Beyond Colonial Imagery?

Dynamics of Religion, Culture and Agency

in the Guardian's End FGM Global Media Campaign

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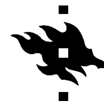

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

Tutkielma on retorinen analyysi The Guardian -lehden tyttöjen ympärileikkauksen vastaisesta mediakampanjasta. Tutkielmassa paneudutaan tapoihin, joilla tuoreessa kampanjoinnissa kuvataan ympärileikkauksia, niiden uskonnollista ja kulttuurista merkitystä sekä ympärileikattuja naisia. Tavoitteena on selvittää, miten Guardianin kampanja asennoituu ja reagoi tyttöjen ympärileikkauksia ympäröiviin ristiriitoihin länsimaisessa mediakeskustelussa, erityisesti kysymyksiin ympärileikattujen naisten uhriuttamisesta, universaaleista ihmisoikeuksista ja vähemmistöryhmien kulttuurin ja uskonnon kunnioittamisesta. Tutkielma nojaa postkolonialistiseen teoriaan ja diskursiiviseen uskontotieteeseen, ja sen taustaoletus on konstruktionistinen. Lisäksi tutkielma kytkeytyy joukkoon tuoreita tutkimuksia ja teorioita, joissa paneudutaan länsimaissa käytyyn keskusteluun ja kampanjointiin ihmisoikeusloukkauksiksi mielletyistä kulttuurisista perinteistä. Näissä keskusteluissa ja kampanjoissa on nähty jäänteitä siirtomaa-aikaisista asenteista ja valta-asetelmista.

Tutkielman aineistona on Guardianin kampanjan internet-sivuilta löytyvä 96-sivuinen tekstimateriaali, joka koostuu uutisartikkeleista, haastatteluista, kolumneista ja pääkirjoituksista. Menetelmänä käytetään retorista analyysiä. Analyysi on jaettu neljään osaan. Ensimmäinen osa keskittyy ympärileikkauksen nimeämiseen ja luokitteluun. Toisessa osassa käsitellään toimijuuden ja uhriuttamisen dynamiikkaa aineistossa. Kolmas osa keskittyy argumentaatioon, jota lähestytään oletettujen vasta-argumenttien kautta. Neljännessä osassa analysoidaan uskonnon, kulttuurin ja tradition käsitteiden käyttöä ja niiden kautta sitä, millaiseksi ympärileikkausten kulttuurinen ja uskonnollinen merkitys aineistossa rakentuu.

Kampanjateksteistä välittyy voimakas universalistinen taustaoletus. Ympärileikkauksen moraalinen tuomittavuus kuvataan faktana, ja kampanjoijilla katsotaan olevan velvollisuus levittää paitsi tietoa, myös moraalista totuutta. Samalla Guardianin kampanjan tekijät vastaavat sekä suoraan että epäsuorasti ympärileikkauksen vastaiseen kampanjointiin kohdistettuun kritiikkiin. Kulttuurisensitiivisyyteen vetoaminen ympärileikkauskeskustelussa tuomitaan rasismina ja välinpitämättömyytenä. Tämän lisäksi kampanjaa johtaa kaksi nuorta naista, jotka kuuluvat ympärileikkauksia perinteisesti harjoittaviin yhteisöihin. Heidät esitetään kampanjateksteissä sankariroolissa. Samanaikaisesti enemmistö ympärileikatuista naisista kuvataan kuitenkin alistuvina uhreina, joilla ei ole omaa toimijuutta tai ääntä. Samalla tavoin kampanja pyrkii kirjoittamaan ymmärtävästi myös ympärileikkaajista ja ympärileikkauksen puolustajista, mutta kuvaa ympärileikkauksia brutaaleina väkivallantekoina.

Ympärileikkaus rakentuu aineistossa lähes ainoastaan seksuaalisuuteen ja sen kontrolloimiseen liittyvänä toimenpiteenä. Sen uskonnollinen merkitys kuvataan uskonnon väärintulkintana, ja siihen kytkeytyvät poliittiset ja taloudelliset rakenteet sivuutetaan lähes täysin. Näin Guardianin kampanja samanaikaisesti pyrkii välttämään ympärileikkauskeskustelun vanhoja ongelmia ja retoriikan tasolla toistaa niitä tavoissa, joilla se kuvaa ympärileikattuja naisia ja heidän yhteisöjään ja kulttuureitaan.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords
Tyttöjen ympärileikkaus, diskursiivinen uskontotiede, postkolonialismi, toimijuus, retorinen analyysi, ihmisoikeudet

Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited
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Introduction

This study is a rhetorical analysis of the Guardian's End FGM Global Media Campaign. Relying on theories of social constructionism, postcolonialism, and discursive study of religion, the aim of the study is to analyse ways in which the Guardian's campaign addresses questions of religion, culture, agency, and Othering in connection to female circumcision. In particular, the study is concerned with how the Guardian's campaign positions itself in the power relations and controversies surrounding the circumcision debate in Europe and the United States. The focus of the research is thus on how the Guardian campaign addresses issues of intervening in the culturally mandated practices of others without insulting their religious and cultural values or reinforcing colonial stereotypes and power relations.

Defined by the World Health Organisation 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”, female circumcision affects an estimated 125 million women worldwide, a majority of them in Africa (WHO 2008, p. 4; UNICEF 2013, p. 22). It is performed for a wide variety of interlinked social, cultural, religious and economic reasons across a vast geographical area where it has been a tradition for sometimes thousands of years.

For the past thirty years, female circumcision has been the source of public outrage and sometimes heated debate in Europe and the United States. Debates on female circumcision in the "West" have circled around questions of universal human rights on the one hand, and external intervention in cultural practices on the other. Human rights, taken to apply to all human beings in all contexts, have been used to unambiguously condemn female circumcision and call for immediate intervention. At the same time, European-based anti-circumcision campaigns have been accused of arrogance, racism, and cultural imperialism, and criticised for reproducing colonial power relations and stereotypes.

Anti-circumcision campaigning thus becomes a hazardous territory, and how and in whose terms female circumcision is defined and debated becomes highly significant. From a social constructionist premise, language constructs reality as well as describes it. Truth, especially concerning abstract concepts such as "culture", "religion", or "human rights", is

not an objective absolute but something produced, consciously or not, in discourse and description. Who has the right to make these categorisations, to define the "truth" about people and procedures, is fundamentally a question of power. Similarly, researchers within discursive study of religion have pointed out that the concept of "religion", born in a certain place and time to describe a certain mode of social organisation, cannot be directly applied to other contexts without simultaneously asserting a position of power from which to define and organise the ideologies of others.

This is especially true in the context of this study, focusing on a European-based campaign against a cultural practice found primarily in Africa. Previous studies on anti-circumcision campaigning and circumcision discourse in the "West" have shown that these campaigns and discussions cannot exist in a cultural, historical or political vacuum. On the contrary, their representations of non-European people, cultures and religions continue to be influenced by a long history of unequal power relations and stereotypical representations of the Other.

Simultaneously, anti-circumcision campaigning today is already aware of these criticisms and concerns. Campaigners in Europe and the United States thus face a difficult task in condemning the practice while remaining respectful towards people whose cultural and religious values differ from their own. The present study is an analysis of how these dynamics are played out in one recent anti-circumcision campaign. To what extent are the old stereotypes and power relations still present in an influential campaign in 2015, and how does this campaign address them?

Launched in the United Kingdom in February 2014, the Guardian's *End FGM Global Media Campaign* is arguably one of the most influential anti-circumcision campaigns active today. After successful lobbying in the UK and the US, *End FGM* is now focusing on Africa. The campaign's website explains the campaign aims as follows:

> The Guardian's Global media campaign against FGM aims to put all the tools of the modern day communication to work to end FGM - as quickly as possible.
>
> …

> Over the next year the Guardian's End FGM Global Media Campaign aims to keep making new partnerships across Africa with prominent media groups and make ending FGM a priority for us all.
>
> Whether we work through journalism, soap opera, animation or advertising, the time has come to end FGM. The international reputation of the Guardian will help us open the doors of those that can change minds and educate.
>
> (Guardian, 10 July 2015[i])

The campaign began with a petition by a 17-year-old student from Bristol, Fahma Mohamed, demanding the Minister for Education to write to every school in the United Kingdom about the dangers of female circumcision. Supported by The Guardian, the petition gathered nearly 250 000 signatures in less than a month on the online platform change.org. The campaign gained international notice, including backing from United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai.

