

Dr Lotte Hughes (Ferguson Centre, History) and Dr Mark Lamont will present papers based on case studies carried out for the ESRC-funded project 'Cultural Rights and Kenya's New Constitution' (2014-17) in which they were, respectively, PI and Research Associate. The papers will examine, separately, issues around what is colloquially known as 'circumcision' or 'the cut'. Both throw up issues around the tensions between human rights versus cultural rights, in the new dispensation following the passing of a 2010 Constitution which enshrined cultural rights for the first time, while outlawing harmful cultural practices. The best known of these practices and the one that draws the greatest condemnation internationally is FGM/C, or female genital mutilation/cutting, traditionally performed upon pubescent girls to mark their initiation into womanhood. However, FGM does not always involve rites of passage or initiation, and is in some places performed on much younger girls. Far less attention is paid to, and disapproval heaped upon, male circumcision, which does not tend to be regarded in Kenya as gender violence at all – even when carried out by force on adults. FGM is against the law in Kenya, male circumcision (forced or non-forced) is not. The presentations will explore some of the issues arising, in the context of, on the one hand, the local and globalised moral panic around FGM, and, on the other, the almost total silence around ritualised male gender violence.