

**Crippling Cultures and Tormenting Traditions – Female Genital Mutilation  
in Fact and Fiction**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Philosophy in English

By

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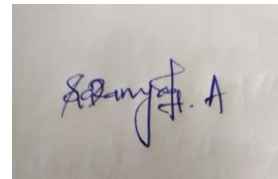
Coimbatore

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*Declaration*

## DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled “Crippling Cultures and Tormenting Traditions – Female Genital Mutilation in Fact and Fiction” submitted by me for the degree of Master of Philosophy (M. Phil.) in English is the record of work carried out by me during the period from July 2019 to December 2020 under the guidance of Dr. (Mrs.) S. Jayalakshmi, Assistant Professor, Department of English, and has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship, Titles in this University or any other University or other similar institution of Higher Learning.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in blue ink. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'S. Jayalakshmi. A'.

Signature of the Candidate

***Certificate***

## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “Crippling Cultures and Tormenting Traditions – Female Genital Mutilation in Fact and Fiction” submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy (M. Phil.) by Saranya. A (19MPENF006) is the record of research work carried out by her during the period from July 2019 to December 2020 under my guidance and supervision, and this work has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship, Titles in this University or any other University or other similar institution of Higher Learning.



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Signature of the Research Supervisor



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*Acknowledgement*

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

“Unless action to end female genital mutilation is accelerated now, another 68 million girls will have been cut by 2030” (UNICEF, 2019).

‘Female Genital Mutilation’ (FGM) or female circumcision is a plan of action which performed on a girl or woman to change or wound her genitalia for non-medical reasons. The procedure involves a partial or total removal of female outer genitalia, which causes severe bleeding, urinating problems, infection as well as complication during child birth and raised the level of new born death. ‘Female Genital Mutilation’ is carried out on young girls between infancy and age fifteen as a cultural practice. Also, it is deeply implanted norms in gender inequality. The reason in the development of the practice is different from one another. Some of the communities follow this practice “as a rite of passage into womanhood while others follow it as a way to suppress a woman’s identity and sexuality”. Some clans accomplish the practice with religious beliefs, although there is no religious script about female genital mutilation. They practise genital mutilation in the belief of ensuring a girl’s virginity, future marriage and family honor. By following female circumcision girls and women are facing risk in their daily life. There is no benefit of health and leads to long-term medical complications. Also it can lead in the increased risk of HIV transmission. Moreover ‘Female Genital Mutilation’ is a violation of women’s fundamental human rights.

Ngiana- Bakwion Kandala and Paul Nzinga Komba in their book *Female*

*Genital Mutilation around The World: Analysis of Medical Aspects, Law and Practice* (2018, 96) have suggested that Hosken first coined the phrase Female Genital Mutilation. FGM is one of the major cultural practices in around thirteen countries which should be stopped at the earliest. UNICEF has stated that: “The 6<sup>th</sup> of February every year marks the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation. The day is observed to raise awareness among people who believe that this would protect women and to arouse support to end the practice. While the exact number of girls and women worldwide who have undergone genital mutilation remains unknown. At least 200 million girls and women aged between 15 and 49 from 30 countries have been subjected to this practice”.

These amounts to a total population of 200 million and more than a half of this total population live in the following three countries Egypt, Ethiopia and Indonesia. And also it is followed in Djibouti, Guinea and Somalia where almost ninety percentages of women mutilated.

The experienced practitioners play an important part in performing FGM in a number of countries. In seven countries, over 20 million women and girls have been affected to female genital mutilation. The medicalisation of the profession does not make it safer with the natural functions of the bodies of girls and women. The activity has been driven underground in many cultures, rather than abolished. It has led girls to be cut at younger ages amidst greater secrecy.

In 1997, the WHO listed four different types of female genital mutilation. Severity and health risks are closely linked to the type of FGM being done and the amount of tissue is being cut. The four major types of FGM are:

- Type 1 - Clitoridectomy
- Type 2 - Excision
- Type 3 - Infibulations
- Type 4 - Other harmful procedures

**“Type 1 - Clitoridectomy** - Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans (the external and visible part of the clitoris, which is a sensitive part of the female genitals, with the function of providing sexual pleasure to the woman), and/or the prepuce/clitoral hood (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoral glans) When it is important to distinguish between the major variations of Type 1 FGM, the following subdivisions are:

- **Type 1a** - Removal of the prepuce/clitoral hood only.
- **Type 1b** - Removal of the clitoral glans with the prepuce/clitoral hood.

**Type 2 - Excision** - Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans and the labia minora (the inner folds of the vulva), with or without removal of the labia majora (the outer folds of skin of the vulva). When it is important to distinguish between the major variations of Type II FGM, the following subdivisions are:

- **Type 2a** - Removal of the labia minora only.
- **Type 2b** - Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans and the labia minora (prepuce/clitoral hood may be affected).
- **Type 2c** - Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans, the labia minora and the labia majora (prepuce/clitoral hood may be affected).

**Type 3 - Infibulations** - narrowing of the vaginal opening with the creation of a

covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the labia minora, or labia majora. The covering of the vaginal opening is done with or without removal of the clitoral prepuce/clitoral hood and glans (Type 1 FGM). When it is important to distinguish between variations of Type III FGM, the following subdivisions are:

- **Type 3a** - Removal and repositioning of the labia minora.
- **Type 3b** - Removal and repositioning of the labia majora.

**Type 4 – Unclassified** - refers to other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, for example pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterization”. (World Health Organization)

Ngianga- Bakwion Kandala and Paul Nzinga Komba also suggest that a social activist Androus, defines that: “Female Genital Mutilation or female circumcision mentions as a type of surgical modification of the female genitalia. The surgery would either remove the major portions of the vagina, or limited genital involvement which does not change the genitalia significantly. In the name of cultural and religious practices, this surgery would be done mainly on girls who are under transition from childhood to adulthood. The essence of being a woman in the society is derived only from the practice of FGM” (Kandala, 96).

Moreover, Ngianga- Bakwion Kandala and Paul Nzinga Komba also suggest that Shweder, an American cultural anthropologist opinions that “female circumcision refers to the coming of age and gender identity ceremonies involving genital alterations. He considers female and male circumcision as an important phase in the transition to adulthood”. (Kandala, 96)

The justifications of Female Genital Mutilation are the reason given to take

the practice performs again. These reasons are related to one another. Practising Female Genital Mutilation is justified as it is the tradition of the rite of passage. The beliefs and culture values are connected to the societies practice. When people from outside hear these reasons the particular belief system often sounds unreasonable and idiotic. Anika Rahman and Nahid Toubia in their book *'Female Genital Mutilation: A Guide to Laws and Policies Worldwide'* concur FGM is a representation of "an act of socialization into cultural values and a connection to family, community members and previous generation". (Rahman & Toubia, 5)

The anthropologists chose to explore the symbolic meaning and reasoning behind this observation of Ngianga- Bakwion Kandala and Paul Nzinga Komba. They have observed that the practice of 'Female Genital Mutilation' as: "rite of passage rather than indulging in ethnic and political controversy surrounding the custom" (Kandala, 97). And Female Genital Mutilation has been a most sought after subject for intense researches globally. Ngianga- Bakwion Kandala and Paul Nzinga Komba also observe that: "Yet the very concept of mutilation denotes that the practice is, prima facie, bad, barbaric, primitive and amounting to torture, discrimination and inhumane treatment" (Kandala, 97). But it is not necessarily be like. Certain writers choose to use the word cutting, which they believe is less stigmatizing than Female Genital Mutilation to denote the practice. In a description "the merit of being neutral and non-ideological and amounts to showing respect to practicing communities. Ngianga- Bakwion Kandala and Paul Nzinga Komba also label the human subjects who has undergone – voluntarily or forcibly - Female Genital Mutilation as patient and protected person or victim" (Kandala, 97).

Female Genital Mutilation has been started practising 2000 years back. Yet the whereabouts of the tradition of practising FGM are unknown. In ancient Egypt, it was practiced as a symbol of aristocratical distinction. Some are of the opinion says the practice of 'Female Genital Mutilation' began in the slave trade when slave women were traded into Arab societies. On the other hand there is a belief that: "The practice developed independently among certain ethnic groups in sub-Saharan Africa as part of puberty rites". Generally, Female Genital Mutilation seen as a way of ensures the virginity of women and numbs female sexual desires. Many commentators believe that the practice evolved from the primitive communities. Mainly it is to subjugate women sexual behavior and to establish control over them. Some communities performed Female Genital Mutilation to ensure virginity of their women.

Traditional beliefs, values and attitudes are the supported reasons to be carried out in this practice. Some of the communities valued as a passing ritual to become proud women. Others value that it is a way to preserving a girl's virginity until marriage.

"In most of these countries FGM is a pre-requisite to marriage and marriage is vital to a woman's social and economic survival. It is believed by some African women that if their daughters are not circumcised would not get husband. This harmful tradition has been guided by taboos generation after generation. FGM is rooted in culture and some believe it is done for religious reasons, but it has not been confined to a particular culture or religion. FGM has neither been mentioned in the Quran nor Sunnah. It has been highlighted that FGM was practised in the United

Kingdom and United States by the Gynecologists to cure women of so-called female weakness. The practice of FGM continues within some communities in various forms and even in the 20th century girls and women are still subjected to this harmful tradition". (WHO, 2020)

Female Genital Mutilation precedes the dawn 'Islam' and 'Christianity'. "Researchers have traced the practice to Egypt to as old as the fifth-century BC and argue that the geographical distribution of Female Genital Mutilation suggests that it originated on the west coast of the Red Sea. Egyptian mummies show women infibulated and this is supported by a Greek papyrus in the British Museum dated 163 BC. A Greek historian and geographer in the second-century BC reported that a group along the eastern coast of the Red Sea cut their women in "Egyptian style" and that another group cut off in infancy with razors the whole portion that others circumcise" (Wilson, 2012).

There something shows the relationship between 'Female Genital Mutilation' and slavery. Dos Santos reported that: Somalia "had a custom to sew up their females, especially young slaves to make them unable for conception which makes them sell dearer, both for their chastity and confidence which their masters put in them"(1609). Kandala, reports that:

"Egyptians practised female circumcision and infibulation to prevent pregnancy in women and slaves. Egyptians raided and traded the Black south for slaves from dynastic to Byzantine times and Sudanese slaves were exported through the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf before the rise of Islam". (Kandala. 20)

Wilson stated that: “The anthropologists believe that FGM was practised among Equatorial African herders to protect young female herders from being raped, or an outgrowth of human sacrificial practices, or some early attempt at population control. Today, FGM is an entrenched practice that occurs in the African Sudanic belt between the Tropic of Cancer and the Equator, from the West Atlantic Coast across to Egypt down to Kenya and Tanzania in East Africa. The practice is spread across wide cultures and it is recommended that the practice may have arisen independently among different groups. A mix of cultural, religious and social factors is the reason for practising Female Genital Mutilation within families and communities”. (2012)

The practice of Female ‘Genital Mutilation’ is a social convention and it defines the necessary way of raising girl perfectly. This practice has been motivated by people’s faith on sexual behavior. Wilson mentioned that “Female Genital Mutilation is associated with cultural ideals of femininity and modesty. Local structures of power and authority can continue upholding the practice. They consider this as a cultural tradition, which is often used as an argument for its continuation. In some societies, recent adoption of Female Genital Mutilation is connected to copying the traditions of neighbouring groups, or a part of traditional revival movement. ‘Female Genital Mutilation’ is practised by new groups when they move into areas where the local population practices Female Genital Mutilation”.

Research indicates that women suffer serious adverse health effects after genital mutilation. Female Genital Cutting is varying for the type and seriousness of the procedure and the cleanliness of the tools. Moreover, it is focused on the girl’s

health or woman being cut. Women who undergo Type 1 and Type 2 of the procedure are at less risk for obstetric complications than those who undergo Type 3 FGM.

The important duty of the doctors is to identify what made their patient to undergo Female Genital Mutilation. Doctors could not provide required care to them without the process, which the patient needs in that particular circumstance. Experts advise that “the health professional must be an expert woman as she will have proper awareness and background knowledge of the issues and also about the patient. This issue should be addressed only with the help of women from regions of prevalence, who themselves have been subjected to some particular form of FGM”.

Mary Nyangweso in her book *‘Female Genital Cutting in Industrialized Countries: Mutilation or Cultural Tradition?’* raises the issue as follows:

“In most of the countries, female genital mutilation is performed in unclean conditions by traditional practitioners who may use scissors, razor blades, knives, broken glasses, tin lids, thorns, sharp stones, or pieces of glass, all of which pose high health risks”. (Nyangweso, 57).

This practice takes place in a group setting, more than one person involved in this practice with unsterilized instruments which increases the risk of infection. Modern countries especially in urban cities, they prefer to have the procedure to perform in hospitals. To protect children from the consequences the practice has been criminalized in many countries. Women who are all undergone this practice faced health consequence which are immediate, long-term, or both.

Mary Nyangweso also observes that: “Immediate consequences include severe pain, urine retention, shock, hemorrhage, and infection” ( Nyangweso, 58). The

removal of clitoris is more painful because of all the nerves joined in clitoral. The worst pain comes a day after the procedure happen while they have to urinate via wound. Although, some patients may experience shock, which often occurs from acute pain and sepsis.