Unable to ignore a campaign of this magnitude, the Minister for Education Michael Gove agreed to write to every school in England and even met with Mohamed to discuss the issue. The campaign then spread to the United States, where Atlanta resident Jaha Dukureh started a petition on the same platform, calling for a nation-wide survey into the prevalence of female circumcision in the US. The campaign is now being taken to the African continent as well, with a seminar for young people in the Gambia and media campaigning in Kenya.

This campaign was chosen for the study for two main reasons. Firstly, because its relatively recent launch date makes it more representative of contemporary anti-circumcision campaigning than an older campaign. Secondly, because the backing of influential figures such as Ban and Yousafzai adds weight and authority to the campaign. The UN involvement is particularly significant, as it suggests that the campaign's approach is approved and supported by an organisation that is often taken to stand for a global consensus.

Due to its scope and its influence, the Guardian's campaign is likely to affect attitudes towards female circumcision among its audience in Britain and the United States. Less

directly, the way the campaign texts discuss and describe circumcised women and the communities they come from will have an impact on how these women, their communities, and their cultural and religious traditions are perceived. Therefore, the present study will analyse how the campaign texts construct circumcision, its cultural and religious aspects, and circumcised women themselves, from a methodological framework of discursive study of religion and rhetorical analysis.

The textual material on the campaign website – including news articles, editorials, interviews, and columns – will be combed through for four main points of analysis:

1) *Naming, truth claims, and categorisation*: what is female circumcision called and how is it described? What other practices or phenomena is circumcision likened or linked to?
2) *Agency, voices, and speaker positions*: who speaks, for whom? Whose voice is heard, who has the authority to speak? Who are presented as active agents, who as passive?
3) *Argumentation*: what is the argumentative position that is being justified, what is criticised? What are the debates the campaign takes part in?
4) *Religion, culture, and tradition*: what is classified as belonging to these categories, what is not? How is religious terminology used?

Taken together, the answers to these questions will produce a picture of how the Guardian's campaign constructs female circumcision, its religious and cultural significance, and the women it affects. Simultaneously, this four-part analysis will examine how the campaign solves the age-old dilemma of anti-circumcision campaigning – whether an ideal of universal human rights mandates an intervention in cultural practices, and if so, how can this intervention be achieved without insulting cultural and religious values? The results of this analysis will be contrasted to past analyses of anti-circumcision campaigning, to see to what extent anti-circumcision campaigning in 2015 follows, or deviates from, the patterns they have outlined.

Context and Background

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the subject and context of the study. Firstly, I will discuss female circumcision in general. Secondly, I will present a short history and analysis of anti-circumcision campaigning, focusing on campaigns and abandonment efforts initiated in the "West". This is essential for an understanding of what the Guardian's campaign is working against, and the tradition it follows in doing so.

Female Circumcision

A note on terminology.

There is an ongoing debate among academics and activists on what term to use when discussing female circumcision. None of the available options are neutral or free of connotation. For a study that operates from the premise that namings construct reality, the choice of terminology is significant and has to be explained before advancing into the study itself. This is especially true since I have opted for using a different term than the material I analyse; I will use *female circumcision*, while my material mostly refers to the practice as *female genital mutilation*.

In this, the Guardian's campaign follows a prevailing trend among most Euro-American sources today. In this context, *female genital mutilation* (FGM) is the most commonly used term for describing non-medical genital alterations performed on women and girls for cultural or religious reasons. It has been argued (eg. UNICEF 2013, p. 7) that *circumcision* is both medically inaccurate and misleading in terms of the amount of damage caused by these operations.

But while *circumcision* may be misleading in terms of the invasiveness of some of these surgeries, *mutilation* is misleading in terms of the motivation behind them. *Mutilation* implies cruelty and purposeful harm, and is thus inaccurate in describing an operation that most practitioners and subjects do not regard as harmful or cruel (for further discussion see Gruenbaum 2001, pp. 3-4). Similarly, critics of the term *mutilation* have argued that "to describe someone as 'mutilated' is pitying and disparaging and prejudices debates about women's autonomy. The term may alienate members of practising communities" (Dustin

2010, p. 20). While most Euro-American campaigns prefer to use *FGM*, *circumcision* is the term most commonly used by African academics and researchers working on the issue (eg. Ajayi-Soyinka 2005; Akudinobi 2005; El Saadawi 2005; Korieh 2005; Nnaemeka 2005; Obiora 1997a, 1997b, 2005, 2006).

A newer term, *female genital cutting* (FGC), has been gaining popularity in recent years. According to UNICEF, this term was introduced "in an effort to become more culturally sensitive" (UNICEF 2013, 7). Certainly, it can be seen as a compromise between *circumcision* and *mutilation*, though it shares the external viewpoint of *FGM*. Some also use a combined form – *FGM/C* or *female genital mutilation/cutting*. In a highly interesting passage of the same UNICEF report, the authors explain that this alternative "is meant to capture the significance of the term 'mutilation' at the policy level and highlight that the practice is a violation of the rights of girls and women. At the same time, it recognizes the importance of employing respectful terminology when working with practising communities." (UNICEF 2013, p. 7.) *Mutilation* is admitted to be a disrespectful term, but instead of ceasing to use it, this is addressed by complementing it with *cutting*.

It is also noteworthy that none of these terms are widely used in circumcising communities themselves. In Arabic-speaking regions, for instance, the most commonly used word is *tahur* or ritual purification (Gruenbaum 2001, pp. 3–4). Additionally, Moira Dustin (2010), Leslye Amede Obiora (2005) and Christine Walley (1997), among others, point out the possible dangers of using any single term to cover the entire spectrum of these operations. Performed for a variety of reasons across a vast geographical area, on newborns or adult women or anything in between, from ceremonial pricking to a removal of all external genitalia, the range of operations is much broader than the use of a single term suggests.

Although using a single term is extremely problematic, I will have to do so in this study because my material does so as well. My focus is on media discourse and anti-circumcision campaigning, both of which employ a category called FGM or FGM/C that includes most – though not all – nonmedical genital alterations on women. I will use the term *female circumcision* to cover this range of procedures for two reasons. Firstly, because I find that it more accurately describes what these operations are about to the people who practice them. And secondly, because *female genital cutting* – though commonly used only in the context of "traditional" genital cutting – would technically also include procedures that are not a

point of interest in the material I will analyse, namely cosmetic surgeries of the female genitalia.

Female Circumcision: An overview

This section offers an overview of female circumcision – a necessary starting point for the subsequent analysis of how it is addressed in Euro-American media discourse. Here, I will first address definitions and typologies of female circumcision. This will be followed by a brief introduction to how, when, and where circumcision is practised. Finally, the section presents some of the reasons and motivations for circumcising girls and women and addresses its cultural and religious significance.

The World Health Organisation defines female circumcision 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” (WHO 2008, p. 4). Though other classifications exist as well, the WHO typology of four types of female circumcision is the most widely used.

The first type entails the total or partial removal of the clitoris. In some cases, only the prepuce or hood of the clitoris is removed. Medical circles refer to this procedure as clitoridectomy, and some Islamic groups as *sunna* circumcision after the Arabic word for a tradition of Prophet Muhammad. (UNICEF 2013, p. 7.)

The second type, known as excision, stands for a partial or total removal of the clitoris and labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora (UNICEF 2013, p. 7). Somewhat confusingly, this is known as *sunna* circumcision in the Sudan (Gruenbaum 2001, p. 2). The range of operations under this heading is wide, from relatively mild procedures close to clitoridectomy to a total excision of the external genitalia.

The third and most famous type, known as infibulation or pharaonic circumcision, is most common in the Horn of Africa. It entails a removal of all external genitalia and a stitching together of the cut to form a smooth scar tissue. This narrows the vaginal orifice, leaving only a small opening for urine and menstruation. The clitoris may either be removed or else left intact beneath the scar. Sexual intercourse and childbirth often require defibulation or opening of the infibulation scar. Reinfibulation after childbirth is also common. (UNICEF

2013, p. 7; Gruenbaum 2001, p. 3; Boddy 1998, pp. 81-83; Hicks 1996.) Contrary to what media representations would suggest, infibulation is the most rare of the four types, comprising about 15% of all cases of female circumcision in the mid-1990s, and about 10% in 2007 (Boddy 1998, p. 82; Toubia 1995, p. 10; WHO 2008, p. 5).

