create order 'in the context of conflictuality' (Mouffe, 2005, p. 9) that we take to be constitutive of international development.

In addition to a close reading of relevant literature on the education sector in Rwanda, the article is based on original fieldwork carried out in Kigali during 2015-2016, as well as on interviews in aid headquarters in Brussels, London, Stockholm and Washington DC in the same period. Altogether 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders in the Rwandan education sector including: GoR authorities, bilateral and multilateral donors, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and local civil society organizations (CSOs), including teacher unions. Respondents for the study were purposively selected to reflect the broad ensemble of actors, on both sides of the donor-recipient relationship. Most of

the respondents represent stakeholders within the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG), which is the main body for coordinating and implementing education aid in Rwanda. We also deliberately included actors which were outside of the ESWG, in order to get a more diversified picture. The interviews were conducted in English and most often took place in the respondents' own offices. Each interview was structured around an interview guide covering broad themes such as agendas, activities, procedures, strategies, collaborations and tensions in the education sector. The data further includes a variety of policy documents, reports and other printed material. Key documents to have been analyzed include Rwanda's overall development strategies (RoR, 2000; RoR 2013a), as well as the education sector plan (RoR, 2013b), but we have also gone through reports, evaluations, newsletters, web pages, etc. from the different organizations under scrutiny. The data was subjected to thematic analysis - coding and re-coding - and subsequently made sense of through theory of post-politics (cf section 3). On the one hand we dug into data that helped us understand how efforts to build consensus were put into practice in the ESWG, and how situated subjects understood, and engaged with, these strategies. Furthermore, we searched for, and sought to understand, instances in the material where such strategies appeared to run into an impasse, i.e. articulations of adversarial we/they relationships and mundane wars of position that served to destabilize the alleged consensus. Elsewhere we have elaborated at length on how aid to education can be studied empirically in environments with strong post-political features (Author X and Y). Readers interested in a more in-depth discussion on the principles that underpin the present study are kindly directed to this methodological piece.

The contribution of the article is two-folded. Firstly, the paper follows up on developments in the Rwandan education sector since Rachel Hayman's seminal 'aidnography' a decade back (Hayman, 2006, 2007). Hayman explored early attempts in Rwanda to coordinate and streamline education aid in accordance with the principles set out in the Rome and Paris declarations, and her study demonstrated how these efforts were hampered by tensions and conflicts. Ten years have now gone by and it is thus of great interest to get an update on the contemporary organization of the sector and to see how some of the issues raised by Hayman (and others) are being dealt with today. Secondly, the paper adds new theoretical layers to previous research in the sector. Hayman concluded her thesis with the statement that her empirical findings 'may warrant further reflection in order to tease out more theoretical lessons' (Hayman, 2006, p. 199). The paper takes this challenge seriously by employing theory of post-politics. This theoretical perspective, stemming from post-foundational political thought, is concerned with contemporary forms of depoliticisation. In our argument, such a lens enables

us to discern how strategies of depoliticisation operate in the governance of aid to education and how they foreclose many of the conflicts once identified by Hayman.

The article is structured as follows. Section two provides a backdrop for the article's argument by revisiting Hayman's decade old study, as well as subsequent literature on aid and education in Rwanda. Section three introduces the article's theoretical lens. Based on this theoretical perspective, and in close conversation with Hayman's previous findings, the fourth section analyses the organizational measures through which (post-political) order has been created in the sector. The fifth section concludes.

2. Backdrop: Revisiting Hayman

In order to understand the contemporary organization of education aid in Rwanda it is helpful to look a decade back. In the early 2000s Hayman conducted an extensive 'aidnography' in the country, focusing partly on the education sector (Hayman, 2006; 2007). At this time, international development policies were increasingly marked by efforts to improve donor coordination and enhance the effectiveness of aid as set out in principles of the Rome and Paris declarations. Hayman took an interest in how, and to what extent, the new principles of ownership, harmonization, alignment, result-based management and mutual accountability were translated into local aid practice. Hence, her research was conducted in a period when the so-called new international aid architecture was in its infancy. For those with high hopes in significant changes of how development assistance was implemented her findings must have been rather disappointing. Hayman's analysis clearly showed that the apparent global consensus on more coordinated and effective aid was distant in local practice. Of note is that the Rwandan situation was hardly unique as similar evidence was reported from several other African countries at the time (e.g. King, 2007; King, McGrath & Rose, 2007). Although the Rwandan education sector was upheld as an example, with a 'cluster' (the predecessor of the ESWG) in operation at a relatively early stage, Hayman still found that harmonization was seriously complicated due to significant variations in the priorities and agendas of different actors (Hayman, 2006, 2007).