Mary Nyangweso also observes that: “Long-term consequences of female genital mutilation include damage to the genitalia, cysts, abscesses, keloids, scarring, damage to the urethra, dyspareunia, difficulties with childbirth, and sexual dysfunction” (Nyangweso, 58). Women who took the most severe forms of the procedure are left with scars that cover most of their vagina. It is leading to slow or strained flow of urine or even dangerous urine retention. Scars can also develop into cysts, abscesses, or keloids that can cause severe pain during intercourse. Other forms of tissue damage make normal sex impossible or very painful, or can lead to tear during intercourse.

This research study focuses on the representations of ‘Female Genital Mutilation’ in African Women’s Writing. The study involves both factual accounts of FGM and representative fiction. Factual works include *Desert Flower – the Extraordinary Journey of a Desert Nomad* (1998), Waris Dirie’s biography written by Cathleen Miller, *Infidel* (2007), an autobiography by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and ‘*Do they Hear You When You Cry*’ (2012), an autobiography by Fauziya Kassindja. The Fictional works include the novels *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) by Nawal El Saadawi, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) by Alice Walker, and *Bailey’s Café* (1992) by Gloria Naylor.

Waris Dirie, a Somalian fashion model and women's rights activist. She is known for her efforts to eliminate female genital mutilation. "At the age of thirteen, she escapes an arranged marriage to a much older a man in Somalia, moving to London and eventually becoming a famous fashion model. She left her modelling career to campaign against FGM, and founded the Desert Flower Foundation, which seeks to end the practice of FGM by raising awareness, implementing programs and supporting victims who have undergone the procedure" (1997).

Dirie, "a victim of FGM at the age of five overcame personal and cultural barriers to speak openly about it during a 1996 magazine interview. Her celebrity status helped to catapult the topic into the public eye, and in 1997 she was appointed as the United Nations Population Fund's special ambassador for the elimination of FGM". She has recurrent her experience with FGM, as well as her dramatic transformation from nomad to fashion model, in her autobiography *Desert Flower: The Extraordinary Journey of a Desert Nomad* (1998). She puts it through in her own way in the biography, "I feel that God made my body perfect the way I was born. Then man robbed me, took away my power, and left me a cripple. My womanhood was stolen. If God had wanted those body parts missing, why did he create them?"

Alice Walker (1944) is a Black American novelist whose fictional works are more efficient and economic. She wrote the novel *The Colour Purple*, "for which she won the national book award for hardcover fiction and Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1982".

*Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) is one of her famous novels which are an example of revolutionary moment against the oppression of those colonized gaze. The

ritual of 'female genital mutilation' and the AIDS epidemic are imaged as the means to oppression. The protagonist of the novel is "Tashi, a tribal African woman, who lives much of her adult life in North America. Her emigration allowed her to escape the practice of FGM, yet instead of being relieved she is haunted by the fact that she has not undergone what is deemed a rite of passage, and returns to her native country to undergo FGM as a teenager. The resultant psychological trauma affects her throughout her life, as she continues to question why this disfiguring sacrifice was asked of her".

Nawal El Saadawi, "the great Egyptian feminist and writer, has published more than 50 books in Arabic. In Egypt, her supporters have established a Nawal El Saadawi forum, which holds regular meetings in Cairo and elsewhere at which her books, she. The international awards continue to pile up at this point, there are too many to count and do the invitations to speak". Her opinion is more important. Everyone interested to know what she done of Isis, against which she has campaigned all her life. Old-fashioned and autocratic are which sometimes she sounds that query her obsession with colonialism at your peril. Where others fear to tread she is strong and fearless.

Gloria Naylor is an American Novelist whose works include *Bailey's Cafe* (1992) that presents that "a look at the complicated dance of patrons and purveyors at a greasy spoon in 1940s Brooklyn, and *The Men of Brewster Place* (1998), in which she fleshed out the ancillary stories of the men who appeared in her earlier novel". *Bailey's Cafe* is the most ambitious, audacious, and mesmerizing novel. In this fourth novel, Naylor uses her continuing experimentation with narration, reality, and the

supernatural elements. *Bailey's Cafe* is a collection of deeply moving personal stories of female sexuality through the blues. Each character is a living embodiment of pain. In this novel also Naylor uses the elements of blues as in *The Women of Brewster Place*: "the loss and the desire to move on and call-and-response. Mattie Michael loses her house and son and Lucielia loses both her daughter and husband. This loss that each of these characters experiences is what calls them out of their current state of grief". Naylor chooses to locate the novel within a specifically cultured and gendered context of disposed women world-wide. The structure of the novel is mimics of a blue's song. As in her earlier novels, Naylor uses seven as a recurring number; once again, as in *The Women of Brewster Place*, she has seven stories to tell about the women who come to the cafe, each one representing a note on a chromatic scale. Naylor exposes the painful details of female sexuality in "aching consciousness".

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a "Somali born Dutch American activist and politician. He is best known for her contention that Islam is fundamentally incompatible with Western democratic values. Specifically, those upholding the rights of women. In her teens, she joined the Muslim Brotherhood, in which she was indoctrinated to believe that Jews were a sub-human enemy and that their state occupies Muslim lands and must be destroyed".

Hirsi Ali's memoir *Infidel* (2007) "her most recent book '*Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now*' embody the brutality of such neurotic generational tradition in Somalia and Arab Saudi. Growing up in Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Kenya, Ayaan was a devout believer of Islam who soon realised the evolution of

her beliefs, which in the end led to her intellectual awakening and activism in the Netherlands against gender inequality”.

In her memoir, “Ayaan describes the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teaching through the Quran, the Hadith and Syariah law as factors contributing to unequal and unjust treatments of women in Islamic society. She graphically describes a society that tyrannizes and brutalizes women in order to protect them from being stigmatised as immoral and impure. Ayaan’s awakening to a society that projects such violences against women led her to battle against sexual exploitation and oppression of women to ensure that women are sexually liberated from patriarchy”.

Layli Miller Bashir Fauziya Kassindja was born in 1977 in Togo, as the youngest daughter of a wealthy and prominent family. She now lives in Virginia. She recently graduate from the American University Washington College of Law. She lives in Virginia with her husband. Gini Kopecki is a freelance writer who lives in New York City.

This study aims to create awareness of the brutal practice of Female Genital Mutilation among the general public at large and budding researchers in particular. The study is confined to select Fiction and Non-fiction of writers who have discussed FGM from their personal encounter with the same and have vehemently opposed the practice because of the fatal consequences involved.

Chapter one of this study is the introduction to the concept, types and practice of Female Genital Mutilation in different cultures across the globe. It also introduces the authors and works chosen for study. Chapter Two gives a detailed review of earlier research literature related to this topic. Chapter Three discusses the cultural

factors that prompt the practice of Female Genital Mutilation, how it continued under cultural effects and the cultural benefits said to be gained by practicing FGM. Chapter Four discusses the controversial issue of 'Female Genital Mutilation' as a gender based violence that affects the physical, psychological, and sexual health of women. Chapter Five is the conclusion that summarizes the arguments and presents the practice of FGM as a condemnable one.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Related Literature**

This chapter presents a review of literature on Female Genital Mutilation to express the critical assess the theoretical and methodological approaches that aim to the eradication or reduce the following of ‘female genital mutilation’. This review includes research articles written about the beliefs behind this practice, the consequences that follow Female Genital Mutilation, treatment options available and the methods to stop or reduce the continuation of FGM.

Literature search was conducted on databases like Globally Published works of Pedro, Cochrane, Cinahl and Medline. These writers observe that the predominance of Female Genital Mutilation is reducing due to legal actions and community based awareness programmes. The consequences of Female Genital Mutilation can be divided into two groups: “short and long term. Treatment options are well documented in the literature. Health care professional should be well-informed and sensitive to treat properly those women who have suffered FGM. They should also inform women about the possible consequences and the legal aspects that can be resorted to, by the victims. Society should be informed about this procedure and should encourage open communication with the society, especially between men and women”.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) indicates “to all the procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons” (WHO, 2010). The World Health

Organization defines four main types of FGM that are described in the first chapter. Even through “the term mutilation is widely used, women who have undergone this procedure often refer to it as cutting”. (United Nations development found for Women, 2007).

Inungu and Tou (2013) have found that Female Genital Mutilation initially shown in the ancient Egypt more than 5,000 years ago. Mummies found belongs to that particular period. According to White Horn et al.(2002), “in Europe, the practice was used as treatment for epilepsy, sterility and masturbation during the 19<sup>th</sup> century”. Today in the era of girls, FGM differs greatly from region to region and between age groups, FGM is performed from the age of seven to eight days babies, elsewhere, to adult women during the first pregnancy.

Varol et al. (2014) point out that” FGM is usually performed at the youngest age possible to avoid questions from educated authorities and because older girls might defend themselves against the practice”.

Elneil states that “the procedure is carried out in remote areas as well as in cities and at all levels of society from the elite to the professionals and to the simplest villager. In rural areas older women who are known as traditional cutters perform FGM. Momoh (2004) asserts that crude instruments such as knives, razors, scissors or sharp stones are often used. It is performed under unhygienic conditions with the same instruments used on different girls” (2016).

In some areas the procedure followed by anesthetic with the help of health professionals. They see the procedure in a most acceptable level. The phrase Medicalization of FGM refers “to the situations in which FGM is practiced by any

category of healthcare provider, whether in a public or a private clinic, at home or elsewhere”.

WHO stated that:

“Health professionals who perform Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) are violating girl’s and women’s right to life, right to physical integrity and right to health. They are also violating the fundamental ethical principle: do no harm”. (WHO, 2010)

As seen, ‘Female Genital Mutilation’ is a barbaric cultural practice that should be eradicated from the global societies. It is discussed in this dissertation on how Female Genital Mutilation is portrayed in fictional works and in an autobiographical works and also practiced. There are plenty of literary works that deal with the plight of women in the practice of ‘Female Genital Mutilation’. African and American writers have presented their views through their writings. Additionally, journalists and researchers further trace the experience of victims in their articles too. Thus we could see the eternal consequences of FGM among women and girls through the narration of this brutal practice. The novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) is one of the primary sources chosen for this dissertation, where she has narrated the protagonist Tashi’s inner feelings and find out her own self as a mutilated African woman.

Walker’s liberation is reaching universe through writing. She feels free to discuss any topic such as Female Genital Mutilation, a taboo subject. The purpose of this novel is to expose how much the practice of FGM is horrible and to save young girls from disfiguration in the name of tradition, religion and patriotism. Walker

discusses the customs and tradition of the black community in her work which keeps women subservient to man.

*Possessing the Secret of Joy* is a famous novel that focuses on the subjugation of women through oppression and exploitation and it presents a part of the complex story of the black women's sufferings as well as heroic struggle which breaks her bondages, which in turn leads her to move towards liberation and expansion. As a revolutionary, she arouses by inquisition into Jesus Christ a case of her protagonist suffering towards FGM. Walker explains FGM as:

“They circumcised women, little girls, in Jesus's time. Did he know? Did the subject anger or embarrass him? Did the early church erase the record? Jesus himself was circumcised; perhaps he thought only the cutting done to him was done to women, and therefore, since he survived, it was all right”. (PSJ 35)

Tashi's emigration is one of the main reasons to escape from the cultural practice Female Genital Mutilation. She is haunted by the fact that she has not undergone the practice what is deemed to be a rite of passage. And she feels alienated from her native tradition, so she comes back to her native country to undergo FGM as a teenager. Dealing with the complex notion of choice, yet Tashi is a woman who feels confused between two cultures. She takes a decision to undergo FGM is to honour her native culture. Consequences of mutilation are never seen by those communities. They have a wrong belief that she will be a 'woman' after the mutilation. In this sense, Tashi's psychological trauma affects her throughout her life. Finally Tashi self queries, why this disfiguring sacrifice was demanded of her.

Ngianga- Bakwion Kandala and Paul Nzinga Komba in their book *'Female Genital Mutilation around The World: Analysis of Medical Aspects, Law and Practice'* (2018), opine on Female Genital Cutting with a contradictory note, "whether the practice is considered as a 'Mutilation' or a 'Cultural' Tradition". Mary Nyangweso in her book *Female Genital Cutting in Industrialized Countries* (2014) has compiled several interviews, blog writings and autobiographical writings of victims. Lucy Mashua, the Global Ambassador gives an interview to the *Frontpage* (49). She is fighting against FGM and stands up for women's rights. In this interview she shares her experience with the practice of Female Genital Cutting. Stating that she belongs to the Maasai tribes who settled in southern Kenya, she described that their tribes are known for "cultural wearing of beads, red ochre and wraps". They are nomadic people and move with their animals for pastures. Mashua's community practises 'Female Genital Cutting' in order to control and tame women.

Mashua explains how exactly the act was performed as:

"One chilly morning in a group of 29 girls, we were mutilated. I was tied with a rope because I was screaming and begging them to stop. Some girls were considered brave for not crying aloud. But I know their heart cried out loud. I could hear their cry and still do. It is so hard for me to talk about this. It's so fresh. I am still so traumatized. They used the same knife on us, not caring about any infections. These are traditional mutilators and midwives that perform this savagery". (FGCIC 50)

In the mean time, Mashua takes a decision to raise voice against Female Genital Cutting. She swears to reach the World Court and criminalize FGM globally. She

wishes to build a network of committed people. She wants to be a human rights movie documentary producer and plans to voice out to attract the attention of all kinds of good people. Mashua explains “the various challenges that she faced as an advocate against FGM. First she was rejected by her own society, relatives and friends. In spite of her strong uncompromised belief that women are also human and no one has the right to take a razor, knife or sharp glass to cut off their clitoris. No one owns a woman and no one should inflict any kind of violence on a woman”.