The fourth type is the broadest, including ”all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, for example: pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterization” (UNICEF 2013, p. 7). This is less a type of surgery and more a category entailing all surgeries that do not fall into the first three categories. The breadth of this grouping showcases the problematics of using a single term to cover such a wide variety of procedures.

There are numerous health risks associated with female circumcision. These health risks depend to a large extent on the type of procedure as well as the circumstances under which the operation is carried out. Immediate risks include haemorrhage, shock, severe pain, and infections due to unhygienic conditions and implements. Long-term risks include urinary retention and recurrent urinary tract infections, cysts, and infertility. In cases of infibulation, sexual intercourse is often excruciatingly painful and complications in childbirth are common, sometimes even resulting in maternal or infant deaths. (Boddy 1998, pp. 85-86; Gruenbaum 2001, pp. 4-6; UNICEF 2013, p. 43; see also El Dareer 1982; Lightfoot-Klein 1989; Toubia 1993.)

In addition to physical complications, psychological effects such as fear, anxiety, and trauma have been reported (Boddy 1998, p. 86; Gruenbaum 2001, p. 7; Rahman & Toubia 2000, p. 9). It has also been pointed out, however, that in communities where circumcision is the norm, negative psychological effects are countered by community support. Additionally, if circumcision is a requirement for becoming adult, beautiful, or pure, “not being circumcised may be the more traumatic condition”. (Boddy 1998, p. 86.)

Moreover, Obiora (2005, pp. 186-187), Dustin (2010), Carla Obermeyer (1999, 2003), and Bettina Shell-Duncan (2001, 2008) have questioned the reliability of the medical facts commonly referred to when addressing the health risks of female circumcision. The data quoted in anti-circumcision campaigning is often derived from case studies on infibulation, the most severe form of female circumcision (Shell-Duncan 2008, p. 226). Additionally,

many of these case studies are not generalisable due to either a small sample or poor execution or both, leading Obermeyer to a conclusion that ”evidence on complications is very scarce” (Obermeyer 1999, p. 92). This is not to say that no complications exist or that the operations are harmless, only that the evidence quoted as medical fact is often questionable and sometimes exaggerated – “a worst case scenario” where no differentiation is being made between different types of procedure and differences between individual experiences (Dustin 2010, p. 9). As an example, Conroy (2006, quoted in Shell-Duncan 2008, p. 226) has noted that in terms of pregnancy and childbirth complications, female circumcision is a smaller risk factor than maternal smoking.

The effect of circumcision on female sexuality is still not sufficiently researched, but it has been established that the procedure does not by definition eliminate sexual pleasure and orgasm (Boddy 1998, p. 88; Gruenbaum 2001, pp. 133-157; Rahman & Toubia 2000, p. 9; Shell-Duncan & Hernlund 2000, p. 17). Studies by Asma El Dareer (1982), Hanny Lightfoot-Klein (1989), Ellen Gruenbaum (1996), and Janice Boddy (eg. 1989) in the Sudan indicate that while sex is a painful necessity for many excised or infibulated women, others reported enjoying sex all or part of the time and regularly experiencing orgasm or sexual climax. In El Dareer's study, this percentage was around 25%; in Lightfoot-Klein's, nearly 90%. (Boddy 1998, p.88; Gruenbaum 1996, p. 462; El Dareer 1982, p. 48; Lightfoot-Klein 1989, p. 383-384.)

The practicalities of how and when the procedure is carried out vary enormously. Girls can be cut as infants or as teenagers reaching marrying age, though the most common age is between four and ten years. The age often coincides with that of circumcising boys in the same community. (Boddy 1998, p. 81; Gruenbaum 2001, p. 3; Lightfoot-Klein 1989, p. 378; for a detailed statistic on circumcising ages, see UNICEF 2013, p. 50.) The procedure is most commonly carried out by traditional midwives without anesthesia or antiseptic, using a razor blade, scalpel, scissors, or even a shard of glass (Lightfoot-Klein 1989, p. 378; UNICEF 2013, pp. 44-46).

In some areas, such as Egypt, Sudan, and Kenya, circumcisions are increasingly carried out in hospitals by health professionals, reducing the risk of infections and making the procedure less painful for the girl. At the same time, the UN and its NGOs, including the World Health Organisation and UNICEF, have been strongly opposed to the medicalisation

of female circumcision. According to WHO, medicalisation legitimises and further institutionalises female circumcision, and contradicts the Hippocratian oath, “do no harm”. (Boddy 1998, p. 85; UNICEF 2013, pp. 43-46; WHO 2008, pp. 6-7, 12.) This opposition to medicalising female circumcision has led, in many regions, to a situation where boys are taken to hospitals to be circumcised under anesthesia, while the girls of the same village are circumcised in unhygienic conditions and without pain relief.

The ritual dimension of female circumcision varies dramatically from one community to another. In some societies, the operation is accompanied by ceremonies and celebrations or connected to an initiation rite; in others, it is carried out in a routine way, as a necessary surgical procedure performed on girls of a certain age. (Boddy 1998; Gruenbaum 2001; Rahman & Toubia 2000; Shell-Duncan & Hernlund 2000.)

According to a recent UNICEF estimate, more than 125 million girls and women have undergone some form of female circumcision in the 29 countries in Africa and the Middle East where the practice is most prevalent. The real number is likely to be somewhat higher due to immigrant communities in Europe, North America, and Asia. The countries with the highest percentage of circumcised women are Somalia (98 %), Guinea (96 %), Djibouti (93 %), Egypt (91 %), Eritrea (89 %), Mali (89 %), Sierra Leone (88 %) and the Sudan (88 %). Five other countries, namely Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ethiopia, Mauritania, and Liberia, have prevalence rates of over fifty per cent. (UNICEF 2013, p. 22, 27.) Though often treated as only an African tradition, female circumcision is also practised in Indonesia, the Yemen, and Iraqi Kurdistan (UNICEF 2013, pp. 26-31; 2015).

Immigration has brought female circumcision to new regions, including Europe and the United States. However, genital cutting of women is not a previously unknown practice to the Western world. In the Victorian era, clitoridectomy was practised in the United States and Great Britain as a cure for hysteria, homosexuality, and masturbation, continued in the United States and Australia up to the 1960s (Bell 2005, pp. 131-132; Boddy 1998, pp. 91-92; Korieh 2005, p. 114). At present, operations matching the WHO definition – partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons – are gaining prevalence in the West, marketed as cosmetic surgeries or “trimming” (Braun 2005, 2009, 2010; Davis 2002; Essén & Johnsdotter 2004; Sullivan 2007).

Female genital cosmetic surgery (FGCS), also called vulvovaginal aesthetic surgery or the ”designer vagina”, has been gaining in popularity in Europe and the United States from the 1990s onwards. Virginia Braun (2010) defines FGCS as ”a range of procedures that aim to change aesthetic (or functional) aspects of women's genitalia but that are not medically indicated”, excluding genital surgery for intersex or trans people and ”traditional female genital cuttings” (Braun 2010, p. 1393). These procedures include labiaplasty or reduction of the labia minora, pubic or vulvar liposuction, ”vaginal rejuvenation” or tightening, clitoral hood reduction or removal, ”augmentation” of the labia majora, hymen reconstruction, and ”G-spot amplification”. (Braun 2009, p. 233-234; 2010, p. 1393.)

These procedures are most commonly performed on genitals that are healthy and within the range of ”normal”, though the women themselves might not see them that way. Typically, women seek labiaplasty because of a “perception of abnormality and the impact of their labial appearance (or their perception thereof) on their sex lives”. This reasoning is in line with advertising for FGCS, which promises “both aesthetic improvements and (functional) increases in sexual pleasure and psychological well-being. What is certain is that many women seek surgery to address psychological concerns.” (Braun 2010, p. 1399.) Additionally, a medical condition called labial hypertrophy has emerged to provide medical grounds for labiaplasty. The measurements of what constitutes hypertrophic or protruding labia varies substantially from one medical treatise to another, as does the classification of hypertrophy as a normal variant or an abnormality. (Braun 2010, p. 1400.)

Despite matching the WHO definition, female genital cosmetic surgery is not generally treated as a form of “FGM”. While the reasons usually cited for FGCS are almost invariably related to personal concerns – sex life, self-esteem, appearance, and psychological well-being – the motivations behind female circumcision are often more communal. Like the procedures themselves, their motivations vary from one community to another. Typically, however, the procedure is linked to concerns for a girl's marriageability.

