

“We Cannot Be Led by a Child”: Forced Male Circumcision during the Post-election Violence in Kenya

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This paper is part of an ongoing research addressing the phenomenon of sexual violence in war and conflict situations in three African contexts including DR Congo, Kenya and Rwanda. The paper argues that while sexual violence in these conflict situations, including the mass rape of women is a reflection of the prevailing gender ideologies, the contextual features or the way they intersect with various markers of identity including, ethnicity, culture, history and the economy, the latter of which we describe as the “politics of my pocket” are little understood. While women in Kenya were, similarly raped during the post-election violence in 2007, men were also forcibly circumcised, suffered castrations and other forms of mutilations to humiliate, terrorize not just the individual men, but the entire communities.

The paper thus focuses on the ritual of male circumcision among the Kikuyu in Central Kenya and examines how it has been changing and in particular why and when such a life-course transitional institution meant for inculcating ethical analysis of the self and others became that violent.