Fighting for Justice (and Survival): Kenyan Civil Society Accountability Strategies and Their Enemies

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Abstract

Drawing on interviews with civil society actors and international donors, this article examines the role of Kenyan civil society in advancing accountability for serious international crimes, specifically the 2007–2008 post-election violence. We consider civil society as recipient and transmitter of norms of accountability and as transformer and user of such norms, as well as civil society strategies for engaging with actors domestically and internationally. Exploring how civil society has devised advocacy strategies relating to the International Criminal Court and domestic justice mechanisms, we challenge some of the assumptions in the literature on civil society and accountability. In particular, we question whether civil society can predominantly rely on international standards as part of a 'justice cascade,' arguing that the Kenyan case illustrates a more complex situation where narratives of justice and accountability continuously change and may be undermined as a consequence of counternarratives devised by those opposed to criminal justice.

Key words   Kenya   civil society   accountability   International Criminal Court

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