In Europe, Mashua launched a worldwide campaign to stop Female Genital Mutilation. She participated in many programmes in and around Central African countries through demonstrations, orations in seminars, radio and television programs. In 1999, she started her official campaign in Kenya. Some activists were hypocritical which disappointed Mashua. Her further step to end FGM is that everyone should voice their opinions or scribble some words on paper or some other way their opinions to express their rejection about the practice. She elaborates her point that she is from a Christian tribe which is full of traditional beliefs. She never finds the reason why the community is following the harmful practice. Because there is no religious evidence that to mutilate women. As it is mentioned earlier, this practice is a step of subjugating women and they could not find a root through the religion.

Mary Nyangweso in her book *Female Genital Cutting in Industrialized Countries* observes that in Justo Casal’s and Linda May’s, article *Female Cut Exported to Europe*, relate the story of Kadra, who revealed the truth that among many migrant communities FGM is still alive. She exposes an incident that happened

in her life. Imam, a Muslim leader who supports FGM but before the television reporters he posed to be with views opposing the practice of FGM. One day he convinced Kadra to get circumcised. Kadra could not understand these two varied opinions and when these differences of Imam aired on the television, Imam was caught red-handed and everyone came to know that Female Genital Mutilation is still practiced in their country. As mentioned by Justo and Casal and Linda May, Female Genital Mutilation was practised in Islam. Many writers' assumption was that Kadra should be circumcised which is the immediate reaction for Imam's recommendation. (Nyangweso, 52)

Mary Nyangweso in her book *Female Genital Cutting in Industrialized Countries* observes about a blog by Cleunse as educating women on the practice of 'Female Genital Mutilation'. She considered herself a survivor because with her strength and courage, she protected her daughter from this cultural practice. Cleunse narrates the trauma which happened in her life. She met a man from Egypt. He was Muslim and divorced. Moreover he was polite and respectful. "He never questioned her virginity before marriage". So, she married him in 1998. But, she had no idea that his mother was mutilated, despite the fact that she belonged to the third generation American woman from Jersey. She asked herself if in the world she knew about female genital mutilation? Cleunse explains further in her blog:

"I was 4 months pregnant with my eldest daughter and he tells me he wants her to be circumcised! I nearly killed him! . . . I ran as fast as I could to the airport. I proceeded to purchase a one way ticket to Georgia and have never looked back since . . . There was no way anyone would

even try to mutilate my baby girl! Over my dead body! I am not saying that all Egyptian men or foreign born men are female genital mutilating”.

(Nyangweso, 51-52)

The main reason for her to write this blog is to warn everyone marrying a person from outside problems that will develop from such a union.

Mary Nyangwesi’s work ‘*Female Circumcision: The Interplay of Religion, Culture and Gender in Kenya*’ (2007) delineates the health risks involved in this so-called cultural practice of Female Genital Cutting:

“I have met and interacted with these women who are circumcised and their experience is pathetic and painful. I am a nurse and so I have tried to assist those who are circumcised, during delivery, for instance, and it is not easy either for the mother or the midwife. There are more complications such as perennial tears, bleeding, delayed second stage leading to still births, infections, etcetera”. (Wanyama, 2015)

Various forms of female genital mutilation are introduced by anthropologists exploring the African colonies. Fran P. Hosken is an American researcher and radical feminist activist who raised her voice against the practice totally rejected the term “Female Circumcision”. And she coined a new phrase “Female Genital Mutilation” which is used by World Health Organization (WHO) the Governments. *The Hosken Report: Genital and Sexual Mutilation of Females*, an article published in 1978 explicates the masculine role in upholding female genital mutilation. Hosken adds a statement from feminists, which exposes an impact on public views about the practice in Africa.

Hosken has spoken about the story of a Sudanese woman who was terribly infibulated. She was circumcised at the age of five. She was infibulated two times, when her mother and aunty felt that she was not close enough. They took her to the midwives' home and she tried to escape from them. But she had no strength, moreover they held her tight. She explained how the practice took place further:

“They held me down and put a cover over my mouth so I could not scream. Then they cut me again; and this time, the woman who operated on me made sure that I was closed. I don't know how many days I was lying there. The pain was terrible. I was tied up and could not move. I could not urinate; my stomach became all swollen. I was terribly hot one moment, then shaking with cold. Then the midwife came again. I screamed as hard as I could, as I thought she was going to cut me again. Then I lost consciousness”. (THR 30)

When she opens her eyes in a hospital she was highly terrified because she could not bear the pain and she wished she was dead. Years later, she met a doctor who informed her that due to infibulation she could never have a child. In her community no one marries a girl who is not able to give birth to a child. She has no response from her mother and aunty for her question ‘why did you do this terrible thing to me?’.

Other radical feminist writers admit that in a form of male violence, they generally label the discrepancy between female circumcision and male circumcision. Sara Johnsdotter and Birgitta Essen have quoted in ‘*Genital and ethnicity: the politics of genital modifications*’ (2010):

“FGM is a training ground for male violence. It is used to assert absolute male domination over women not only in Somalia but all over Africa. Somalia is a classic example of the results of male violence: the practice of infibulations as family customs teaches male children that the most extreme forms of torture and brutality against women and girls is their absolute right and what is expected of real men”. (Johnsdotter, 31).

UNICEF has stamped 6<sup>th</sup> of February as an International Zero Tolerance Day for female genital mutilation. This action mainly motivates people to secure girls and women from this procedure. In 30 African countries, 200 millions of women have undergone this practice.

Many African women writers have focused on FGM in their works. Mainly writers who have undergone this practice have revealed their affliction through their perspectives. Thus in *Desert Flower-the extraordinary journey of a Desert Nomad* (1997), Waris Dirie a human rights defender and a survivor of female genital mutilation, expresses her inner feelings and the ambience in the society. She narrates how she ran away from her oppressive life in the African desert. And also she exposes the inhumane procedure of female genital mutilation, which she underwent at the age of five. Waris Dirie says about female genital mutilation in her work ‘*Desert Flower: Extraordinary Journey of a Desert Nomad*’ (1998),

“I feel that God made my body perfect the way I was born. Then man robbed me, took away my power, and left me a cripple. My womanhood was stolen. If God had wanted those body parts missing, why did he create them?” (Dirie, NP).

*South Coast Today* published an interview with Dirie in 1996 titled “*Female Mutilation: A model’s story of ritual torture*” by Lisa M. Hamm, where she has described her experience with female genital mutilation. “More than twenty years ago, when she was a child, her sex was stolen from her in an ancient African ritual”. Dirie here explained that the way she looks the practice, elder sister of her confessed about the practice. Dirie’s elder sister stated that:

“She used to tell me, ‘Oh, I’m a woman now. I’m not a girl anymore,’ I said, ‘Mama, when are you going to do to me what you did to her? I want to be a woman!’ Of course, my time came and it wasn’t the greatest like I thought it was going to be. She pauses. It was nothing but torture”. (M. Hamm, 1996)

In the interview Dirie recalled her frightful experience on Female Genital Mutilation. “One night Dirie got a full glass of camel’s milk at dinner when usually family shared a single glass. And her mother said that the next morning Dirie was going to be a woman and she was so excited and looked forward for the next day. Her mother woke her up before dawn and they started to walk towards the desert. The two met an old gypsy woman. Dirie recalled how that horrified practice was done on her. Then, Mother told her that she didn’t have strength to hold Dirie down. So she asked her to not to fight. Further, Dirie’s mother stuck a wood in between her teeth. And she said that “just hold onto your pain there”. The gypsy woman started to circumcise her with small, dull blade. Suddenly, Dirie felt severe pain followed by seemingly endless agony”.

The consequences after the procedure were that she was highly depressed and

legs were tied together from hip to ankle for weeks to keep from ripping open the wound. Urinating was severe and became infected. Most severely she could not eat for a month due to the pain of the circumcision. As she became a famous model and older, she refused to accept her fate as a Somali woman.

Tobe Levin Von Gleichen has written an article “*The German Movement against Female Genital Mutilation and Four Jewish Foremothers*” (2019). Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) victims break their silence in this article. He first encountered the practice of FGM in 1977 in German feminist magazine *Emma*. He says “African novelists who condemn the practice in a field of inquiry for literary scholars with my 1986 essay on Kenyan novel with female circumcision that Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *The River Between* (1956). Jewishness has another hypothetical tie to FGM. They have successfully eliminated FGM. In Israel, Dr. Robert H. Belmarker is a key researcher who lived in Beersheva for half of the century.”

Dr. Marion Hulverscheidt introduces four Jewish women from the article *The German Movement against Female Genital Mutilation and Four Jewish Foremothers* (2019) - who are all against the genital torture in Germany. The first woman was Herta Haas (1907-2007) born in Frankfurt in 1907. At the age of seventy two, she began talking about the problem, informing people, getting recommendation to enlarge her audiences and writings. Moreover her medical knowledge and prodigious language skills were the two things that compelled her tenacious advocacy. She noted that Germany’s central government has taken primary actions to end FGM. Herta encountered a former pastry chef and famous survivalist, Rudiger Nehberg. He came up with a new approach to prevent girls and women from the cultural practice FGM.

He describes desert conferences in Ethiopia, Mauritani and Djibouti: Nehberg's aim was to break the silence and rally the men. Thus, respected Muslim scholars and to publicly oppose FGM. In Germany FGM is a crime and punishable under the penal code. The number of girls residing in Germany who are at risk remains high (Levin, 171-174).

Franziska Porges Hosken (1920-2006) describes Female Genital Mutilation in the article "*The German Movement against Female Genital Mutilation and Four Jewish Foremothers*" thus:

"Mutilation of female sexual organs, no matter what the reason, is a fundamental violation of the human rights of all women, and in particular of the children and women who are cut. The right to bodily integrity is a universal human right that cannot be abridged". (Levin, 174)

*Efuru* (1966) is a novel written by Flora Nawpal, which explores Nigerian village life and value of tradition in African society. Efuru is a protagonist, considered as an epitome of courage and symbol of change. As a character, Efuru has shown that men are not the bosses, culture and tradition is a thing, which upholds men as superior to women. In order to challenge the male chauvinistic society, Flora has introduced a strong and powerful female character. In this novel, she expresses her thoughts in a subtle and neutral way.

"The women went to the back of the house and there it was done. Efuru screamed and screamed. It was so painful. Her mother-in-law consoled her. It will be soon over, my daughter don't cry. Meanwhile Efuru's husband was in his room. He felt all the pain. It seemed as if

he was the one being circumcised. (...) ‘It’s being done now,’ one of the neighbours said to the other.’ ‘Oh, yes, that’s it. I saw the woman when she came. Efuru is having her bath. Poor girl, it’s so painful.’ Efuru lay on her back with her feet apart. She was not crying any more. But it was still very painful”. (Nawpal, 13-14)

One of the significant writers about FGM is Ayaan Hirsi Ali. She is a Somali born and Dutch-American activist, author, scholar, former politician, novelist and feminist. Ayaan’s works are mainly focused on her journey from devout Muslim to atheist activist. *Infidel* (2006) is an autobiography in which she describes how she rebelled against her family and her religion. Hirsi Ali took her life experiences as an evidence to display how women are treated in Islam. As an emancipator of Muslim women, she argues that in Islam women inhabit fundamentally precariously subjugated position and she highly condemns the religious practice of “female genital mutilation” which she underwent at the age of five. This practice is mainly performed in Muslim Africa and Middle East. It is carried out by Muslim immigrants to their new countries.

In *Infidel* (2006), Ayaan explained how female genital mutilation has affected herself, mentally, socially and religiously. She illustrated her psychological trauma of action during the procedure female genital mutilation thus:

“Grandma caught hold of me and gripped my upper body... Two other women held my legs apart. The man who was probably an itinerant traditional circumciser from the blacksmith. Then the scissors went down between my legs and the man cut off my inner labia and clitoris. I heard

it, like a butcher snipping the fat off a piece of meat. A piercing pain shot up between my legs, indescribable, and I howled. Then came the sewing: the long, blunt needle clumsily pushed into my bleeding outer labia, my loud and anguished protests, Grandma's words of comfort and encouragement... When the sewing was finished, the man cut the thread off with his teeth. That is all I can recall of it". (Rashidi, 199).

From the above citation, Ayaan narrated her childhood innocence and bliss. And also about circumcision which was filled with cruelty and pain. She was treated as an animal during the process of circumcision. And she had no control over her reproductive system. Ayaan felt disconnected with her own body. And she was performed FGM by her own grandmother and mother who themselves were the victims of this crucial procedure. *Infidel* mainly depicted "the control and abuse of women and girls as a practised norm of oppressing women via culture and laws as constructed by men who institutionalize power in society".

"The excision of women is cruel on many levels. It is physically cruel and painful; it sets girls up for a lifetime of suffering. And it is not even effective in its intent to remove their desire". (Dirie, NP).