In most circumcising communities, circumcision is a prerequisite for marriage. Uncircumcised women may be considered sexually deviant, immoral, or wild, circumcised as chaste and respectable. Making a good marriage is vital for women in an environment where their social standing and economic security are entirely dependent on their roles as a

wives, mothers, and grandmothers. As a woman's status increases with arranging the marriages of her children and grandchildren, an older woman's power and influence in her community are dependent on the circumcision and thus marriageablility of her daughters and granddaughters. (Boddy 1998, pp. 94-97; Gruenbaum 2001, pp. 33, 45-46.) As phrased by Boddy, “[w]omen know what they must do to succeed in a world whose terms they did not set but which their own actions help to ensure” (Boddy 1998, p. 96).

Moderating the sexual behaviour of young girls and women is also related to a concept of family honour as dependent on the honour of its daughters. In most circumcising communities, the unit whose concerns, rights and obligations are negotiated is the family rather than the individual; indeed, many do not find the individual as an independent, self-contained entity a meaningful concept at all. Thus, questions of consent to circumcision become extremely complicated, partly because they are set in terms alien to many of the people involved. (Berg & Denison 2013, p. 846; Boddy 1998, pp. 94-97; Gruenbaum 2001, pp. 33, 45-46.)

Female circumcision has not been reported to exist in any society that does not also circumcise males. The circumcisions of both sexes are often described as purifying, in contrast to uncircumcised bodies – both male and female – that are described as ugly or unclean (Berg & Denison 2013, p. 848; Boddy 1998, p. 101). During an extensive fieldwork period in rural northern Sudan, Boddy noted that a cultural ideal of closedness as pure, safe, and sacred repeated itself everywhere from architecture to metaphors and expressions. Openings were viewed as vulnerable, closure as curative. (Boddy 1998, p. 101; see also Boddy 1989.) Boddy's observations are but one example of the ways in which circumcision can be linked to a community's values, world view, and belief systems. Similarly it is often inseparable from the cultural and gender identity of the individual. Circumcision can be seen as a procedure that removes ambiguity of gender: the removal of the ”feminine” foreskin from men and the ”masculine” clitoris and external genitalia from women makes each sex purified, beautiful, and clear (Boddy 1998, p. 101; Gruenbaum 2001, pp. 67-68).

Nor can the practice be separated from religious ideals and beliefs. In many regions, such as Northeastern Africa and Indonesia, a majority of practitioners are Muslims, and they have integrated it into their Islamic faith. Although practised by Muslims, female

circumcision is not mentioned at all in the Qur'an, and the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad are ambiguous on the subject. Islamic religious scholars are likewise divided on the topic; while some consider the milder forms acceptable or recommended but not obligatory, others condemn the practice as altogether un-Islamic (Gruenbaum 2001, pp. 64-65; UNICEF 2013, p. 70). Female circumcision is also practised among people of other faiths, including Christianity, Judaism, and traditional African religions. (El Saadawi 2005, p. 22; Gruenbaum 2001, pp. 33, 64-65; UNICEF 2013, pp. 70-73.) The practice is considered to predate both Islam and Christianity, and its place of origin is still debated; among others, it has been speculated to have originated in the Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, or ancient Egypt (Gruenbaum 2001, p. 43; Hicks 1996, pp. 24-25).

Religious reasons for practising circumcision are not separate from reasons related to identity or values. Conservative factions in all three Abrahamic faiths place great emphasis on chastity, especially for women. A woman's virginity and sexual passivity have been associated with purity and virtue. Therefore, among populations that practice these faiths, pro-circumcision arguments related to the preservation of a girl's chastity and prevention of premarital sexual intercourse are simultaneously religious arguments. (For further discussion see Gruenbaum 2001, p. 50.)

Female circumcision is thus intricately linked to complex social and economical structures, belief systems, and individual identity and aesthetics. These complexities, if not addressed and understood, can seriously hinder abandonment efforts. As the next section will demonstrate, the success or failure of an abandonment strategy will, to a great extent, depend on its sensitivity to the cultural and religious significance of circumcision to people who uphold the practice.

The Anti-Circumcision Movement

While practising communities have been adopting and abandoning circumcision for centuries, the first outside efforts to end female circumcision date back to the colonial era. In the 19th century, European missionaries and colonial administrators drafted the first anti-circumcision laws in Burkina Faso, Kenya, and the Sudan (Rahman & Toubia 2000, p. 9). The most recent comprehensive study on anti-circumcision legislation, a UNICEF

report from 2013, listed 24 practising and 35 non-practising countries that have specifically prohibited female circumcision in their criminal code. A majority of these countries have banned circumcision of women and girls of all ages and in all circumstances, though others – such as Mauritania, Tanzania, the United States and Canada – only prohibit the circumcision of minors. (UNICEF 2013, p. 8.) The efficacy of legislation alone in abandoning female circumcision is questionable. For instance, legislation prohibiting the practice has been in place in the Sudan and Egypt since the 1940s and 1950s, but circumcision rates in both countries are still around 90% (Rahman & Toubia 2000, pp. 7, 10; UNICEF 2013, pp. 22, 27.). In fact, the percentage of circumcised women in the Sudan has grown since colonisation (Kirby 2005, p. 84).

The beginning of the current Euro-American opposition to female circumcision can be traced back to 1979, when the World Health Organization sponsored the Seminar on Harmful Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (Rahman & Toubia 2000, p. 10). At the seminar, journalist Fran Hosken presented *The Hosken Report. Genital and Sexual Mutilation of Females*, a controversial report which consisted of findings gathered while travelling throughout Africa, and demanded a strong stance for the immediate eradication of the practice. It is credited for raising public awareness of female circumcision worldwide on an unprecedented scale, but criticised for its radical approach that justified, and even pleaded for, external interference. (Rahman & Toubia 2000, p. 10; Gruenbaum 2001, p. 22.)

1979 also saw the passing of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was passed ten years later in 1989. Female circumcision has since been classified by the UN as a violation of both. A more specific statement on circumcision was issued in 2002 with the passing in the UN General Assembly of a resolution on *Traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls*, calling upon national measures from all member states to abandon the practice. (UNICEF 2013, pp. 8-13.) The most recent major development in the global, West-led anti-circumcision movement occurred in December 2012, when the United Nations General Assembly ratified a resolution titled *Intensifying Global Efforts for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilations*, officially banning the practice (UN 2012).

Shell-Duncan (2008) recognises two phases in the campaigning that followed Hosken's report and the 1979 conference: the health approach and the human rights approach. Initially, anti-circumcision campaigns focused on the health risks of the operation and sought to intervene through community-based health education. This approach proved less effective than was anticipated. Shell-Duncan offers two major reasons for why the health argument failed to achieve the desired result. Firstly, the health risks of female circumcision are often already familiar to the people practising it, but the social and cultural importance of the procedure is considered to outweigh these risks. Secondly, as we have seen, the health information used to support this claim is not always reliable, undermining the credibility of the campaigns. (Shell-Duncan 2008, pp. 225-226.)

The human rights approach began gaining prominence in the early 1990s. In the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, violence against women (VAW) was officially recognised as an international human rights issue, and female circumcision was classified as a form of VAW. Thus, campaigning against female circumcision was linked with the movement against VAW. (Shell-Duncan 2008, p. 227; UNICEF 2013, p. 8.) The redefinition of female circumcision as a human rights issue pleads for intervention under other subheadings as well. According to UNICEF, "defining it as a form of torture brings it under the rubric of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Moreover, since FGM/C is regarded as a traditional practice prejudicial to the health of children and is, in most cases, performed on minors, it violates the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)." (UNICEF 2013, p. 8.)

The human rights approach has, however, been criticised for arrogance and Eurocentrism. Despite its claims of being universal and apolitical, it has been accused of being but the newest form of the civilizing mission of colonial times (eg. Gunning 1992, pp. 190-191; Mamdani 2007, quoted in Shell-Duncan 2008, p. 230; see also Ajayi-Soyinka 2005; Nnaemeka 2005; Obiora 1997a, 1997b, 2005). This may be an exaggeration, but it has been argued that the human rights approach inadvertently reduces Third World women to powerless victims in need of rescue from the outside (Gruenbaum 2001, pp. 202-206; Nnaemeka 2005, p. 39; Obiora 2005, p. 183; Shell-Duncan 2008, pp. 230-231).

