

Women's Movements after Post-Election-Violence in Kenya - Recovering Social and Political Spaces

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The ethnic clashes after the general elections 2007 in Kenya changed the political opportunity structures for women's movements: The acts of sexual violence during the conflict destroyed the living conditions of women and fostered a re-traditionalization of women's roles. During this time employees of women's organizations became actors of re-traditionalization by referring to ethnic belongings: women conformed more to their ethnic group than to be a women. Thus, gender identity became secondary and ethnic belongings became number one. The post-conflict situation opened new opportunities for women's movements and women's activists were engaged to revive gender identity. While several analyses of peace and conflict studies emphasise a continuation of re-traditionalization in post-conflict situations, the following contribution will emphasize that new social and political spheres of action arose and women's movements have been reconfigured in post-conflict situation in Kenya. In order to explore the relevance and impact of women's movement in post-conflict situation, they will be considered on the basis of social movement's theory, particularly the Political-Opportunity Structures-, the Collective Identity- and the Framing-Theory. Against this background, the empirical data were interpreted, that have been collected in a three month qualitative research in Kenya. The analyses will show that women's movements draw attention to women's discontentment and try to overcome traditional perceptions of being women. Women's movements also regain an important space in civil society and towards the government. The integration of women's movements in the truth, justice and reconciliation process as well as the increasing public awareness on gender-based violence strengthens the dialogue between women's movements and the state. Furthermore, women's movements hold the government accountable and participate in decision-making processes. All these processes are notably, because women's movements have been considered historically as weak and it seems to be the first time, that women's movements in Kenya regain social and political space on the basis of a shared identity. While women's movements become stronger, women's movements still compromising mechanisms of exclusion, which still hamper collective action.