Being an Islam critic, Hirsi Ali's writings remain controversial in every aspect. *Infidel* is considered being a national bestseller. She adopted the western liberal feminist rhetoric form of writing. Ayaan carried her life narrative as an uncomplicated testimonial of the real life experiences of Muslim women. *Infidel* thus describes the mistreatment of women in Somalia and Saudi Arabia.

In Somali community, the women also undergo too much of social

indifference. When they do not practice female genital mutilation in their family, the society considers them as a woman with no virtue and purity. Through this mutilation process the obsession about female purity goes to an extreme. It is considered as harmful that girls and women should be sexually pure and modest without being infibulated. Men want their women to get genital mutilated. Some communities have followed female genital mutilation as a religious practice. Ayaan has mentioned in *infidel* that religious practice were not in Quran. Because of cultural practice the Muslims blindly and wrongly follow such practice in the name of Islam. In *infidel*, Ayaan depicts “female genital mutilation” and the concept of Baarri and the fact that the intelligence and kindness are not expected from a Muslim Women. Instead they only consider ability to serve husband’s needs and sexual desires.

Jean-Marie Volet, in her article “*Tradition and Modernity are Here to Stay: An Analysis of Francophone African Women’s Writings*” (1998) has dealt with francophone African women’s writing. A group of authors originated from Africa and living in different parts of Africa were exploring the blurb and background information. Authors such as Keita, Yaou and Amoi were found in the Ivory Coast. Fatou Keita deals with Female Genital Mutilation in her work *Rebelle* (1998). This novel depicts the harsh reality of contemporary life and the difficulties which African women face to establish a meaningful relationship in a new social environment. The protagonist Malimouna is a young woman who escaped from the practice of genital mutilation. She lived in a small village, Boritouni, where her friends have subjected to the practice of FGM. Malimouna’s family arranged a marriage for her with an old man. She wants to escape from their tradition and she flees from her small village.

Twenty years later she caught up with an elderly woman, who was considered as the oldest sister of Boritouni. As soon as she met the elderly woman the first thing that happened to her was circumcision. An elderly woman stated that Malimouna still belonged to their community and the first thing to do is to make her a woman.

Malimouna's partner's reaction on FGM in Keita's *Rebelle* is this:

“You are mad. I forbid you to do that! ... It is undignified for a woman to bare herself to the world in that way. Have you thought about me and the children? I do not want my parents to learn about all that. Do you realize? How am I to explain that I married a woman who is not circumcised?”.

(*Rebelle*, 191)

According to Malimouna's partner, the issue of circumcision is detached from women's traumatic experience. He expresses about his family's reaction towards circumcision. In the eyes of his family if she speaks out about the procedure and experience of circumcision that will be a great damage to their family reputation. Future circumcision is in the hands of circumcised people and it is not necessary to talk about its consequences. Tradition thus occupies permanent features in the way it changes according to people's volition, power, expectation and interpretation.

Anika Rahman & Nahid Toubia explain the harmful procedure of FGM in their work “*Female Genital Mutilation: A Guide to Worldwide Laws and Policies*” (2001):

“The cutting of healthy genital organs for non-medical reasons is at its essence a basic violation of girls' and women's right to physical integrity. This is true regardless of the degree of cutting or the extent of the complications that may or may not ensue”. (Nahid Toubia, 5)

Courtney Smith has written an article titled *Who Defines "Mutilation"?* *Challenging Imperialism in the Discourse of Female Genital Cutting* (2011). This article discusses the important movement of feminism which encounters universalizing strategies for understanding oppression of women. He shares his idea that "the barbaric, uncivilized and mutilating practice does not happen in uniform, primordial societies". Instead, it focuses on community and inclusivity. Benhabib considers community of conversation across cultures. For this study Smith interviewed two countries, the United States and Senegal. He conducted three types of interviews with women and men. That is open-ended, eight in-depth and semi-structured interview. In the beginning men and women discussed topics such as identities, economic roles, beauty, and marriage, social, familial and their own physical bodies and then about the practice of FGC. (Benhabib, 24)

In Senegal, Smith had three different interpreters for the interviews translating responses from three languages into French. In Halpulaar 26 interviews were conducted. For this a married Halpulaar man served as an interpreter. A divorced Mandinka woman interpreted 20 interviews. And a single Serer woman translated the twenty-two Wolof interviews into French. Men in this study has hesitated and felt uncomfortable to talk about the cultural practice of Female Genital Cutting. An American, social activist Molly Melching who is director of a Non Governmental Organization in Senegal, targets on the informal education of women and the abandonment of FGC. Tostan is a program which works in villages, towns and cities across the country.

In the United States, Smith has interviewed a woman who spent two years in

the Peace Corps in a Mandinka village in the Gambia. It is an exposure to Female Genital Cutting. And he selected three interviewees. They first explained their own experience about the practice and also answered his questions. They emphasized that the concept of autonomous choice in both FGC and breast implantation. Particularly, a woman stated that women should take decision to change their body how they wanted it to be. She felt sorry for those women who wanted to implant. But she accepted it if it was their own choice. Another woman said “what is really bad about FGC is that it is done on children who have no choice in the matter” (34). Women’s hyper sexuality is thought to diminish which helps them to protect their virginity until marriage. Through this women reserving their body for procreative use. Then they could understand their identities as women.

In Darkar, a woman said that “a woman with money and everything is considered as nothing, without children and husband. If they want to be real women, they should beget children”. This statement demonstrated that a woman’s identity is based on her childbearing role. US women activists like Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar present the image of women in FGC practicing communities as sexually blunt victims. In Senegal an interviewee noted, “We are just fine with excision but what we really need is a well” (37).

The majority of interviewees presented that girls are not protected by excision. They are being stripped of their natural right to sexual pleasure. Americans see Female Genital Cutting as a “Castration of women” that does nothing but reinforce women as a property of men. Smith took steps to create global dialogical community based on equality and open dialogue. Through this, interviewees had fresh look at

their environments and own traditions. He gathered several ideas from different interviewees. Based on those ideas Smith stated that American women see the truth behind FGC where Senegalese women were not able to get the original essence of FGC.

Few women activists also mentioned about this issue in the UN women entity under the title, *Survivors speak: Women leading the movement to end FGM*, published in 2019. The first woman activist was Purity Soinato Oiyie, a Maasai woman who lived in Kenya. In her childhood she escaped from the cultural practice of Female Genital Mutilation and child marriage. She delivered a speech on the status of women in the sixty-second UN commission celebrations, the largest gathering on gender equality and women's rights, where she expressed her inner feelings and her dream to build a school for girls.

Purity Soinato Oiyie explained how she was rescued from the practice Female Genital Mutilation:

I was only 10 or 11 years old, when my father decided to circumcise me. I was to become the fifth wife to a 70-year-old man. I talked to my class teacher and she informed the police chief. Just two hours before the cutting ceremony, the police came and took me away (Oiyie)

Later, Oiyie lived in Narok town for eight years Oiyie's father blamed her mother for Oiyie's escape from the practice and her mother did not wish her daughter to get circumcised. She joined with World Vision and The Kenyan anti-FGM and created awareness among people in the villages. They were surprised to see her as an educated Maasai woman. By showing them videos of FGM she told them the

importance of education.

Oiyie talks about the consequences of the practice to the boys. They understand how the practice crushes women and took a step forward to stop this practice by not marrying a girl who have undergone FGM. The Maasai community needed free education for girls. Parents were poor and unable to give their daughter education. Oiyie's father feels proud about her. Now, in their community a girl's education is mandatory. And they consider education as Purity. She started a foundation named Silan. She learnt an important lesson at CSW that women deserve all rights. There is no need for them to beg for their rights.

The second women activist is Jaha Dukureh, UN Women Regional Goodwill Ambassador for Africa. She is leading a movement to end Female Genital Mutilation and child marriage. Their cultural practice leads them to go for child marriage at the age of ten, Dukureh initiated her step to abolish such a harmful practice through the local television speaking about how women in her community should not be forced to marry. She wanted to reduce the number of girls and women experiencing FGM. She underwent the practice when she was a week old and she has no memories of the process.

At the age of fifteen, Dukureh married an old man. She expresses her thought that "when you force a girl to marry, you've given a man a right to rape her every single day". She left her husband after two months. Then, she wanted to get educated. She joined in a school at Bronx. After finishing her studies, she moved to Atlanta and remarried. She had a girl baby, whom she did not permit to get circumcised. Later she started to campaign against Female Genital Mutilation. She later had a blog where she

shared her own experience and later worked with a lady who supported to stop the practice FGM. In 2014, she registered her own organization and created change.org petition. She requested President Obama to investigate the prevalence of FGM in the United States. Dukureh stated that:

“I think there are still a lot of misconceptions about FGM, like it's practiced by ignorant Africans and people over there who are uneducated, uncivilized. FGM is happening in Africa, but also in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and even in places like Colombia and the United States of America and the United Kingdom! FGM is not about religion. It's not about class. It's not about education. I've seen some of the most educated people practice FGM because they believe it's their culture”. (Dukureh, 41)

Culture is different from place to place and community to community. Every community is different and the reason for practicing FGM is different. Dukureh faces the biggest challenge that people consider “FGM as a religious practice. In this sense, it is hard to bring out the change in peoples heart about the religious obligations. She asked religious leaders to come out and inform that FGM has nothing to do with the religion. Women took their chance to lead the change. They are working hard to make 2030 possible”. (Dukureh, 44)

Magda Ahmed, a rural woman leader in Upper Egypt, spoke in the UN Commission, about the difficulties she faced in her early life thus:

“It is difficult for a girl to continue her education in Upper Egypt. I finished my [high school] diploma but could not take my education

any further as my parents decided that a diploma is enough. My brothers also did not support the idea of educating the girls of the family. I tried to convince them but I failed. Before my mother died, even though she was uneducated, she encouraged me to learn new skills like embroidery, drawing, reading and to write short stories". (Magda, 31).

"Magda Ahmed with the support of her mother-in-law, she worked at a nursery for 3 years. Later, she became a social worker in the Ministry of Social Solidarity. As a social worker she visited charity homes for the destitute women and wrote a report on their families. Women started to share their personal stories with Magda. They were also the victims of domestic violence such as child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation. Magda is trained to create awareness on the consequences of these practices for girls and women. Finally, she concluded it by saying that her experience of marrying young helped her to enlighten the women who suffered the same reason". (Magda, 33)

This clearly explicates the difference between circumcision and excision. Circumcision performed on male is for the purpose of hygiene and sexual pleasures where as excision performed on women to mute her sexual pleasures and to enslave her permanently to men. Both her emotional and physical needs and desires were numbed by excision causing excruciating pain.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Culture as the Fertile Ground for FGM**

This chapter discusses the cultural factors that prompt the practice of Female Genital Mutilation and how FGM continued under cultural effects and the cultural benefits said to be gained by practising FGM. “Female Genital Mutilation” is one of the top ten problems of Africa. Culture, tradition and rituals are the key factors for Africans to lead their life. Their culture is disclosed through arts, crafts, folklore, religion, clothing, music, cuisine and languages. Culture is not only limited to painting, music and costume alone; culture is something beyond the celebration and the rituals that follows the birth, marriage, cuisine and sport. Moreover, culture is defined as people’s way of life.

The African continent houses more than 50 independent countries which accounts for 16% of the world’s population. The said independent countries have over 3000 tribal communities which have their own cultural practices. These tribal communities include the world famous ethnic groups such as Igbo and Yoruba. The ethno linguistic groups include various Afroasiatic, Khoisan, Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan populations. The official population count of the various ethnic groups in Africa is highly both due to limited infrastructure to perform censuses and due to the rapid population growth. There have also been accusations of deliberate misreporting in order to give selected ethnicities numerical superiority (as in the case of Nigeria's Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo people).

Chinua Achebe explicates that dignity and self-respect are the fundamental theme of African writer. Bernth Lindfors says in his *Politics, Culture, and Literary Form*.

“That African people did not hear of culture for the first time for Europeans; that societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, which they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African peoples all but lost during the colonial period, and it is this that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer’s duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost”. (BL. 25)

‘Apart from all the accusations and acceptance these ethno linguistic groups of population practice similar and diverse cultural and traditional practices in lieu of their religion(s) which are termed as Pagan by the modern civilization’. (BL. 28)

These Paganistic religious practices include barbaric rituals such as animal and human sacrifices which also include Female Genital Mutilation and Female Genital Cutting. Nevertheless, to justify the objectives of this research, focus is placed on the cultural aspects involved in the practice of FGM.

In 1973 approximately 1 million girls were victimized by Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), widely practiced in more than 20 African nations from Mauritania to the Ivory Coast in the west, to Egypt and North Tanzania in the east, as well as in Oman, Bahrain, North and South Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates. FGM takes

place among the Muslim populations of the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Jewish Falashas in Ethiopia. FGM is practiced on “babies just a few days old to the girls right before marriage, or young women pregnant with their first child. The most extreme mutilation is called infibulation. In Somalia, almost 100% of the women are infibulated and so are more than 80% of the women in north and central Sudan. In Ethiopia/Eritrea, Mali, and Sierra Leone, 90% of the women have undergone some form of genital mutilation. The rate reaches 70% in Burkina Faso; 60% in Kenya, Gambia, and the Ivory Coast; and 50% in Senegal, Egypt, Guinea Bissau, and Nigeria. The mutilation often results in accumulation of menstrual blood and pelvic inflammatory disease often leading to infertility”.