Firstly, Hayman contended that there were tensions between donors and the GoR in terms of balancing short-term and long-term development goals. Most donors prioritized basic education in line with their poverty reduction agendas and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While the GoR recognized these priorities, they still pushed for a considerable expansion of higher education *and* dissemination of Information and Communication

Technology (ICT) throughout the education system in accordance with the long-term development *Vision 2020* of Rwanda becoming a globalized knowledge economy. Hayman showed how these matters, given the country's limited resources, turned into a contentious issue between donors and the government (Hayman, 2006, 2007). Another example from this time was the GoR's politically motivated insistence on a trilingual education policy which few donors agreed on 'due to the impact on quality in light of poor language skills across the board in the education system' (Hayman, 2007, p. 377).

Secondly, Hayman found that there were significant tensions between donors. At the time of her fieldwork the main donors supporting the Rwandan education sector were the UK and the World Bank. Other important development partners were UNICEF, Germany, Belgium, France and Sweden (the latter acting as silent partner of the UK). Major INGOs in the sector were Voluntary Service Overseas, Concern and CARE international. Hayman showed that although all major partners had officially subscribed to the global 'consensus', real commitments differed substantially. She reported on disagreements amongst the donors and her results showed that they had dissimilar priorities in the sector (e.g. as regards levels of the education system; subjects and curriculum areas; material and infrastructure; modes of management and governance) *and* that they also used completely different aid modalities. Explanations for this were connected to differences as regards: broader donor policies and priorities of home offices; understandings and views of the GoR; historical engagement in Rwanda's education sector, as well as self-images and perceptions of the agency's area of expertise (Hayman, 2006, 2007).

Thirdly, Hayman's analysis showed that there was anything but homogeneity *within* singular donor agencies as well as within the GoR in terms of perspectives and political priorities. Internal disagreements and inconsistencies within donor programmes were found to be common (Hayman, 2007, 2008). That it can be extremely misleading to treat donor and recipient institutions as monoliths has also been highlighted in works on development policy more broadly (Cornwall & Brock, 2005) and education aid more specifically (author X&Y).

Fourthly, at odds with the core idea of the new aid architecture, Hayman brought attention to considerable limitations in terms of Rwandan 'ownership'. For example she noticed a lack of coordination on behalf of the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), with 'meetings taking place almost exclusively in the domain of donors and little indication of the Ministry wishing to take this activity on' (Hayman, 2007, p. 376). Moreover, Hayman elaborated on the contradiction between national 'ownership' and far-reaching dependence on donors (Hayman, 2006).

In a follow-up study, conducted in mid-2008, Hayman concluded that certain progress had been made. The GoR had embraced the aid effectiveness ideal and the structures for coordination had improved (Hayman, 2009). Yet, difficulties prevailed and different agendas could still be found on both the donor and government side. She further pointed to the limitations of national ‘ownership’. While GoR was often depicted as being in ‘the driver’s seat’, Hayman concluded that the government primarily pushed a policy agenda that already reflected what the donor’s wanted to see. Hence, as long as the donors were happy with the strategy they ‘allowed’ the GoR to ‘own’ it. Moreover, she raised the issue of how representative the GoR’s agenda really was to the broader interest of Rwandan society. Thus, rather than ‘national’ ownership, Hayman contended that *joint* donor-GoR ownership was a more accurate diagnosis (Hayman, 2009).

Quite clearly, coordinated aid, smoothly aligned with ‘national’ policy priorities is anything but a straightforward enterprise. Subsequent studies from Rwanda have also shown that many of these contested issues remain. Diverging opinions on how to gear the education sector in relation to short-term versus long-term development priorities is a case in point (Ansoms & Rostagno, 2012; author X). One example of a concern that has arisen in the context of such discussions is whether the ICT-strategy has actually exacerbated inequality in the country (Rubagiza, Were & Sutherland, 2011, author X). Another contested issue has been the country’s sudden switch in 2008 from a trilingual policy to English as medium of instruction throughout the entire education system. The new policy provoked a lot of debate (e.g. Rosendal, 2010; Samuelson & Freedman, 2010; author, X) and serious difficulties on behalf of both teachers and pupils have been reported (Abbott, Sapsford & Rwirahira, 2015; Musker et al, 2014). In 2011 the policy was somewhat modified with Kinyarwanda reintroduced as medium of instruction in grade 1-3. Yet another contested issue has been the authoritarian elements of Rwanda’s civic education programme *Itorero* (Sundberg, 2016).

At the end of the day many of the concerns raised by Hayman a decade ago prevail. Arguably, however, the ways in which the GoR and its partners in the education sector deal with them have been refined. In upcoming sections we shall take a closer look at some of the developments since Hayman’s pioneering work. More specifically we will bring attention to a set of post-political strategies that have been employed to make the sector operable in the context of conflictuality that international development inevitably involves. First, however, a few theoretical clarifications.