The debate about the human rights framework raises important questions of whether universal values exist, and if so, who has the right to define what these values are.

Ultimately, the debate is about the authority to define and name female circumcision: can a procedure done in celebration by loving parents for the best interest of their child be labelled torture and child abuse? Can a practice upheld largely by women be labelled gender discrimination? (See eg. Gruenbaum 2001, pp. 24-31; Shell-Duncan 2008, pp. 228, 230.) Although increasingly contested, the human rights approach is still widely in use today, and is also visibly present in the Guardian's campaign material.

However, a bulk of the work against female circumcision is done outside of international conferences, West-led campaigns and UN resolutions. According to Obioma Nnaemeka, "it is grossly erroneous to conclude that things are changing in Africa because of Beijing (or any such UN gatherings)" (Nnaemeka 2005, p. 39). Instead, she credits local men and women and their NGOs for successes in the abandonment of female circumcision. She cites Women's Issues Communication and Services Agency (WICSA) in Nigeria and TOSTAN in Senegal as examples of African-based NGOs that combat female circumcision in ways more effective than external intervention – campaigning in villages in the people's own languages, and treating female circumcision not as an isolate but as a part of a wider social and economical structure. (Nnaemeka 2005, pp. 39-42.)

Nnaemeka explains the success of these campaigns with "sensitivity to context and complexity, cultural understanding and its integration in project design, participatory processes, use of local languages, collaboration between women and men, participation of local religious and "traditional" authorities, and genuine, meaningful collaboration between local communities and foreign entities" (Nnaemeka 2005, p. 42). Similarly, Obiora stresses the importance of cooperating with the communities themselves and, most importantly, "conceding the local women the right to take the lead in identifying their needs and formulating their solutions" (Obiora 2005, p. 195). According to Nnaemeka, "African women do not lack agency. What they lack may be the material and structural conditions necessary for the accomplishment of their goals" (Nnaemeka 2005, p. 39).

Some features of European-based female circumcision discourse and campaigning have – inadvertently or not – presented circumcised women as lacking in agency. This stands in sharp contrast to the discourse on female genital cosmetic surgery. In public discourse, FGCS is framed as an individual choice, even empowerment, and the personal reasons and the freedom of the woman are emphasised. Virginia Braun (2009) argues that this choice

rhetoric may be called into question ”as numerous women make the same 'choices', for apparently very similar 'personal reasons'” (Braun 2009, p. 244), suggesting a wider cultural or societal phenomenon. According to Braun, the medicalisation of difference and the problematisation of healthy variants of the female genitalia, together with advertising and positive media coverage of FGCS, produce an atmosphere that simultaneously creates a problem and offers a solution to it through surgical intervention.

The ”free choice” in the case of FGCS is thus influenced by aesthetic norms and ideals that are not absolute but culturally conditioned. (Braun 2009, 2010; Sullivan 2007.) Similarly, Liao et al. (quoted in Braun 2010, p. 1400) conclude that “[w]here decisions to operate on healthy sex organs are triggered by a perceived defect informed by commercial pressures, where reliable information on risks and benefits is unavailable and where there is no provision of alternatives because there is no concerted effort to develop them, the ethics behind informed consent are vastly compromised.”

Braun also argues that the choice rhetoric serves to distance FGCS from female circumcision, associating it instead with other forms of cosmetic surgery such as breast augmentation, or non-surgical genital alterations such as pubic hair removal (Braun 2009, p. 241). Similarly, according to Nikki Sullivan (2007), a rhetoric of vaguely defined ”female sexual pleasure” further separates these two forms of genital modification. Where female circumcision is portrayed as destructive to female sexuality and sexual pleasure, genital cosmetic surgery is marketed as enhancing it (Bell 2005; Braun 2005; Sullivan 2007).

It has been pointed out by numerous researchers that FGCS violates laws prohibiting female circumcision, though there have been no prosecutions (eg. Braun 2009; Davis 2002; Essén & Johnsdotter 2004; Sullivan 2007). In the United Kingdom, the law allows for genital cutting of women “where necessary for physical or mental health” – in practice, in cases of mental distress caused by a perceived abnormality in genital appearance – but not ”as a matter of custom or ritual”. As Moira Dustin and Anne Phillips point out, this legislation effectively dictates that ”a girl or woman could have surgery to enable her to conform to majority social norms, but not to conform to those regarded as minority ‘cultural’ norms” (Dustin & Phillips 2008, p. 415). Crucially, this discrepancy reflects dramatically differing attitudes towards the autonomy and agency of ”Western” women on

the one hand and African women on the other.

The anti-circumcision movement has thus focused its arguments on women's right to bodily integrity. On occasion, this has been augmented by a call for consent – the right of women to choose what is or is not done to their bodies. Whether women are treated as capable of making informed choices on genital surgeries seems dependent on their ethnic and cultural background. In debates surrounding the issue in the “West”, claims of universal rights meet questions of free choice and informed consent.

Theoretical Framework

Social Constructionism: Communication, power, and discourse

The theoretical framework of the present study is based on social constructionism – that is, the idea that social interactions construct reality as well as describe it. Though the major theories of the field are not directly used in the analysis of the present study, their brief introduction is indispensable for understanding the theoretical and methodological framework it operates in.

Social constructionism cannot be mentioned without mentioning Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's classic *Social Construction of Reality* (1966) in which they argue that all knowledge is transmitted through and derived from social interaction. Jonathan Potter (1996) illustrates this principle by metaphors of the mirror and the construction yard. Rather than viewing language and discourse as mirrors that reflect an objective reality “out there”, they are understood as constructions that are created in a certain context and for a certain purpose. Thus, descriptive language does not reflect reality so much as create versions of it. (Potter 1996, pp. 97-98; see also Fairclough 1992.)

Michel Foucault (eg. 1970, 1991, 1998) and Antonio Gramsci (eg. 1971) took this thinking one step further in arguing that language, knowledge, and social interaction also construct and maintain relations of power. Both Foucault and Gramsci make a distinction between *absolute power* and what Foucault calls *power/knowledge* and Gramsci, *hegemony*. Absolute power refers to visible, concrete forms of power, as excercised by state officials,

the police, and other such persons and institutions. Foucault's notion of power/knowledge refers to the dominance of certain ideas and discourses, certain ways of thinking and talking about specific topics. Foucault writes about ”regimes of truth”, meaning that each society has its own politics regarding what counts as true and who gets to decide this. For Foucault, power is not restricted to politics or physical force (absolute power) but is present in our everyday lives. (Foucault 1970, 1991, 1998; Gramsci 1971; see also Lakoff 1990, Potter 1996.)

In a similar way, Gramsci distinguishes between the political society, ruled by force, and the civil society, ruled with the consent of those ruled. Gramsci's civil society refers to the public sphere where consent to the hegemony is manufactured. For Gramsci, hegemony stands for the dominant ideas of what is normal and acceptable in a society – in the context of his own writings, the capitalist mindset. (Gramsci 1971.) Thus, both Gramsci and Foucault wrote about power as constituted through knowledge and ideas rather than simply through the use of brute force.

In *Talking Power,* Robin Tolmach Lakoff (1990) argues that ”[o]ur every interaction is political, whether we intend it to be or not; everything we do in the course of a day communicates your relative power, our desire for a particular sort of connection, our identification of the other as one who needs something from us or vice versa” (Lakoff 1990, p. 17). Fundamentally, what all these theorists are saying is that what is presented as knowledge is never neutral, but instead always constructed in the context of, and contributing to the continuing existence of, certain relations of power.

The dominant discourse dictates, in effect, whose voice is heard and whose is not, whose truth is presented as objective. Both opponents and proponents of female circumcision draw upon ”medical fact” that is dubious in its reliability, whether it is surveys with unknown sources, or claims about the positive effects of circumcision to hygiene or infant health. The persuasiveness of these claims is less dependent on their “objective” truthfulness than on their power. As the postcolonial theorists introduced in the next chapter have argued, dominant myths will not disappear immediately when proven false; instead, their power is derived from the images and impressions they create that often outlive any “fact” they were originally based on.