All women find sexuality problematical, especially women living in countries that were colonized or had colonized others. In Africa, “sexuality is a very gender-specific social construct. Africans foster heterosexuality through socialization from early childhood and discourage any sign of sexual stimulation in their children. After teaching that humans are naturally heterosexual, Africans teach their children that marriage is essential for the moral uprightness of society, although most Africans are, in fact, raised in many types of alternative families. Critique of the heterosexual form is literally nonexistent in African feminist genre because African sexuality is really male sexuality. When people assert that an African culture exists, they really mean that patriarchal constructs about maleness and femaleness pervade the continent. Women are not expected to experience sexual satisfaction, and, indeed, the practice of female genital mutilation assures that they will never experience sexual pleasure. This practice assures that female sexuality exists only through men. It represents a

misogynist point of view about the female body and is equally repulsive whether it takes the form of excision of a part of the clitoris or removal of all of the external genitalia. This practice controls female sexuality by depriving women of the opportunity to engage in homosexual relations”. The resulting option of heterosexuality must be seen to serve the patriarchal interests of female oppression.

The expression of sexuality varies in different cultures. Most societies consider the expression of sexuality as a taboo and they resort to the institution of marriage to control the expression of sexuality in their community. In the West, the availability of cheap, effective contraceptives advocates free sex. Sexual liberation in the West causes women to be exploited by men and creates instability in nuclear families.

Nicki defines culture as one that: “refers to a large and diverse set of mostly intangible aspects of social life’ which is defined by as consisting of values, beliefs, systems of Language, communication and practice that people share in common”.(Nicki Lisa Cole , 2019)

Culture can also be considered as the collectivity of human activities and general principles of socialization, acceptability and sustainability. However, an American sociologist, Charles A. Ellwood explains the multifacets of culture through;

“A collective name for all behaviour patterns socially acquired and socially transmitted by means of symbols; hence a name for distinctive achievements of human groups, including not only such items as language, tool making, industry, art, science, law, government, morals and religion, but also the material instruments or artefacts in which cultural achievements [sic] are embodied and by which intellectual

cultural features are given practical effect, such as buildings, tools, machines, communication devices, art objects, etc.... The essential part of culture is to be found in the patterns embodied in the social traditions of group, that is, in knowledge, ideas, beliefs, values, standards, and sentiments prevalent in the group. The overt part of culture is to be found in the actual behaviour of the group, usually in its usages, customs, and institutions.... The essential part of culture seems to be an appreciation of values with reference to life conditions. The purely behaviouristic definition of culture is, therefore inadequate. Complete definition must include the subjective and objective aspects of culture. Practically, the culture of the human group is summed up in its traditions and customs; but tradition, as the subjective side of culture is the essential core". (Arowolo 3-4)

Dr. Ashenafi Moges, in his article titled 'What is behind the tradition of FGM?', discusses that FGM is not performed only on the obligation of the religion alone. There is no religious script that mentions this mutilation practice for girls or women. However, women believe that FGM is universal where literacy and poverty prevail in society. It tightens the social pressure. The countries that practice FGM have defined it as an essential reality in the life of women. These justifications are also strengthened by cultural relativists who "assert that the practices within any specific culture are unique to the values, systems and practices within that culture. For them, there are no universal standards and the morality and values of one national culture cannot be compared to that of another" (Moges, 8). Moges gives a note on

FGM as follows:

“One of the biggest misperceptions about FGM is that it is sanctioned by religion be it Christianity or Islam. There is no possible connection between FGM and religion as it predates both of them. There is nothing specific in the Bible or the Koran which allows the mutilation of women. The Koran does not refer to FGM but there is a *Hadith* (saying of the Prophet) which says reduce but do not destroy”.  
(Moges, 8)

In the history of African culture FGM comes from the tradition of two external influences. That is, the European Christian and the Arab Islam. Barbara Nussbaum says in her work *African culture and ubuntu* that African traditional culture is highly difficult to be recorded in the beginning as those cultures are only through word of mouth in an oral form and there are no concrete evidences to establish them. Later, historians started to pen them in journals and books, of course without concrete evidences. African culture is based on philosophical and humanitarian principles on which some African political leaders try to betray.

There are many philosophers and sociolinguists who have registered their perception towards *ubuntu*. “South African Bishop Dandala says that *ubuntu* is a base line for a specific lifestyle or culture that is built on honouring human relationships as primary in any social, communal or corporate activity”. “Buntu Mfeenyana, South African sociolinguist describes that *ubuntu* is the quality of being human. It is the quality, or behavior of society that is sharing, charitableness, cooperation. It is a spirit of participatory humanism”. (1-2)

For centuries, our mutuality and concreteness has been celebrated in the African culture through “a profound understanding between the connections of past and present, between human beings and nature, of our common humanity, and of a shared spirituality. The art of communication between ancestors of the past and those in the present has been mastered by the Africans for long. Africans have also mastered the dialogue between all of us (plants, birds, and animals included), who live together in a way that creates shared meaning and communal understanding. For South Africans the golden threads of *ubuntu* woven from the old traditional African fabric of interconnectedness is the new physics”.

The book ‘*Sawubona Africa*’ describes “the various ways in which the arts of storytelling and community-building rituals strengthen and enliven the group relationships. Values and processes gearing are focused towards seeking consensus, mutual understanding and maintaining harmony in African culture. These include simple interpersonal processes, such as how to greet someone in the morning, to leadership and healing skills. They range from how a person leads a group to improvise together in dance; to how a chief makes decisions or how war healers reduce vengeance among people who have participated in a war”.

Koso Thomas describes Female Genital Mutilation as a cultural procedure as follows:

“The female is firmly held down on dry ground with her legs wide apart to expose the genitalia and the parts to be removed. In some cases, the genital part to be excised is held with a special hemostatic leaf before excision, or the candidates are made to lie near a cold

flowing stream so the excised area can be bathed in chilled water to numb the pain. The implements used are often unsterilized razor blades, knives, scissors, broken bottles, or any other sharp implement. Some form of herbal dressing is applied to the raw wound after the operation. The same implement is used for successive operations without sterilization”. (Koso-Thomas, 413)

The mothers and the Grandmothers who have the authority over their clan usually organize the procedure of FGM. Most of the young girls of the community anxiously look forward to the day of FGM as they are ignorant of what exactly is going to happen to them and are of a notion that they will finally become a part of the community sets their excitement in motion. The so-called FGM performers are deficient of medical experience to perform FGM and the only experience they are credited with is acquired through genital removal in poor circumstances.

Female genital mutilation is not only physically painful but a violation of a fundamental human right and cannot be defended as a traditional ritual immune system to criticism by outsiders to the cultures where it is practiced. On the other hand the defenders may argue that female genital mutilation is accepted and sought after by women themselves in the cultures where it is prominent. Thus it is not so different from American women choosing to have breast implants and other forms of cosmetic surgery in order to appear more feminine (Macklin, 1999: 68).

According to Tiles, in order to achieve an effective research such distanced position is required, because it is not in the nature of anthropology and similar disciplines to interfere with the morality of such harmful practices: “All an

anthropologist or social theorist may do is try to piece together an account of a culture's system of beliefs and practices that may help us to understand how such customs—abhorrent to us—might seem perfectly reasonable to the people who follow them” (Tiles, 2000: 12).

*Possessing The Secret of Joy* (1992) is a novel written by Alice Walker which expresses the tension between culture identity and gender. The issues of culture, medical and legal importance are foregrounds of the practice “Female Genital Mutilation”. This novel proves that the practice of ‘Female Genital Mutilation’ is considered as a key to hold women sexuality and sociality. Subsequently, the practice performed as a human rights violation and repudiated in the ground of universal ethical standard. Moreover walker refers to it as a taboo breaker in this novel. Her work is straightforward accusation of the perpetrators of genital mutilation. Mostly black or white Americans always try to speak out in the form of novel for the brutalized African women.

The following paragraph is quoted in Olakunle George's “*Alice Walker's Africa: Globalization and the Province of Fiction*” explains:

“One day, as I was washing carefully between her claw like toes, she informed me blandly that it was only the murder of the tsunga, the circumciser, by one of those whom she has circumcised that proves her (the circumciser's) value to the tribe. Her own death, she declared, has been ordained. It would elevate her to the position of saint”. (364)

Walker presents Female Genital Mutilation as an Olinka culture. M'Lissa performs the cultural practice of FGM on girls in the novel. She is an elder and

mentally disabled woman and has an evil, destructive physical appearance. Tashi described M'Lissa's outlook in a magazine titled *Newsweek*. It depicts M'Lissa as a complex product of culture. In the novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), the character M'Lissa is subjected with mad and a stereotypical evil witch. And she shares her own experience of excision and pain to Tashi. She celebrates the practice as her community ritual. Tashi looks for the right time to murder M'Lissa, the elder woman, because her sister Dura died when M'Lissa performed the brutal practice of FGM.

Tashi explains how she tries to kill M'Lissa in the novel, *Possessing the Screech of Joy*. She used a pillow as a weapon to murder the old woman. At the time Tashi remembers those sad stories in M'Lissa's life and this makes her to lose the intension of slashing her. M'Lissa tells her about their 'Tsunga' tradition that is well appreciated women in their community and to be murdered by someone she circumcised. The turning moment in this novel is Tashi's murderous rebellion distincts the self unfolding of Olinka history.

*Infidel* (2006) is a famous autobiography written by a Dutch and American Somali activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali. This work gives detailed notes about her life in "Somalia, to Saudi Arabia, to Kenya, to Netherlands and finally in United State". This novel is an attempt to find an ideological homeland. She explains only a physical journey to several places. As an ex-Muslim woman she shares her own experiences against a moral and political space. Ayaan was educated in a Muslim girls school and the books which she read expressed the ideas of races were equal, women were equal to men and some concept are new to her such as freedom struggle and the adventure.

Ali is considering these as a model for intellectual awareness and development. She is a Muslim woman who comes out of Islamic oppression in the physical and cultural aspects. However she has mentioned that in *Islamic society* women are abused by Female Genital Mutilation and are forced into marriage.

Hirsi Ali narrates the status of women in Islam in her works. And she is not a Herskovitzian relativist. Her article *Islam Silent Moderates* was published in *The New York Times* in 2007. In this work she explains “Islam’s Moderates by invoking their opposite , the Radicals. According to Ali, the Radicals constitute proponents of Islamic justice. She is not a Herskovitzian relativist. We in the West would be wrong...to elevating cultures full of bigotry and hatred towards women to the stature of respectable alternative ways of life” (Ali, 333) says Ali. Her famous works are *The Caged Virgin*, *Infidel* and a film titled *Submission*. In *Infidel* Ayaan says that the Somali culture is not easy to understand and it has many forms. She states that an arranged marriage is equal to arranged rape. She points out that marriage is highly a problematic tradition which starts as a symbol of marital relationship. It is a kind of domestic violence in Muslim families.

Ayaan, from Somali, had a conversation with Ellen, a Dutch woman, in which they discussed love, courtship and virginity. Ayaan says that Female Genital Mutilation is a kind of violation which keeps women physically mute. Moreover, this procedure ensures women’s virginity. She started to search the places where FGM is followed. Then she figures out that Dutch people did not follow this practice. Later, she asked Ellen how her husband would know if she is a virgin or not for which Ellen replied “my husband knows about that. Because I told him that I am virgin.” Ayaan’s

question seems weird to her. Ellen asks her that do you have any test about your virginity? Ayaan says yes and explains the procedure of excision which makes women shut.

Another instance from *Infidel* explains how Female Genital Mutilation is considered as a cultural practice:

"If you're not cut, you're not pure, are you. Very innocently, with her big blue eyes wide, Ellen asked, Pure from what. Pure from what. Pure from what, exactly, I thought about it for a long time, and realized I had no answer. It wasn't completely because of Islam that we were cut: not all Muslim women are excised. But in Somalia and the other Muslim countries, it was clear that the Islamic culture of virginity encouraged it. I knew *ofnofatwa* denouncing female genital mutilation". (Ali, 207)

In their community circumcision is one of the ways to see women's purity. And Hirsi Ali argues that some women supported this practice because they feel proud to be cut. One afternoon Ayaan, Jawahir and their relatives had a conversation about marriage. It was inevitable to discuss 'Female genital mutilation' as a part of the topic of marriage. Some girls felt good about how the practice made them tight and pure. Jawahir, a Somalian girl and a illiterate, feels proud about herself and says she is double virgin. Jawahir says that by just hearing the peeing sound of a girl one can find whether the girl is circumcised or not. If the girl is not circumcised she pees like a man loudly. Moreover menstruation which is a natural thing has made them to be treated like filth and they are therefore prohibited to pray. It mandates that girls

during their periods should not touch Quran. Somalians never talk about sex directly to others. They thought that the subject of sex is shameful and dirty. These culture-based problems are what keep women under men.