3. A ‘post-political’ lens

The concept of ‘post-politics’ has been introduced by post-foundational political philosophers (e.g. Mouffe, 2005; Rancière, 1999; Žižek, 1999) in order to capture a strong trend in contemporary societies whereby political contestation is becoming increasingly foreclosed through technocratic and consensual governance arrangements. Hence, in sharp contrast to a democratic ideal of dissonant voices and agonistic debate, post-political arrangements seek to facilitate governance by evacuating truly political questions or by redressing them in technical terms. In other words: politics is transformed into an art of expert administration (Žižek, 1999, p. 353). However, such efforts are never entirely successful. Post-foundational ontology suggests that all social orders are contingent and that ‘the political’, a dimension of antagonism that takes the form of a collective we/they relationship, is constitutive of human societies (Mouffe, 2005). From this ontological stance societies are inevitably imbued with political conflicts that simply lack a ‘rational’ solution and where reconciliation of all views is impossible. This means that while efforts to establish a post-political consensus – ‘in the context of conflictuality provided by the political’ (Mouffe, 2005, p. 9) – can be powerful, they are ultimately always incomplete. Characteristic of post-politics is thus illusory attempts to move beyond ‘the political’, e.g. organizational measures to establish and reach supposedly ‘neutral’ and ‘rational’ societal goals, through ‘efficient’ and consensus-based governance systems, informed and guided by ‘objective’ knowledge.

Recently, the philosophical debate on post-politics has been accompanied by a rapidly growing number of empirically oriented studies in different domains (e.g. Fletcher, 2014; MacLeod 2013; Williams & Booth, 2013; Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014; author X). These works show how a range of political matters is increasingly represented as ‘technical’ problems to be handled through expert management, evidence of ‘best practice’, and participatory multi-stakeholder arrangements with a narrow scope of possible outcomes. Hence these studies essentially confirm that post-political arrangements of various sort have become commonplace.

The ‘new’ global aid architecture – based on principles such as alignment, harmonization, partnership, result-orientation and evidence-based management – as referred to above, clearly signals a post-political logic. Bridging the life-chance gulf between the rich and the poor largely appears as an apolitical and technical matter. Recent research on education aid has also been mainly concerned with the effectiveness of the new modalities (e.g. Birchler & Michaelowa, 2016; Heyneman & Lee, 2016; Riddell & Niño-Zarazúa, 2016). Yet, theory of post-politics has scarcely been employed to studies of aid, let alone aid to education. There are a few papers that focus on other domains of international development (Kamat, 2014; Wilson, 2014; Author, X) and some explorative work has also been conducted of education aid (Authors, X&Yab).

Broadly speaking, however, there is a dearth of such analyses. This paper addresses this scarcity and it demonstrates that a post-political reading of education aid in Rwanda can take us quite far. While we are the first to recognize that the Rwandan context is not typical of donor-recipient relationships (e.g. author, X), we still believe that the theoretical lens can lend itself well to other country contexts too. Hence, given that the aid architecture is global in scope and that it has obvious post-political features, we maintain that the findings are of significance beyond the singular case. Finally, in our view, post-foundational political thought offers a constructive response to McGrath's (2014, p. 10) recent call for more creative research, based on a 'reappraisal of epistemological and methodological stances', in the field of international education and development.

4. The post-politics of education aid in Rwanda

As mentioned above the Rwandan education sector has been portrayed as a 'model sector'. The reasons behind this epithet include that the sector was early to put in place forums for donor coordination in line with the Paris Agenda (Hayman, 2006; Holvoet & Rombouts, 2008), as well as that aid spent on Rwandan education is suggested to have had a comparatively high impact on economic development (DfID, 2014). The Rwandan education sector has furthermore been depicted as successful in terms of drastically increasing enrolment rates at primary and secondary levels (e.g. Williams, 2016). Drawing on theory of post-politics, and in conversation with Hayman's (and others') previous findings, this section explores the technocratic governance arrangements underpinning this alleged success story. First we present an overview of the new institutional set-up for education aid and some of its post-political features. After this we focus on four specific post-political strategies which sustain order and make governance operable in spite of persistent conflictuality: harmonizing fragmentation; scientization; recasting civil society, and post-political ownership. As will be shown in each sub-section, these strategies are powerful but never entirely successful. Furthermore, the strategies are interlinked but we present them separately for analytical purposes.

4.1 A new institutional set-up

At the time of Hayman's (2006, 2007) research, aid in Rwanda was organized in largely donor-driven sector clusters. The main body for coordinating and implementing education aid a decade later is the ESWG. The ESWG meets quarterly and includes all major partners: government agencies, bilateral and multilateral donors, INGOs and CSOs. The overarching task

of the ESWG is to align support around the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) (RoR, 2013b). The MINEDUC is responsible for implementing the ESSP, and in doing this it is supported by a number of semi-autonomous bodies including the Rwanda Education Board (REB), the Workforce Development Authority (WDA), and the Higher Education Council (HEC). Within the ESWG there are three sub-sector groups, which meet monthly and report to the ESWG, and this is where most of the work in the sector takes place. These so-called Technical Working Groups are: the basic education strategy group (chairs: REB and UK/UNICEF); the TVET strategy group (chairs: WDA and Germany), and; the higher education strategy group (chairs: HEC and Sweden).