Postcolonial Theory: Othering, hybridity, and agency

> [W]e witness the rise of a more elaborate model of the relationship of Europe to the ”dark continent”: a relationship of both complementary opposition and inequality, in which the former stood to the latter as civilization to nature, savior to victim, actor to subject. It was a relationship whose very creation implied a historical imperative, a process of intervention through which the wild would be cultivated, the suffering saved.
>
> (Comaroff & Comaroff 1997, p. 691.)

Postcolonial theory delves into the relationship between coloniser and colonised, and how these roles and power relations continue to be played out in politics, ideologies, and discourse after the official dismantling of colonial rule. Jean and John Comaroff, quoted above, summarise this relationship in terms of agency, power, and Otherness: the colonial subject was perceived as passive, helpless, and wild, contrasted with an active “civilised man”.

Othering refers to the representation of a certain group of people or a certain region of the world as the Other, a polar opposite of the self. In the colonial context, the colonisers have had a tendency to view the colonised as Others; Europeans were seen as rational, civilised, and superior, and the colonial subjects – Africans, Asians, Native Americans and Australians – as irrational, primitive, and fundamentally inferior. This type of Othering was – and still is, to a degree – used to justify unequal power relations. (see eg. Comaroff & Comaroff 1997; Hall 1992; Said 1978.) In his 1978 classic *Orientalism*, Edward Said introduces the concept of Orientalism or systematic Othering of the East as a polar opposite of the West. For Said, Orientalism was also an attribution to the Other of ideas about the exotic, the magical, and the alluring. (Said 1978.) Similarly, Stuart Hall analyses a dichotomy of “the West and the Rest”, wherein the rest of the world is constructed as an inferior Other to a civilised “West” (Hall 1992). For both Said and Hall, these constructs of the Other serve as forms of self-definition, more informative about their creators than the “cultures” they propose to represent.

Otherness, as used by Said, Hall, and others, is chiefly a tool for analysing the point of

view of the dominant party. Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity attempts to move beyond this and to take the colonial subject's own perspective into account in the analysis. Bhabha also stresses the multiplicity of mindsets present in both parties of the colonial setting – both the colonisers and the colonial subjects. Bhabha's concept of hybridity entails a double consciousness wherein the colonised mediates between submission on one's own terms and acquiescence to the colonial authority *as given*. Thus, Bhabha makes a difference between accepting colonial domination on the terms of the coloniser (acquiescence) and on the terms of the colonised (submission). (Bhabha 1994.)

Bhabha's idea of hybridity becomes relevant if we move from simply examining the point of view of the dominant party to an approach that also attempts to account for the position of the ”Other” him- or herself. In the context of anti-circumcision campaigning, this would mean making a distinction between two kinds of abandonment strategies. On one hand would be approaches that seek to impose new cultural norms (such as leaving girls uncircumcised) from the outside, in an outsider's terms – what Bhabha would call acquiescence. On the other hand would then be approaches where change is initiated by, or at least mediated with, the circumcising community itself, in their own terms and for their own reasons – in Bhabha's terms, submission. This classification, however, runs the risk of framing the anti-circumcision agenda as foreign to circumcising communities.

Previous Research: Multiculturalism, Colonialism, and the Rights of Women

> Colonial discourse and the current feminist discourse on female circumcision assume the same binary trajectory of a civilized, emancipated, and autonomous Western woman, on the one hand, and the oppressed and backward non-Western woman on the other. Such binaries are possible only with the Western subject as the primary reference point.
>
> (Korieh 2005, p. 116.)

> The fears of terrorism are, at their most basic, fears about the activities of young men. But as these feed into attacks on 'misguided versions of multiculturalism', the critique of minority cultures and religions is played out largely on the bodies of young women.

> (Phillips & Saharso 2008, p. 292.)

More specifically, the present study is located in a field of recent works on the rights of women in a context of multiculturalism and unequal power relations. In the past ten years, both “Western” and “non-Western” researchers have studied the problematics of intervention in culturally mandated practices that clash with Euro-American ideas of human rights. As noted by Anne Phillips and Sawitri Saharso above, these debates are often centered on the rights and bodies of women – be it headscarves, honour-related violence, child marriage, or female circumcision. According to Dustin, “[f]or the international human rights community over the past 30 years, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) has become a test of whether there are absolute rights and wrongs that are the basis of international human rights standards, or whether universalism is 'barely disguised ethnocentrism'” (Dustin 2010, p. 7; see also Gunning 1992, pp. 190-191).

Dustin differentiates between two positions in today's Euro-American academic and public debate on female circumcision. ”[T]here is the anti-FGM/C lobby and there are the critics of that lobby – the latter do not (usually) support FGM/C but believe different standards are being deployed for different cultural groups, that the issue is complex and that it is not being addressed in the most effective way” (Dustin 2010, pp. 7-8). In particular, African scholars have criticised an approach that focuses only on circumcision and refuses to address wider economical or political issues that often have a greater impact on women's daily lives (eg. El Saadawi 2005, pp. 22-26; Nnaemeka 2005, p. 13; Korieh 2005). Chima Korieh phrases this as follows: “In many respects, Western feminist patronizing and imperialistic insurgency focus primarily on female circumcision with little or no concern for the priorities of women in non-Western societies which include education, poverty, and health issues” (Korieh 2005, p. 121).

Another aspect of Western-based anti-circumcision campaigning problematised in this line of research is the way it portrays African women and their bodies. As phrased by Nnaemeka, “[t]he resistance of African women is not against the campaign to end the practice, but against the dehumanization and the lack of respect and dignity shown to them in the process” (Nnaemeka 2005, p. 30). According to Chima Korieh, Western feminists and media are guilty of reducing African women to “mutilated, abject bodies” instead of

autonomous human beings (Korieh 2005, p. 122; see also Ajayi-Soyinka 2005, p. 70). Similarly, Ange-Marie Hancock argues that "African feminism... should include but not be limited to issues surrounding women's bodies" (Hancock 2005, pp. 253-254). In objectifying and victimising African women, these anti-circumcision efforts have not only reinforced colonial stereotypes, but also sparked opposition from local activists campaigning against circumcision in Africa and other practising regions.

As Dustin puts it, the chief problem is that "[t]he vocabulary of FGM/C discussions plays a significant role in reinforcing this polarization between 'us' – women who make choices and are part of the modern world – and 'them' – victims of an oppressive culture" (Dustin 2010, p. 11; see also Gunning 1992, Hancock 2005, Hale 2005, Nnaemeka 2005). Similarly, Obiora argues that "the (re)presentation of Third World women as ignorant victims of barbarous sexual practices with the discursive self-representation (not necessarily material reality) of Western women as enlightened and liberated" serves to reinforce "imperialistic roles and interests" (Obiora 2005, p. 185). Fundamentally, these polarisations are not only detrimental to any attempts at real dialogue or mutual respect and trust between Western feminist activists and the African women whose interests they claim to promote; they also strengthen a highly problematic setup where African women's rights, interests and priorities, even their bodies and sexualities, are defined and discussed by an outsider, without reference to the women themselves.

In particular, it has been argued that the double standards applied to Euro-American women on one hand and African women on the other undermine the credibility of anti-circumcision campaigning. For one thing, violence against Euro-American women is generally not seen as cultural, while violence against Asian or African women is; for another, genital modifications on Euro-American women are framed as "free choice", while even similar operations on African women are conditioned by "culture" or "tradition" (Braun 2010; Dustin 2010). This attitude also serves to explain partly why African women's own voices are so often bypassed in the anti-circumcision movement: if they are victims brainwashed by an oppressive culture, they cannot be expected to take responsibility for initiating or directing change in their societies, or even for identifying their own rights and needs.

African women are thus facing what Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka terms *double patriarchy*: in

addition to contesting patriarchal structures in their own societies, they have to either accede to or fight against objectification and victimisation by an equally patriarchal West. The anti-colonial struggle has, in some respects, become a contest between two patriarchal systems in which women and their bodies become the battleground. (Ajayi-Soyinka 2005, pp. 47, 61-62; El Saadawi 2005, pp. 21-23; see also Nnaemeka 2005, Phillips and Saharso 2010.)

How relevant are these perspectives and concerns to an anti-circumcision campaign launched in 2014? Incontestably, much of past campaigning has served to reproduce colonial power relations and racist stereotypes of Africans as Others and African women as victims in need of rescue; but the picture is not that simple any more. While the campaign under scrutiny in this study is run and financed by a UK-based news agency, it was also initiated and spearheaded by two young, educated Muslim women who come from traditionally circumcising communities.