Hirsi Ali is one who was the most media exposed author in the recent years. Later she begins to see Islam as a central problem for many issues. Particularly immigration integration is crucially a cultural and religious problem. Traditional region and the modernity of the western world are the enormous cultural gap between many non-Western immigrants. In her opinion, “the basic tenets of Islam are a major obstacle to integration” (*Infidel*, 129). “Her argument gains much momentum from the fact that she herself is of Somalian descent and raised as a Muslim. This immunizes her against reproaches of being prejudiced or even racist. After all, she can claim to have firsthand knowledge of the culture practices she condemns”.

*Infidel* consists of seventeen chapters. Particularly, in chapter fourteen Ayaan discusses how she lost faith in God. Stating that Quran was written by a man, she says that God has never given anything as rules and rituals in Quran. People may interpret the holy book in their own ways, however, should not force anything inhuman in the name of holy law. They should set in free. Ayaan stated that the practice of Female Genital Mutilation is performed to all the girls in Somalia, only in the name of culture and religion. This practice is carried out by not only Muslims, but also other non-Isamic communities. Ayaan states that people choose religion to justify the barbaric act. The Imams support this practice and girls who are uncircumcised are considered as whores, devils and impure.

Ayaan has opposed the practice of excision in many ways. she started an

organization to help the girls who are all affected from circumcision, a cultural practice.

“I found myself thinking that the Quran is not a holy document. It is a historical record, written by humans. It is one version of events, as perceived by the men who wrote it 150 years after the Prophet Muhammad died. And it is a very tribal and Arab version of events. It spreads a culture that is brutal, bigoted, fixated on controlling women, and harsh in war”. (Ali, 262 )

*Desert Flower- The Extraordinary Journey of a Desert Nomad* (1998) is an autobiography written by Waris Dirie. She indicates the value of culture and tradition of Africa in this novel. Oral poetry is considered as a long tradition of her country. And her community people used to narrate stories of camel which consisted of valuable lessons. The stories floated from one generation to another which added value to their culture.

Italy had colonized Somalia till 1960 and the Italian influences can be seen in Mogadishu’s culture, architecture and society. In Somalia, getting married and becoming a mother is very important. Circumcision was planned for Aman and Halemo, the older sisters of Waris. One day Waris’s father brought home gypsy a woman who performed the ancient ritual. Since Aman went out to get water for her family, Halemo alone underwent the circumcision. As Ayaan Hirsi Ali mentioned in her autobiographical work *Infidel*, Waris also explains the harmful procedure of Female Genital Mutilation in Somalia. Particularly in her community gypsy women are considered as important members. But Waris has always seen her as a “killer

woman” (44).

Waris expresses her painful experience, of her own circumcision and some Somalian girl’s, in her novel *Desert Village*. After she underwent the procedure of Female Genital Mutilation, people used to say this was the tradition followed by ancestors. Marriage and sex is a private subject. They never talk about these topics in their family and in their whole culture. Later, Waris left her family because her father fixed her marriage with an old man. She struggled a lot to get a position in her life. Finally, she started her career as a model there. However, she started an organization to help the girls who are affected by the cultural procedure of Female Genital Mutilation.

Waris condemns men, in one of her interviews about Female Circumcision, for not protecting their women from this painful practice. Though even men can understand the trauma of excision, they still want women to be under their control. Waris recollects the horror story of Female Circumcision narrated by Marie Claire: “... have not been able to get it off my mind...Even if living in a culture where God is not known to exist, people cannot help but realize that by the pain, trauma, and even death this inflicts on their women that it is SO WRONG! How can they continue to allow this to happen to their wives, daughters, and sisters? Surely they must know they are destroying their women in so many ways!”. (214)

“In my culture, a woman earns a badge of respect when she becomes a mother” (211). Women sacrifices self identity, rights and power to get the respects which provide by their society people. Cathleen Miller contributed her small part in Waris’s *Desert Village* (1998). She finds no justifiable reason or explanation for this

practice. This practice, in the name of culture, therefore, should be stopped. In future, no children should suffer this horrifying practice. They started to raise voice. In the beginning received two negative comments that they are from Somalia. After that they talk about the issues in the possible areas to change people's view about the practice.

“There will be more told in the future, but Waris, there are not any more to be told of an entire culture that can be more horrifying than what these people are doing to their children. I cried and felt deeply when I read this. I want to do something to change things, but I don't know what one person can do”. (Diris, 215)

*Do They Hear When You Cry* is an autobiography written by Fauziya Kassindja. She was born in 1977 in Tago, Africa. In this work, she describes her refusal to undergo the ritual of Female Circumcision which is called as 'kakia' and a forced marriage.

“This man wanted my woman parts cut off before taking me as his wife. It is a traditional practice in my tribe, which we call kakia. Most people call it female circumcision. But that doesn't really describe what kakia is. Since I've been in this country, I've heard people refer to kakia as female genital mutilation. Mutilation. Yes, that's the right name”.(Kassindja, 10)

And Fauziya's life changed dramatically when her sister helps her to flee Germany to escape from these traditions. She got fake passport to move to United States. Unfortunately, immigration officials came to know about the false passport.

And she was imprisoned in the United States. Later, 22 year old law student Layil Miller Bashir takes up Fauziya's case. Moreover, this novel is exposed the story of two women, Fauziya and Layil. Layil takes up the case wholeheartedly. Fauziya is emotionally broken and finds a great friendship with Layil. She gets help from the American University International Human Rights Clinic. Finally, Fauziya was granted asylum on 13 June 1996.

Fauziya's family was almost destroyed when her father died. Hajia Mamoud and Malam Mouhamadou, her father's sister and brother, got power in house. Hajia evicted her mother from the family and Malam became a legal guardian to Fauziya. They both arranged her marriage to an old man who had three wives and he ordered that Fauziya's women parts should be cut before he took her as his wife. It was a traditional practice of her community. Whatever the tribe tries indulged the harmful practice in front of tradition view Fauziya's father opposed it. After her father passed away there is no one to protect her. Fauziya's aunt arranged this practice to be performed to her and she frightened because she knew the girls who died from the consequences of circumcision.

Ferlise is one of the main characters in the work *Do They Hear When You Cry*. When Fauziya was imprisoned for using fake passport in United States, Ferlise was a judge for her case. She says that Female Circumcision is followed as an absolute rule in Fauziya's tribe and is not a mistreatment or oppression. In Northern tribes all women allow themselves to be circumcised. And also Ferlise mentioned that there is not only Fauziya, basically all women in her ethnic group have undergone this practice of Female Circumcision. Ferlise gives judgment that Fauziya should be

sent back to Togo. From the character Ferlise we can understand that there are some educated who also support the non benefit practice Female Genital Mutilation as it is their culture. Fauziya narrated the cultural and traditional practice in the same way how Ayaan and Waris have exposed the pain and anger (that in society).

*Infidel, Desert Flower and Do They Hear When You Cry* is “the personal accounts that presented the social conflicts of the respective writers. In *Infidel*, Ayaan Ali is shocking, brutally honest, and captivating. The protagonist’s courage and resilience are a testimony to the human spirit. The letters and phone calls between her and her father are painfully real and troubling, especially when read in the context of the harshness and violence of the culture from which she came. Most endearing, though, is her indefatigable sense of hope and optimism, despite all that she had seen and been through. She is not blindly accepting the Western culture, she calls it like she sees it, and the good, the bad, and the ugly, but she draws a stark and real portrait of the contrast between the two worlds”.

Waris Dirie says that is “an extraordinary journey from desert nomad, to domestic servant, to supermodel, to UN ambassador for the elimination of FGM. She grew up in the Somali desert where life was tough. At age five, she had to endure an extreme form of FGM, which left her with lifelong damage. She was still luckier than many other girls, some of whom even died as a result of this ritual. An interesting and unusual memoir, which is noteworthy for putting a cruel cultural practice, under the spot light”.

For Fauziya Kassindja regarding Female Genital Mutilation is, “an idyllic childhood in Togo, West Africa, sheltered from the tribal practices of polygamy and

genital mutilation, ended with her beloved father's sudden death. Forced into an arranged marriage at age seventeen, Fauziya was told to prepare for *kakia*, the ritual also known as female genital mutilation. It is a ritual no woman can refuse. But Fauziya dared to try” (124).

The next chapter discusses the contentious issue of recent times, i.e., Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as a gender-based violence that affects the physical, psychological, and sexual health of women. It argues how men view women only as a physical entity in order to assure that they are clean and pure but women are made to believe that it is carried out for their own benefits.

## Chapter 4

### FGM and the Patriarchal Prejudice

This chapter discusses the controversial issue of “Female Genital Mutilation” during recent times. Female Genital Mutilation is a gender-based violence that affects the physical, psychological, and women’s sexual health. It is constructed as a means of policing the women bodies by men in order to assure that they are clean and pure but women are made to believe that it is carried out for their own benefits. The convinced women then consider it as their duty to continue the ritual throughout their family lineage. Young girls are lured into accepting it by the belief that they will enter the respectful gates of womanhood by adopting it and it will make their parents, family, and the whole clan proud of them. Women need to be liberated from the shackles of such callous practice. They need to be educated about it. For this purpose, midwives and doctors play a momentous role. Waris, in her autobiography *Desert Flower* (1998) has revealed how proper education and right behavior of doctors can bring women out of the sufferings of FGM, like in her case, and help them lead a healthy and normal life. Waris has added herself to be the voice of the voiceless and bring about mass awareness against the whole process of FGM. She has given several interviews regarding this issue, published books and made a film based on this novel. As a result of her continuous efforts to eradicate this ritual. she has also established the Desert Flower Foundation to advance women’s right in Africa.

The African way of describing FGM cannot be appeared as nice, in view that most African writer discuss both positive and negative views, while at the same time seeking to avoid private opinion at the purpose of this practice. The African authors

included in this study have broken this cultural taboo and by this, already show defiance of this tradition. They have furthermore had at least some contact with the Western culture and its view of women's role in society, which undoubtedly caused them to compare and question the African tradition.

Searching at the subsequent quotation from Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), we observe a distinction with in the style of her description:

“Then, one day, my mother had to circumcise the girls in my age group. ( ... ) when my turn came she tried to get away with cutting lightly. Of course she took the outer lips, because four strong eagle-eyed women held me down; and of course the inner lips too. But she tried to leave me a nub ( ... ) She barely nicked me there. But the other women saw. What my mother started, the witchdoctor finished. ( ... ) the witches who taught him had been put to death, because they refused circumcision and were too powerful among the women to be left free, uncircumcised. He showed no mercy. In fright and unbearable pain my body bucked under the razor-sharp stone he was cutting me with ( ... )”. (Walker, 206-207).

Right here, the author has selected a first- person narrator, focusing particularly on the pain and worry of the girl being circumcised. The outline uses specific references to the cutting of the outer and inner labia, as well as the circumcising tool. A distinctive instance of FGM description on this novel is the subsequent quotation, where the method is being described in retrospection by using a girl who has observed it:

“As I painted I remembered, as if a lid lifted off my brain, the day I had crept, hidden in the elephant grass, to the isolated hut from which came howls of pain and terror. Underneath a tree, on the bare ground outside the hut, lay a dazed row of little girls, though to me they seemed not so little. They were all a few years older than me. Dura's age. Dura, however, was not among them; and I knew instinctively that it was Dura being held down and tortured inside the hut. Dura who made those inhuman shrieks that rent the air and chilled my heart. Abruptly, inside, there was silence. And then I saw M'Lissa shuffle out, dragging her lame leg, and at first I didn't realize she was carrying anything, for it was so insignificant and unclean that she carried it not in her fingers but between her toes. A chicken—a hen, not a cock—was scratching futilely in the dirt between the hut and the tree where the other girls, their own ordeal over, lay. M'Lissa lifted her foot and flung this small object in the direction of the hen, and she, ( ... ) gobbled it down”. (Walker, 70-71)

The narration is followed by a sense of mystery, a feeling of unknown, which, together with the effective description of the sounds within the hut and Tashi's emotions, step by step grow to be a sense of terror. An exciting way of describing the process of circumcision is offered by Gloria Naylor, who does this with the aid of the usage of a metaphorical allegory of cutting a plum. Despite the fact that, as the following paragraph will show, the smart parallel drawn among the cutting of the plum and the cutting of a female's frame, steadily undertakes a dramatic impact, and

the scene loses its impartial tones:

“The fruit looked tender and soft. The reddish black skin was so thin you could already smell that the flesh would be sweet. (...) Eve took the plum from the counter and cradled it gently in one hand. Fruit that tender will bruise easily...

...Eve plunged the knife quickly into the middle of the split fruit. With one twist of her wrist, she cut out the large pit. It carried ragged pieces of dark amber flesh with it as it fell to the counter. (... ) Juice dripped from the lightning blade, and bits of plum clung to Eve's wet fingers as she scraped away at the meaty sections left inside each half of the open fruit. (... ) Small chunks splattered as they kept falling rapidly to the counter. The plum was cleaned of everything but its delicate outer skin. She held what was left in her sticky palm and it was already beginning to curl inward like a petal”. (Naylor, 145-151)

These writers deal with the personal story being described, retaining their presentation of FGM within the context of the character narration. Gloria Naylor's narration gives a society that enforces girl's circumcision, and the heroine Mariam is an example of such society. Furthermore, the first actual description of Mariam's tradition creates a distance, setting apart her "international" from the reader's: In a nation that time forgot, a nation ringed by mountains, they are hemmed in by huge stone churches but have clung to the God of Abraham and the Law of Moses.