Important for understanding the work in the education sector is the second Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (EDPRS2) (RoR, 2013a). This document recognizes the importance of education and signals a strong investment focus on how to transform Rwanda into a globalized knowledge economy. Every sixth month there are Joint Education Sector Reviews (JESR) commissioned by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN). In April there is a forward-looking JESR focused on plans for the upcoming fiscal year and in September there is a backward-looking JESR, focusing on the progress made. An important part of these JESRs are the so-called 'terms of reference', emanating from MINECOFIN, which focus on results and measurability and are heavily oriented towards fulfilling the EDPRS2. The importance of the terms of reference, and the strong influence of MINECOFIN in the education sector, was highlighted by several of our informants. This development was also anticipated by Hayman (2006, p.183) as she noted that the shift in aid thinking would enlarge the power of the MINECOFIN.

When Hayman (2006, 2007) did her research the UK and the World Bank were lead donors in the Rwandan education sector and, as previously mentioned, the sector was dominated by a few partners. In 2016 the UK and UNICEF are lead donors, suggesting that they are responsible for strategic communication with the government and for coordinating donor activities. The World Bank has decreased its presence in the education sector and is today mainly focusing on higher education. Other big development partners at the time of Hayman's study were UNICEF, Germany, Belgium, France and Sweden, the latter acting as silent partner to the UK. Germany remains an important donor with a focus mainly on TVET. Belgium is no longer active in the sector while Sweden has shifted focus and is now an active partner but supporting higher education. A new big player since Hayman's studies is the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and another one is the US, both strongly focusing on basic education. India and China are increasingly involved in activities relating to TVET but do not form part of the

ESWG (Interview, Bilateral Donor, 21/3 2016). It has been difficult to get a straightforward explanation from the donors as to why these two countries do not form part of the ESWG, but one contributing factor is with all likelihood that they have not endorsed the principles of the Paris Declaration. In addition to the ESWG, the donors meet separately in the Donor Development Partner Group prior to the ESWG meetings as well as before the JESRs. In these meetings the discussions are generally confined to the ESSP (Interview, CSO, 22/3 2016; Interview, Bilateral Donor, 2/12 2015). At the time of Hayman's research there was a large variety of aid modalities and mechanisms in the education sector and only three donors gave sector budget support: UK, Sweden and the World Bank. She did however note a tendency in which 'budgetary and sectoral programme support began to play an increasingly important role' (Hayman 2006, p. 119). In the latest ESSP, however, it is stated that sector budget support largely comes from the UK, the GPE and Belgium (RoR, 2013b), and as of 2016, it is only the GPE which gives sector budget support to education in Rwanda (Personal communication, Bilateral Donor, 31/10 2016). Hence, although education aid is more coordinated than earlier – through the ESWG – aid modalities still differ between donors and the anticipated switch to budget support has not materialised.

In our interpretation the ESWG is a multi-stakeholder governance arrangement, where political contestation is largely downplayed in favour of technical communication between expert administrators. In this way it closely resembles many contemporary post-political entities identified in the recent literature as referred to above (e.g. Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014). Focus has been on establishing alignment and consensus among partners at the sector level, in line with the Paris declaration. However, although there is some leeway for partners in the ESWG, in terms of deciding about educational priorities, these decisions take place within a largely predefined scope of possible outcomes as laid out by MINECOFIN. These 'frames' constitute another noticeable post-political feature of the ESWG. What has been created, quite ironically, is an institutional set-up that makes meetings and dialogue between different partners mandatory, but in these discussions very little is actually at stake. Another important change since Hayman's study concerns the organizational measures by which different donors are allocated to different sub-sector groups. This is the next topic of examination.

4.2 Harmonizing fragmentation

As Hayman's research clearly pointed out, many tensions existed a decade ago, between and within different donors and the government. Since then the sector has become more operable