Methods and Application

Discursive Study of Religion[1]

Discursive study of religion is a line of research focusing on definitions and uses of the concept of religion. A relatively recent approach in the field, discursive study of religion suggests a method wherein the researcher does not offer a definition of religion at all, but instead studies ways in which religion is used as a category of classification. (eg. Arnal & McCutcheon 2013; McCutcheon 1997, 2003, 2008; Moberg 2013; von Stuckrad 2010; Taira 2006, 2013; Wijsen 2013.) According to Kocku von Stuckrad, "[o]ur object of study is the way religion is organized, discussed, and discursively materialized in cultural and social contexts. 'Religion,' in this approach, is an empty signifier that can be filled with many different meanings, depending on the use of the word in a given society and context." (von Stuckrad 2010, p. 166.) Similarly, Teemu Taira asserts that the concept of religion is "historically, socially and culturally constructed and negotiated in various situations" (Taira 2013, p. 26).

1 Within this field, the discipline is referred to as "study of religion" in singular form rather than the more common "study of religions". This is because the object of study is the *concept* of religion rather than entities called "religions".

As an approach, discursive study of religion is deeply rooted in social constructionism – the assumption that ”language is used to construct social reality, that language-use has consequences, that there are multiple overlapping and competing sets of meaning which need careful analysis, that sets of meaning emerge historically and their affectivity is contextual” (Taira 2013, p. 28). Language is not seen as a neutral mirror that reflects reality as it is, but as a means of constructing reality (Moberg 2013, p. 7; Wijsen 2013, p. 77; see also Fairclough 1992, Lakoff 1990, Potter 1996). In this context, the concept of religion, as well as related concepts such as 'faith', 'spirituality', 'sacred', 'ritual', and so on, are treated as constructs with ”socioeconomic and political origins and implications” (McCutcheon 1997) and become the *object* of study rather than tools offered by the researcher. Of interest are the ways in which these and other concepts are used to categorise and classify phenomena: what is presented as “religious”, what is not? How are these categorisations done, and what is achieved by them?

Russell T. McCutcheon also maintains that there are, by necessity, social and political interests behind these classifications; the concept of religion is not immune to questions of power (McCutcheon 2008, Arnal & McCutcheon 2013; see also Taira 2013). Moreover, McCutcheon and William E. Arnal (2013) argue that these power issues are particularly problematic when the concept of religion, a post-Enlightenment European notion based on the social environment of that particular place and time, is uncritically applied to other contexts (Arnal & McCutcheon 2013, pp. 94-96, 107-108).

Both Moberg (2013, pp. 11, 13) and Taira (2013, p. 26) differentiate between using a discursive approach or conducting a discursive study, and using discourse analysis as a research method. As phrased by Moberg, it is a distinction ”between theoretical perspective or orientation and *method*” (Moberg 2013, p. 11, italics in the original). In the context of the present study, I have found discursive approaches to religion helpful in analysing ways of talking and writing about religion. Instead of discourse analysis, which as a method often stumbles on the vagueness of the concept of discourse, I have opted for using rhetorical analysis. These two are closely related – indeed, some might even classify rhetorical analysis as a form of discourse analysis.

Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical analysis was chosen as a research method for multiple reasons. Firstly, as pointed out above, it is more precise than discourse analysis. Secondly, the present study is concerned with the construction of truth through description and argumentation, and rhetorical analysis as a method allows for a thorough examination of these questions. Thirdly, the “regimes of truth” or “hegemonic discourses” of the Other are often not stated openly, but instead manifest themselves indirectly in namings, categorisations, and identifications. This section will provide a brief outline of the theories of rhetoric used in this study. Each of these theories will be addressed in more detail in the analysis chapters.

As a method of research, rhetorical analysis operates on the level of words and expressions, focusing on rhetorical devices used to persuade readers or listeners to position themselves in a certain way (eg. Billig 1987, 1991; Burke 1950; Edmondson 1984; Potter 1996; Sakaranaho 2001). According to Ricca Edmondson, rhetoric “deals with some of the ways in which communication can be made to matter to the person receiving it” (Edmondson 1984, p. 6). Thus, rhetoric deals with words and expressions primarily as communication. Similarly, Jonathan Potter focuses on rhetorics as an intrinsic part of discourse, defined as “talk and texts as parts of social practices” (Potter 1996, p. 105).

Though rhetorical analysis focuses on the form of a speech or text rather than its content, analysing the form of an utterance without taking its content into account would be an impossibility. Content influences form and vice versa, but the persuasiveness of an argument does not necessarily imply the truthfulness or moral worth of its content. (Billig 1987; pp. 89, 103.) Furthermore, Michael Billig argues that “within an argumentative context contrary statements can each be reasonable and justified. Simultaneously, both can be open to criticism.” (Billig 1987, p. 123.) Thus, rhetorical analysis is not concerned with the truthfulness or moral worth of its material, but with how an appearance of truthfulness or morality is constructed in it.

All chief theories of rhetoric today are based on a premise that no text or utterance exists in a vacuum but is, instead, a part of a dialogue or discourse, aimed for a real or imagined audience. Similarly, these theories claim that every argument presupposes a counter-argument. (Billig 1989, p. 113; Billig 1991, p. 143; Edmondson 1984, p. 148; Potter 1996,

pp. 106-107.) Thus, it is not surprising that they should also focus on identifying rhetorical devices that aim at strengthening one position and weakening the other. Kenneth Burke wrote about identifications and divisions, devices of categorisation that aim at grouping together certain people or phenomena and separating others. Identifications also serve to make readers or listeners identify themselves with one party and separate themselves from the other. (Burke 1950, pp. 19-29, 43-46.) Michael Billig (1989, 1991) and Chaim Perelman (1979), meanwhile, focus on justification and criticism in the context of argumentation. According to Billig, if the words of an utterance are examined without considering which positions are simultaneously being criticised, the argumentative meaning of the text is lost. (Billig 1989, p. 121.)

Similarly, Potter uses the concepts of reification and ironisation to describe processes of affirming and undermining truth claims. He defines reification as "turning something abstract into a material thing", and ironisation as "undermining the literal descriptiveness of versions". (Potter 1996, p. 107.) Potter focuses on "factual" descriptions and the way their credibility is constructed. His interest is in how descriptions construct truth and fact through rhetorical means. (Potter 1996.)

Finally, the effectiveness of an argument or a truth claim depends to a great extent on the credibility and authority of the speaker. Jonathan Potter (1996) analyses strategies of producing authority through means of presenting someone as a member of an entitled category of people, or alternately of undermining it by a suggestion of stakes or interest. Analysing authority and entitlement is closely related to questions of power: who is granted the right to speak, who is authorised to speak for others as well as themselves, whose definitions and descriptions are treated as objective truths?

The Research Process

The campaign's official website, http://www.theguardian.com/end-fgm, includes both textual and video material, mostly articles about the campaign work but also interviews and personal accounts of circumcised women, columns, and information about the campaign and female circumcision in general. All pieces on the website include a comment section for readers' comments. The amount of comments for one article range from none to

974. In the interests of narrowing down the material to a workable size, I will focus only on the written material and leave out the videos and comments. This resulted in 96 pages of text. The oldest pieces were from February 6th 2014, the newest from August 24th 2015. All material was gathered on September 30th 2015, and any articles published or changes made on the website after that date have not been taken into account.

This material will be combed through for four main points of analysis:

1) *Naming, truth claims, and categorisation*: what is female circumcision called and how is it described? What other practices or phenomena is circumcision likened or linked to?
2) *Agency, voices, and speaker positions*: who speaks, for whom? Whose voice is heard, who has the authority to speak? Who are presented as active agents, who as passive?
3) *Argumentation*: what is the argumentative position that is being justified, what is criticised? What are the debates the campaign takes part in?
4) *Religion, culture, and tradition*: what is classified as belonging to these categories, what is not? How is religious terminology used?

The theories outlined in the previous chapters will be addressed in more detail in each of the analysis chapters. Together, the answers to these questions will provide an overview of the images the Guardian's campaign constructs of female circumcision, its religious and cultural significance, and the women who perform it and on whom it is performed. At the same time, they will allow for an examination of how the Guardian's campaign positions itself in the power relations and controversies surrounding the circumcision debate in Europe and the United States. The results will be contrasted with the theories presented above, to discover to what extent and in what way anti-circumcision campaigning in 2015 follows, or deviates from, the patterns outlined there.