(Naylor, 141)

Similarly Mariam's tribe is depicted as a enthusiast religious sect, dwelling in

isolation, suppressing women and circumcising girls, which enables create an oblique comment towards FGM and its cultural context. Transfers on to Alice Walker's novel, the writer begins by means of describing individual experiences of circumcision, which then slowly soften into one widespread critique of FGM. Here, greater than in Naylor's narration, the reader is aware of a crucial stance on a transcultural, general stage, provided from an exclusively western perspective. This so-called distant approach, can also be seen in the following passage:

“They do not want to hear what their children suffer. They’ve made the telling of the suffering itself taboo. Like visible signs of menstruation. Signs of woman's mental power. Signs of the weakness and uncertainty of men. When they say the word 'taboo' ( ... ) are they saying something is 'sacred' and therefore not to be publicly examined for fear of disturbing the mystery; or are they saying it is so profane it must not be exposed, for fear of corrupting the young? Or are they saying simply that they cannot and will not be bothered to listen to what is said about an accepted tradition of which they are a part, that has gone on, as far as they know, forever?” (Walker, 155)

At the time, this quotation expresses the culprit of FGM, as mentioned in numerous places of the novel; that is the ignorant African tradition, preserving directly to way of the life at any value, and its men, who, as the superior gender of this culture, suppress the powerless women. Assigning guilt is thus another characteristic of African American writing, which usually implies on patriarchal society. This is where women are not strong enough to confront such hostile tradition.

This idea is also expressed in the passage quoted above, and appears throughout Walker's novel. Similar ideology can be seen in *Bailey's Café* (1992), where the author indirectly expresses the importance of circumcision as a prerequisite for marriage, as the single goal of a girl's life. At the same time assigning guilt is strongly connected to the reasons for circumcision in the novels. Here is one of the most important distinctions between two groups, since it clearly marks the complexity of the issue and the writers' inability of encompassing different views of this tradition. Thus, Flora Nwapa and Nawal El Saadawi's novels try to voice both sides, also giving reasons for FGM as expressed by its advocates. As mentioned before, Walker's narration tends to concentrate on the western interpretations like offering control and subjugating women as the major cause. Nevertheless, we should point out at least one example, where the writer approaches the issue from the African side. That is offering an ancient African legend as the beginning of this ritual. However, the passage ends with the following comment, expressing the heroine's opinion of the myth: "Even so long ago God deserted woman, I thought, staying by her just long enough to illustrate to man the cutting to be done" (Walker, 166). The advocates' reason of tradition is therefore given, but at the same time rejected.

Furthermore, Gloria Naylor's approach is more representational of both sides, and offers the FGM supporters' reasons. Her narration explains the importance of marriage in the described African tribes and defends Matiam's mother's decision to circumcise the girl, as can be seen in the following quotation:

"You do understand, Eve said, how much she loved her daughter. And she couldn't deny in her heart that the girl was always going to be

slow-witted. Finding her a decent husband would be difficult with so many other virgins to choose from, and that is why she had the midwives close her up that tightly. It raises a woman's value".

(Naylor, 152)

Nevertheless, compared the next passage, taken from Flora Nwapa's novel, where the reasons for circumcision are presented in a conversation between the villagers and the midwife, one can see the difference in the style and tone of narration:

"You know( ... ) Nwakaego's daughter?( ... ) She did not have her bath before she had that baby who died after that dreadful flood. "God forbid. Why?"Fear: She was-afraid. Foolish girl. She had a foolish mother, their folly cost them as on, a good son. "How did you know?"They came to me early one morning and told me. They wanted it to be done in my house so that people will not know. The dibia had already told them that the baby died because she did not have her bath. I did it for them.' ( ... )". (Nwapa, 13)

The difference, as shown in the passages, lies in the inherent critical tone with which Naylor describes the reasons for circumcision. Moreover it is giving the reader a sense of disagreement with the tribal culture, whereas Nwapa's description is offered entirely from the tribe's point of view. It is in the style of narrative lie another important distinction, indirectly affecting the reader's view of FGM. Again, Nwapa and El Saadawi's novels seem to seem to strive more for the presentation of the complexity of the issue by constant interweaving of apologetic passages. And the

elements explaining the African view of circumcision can be found by the choice of vocabulary, description of FGM related topics, as well as by the ideological stance of the narration itself. Nawal El Saadawi never offers a direct personal opinion of the things her story criticizes. It is obvious that her depictions of FGM are vague and presented purely from a foggy retrospective of a psychologically exhausted girl. But this truculent tradition is enumerated simply as one of the many hardships the children endure. Therefore, the author seems to be simply stating the facts, as if they were obvious. She does not provide Halima or Halimo with a voice to express their suffering. Her writings were not meant to condemn the described tradition, patriarchal relations, guilty of FGM and worldwide attack on FGM, no protagonist eager to educate others to FGM's true character and achieve its eradication. El Saadawi is simply a voice that describes the ritual and her texts remain open ended for the readers.

The intricate nature of FGM in Nawpa's narration has already been shown in revealing the rather insignificant role the female circumcision plays in her novel, and mild tone used in its description. On the contrary, Alice Walker and Gloria Naylor often rely on their choice of words when stating their negative view of FGM, taking advantage of shocking, dramatic terminology, comparisons, metaphorical language and very self-righteous tone (esp. Walker, whose fictional novel at times seems almost an activist's mission) which results in their one-dimensional FGM descriptions, sometimes highly exaggerated.

Tashi, the protagonist in *Possessing the secret of joy (1992)*, is crippled by her circumcision, has difficulty walking and bathing, cannot have intercourse and lost the

will to live. In her desperation, she returns to Mrica to murder the midwife who circumcised her, paying for the murder with her own life. A direct description of the negative consequences of FGM is given in the following quotation:

“It now took a quarter of an hour for her to pee. Her menstrual periods lasted ten days. She was incapacitated by cramps nearly half the month. There were premenstrual cramps: cramps caused by the near impossibility of flow passing through so tiny an aperture as a M’Lissa had left, after fastening together the raw sides of Tashi’s vagina with the couple of thorns and inserting a straw so that in healing, the traumatized flesh might not grow together, shutting the opening completely: cramps caused by the residual flow that could not find its way out, was not re-absorbed into her body, and had nowhere to go. there was an odour too of soured blood, which no amount of scrubbing until we got to America, ever washed off”. (Walker, 61-62)

Naawal El Saadawi stated that:

Although it is to be mentioned by a passage that, along with Halima’s father’s decision to kill his daughter, could be interpreted this way: “yet, even though she saw a female viper, Hamida knew that anything which kills, must be male ( ... )”. (El saadawi, 62)

This was already shown in the case of Gloria Naylor, and can also be noted in the following passage from ‘*Possessing the Secret of Joy*’ (1992), where the author compares women’s subordination in African culture to the so called White Ant, a type of African termite, which is believed to have been copied by Africans in their hut –

building. At the same time this is claimed to be the origin of the male view of the woman as a creature offered by god for pleasure and food; namely, since this creature's coclony is based on the hierarchy of the queen, whose sole function is reproductive; her cut wings disable her escape and when her egg stock is finished, she is devoured by other ants.

“This madame, Johnson, is your dark tower. You are the queen wholost her wings. It is you lying in the dark with millions of workers termites you who are fat, greasy, the color as you have said of tobacco spit, inert; only a tube through which generation of visionless off spring pass you who endure all this, only at the end to die, and be devoured by those to whom you've given birth. ( ... )”. (Walker, 216)

Naylor's choice of an innocent child, repeating throughout the story a single sentence 'No man has ever touched me', creates a dramatic effects wirth a powerful message. The psychological pain, suffered by circumcised women, is further described in M'Lissa, the woman who circumcised Tashi, as shown in her personal confession in this passage:

“I could never again see myself, for the child that finally rose from the mat three months later, and dragged herself from the initiation hut and finally home, was not the child who had been taken there. I was never to see the child again. I have never cried after that, she said. I knew in the moment when the pain was greatest, when it reached a crescendo, as when a loud metal drum is struck with a corresponding metal sick, that there is no God known to man who cares about children or about

women. I finally see her, she says, astonished”.

“The child who went into the initiation hut, she says. You know I left her there bleeding on the floor, and I came out. She was crying. She felt so betrayed. By everyone. They’d severely beaten her mother as well, and she blamed herself for this. M’Lissa sighed. I couldn’t think about her anymore. I would have died. So I walked away, limped away, and just left her there. She is still crying. She’s been crying ever since I left. No wonder I haven’t been able to. She has been crying all our tears. I have been strong. strong and brave. In service to tradition, to what make us a people. In service to the country and what makes us who we are. But who are we but tortures of children?”. (Walker, 205-210)

In the above citation, Walker cleverly presents the psychological trauma of circumcision, using the midwife, who has been up to this point represented as an advocate of female circumcision. It turns out that underneath the cruel numbness, caused by the horrors of endless circumcisions (imposed on her as a tribal duty) there is an innocent, helpless and scared little girl, who has been suffering all her life due to her own initiation. This makes the reader feel sorry for M’Lissa, while angrier at the ritual and the men behind it.

This passage was greatly criticized by George Olakunle, especially the way Walker conveys the wider idea of women’s oppression in oppression in all patriarch systems. According to him, it draws all characters as representations of stereotypical figures, which she slowly connects throughout the novel and joins in a unified circle.

Olakunle chooses the example of M'Lissa and Tashi to demonstrate his point:

“In the account of her experience, M'Lissa is rendered as archetypical woman, whose emotional numbness is a way of coping with old and unrelieved pain. At this moment, M'Lissa and Tashi's experiences of genital mutilation converge. The text signals the convergence in the way their two voices become fluid and indistinguishable as each confronts her pain. Through the clever use of the pronoun 'she', the image of the crying young M'Lissa becomes the image of every crying circumcised girl. And Tashi is confronted with her 'self' in an earlier generation. In dialogue with M'Lissa Walker figures Tashi as archetypical woman in dialogue with archetypical mother, who is therefore her potential culture self". (Waris, 211)

Gloria Naylor's annotation of the impact of FGM is less explicit, but still fatal for the protagonist. Mariam becomes pregnant and feels unclean according to the tribe rituals. And she wishes to wash herself in a deep chasm, confusing it for an enormous lake, she jumps in and dies. In the way of consequences of FGM, Naylor foreshadows in the case of Mariam's mother, telling us of the severe pain of afterbirth and the difficulty of intercourse following the delivery. The latter particularly, can be seen in the following passage:

“Her mother tells no one how hard she begged Adonai for the firstborn to be a girl. She knew she would remain unclean much longer than with a male child, and so there would be more time to heal before returning to her husband. Even in the hut of child bed there has been

so much blood". (Naylor, 48)

The author is faithful to her generally indirect way of dealing with FGM and only expresses this idea through the mother's preference for a boy, which allows her more time before having to have intercourse with her husband. The circumcised girl Efuru is introduced only a day after the operation, when there is no impression of her experiences awful pain. It is clear that she has already undergone the operation and that the worst is over. Moreover, she receives such amount of attention! It gives an impression that the circumcision has made her privileged:

"... 'how are you, my daughter?' I am well. ( ... )" Is it very painful?"

It is much better now. It was dreadful the first day. "Gbonu, my daughter, It is what every woman undergoes. so don't worry.' ( ... )

Efuru's mother-in-law saw to it that she was very well looked after.

She was to eat the best food and she was to do no work. She was simply to eat and grow fat. And above all she was to look beautiful.

She ate whatever she wanted to eat. ( ... ) It was said that she was feasting. On market days, her mother went to the market and bought

her the best. When she prized something in the market other buyers gave her way and asked her how the feasting woman was getting on".

(Nawpa, 15)

Similarly, Efuru's post-operation description shows how the villagers now see her as more beautiful and worthy:

"Efuru grew more beautiful each day. However, she looked very plump and appealing to the eyes. Now that the wound had healed, she

went out with other women who were circumcised like her. When they went out, they tied a wrapper dyed in cam wood from the waist downwards. Then they had another one also dyed in cam wood which they used in covering their breasts". (Nwapa, 17)

Later on, when Efurū gives birth to a girl, her delivery is not too painful and uncomplicated and there are no mentions of re-stitching or any circumcision-caused side effects. Similarly, Nawal El Saadawi avoids the description of the consequences of circumcision. When in the end Halima dies, the blame is put mostly on the poverty and the constant physical abuse the girl was exposed to. And the author does not hint towards circumcision as the exclusive reason for the girl's death, nor does she describe any physical or psychological consequences.

Eventually, another major difference lies also in the proposed dealing with FGM, which often comes out in the way the novels end. In Nwapa's novel, offering a metaphoric comment on the women's position in the described society in the following passage on Efurū's dreams about the most respected tribal goddess Lady of the lake seems subtle.