through various means. Crucial for this is the way different donors – with dissimilar priorities and agendas – have been allocated by the government to different sectors within education aid. With reference to this, one bilateral donor said, tongue-in-cheek, that ‘the Rwandan government is very good at keeping track of us [the development partners]’ (Interview, Bilateral Donor, 8/12 2015). Hence, while there is a strong appearance of harmonization at the sector level, a more detailed look provides a somewhat different image. The development partners have to a large extent been encouraged to focus on their own prioritized areas within smaller sub-sector groups of ‘like-minded’. This is commonly referred to as the ‘division of labor’. The ESWG is not primarily seen as a forum for voicing disagreements, since most of the meeting time is spent on implementing the strategy as laid out in the terms of reference. According to one bilateral donor informant there are no major disagreements in the education aid sector anymore, and if there are disagreements, these are – somewhat ironically – most likely handled in the ‘technical’ working groups (Interview, Bilateral Donor, 2/12 2015). This aspect was brought up by several of our informants. The division of labor into technical working groups could of course be interpreted simply as a way to avoid duplication of efforts in line with the Paris declaration. Yet, drawing on post-political theory, it could also be read as a way of barring politicization of sensitive topics and avoid tensions by letting formerly disagreeing partners focus on managing their own priorities. A decade ago, Hayman showed that there were major tensions in education aid and that the donors largely were preoccupied with different agendas. With the division of labor, these different agendas have largely been built into the institutional set-up and do hence not constitute a major problem anymore. Hence, rather than orchestrating the appearance of consent (cf. Fletcher, 2014), this could actually be seen as a functional effort to orchestrate dissonance.

The attempts to avoid sensitive topics have, however, not been entirely successful. There are still tensions between partners that want to prioritize basic education and those that want to prioritize higher education and/or TVET (see also Ansoms & Rostagno 2012; author). Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development clearly stipulates that all education levels should get priority. Yet, how to strike a balance between education levels remains a contested issue in Rwanda according to several of our informants, on both sides of the donor-recipient relationship (e.g. Interview, Government Official, 19/8 2016; Interview, Bilateral Donor, 8/12 2015; Interview, CSO, 22/3 2016). This conflict about budget allocations relates closely to the strong role of the MINECOFIN in the education sector as discussed above. For example, a multilateral donor representative claimed that it was easy to get the government ‘onboard’ as long as the proposal was in line with the EDPRS2; otherwise it was seen to be very difficult (Interview, Multilateral

Donor, 13/9 2016). As an example, despite what was stated in the ESSP, Rwanda has not increased the percentage devoted to primary education, and some respondents interpreted this as an outcome of the strong position of the MINECOFIN (Interview, Multilateral Donor 24/4 2015). What seems to be a particularly infected issue in relation to budget allocations is the use of scarce resources for scholarships to a limited number of higher education students. According to some informants this money would have been more efficiently spent on basic education, for example by increasing teacher salaries, since this would benefit more – and also poor – students. In the view of other informants, however, removing subsidies for higher education would make this sub-sector into an even more elitist endeavor. One donor informant said that they have, ‘serious concerns that basic education is underfunded’, and equally stressed that the government - at least in the short term - tends to prioritize higher education, ICT and TVET because these are seen to be most aligned with the EDPRS2 (Interview, Bilateral Donor, 22/3 2016). Confronted with these different perspectives one informant at the MINEDUC said that especially TVET is a main priority for the government, while most donors want to focus on basic education. Yet this informant also argued that this is not necessarily a tension since all education levels need to be prioritized, although the funding levels at present were found to be insufficient for all the tasks at hand (Interview, Government Official, 19/8 2016).

The division of labor within the ESWG helps evading conflict. Yet, it has not managed to solve all tensions in the sector, and the post-political order is hence, as always, incomplete (cf. Mouffe 2005). Despite the explicit intentions in Agenda 2030 there are still tensions on the ground between actors who want different things, and these tensions become extra evident when resources are scarce (cf. Authors). Attempts to hide political prioritizations behind a ‘partnership’ and ‘everything-is-important’ discourse are symptomatic of post-political technocracy. However, as will be evident below, there are other post-political strategies.

4.3 Scientization

One issue that Hayman neither discussed at length, nor predicted for the future, is the increasing role of ‘evidence’ in aid to education. In Rwanda today evidence is really the word on everybody’s lips and the government is portrayed, by itself and others, as being open to new ideas as long as these are evidence-based. For example, one civil society informant suggested that the MINEDUC, ‘is very receptive to evidence-based studies that can help to inform policy and practice and implementation...’ (Interview, INGO, 8/12 2015). As will be discussed below this emphasis on ‘evidence-based policies’ has given civil society a specific role in the

Rwandan education sector. Yet, similar language was used also by other development partners. The discussion about budget allocations between different education levels is a case in point and, as stated by a donor informant, when different opinions prevail, the matter should be settled on the basis of evidence:

Yes, there are tensions [between development partners], I think there is always going to be tensions, but we are professionals you know, we can (...) have a reasonable debate about the best allocation which is based on evidence (Interview, Bilateral Donor, 22/3 2016).

The frequent use of the term ‘evidence’ in the education sector implies that issues for which there are no straightforward ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ become depoliticized with reference to an external and supposedly ‘neutral’ authority. This closely resembles findings from other post-political arrangements where political issues are discursively transformed into matters of expertise and ‘scientific evidence’ (e.g. Schlembach et al, 2012; author, X).

However, the evidence discourse in Rwanda is complex. An illustrative example concerns the recent switch to English as medium of instruction discussed previously. This is a sensitive issue because language of instruction relates to everything from access and completion rates to learning in many schools, as well as to class and identity in a conflict-ridden society (e.g. Rosendal, 2010; Samuelson & Freedman, 2010; Abbott, Sapsford & Rwirahira, 2015; Musker et al, 2014). While the language policy was contentious initially it is not seen to be as controversial anymore. Our informants overall seemed to have accepted the new situation for pragmatic reasons. Several donors and INGOs have even been involved in rolling out the new language policy, although there have been different views among donors, INGOs, and the government as to *how* best to do this. The position of the government has been to make a rapid shift, while several donors and INGOs rather have wanted to move gradually and mix languages in a transition phase. Donors and INGOs that were critical of the implementation of the language policy were not impressed by how the government dealt with ‘evidence’:

...in terms of the text books, if you had them in both Kinyarwanda and English, it would help the kids in terms of their transitioning. So the evidence is quite clear and it was very robust evidence but the Government stood their grounds and said, ‘no, no, no! We cannot do that!’ (Interview, Bilateral Donor, 2/12 2015).

Another informant explained that teachers were very positive towards using textbooks written partly in Kinyarwanda, while the government was not interested as it, allegedly, would slow down the transition process:

The government did not want any Kinyarwanda, anywhere near the books and so despite the fact that [there were] very good results, I think something like fifteen percent improvement over a very short period of using these materials, they were not happy, it was very difficult to ask them why and very sensitive to ask them why... (Interview, INGO, 17/6 2016).

What comes through in this example is a selective use of evidence. References to evidence become problematic when results suddenly point in the ‘wrong’ direction. Another example regards reports of increasing dropout rates in Rwanda. Several donor and INGO informants suggested that there is a connection between the implementation of the new language policy and increased dropout rates but claimed to have had big problems convincing the government of such a connection. In these discussions it also became rather obvious that it was the government that was seen as responsible for this particular policy, despite the new institutional set-up described above. There is thus a limit to how far the post-political consensus on using evidence can go. From the perspective of post-foundational political thought this is not surprising. As long as we are dealing with political problems there will always be allegations that ‘others’ are using evidence selectively to support their own positions. Hence, conflictual we/them articulations remain enduring threats to post-political order. As noted above, scientization also relates closely to the new role of civil society in the Rwandan education sector, which we will now turn to.

4.4 Recasting civil society

At the time of Hayman’s research civil society was playing a rather marginal role in the education sector and it was not formally represented in the cluster groups. Today civil society is represented in the ESWG through the Rwanda Education NGO Coordination Platform (RENCP). RENCP was established in 2010 as a forum for coordination and information sharing among around 70 INGOs and CSOs working with education in Rwanda (Williams, 2015). According to one INGO informant it was formed because it answered to a need expressed by the Rwandan government for a better organized civil society (Interview, INGO, 4/12 2015). A

similar message is conveyed in a consultancy evaluation of the RENCN (Williams, 2015), where the Director-General of the REB is quoted:

Here in Rwanda, things are different. Everything that we do, we do it together. [...] Whether it is local or international NGOs, we do interventions together. We have nothing to hide. We give confidence to donors that their investments are being used well. [...] Working with the RENCN is leading to greater capacity for REB. We work hand in hand. [RECN members] have experience and we recognize that. We pay attention to that and that improves the capacity and knowledge of our own staff (Janvier Gasana, quoted in Williams 2015, p. 19).

In this quote, the notion of civil society as enhancing government capacity is evident. Equally, in the most recent ESSP it is argued that thanks to the coordinated civil society approach, ‘there is now an increasing potential role for NGOs to support government to implement ESSP in areas where they have specific expertise’ (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 74).

An INGO-informant confirmed that the government sees civil society as having a strong expertise, and claimed that organizations working in Rwanda, ‘basically are free experts for the government’ (Interview, INGO, 4/12 2015). This relates closely to the previous discussion about the role of ‘evidence’, and in the consultancy evaluation referred to above (Williams, 2015, p. 23) it is stated that the platform has ‘contributed to the priorities of the [education] sector through evidence-based advocacy.’ The organizations representing RENCN in different forums, for instance in the ESWG, are generally those considered to have the ‘right’ kind of expertise. This is because, as stated by the INGO informant, it does not work to have, ‘a bunch of people raising their voice [if] they do not really have any proof for their demands’ (Interview, INGO, 4/12 2015). The significance of such a post-political stance should hardly be underestimated. This view of civil society actors as ‘experts’ for the government was also articulated by donors. One donor informant contended that civil society is ‘quite strong’ in the Rwandan education sector, due to that they produce ‘strong reports’ (Interview, Bilateral Donor, 22/3 2016). Another donor informant equally described how the government often turns to civil society for information and that they do tend to listen to these organizations if they get convinced that what they are suggesting is ‘best practice’:

So you have International NGOs that have been doing a lot of research and evaluations which the Government finds like it's very - it's evidence based [*Sic.*]. So they have a strong voice (Interview, Bilateral Donor, 2/12 2015).