"Efurū slept soundly that night. She dreamt of the woman of the lake, her beauty, her long hair, and her riches. She had lived for ages at the bottom of the lake. She was as old as the lake itself. She was happy, she was healthy. She was beautiful. She gave women beauty and wealth but she had no child. She had never experienced the joy of motherhood. Why then did the women worship her?". (Nwapa, 221)

The rhetorical question implies that the symbolic meaning of the Lady of the

lake is the fact that it is a goddess of pain-free motherhood and child-bearing as the only accepted and praised values of a woman in African culture. The women adore her precisely because she represent an ulterior function and role for women in their society. This clearly defines the author, who throughout the novel avoids any criticism of FGM, does not promote women's submissiveness to all ends, but ins an advocate of women's strength and economic as well as social independence. This even suggests that she does not perceive circumcision as a destructive element in African women's social position. And predominantly she does not advise any anti-FGM action, apart from the indirectly expressed idea that, same as everything else, African women can handle it on their own.

Nawel EI Saadawl's approach is even more cautions, while her novel is an obvious critique of Arabic society and its cruel obedience of tradition, she avoids expressing an opinion on the future of circumcision. She rather opts for a metaphorical analogy of all the children in the world, who are exposed to various cruelties, and does not suggest the eradication of FGM. The author of these representational works thus seems the future of FGM along with its complex cultural and strong patriarchal background, linking it to other violent practices. Alice Walker does not hesitate in offering eradication of female circumcision as the answer to the issue. The following passage from *The secret of joy* suggests that failure to eradicate FGM will only bring more needless victims.

“I felt it is cruel. But that is only the cruelty of truth, speaking it, shouting it, that will save us now. If we do not, Africa may well be depopulated of black people in our grandchildren’s life time, and the worldwide suffering of our children will continue to be our curse”.

(Walker,259)

Similar thought is expressed in the novel’s ending, when Tashi’s friends watch her execution, bearing the sign: Resistance is the secret of joy! On the other hand, direct opinion of the future of FGM is not the main stream of Gloria Naylor alike El Saadawi, who only expresses this through questioning the reason for circumcision. She does this first by describing an ancient, isolated culture, which makes its rituals a priori questionable. These are the other way of questionable. The other way of questioning circumcision can be seen through Mariam’s miraculous pregnancy. She was banished from her tribe and alleged to be pregnant once the circumcision is done and yet insists she had not been touched by a man. When she is examined by Eve during bathing this turns out to be true.

This gives two possible interpretations; firstly, the author’s criticism of FGM, since the operation is supposed to guarantee the girl’s virginity and thus raise her value, but has caused the opposite in Mariam’s case. Not only was she not protected by the operation from (forced or willing) intercourse, but the operation failed to fulfill its purpose of preventing her humiliation and social media. The second, little more mystical interpretation is that Mariam is in fact a virgin, despite her pregnancy. Arguments in favour of this interpretation are her obviously closed vulva, which Eve

has examined.

According to her mother, she incapable of lying and her retarded state (mentally challenged people are usually used as God's vessels, since these people are never and are seen as morally pure). It is not unusual along the shores of the Blue Nile for virgins to give birth. But I've bathed this girl and seen her body, no man have even tried.

Finally, the possibility of rape is overthrown in the next quotation by Eve:

“So you see, if it had been rape, the whole village would have heard her screams. Even on the wedding night, the ensile, with a willing bride and cautious husband, the village will hear the screaming. Sometimes it will take months and many tips to that but of blood, before the wound he slowly makes allows him to penetrate her without pain. An sometimes she's not fully opened her first child”.

(Naylor,152).

The meaning behind this interpretation would again be more connected to the overall idea of female victimization, of course connected to the rejection of FGM, where Mariam, the innocent and pure female-child becomes the sacrificial lamp god chosen to criticize the African's behaviour and the way treat their women. therefore, both interpretations show that even though Gloria Naylor withholds to comment on the future of FGM, her narration is not without criticism for the practice.

The patriarchal chauvinism is evident in every aspect of this cruel practice. In Waris Dirie's case, an additional important element in her story is the fact that Waris was circumcised at the age of five, but decided to leave Africa years later, after being

threatened by a marriage to an elder man she did not love. This is because of her own father's involvement. Dirie herself stresses that it was her father (who wanted to marry her off) and not her mother (who circumcised her) she ran away from (her mother even helped her escape):

“This horrible journey began when I ran away from my father. I lived in a nomadic tribe in Somali desert, and when I was thirteen years old, my father announced I was to be married to an older man. Since I knew I had to react fast ( ... ) I told my mother I would run away”. (Dirie, 14)

All these factors influence Dirie's ambivalent attitude towards circumcision and the consequent inconsistencies in her criticism of this practice.

A similar situation presents itself in the story of Fauziya Kasindja, who fled her native Togo and sought asylum in America. Although Fauziya repeatedly states that the reason for her escape was to avoid circumcision. She is also threatened to be married to an older man with three wives, where she would probably live in service to their whims, of which she is aware. Therefore, the situation is more compelling, as seen in her own words when thinking of returning to go:

“I'd have to return to my so called husband. Then I'd be set and maybe I'd die. And if I didn't? If I lived? No, that would be worse. Real death would be better than the living death my life would become if I survived. I'd rather die”. (Kasindja, 521)

The fact that she is less open about other reasons for her escape can be understood as a result that she is less open about other reasons for her escape can be

understood as a result of her prison experience. Where, she learnt that FGM was the only reason that would get her asylum. Another fact in favour of this argument is the already Western terminology with which Fauziya talks about all this, proving she has grown to view this ritual in a Western manner (a definite result of the many hours of discussing FGM with her lawyers and reading American debates on FGM). Fauziya's family did not support circumcision and had after her father's death, Fauziya, under the care of her uncle, was to be the first circumcised woman in her family. Like Waris Dirie, Fauziya was assisted in her escape by her mother and sister, and so did not escape from her own, but rather a foreign cultural practice.

Thus the patriarchal aspect becomes evident only through the author's contact with western culture and its values and it is an important factor in the analysis of the writer's attitude towards circumcision. It is absolutely regardless if the writer has accepted the western views. What is to be noted is if the writer is using her writing to try and fight western criticism and its partial view of FGM.

As with African authors, an important factor of African American writing is the writer's participation in the activist polemics surrounding FGM. Since, there is a danger of engaged literature. i.e. literary works that place literary value second to the primary goal, i.e. the argumentation of the writer's viewpoint. Such an example can be seen in *Alice Walker's the Secret of Joy*, where the author's general criticism of FGM is evident, which brought Walker a lot of negative African criticism.

Today's world has welcomed women into every field but quite contrary to it are prevailing problems of domestic violence, sexual abuse of women, female feticide, and rituals like 'female Genital Mutilation', Female Genital Mutilation is

motley of serious human rights violations like gender violence ,sexual liberty, and child abuse. Austrian-American feminist and Frank Hosken published '*The Hosken Report: The Genital and Sexual Mutilation of Female*' (1979) which brought the issue to a wider audience. "It was the first report to estimate the numbers of women cut around the world. Hosken called FGM a "training ground for male violence, and accused women who facilitated it of participating in the destruction of their own kind". "Female Genital Mutilation, also known as all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons". It violates the right to non-discrimination, health and bodily integrity and the victims, invariably, is the young disempowered girl with no voice of their own. Moreover, the practice is performed by the elders of the family so the girls are either scared of losing their parents or confused about their loyalties. They are made to believe that FGM is something universal so they are not supposed to complain against it rather they have to face it socially and bravely to make their families proud of them. This is more than enough to prove that the practice is a sheer patriarchal prejudice upon the women.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a cultural practice that has gained more attention in the field of human rights in the last few years. In 1980, FGM was only dealt within the academic anthropological field. Later FGM was considered for research and discussed by the non-academic individuals via books such as *Desert Flower* (1998) by Waris Dirie and *Infidel* (2006) by Ayaan Hirsi Ali. From these autobiographical works, the authors, who were once victims, expose to the public the naked truths about Female Genital Mutilation and its consequences. By exposing this, the researcher/author believes that the problem of FGM will soon be eradicated. Thus the progression to end the practice FGM is accelerated. Nowadays many writers, research scholars and journalists have started to publish works based on FGM. Many articles and books related to this dangerous practice of FGM can be seen on the internet today. A better understanding of the consequences of FGM can of course help people to come out from the cultural and traditional practice.

Female Genital Mutilation is a systematic set of violation for girls and women. Organizations like UNICEF, UNFPA jointly lead a huge programme to help out women who undergo Female Genital Mutilation as a cultural practice. UNICEF considers the practice FGM as an expression of entrenched gender inequality (UNICEF web source). On examining why the practice is continued, “many practitioners of Female Genital Mutilation believe that the procedure is dictated by tradition and is strictly bonded with the culture to ensure that the women are not

adulterated before marriage because men refuse to marry adulterous women. It is widely believed that the purpose of Female Genital Mutilation is to control women's sexuality, and, in some settings adulterous women are considered dishonorable prostitutes. It is also believed that the clitoris suggests the idea of masculinity and the foreskin of the penis suggests the idea of feminine features”.

Research helps to understand how women struggle to escape from the cultural and traditional practice of Female Genital Mutilation. It deals with African women's writing about the mental and physical trauma involved in FGM. Research has also exposed how FGM is celebrated as an African culture. The researcher has thus taken five important works from African and American women writings for study.

Research on the harmful practice of FGM creates awareness primarily by educating the public as to the benefits ever harvested by this so-called social norm. Creating awareness and empowering people to question this practice is what is urgently needed to end the terrible social and cultural norms that indigenize this practice. A greater understanding of FGM will also help health professionals to create awareness among the common public regarding the health hazards involved in Female Genital Mutilation and to improve the healthcare provided and cease the practice in whole.

“Those who hold these beliefs, therefore, insist the removal of both before a person is accepted as an adult. It is additionally claimed that female genitalia are ugly and dirty and must be removed to enhance beauty and cleanliness. Female Genital Mutilation is perpetrated because it gives men power over women as a group. While no religion specifically requires Female Genital Mutilation it is only the patriarchal

hierarchy of the society that has associated Female Genital Mutilation as a cultural practice that allows this to continue”.

FGM is in fact human rights violation that affects health and but it does not lead to any economical set back, which may be a reason why it is not taken seriously. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the medical complications involved in this practice and to initiate an ethical debate on FGM. The literature review given in chapter 2 has therefore presented the lack of information on the socioeconomic consequences of FGM. The number of studies published over a period of 40 years concerning the prevalence of FGM and its medical complications is quite impressive and the evidence is conclusive and unarguable.

The eradication of the practice remains in the peak in many African countries, where some government introduced prevention programs and has legislated against ‘Female Genital Mutilation’. Hence, there is a growing need to shift the focal points of some research studies to end this practice from the socioeconomic and cultural perspectives.

With an additional sound scientific data for example, “good intervention studies using appropriate methodologies - the effects of FGM on society and the economy could be even better assessed and could further support the fight against FGM. Appropriate researches not only could contribute to prevent FGM but also could support victims of FGM more efficiently. Training health workers and creating awareness among community leaders and authorities are crucial in this context. Surely a multi-sectorial strategy in the fight of FGM is needed, such as quality research, prevention programmes, best intervention practices, and strong advocacy”.

During 1960s, the British colonial government took steps to prohibit the practice of FGM to help out girls and women from this cultural procedure. The governments had to encounter strong resistance from the ethnic societies that were advocating FGM. Nevertheless, several other actions are still being adopted by the governments.

The purpose of this research is therefore to create awareness about FGM among the public that is not familiar with this brutal practice, thereby initiating a possible movement against the practice at least via social media. Thus the research has presented real life accounts and representations through fiction of the practice of 'Female Genital Mutilation' to sensitize the crowd.

Fiction and non-fiction were analysis in the accounts of FGM proves that despite the consistent efforts to create awareness of this brutal practice, there is an inability to present the complexity of the issue to the world outside the communities that practice it. This may be attributed to several factors, such as the autobiographical nature of some works, the aesthetic value and purpose of the novels, unfamiliarity with the African culture, the lack of or insufficient knowledge of FGM, and the already mentioned contact of African writers with the western culture as well as, in some cases, with anti-FGM activism.

Nevertheless one should understand that it is necessary to take into account the actual circumstances surrounding the stories of these authors as well as the time when the fiction and non-fiction works were written. For example, during the time of writing her novel, Waris Dirie was a US ambassador for anti-FGM affairs, and so, it must be assumed, is under great influence from the Western activists' mentality. This

is reflected in her occasional use of western FGM-related terminology and her choice of reasons for FGM, which are common with western FGM abolitionists. On the other hand, her strong critique of FGM notwithstanding, she fails to accuse her parents for her circumcision and is even unable to talk to them about it.

Therefore, the neutral description of Nawal El Saadawi 's novel goes in line with her advocating the objective depiction of foreign cultural practices, while the early edition of Flora Nwapa's novel' testifies of her urge to introduce to the West the yet unknown and interesting African culture, along with its yet unfamiliar and unattacked traditional custom of circumcision, thus described simply and without the need to defend. The defining reason of Mende Nazer's gentle tone in describing FGM can be found in the fact that her circumcision was performed by her parents, for whom the writer feels great love and respect, while Fauziya Kasindja's critical view of FGM is (among other)a consequence of her family's rejection of the custom.

It is also observed that there is a division among African writers between defending their culture and following the newly-gained perspective of the western world. This ambivalent attitude towards circumcision is probably what enables these writers to treat this controversial issue in its full complexity, and is at the same time the greatest distinction that sets them apart from the partial approach to Female Genital Mutilation of most African American writers.

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