A central idea in the new international aid architecture was that civil society should act as a ‘watchdog’ of governments. In the Rwandan education sector, the role assigned to civil society appears to be more about delivering evidence-based policy evaluations. In relation to this, a strong need to align themselves was apparent among the civil society actors. For example, one INGO informant argued that civil society must work closely with the GoR, to show them that they are striving for the same goals, and that only if they manage to do this, they can become influential (Interview, INGO, 4/12 2015). To align themselves so intimately with the government’s official policy clearly puts restrictions on what civil society actors can say and do, as well as on their ability to act as watchdog. Now, since the time of Hayman’s study, concerns have been raised in Western media about the increasing authoritarianism of the Rwandan state (e.g. Seay, 2016; Smith, 2012) It is also widely agreed amongst leading Africanists that civil society in the country has been emasculated and disciplined by the authoritarian government (e.g. Beswick, 2010; Straus & Waldorf, 2011). However, our point is that civil society in Rwanda, rather than being absent or weakened, has been recast and integrated into the post-political machinery. This is reminiscent of Foucault’s (2008, p. 296) old observation that civil society is not an autonomous sphere but ‘the correlate of a political technology of government’.

Recasting civil society does, however, not come without friction, and not everybody feel equally included in the new institutional set-up. Many Rwandan CSOs that are members of RENCNP, are generally not seen to have an equally strong voice vis-à-vis the government (Interview, Bilateral Donor, 2/12 2015). This is mainly because they are rarely found to have the right competency to play the role as ‘experts’. To put it somewhat differently: few Rwandan CSOs are regarded as sufficiently professional to fully partake in the governance of education aid. This low status given to Rwandan CSOs is not necessarily the intention of the RENCNP; the idea behind the platform is rather to give ‘local’ CSOs a voice which they otherwise would not have. By becoming members of RENCNP, it is argued, their questions and concerns can be brought ‘to the table’, and it additionally gives them access to valuable information which would otherwise have been out of their reach (Interview, INGO, 4/12 2015; Interview, INGO, 8/12 2015). Yet, regardless of these intentions, the recasting of civil society has still created some tension between international and Rwandan organizations. In addition, it has led to the formation of a competing CSO-platform – the Rwanda Education for All Coalition (REFAC). It is difficult to pin down what the actual differences are between these two platforms in terms of their objectives. The big issue is rather that RENCNP was seen by members of REFAC as mainly representing foreign INGOs (Interview, CSO, 22/3 2015), while informants from the

RENCP basically claimed that REFAC was a coalition of fraudulent fortune-hunters. This discussion also relates to more general concerns about the ‘professionalization’ of civil society in Rwanda (Author X). Our findings suggest that CSOs are not really given space to voice their opinion unless they can back it up with ‘evidence’ and that the quest for close alignment driving many organizations involved in education aid leads to the exclusion of other organizations. This is yet another typical expression of post-political technocracy, as post-foundational political thought posits that there can be no inclusion without exclusion (Mouffe, 2005). We now turn to the final element of the post-politics of education aid in Rwanda: ownership.

4.5 Post-political ownership

As discussed above Hayman (2006, 2007) found education aid in Rwanda to be dominated by a few donor countries; several donors felt excluded and government ownership was very limited. In her subsequent study she noted a turn towards joint donor-government ownership, where the government had more room for maneuver but still mainly pushed issues that reflected the wishes of the donors (Hayman, 2009). Evident in Hayman’s writing is the idea of a contradiction between government ownership and high level of donor involvement. This ‘ownership paradox’ has received a lot of attention in the research community during the last decade (e.g. Booth, 2011; Whitfield, 2009) and it has very recently been discussed in the particular context of Rwanda (Hasselskog et al, 2017). A very significant contribution, challenging much conventional thinking within the domain, is Hansson’s (2015) investigation of ‘ownership’ as a governing technology. This section seeks to incorporate some of Hansson’s insights into our own theorization of the ‘post-political’ features of ownership in the Rwandan education sector.

Several of our donor informants expressed rather positive views of how the Rwandan education sector operates and claimed that it works much better than in comparable places. Hence further progress appears to have been made since Hayman’s 2009 study. GoR authorities confirmed that the governance of education aid operates smoothly. An informant from the MINEDUC alluded that, ‘we have a common understanding with our development partners’ (Interview, Government Official, 4/12 2015). Furthermore, different development partners reiterated monotonously that the Rwandan government now is in the ‘driving seat’ with regard to education policy, and that donors align with the government’s priorities. Still, we would advise against simply taking such statements at face value. After all, it is in everybody’s interest to claim that the government is in the ‘driving set’ as this is the ideal in the contemporary aid

architecture.

However, inspired by Hansson (2015), we would like to approach the matter of ownership from a different angle, not seeing it as a dichotomous, either/or kind of matter. Even if government ownership in the Rwandan education sector is ‘stronger’ today this does not necessarily imply that the GoR has strengthened its power at the expense of donor influence in a zero-sum-like game. Donor-recipient relations are complex. As seen in previous sections, the Rwandan government is borrowing capacity and expertise on a range of issues in order to operate effectively. Hence, apart from receiving additional resources making it possible to implement policies, the presence of donors – including INGOs – enables the government to constitute itself as an active and responsible agent, leading the education sector in a result-oriented and evidence-based direction. Hansson’s (2015) work is important here, as she demonstrates that government ownership and high levels of donor involvement do not necessarily contradict each other. The former can actually be reinforced by the later. In her study of the Nigerien water sector ‘ownership’ is not conceptualized as autonomous self-determination but as the capacity of the government to act and perform, something that demands a close presence of donors (Hansson, 2015). If ownership, in such a way, is approached as a governmental practice, rather than as something that an actor has (or has not), it also marries well with post-political analysis.

Perceived as a governmental practice, ‘ownership’ in the Rwandan education sector clearly unfolds within a narrow and largely predefined set of possible outcomes, carefully measured on a range of performance indicators. Governance of the sector is also, as discussed above, executed by a consensus-oriented regime of technical experts on both sides of the donor-recipient relationship. In such a post-political constellation conventional and binary distinctions between ownership and ‘donorship’ appears increasingly obsolete. Hence, in our interpretation, being in ‘the driver’s seat’ in the Rwandan education sector is not so much about having the sovereign authority to make autonomous decisions about where to go, but rather about, in communication with the co-driver(s), demonstrating the ability to move forward in accordance with the map. In many ways this is the essence of post-politics. Still though, it is important to keep in mind that if ‘ownership’ is a governmental technique that operates through the agency of the governed (cf. Hansson, 2015; Hansson & Hellberg with Stern 2015), then resistance remains an enduring possibility. In other words: governing is always uncertain and post-political order is never complete.

5. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of Hayman's (2006, 2007) pioneering study, this article has explored the technocratic governance arrangements that underpin the alleged success story of education aid in Rwanda. The Rwandan education sector has gone through some remarkable developments since Hayman's findings were published a decade back. Hence, while many of the conflicts that she identified prevail, the manners in which they are dealt with have become more sophisticated. Order has been created in the sector and it now operates through a number of arrangements and strategies that help evading political conflict and which render educational development largely technical in nature. Five such aspects have been highlighted.

Firstly, a *new institutional set-up* has been put in place. This coherent structure of multi-stakeholder working groups and joint evaluation meetings entail little political discussions, but all the more technical communication between administrative experts, guided by terms of reference set out by the MINECOFIN. Secondly, old tensions in the sector have largely been evacuated through a sophisticated form of *harmonized fragmentation*. Donors have been allocated to different sub-sectors and encouraged to manage their own priorities in accordance with the 'division of labour' principle and the 'everything is important' discourse. Thirdly, *scientization* has become the new norm of governance. Political decisions are increasingly transformed into matters of 'evidence' and thus outsourced to an external and supposedly 'neutral' authority. Fourthly, *civil society* has moved from a marginal to a more significant role in the sector. Yet, it has simultaneously been *recast* from domain of largely ignored community voices, to a pool of technical expertise tightly integrated into the government machinery. Finally, a *post-political* form of *ownership* is now in place. This governmental practice is not so much about sovereign authority to make autonomous decisions, but rather about the capacity to act and deliver, in close presence of donors, within narrow and largely predefined parameters. The significance of these arrangements should hardly be underestimated and the outcome is a largely depoliticized education aid environment.

However, post-political governance arrangements must not be mistaken for an apolitical world. It is essential to understand that efforts to depoliticize occur precisely because 'the political' is constitutive for human societies (Author X and Y). Moreover, while post-politics can manage or evade persistent conflict to a certain point, it can never fully resolve it. In many ways aid to Rwanda can be seen as the ultimate example of how the spectre of 'the political' inevitably haunts post-political order. After all, these institutional arrangements are not only seeking to manage the abysmal rift between the global rich and poor, but they are also articulated in a country context marked by huge internal social stratification and a history of the most horrendous and extreme expression of 'the political': genocide. Hence it is certainly

important to be humble and to put post-politics in context. Be that as it may, we cannot help but to ask ourselves, in line with Mouffe (2005, 2013), whether it would be possible to create an educational aid environment that allows for ‘the political’ to take on a more democratic and agonistic form? In our view this is one of the most pertinent questions for the field of international development and education post-2015.

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