Analysis

Constructing Truth Claims.

> A central feature of any description is its role in categorization; a description formulates some object or event as something; it constitutes it as a thing, and a thing with specific qualities. The description presents something as good or bad, big or small, more violent or less violent, although often with more subtle options.
>
> (Potter 1996, p. 111.)

In order to study how the Guardian's campaign positions itself with regards to questions of agency, religion, and culture, it is necessary to begin with an overview of how circumcision itself is constructed in the campaign material. For Jonathan Potter (1996, quoted above), descriptions function as categorisations in that they classify people and phenomena as belonging to certain categories and separate from others. How circumcision is named, described, and categorised in the material – what it is, which "specific qualities" it has – is indispensable for the subsequent analysis of how its religious and cultural aspects or the agency of different actors are constructed.

This chapter will thus look into ways in which female circumcision is described and categorised in the Guardian's campaign. The chapter is divided into two parts. The first part deals with naming, description, and adjective use, focusing on what female circumcision is called in the material and how it is described. In the second part, I will look at which practices and phenomena female circumcision is likened or linked to, or treated as part of. Summing up the finds of these two parts should produce a picture of truth claims about female circumcision in the material.

Naming circumcision: terminology and description.

As shown in the beginning of this study, female circumcision has been called by many names, none of them neutral or empty of meaning and connotation. The Guardian's campaign, like a majority of media and campaign sources today, almost systematically uses *FGM* or *female genital mutilation* – indeed, the term FGM even features in the campaign's

heading. *FGC* or *female genital cutting* is mentioned a few times as an alternative phrasing, but is not used to refer to the practice. *Circumcision* is used several times, mostly in articles that feature interviewees from circumcising communities.

Naming influences how the operations and the motivation behind them are perceived. Mutilation, as discussed earlier, implies purposeful cruelty and destruction. The Guardian's material uses the full long form of the term less often than it does the shorter, simpler FGM. This abbreviated form somewhat lessens the connotation of savagery induced by talk of mutilation and instead sounds milder, neutral, almost clinical. In contrast, the connotation becomes more pronounced when *mutilation* is converted into a verb or an adjective. The following two extracts differ in tone, even though they are essentially saying the exact same thing:

> An estimated 66,000 women and girls in the UK have experienced FGM, and some 140 million women and girls are thought to be living with the consequences worldwide.
>
> (Guardian, 10 February 2014[ii])

> Over 130 million women living in the world today have been mutilated.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[iii])

In the first extract, women are "living with the consequences" of "FGM". Jonathan Potter would address this wording as a nominalisation – that is, transforming a verb into a noun for rhetorical purposes. Used also as a device of hiding the agent of an action, it appears here to serve a second function: that of displaying neutrality. This, as Potter adds, is "not […] the same as actual neutrality" but rather a rhetorical device for appearing impartial. (Potter 1996, p. 182.) The second extract takes a very different approach; here, millions of women have been "mutilated", a much more direct statement that allots blame in a way "living with the consequences of FGM" does not. Despite the differences in connotation, these forms are used more or less interchangeably in the Guardian's campaign. In the extracts above, for instance, "experiencing FGM" and "being mutilated" are used to refer to the exact same thing in the exact same context, that of relating the estimated number of circumcised women in the world.

Naming the practice is generally not problematised in the Guardian's material. An exception is provided by an article on alternative initiation rites for girls, written by Kenyan anti-circumcision activist Sarah Tenoi. Tenoi consistently refers to the practice as circumcision or, at most, cutting, and addresses the terminology issue in clear terms:

> I choose to call what happened to me circumcision because I do not like to think of myself as having been mutilated.
>
> (Sarah Tenoi; Guardian, 6 February 2014[iv])

This argument is reminiscent of the criticisms previously levelled at the term FGM (see eg. Dustin 2010, Korieh 2005, Nnaemeka 2005). While the Guardian published Tenoi's article as part of their campaign, her argument about terminology is not addressed at all in the other articles and writings on the campaign website.

Unsurprisingly, the only other voices who consistently use circumcision instead of FGM are interviewees from practising communities or, in one case, an anthropologist interviewed as an expert. This is exceptional in itself, as most of the experts interviewed are either veteran campaigners, healthcare professionals or representatives of law enforcement. Interestingly, the use of "circumcision" seems to spill from the interviewees to the journalist, as in a piece on new Swedish anti-circumcision policies that features both the anthropologist and Somali women interviewees. Though the article uses FGM as a general term, circumcision is used not only in quotes from these interviewees, but also in describing their connection to the practice:

> She said she herself was circumcised and had ensured that her now 25-year-old daughter was before they moved to Sweden in 1994.
>
> (Guardian, 27 June 2014[v])

More interestingly still, the article includes a few instances of the use of "circumcision" instead of "FGM" outside paragraphs such as the above. In the following passage, the two are used interchangeably:

> The pilot in Norrköping, which grabbed headlines when it was wrongly reported that an entire school class of girls had been **subjected to FGM**, 28 in

> the most severe fashion, has trialled a new hardline policy in which school nurses are trained to routinely question young girls about whether they have been **circumcised** whenever they come in for treatment or a checkup, bypassing their parents.
>
> (Guardian, 27 June 2014, bolding added[vi])

Even more strikingly than in the earlier example of alternating between "experiencing FGM" and "being mutilated", this example shows a lack of emphasis placed on consistency in the use of terminology and the connotations created by the different ways of naming the practice.

Though used several times in the material, circumcision as a term is also explicitly criticised, either in passing or with considerable elaboration and detail:

> A second set of laws passed in 2011 made it illegal to promote or to facilitate what used to be known as female circumcision, and stiffened penalties.
>
> (Guardian, 7 February 2014[vii])

> Taina Bien Aime, director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women and a long-time anti-FGM campaigner, says comparisons between male and female circumcision are unhelpful. "Type one FGM would be like removing a male's testes, type three is equivalent to removing both the testes and the penis. There is no way that would be deemed acceptable." Unlike male circumcision, FGM also inhibits sexual pleasure and can cause severe pain and sexual and reproductive health complications.
>
> (Guardian, 13 May 2014[viii])

In the first extract, "female circumcision" is allocated to the past, an outdated name that is not – or should not be – used any more. In the second, Bien Aime brings up the old argument against the term – namely, that a comparison to male circumcision is to downplay the seriousness and harmful nature of female circumcision. Of note is that, as Kristen Bell has pointed out, male circumcision is generally not discussed in terms of "inhibiting sexual pleasure", even though it entails the removal of highly sensitive genital tissue and leads to reduced sexual feeling. Bell has suggested that this difference in

approach can be traced to perceptions of male sexuality as strong and active, as opposed to female sexuality as fragile and passive, completely destroyed by any removal of tissue. (Bell 2005.)

On the whole, the Guardian's material is relatively consistent in its use of FGM or mutilation to refer to female circumcision. However, the way these terms are used interchangeably, and the way some articles use "circumcision" on occasion while others explicitly treat the term as a relic from the past, showcase a lack of either awareness or care in the differing connotations these terms evoke.

In addition to official terms such as FGM, the Guardian's material uses a range of other words to refer to female circumcision. The most common is a neutral "the practice" or sometimes "the procedure". As the articles are, in the main, written in newspaper style, a neutral rhetoric such as this is to be expected. In other points, circumcision is referred to as "the abuse" or "the crime", thus placing circumcision in a legalistic framework. Like all namings, these constitute truth claims in that they define what circumcision is; significantly, however, these namings also include moral statements. By classifying circumcision as a crime, the authors make a strong moral statement while retaining an appearance of objectivity.

While the body of the text usually keeps to these neutral phrasings, interviewees commonly compliment them with adjective use. Circumcision is labelled, among others, a "terrible thing" (Fahma Mohamed, 6 February 2014[ix]), an "inhumane and unnecessary practice" (The Liberal Democrat party, 6 February 2014[x]), a "horrific abuse" (Fahma Mohamed, 25 February 2014[xi]), or an "unacceptable practice" (Justice minister Mike Penning, 20 October 2014[xii]). While the articles themselves tend to steer clear of phrasings such as these, an exception is made with the use of "brutal". The material contains several examples of circumcision being referred to as a "brutal practice" or a "brutal procedure", not by interviewees, but by the newspaper-style articles themselves (see eg. Guardian, 7 February 2014[xiii]; 9 February 2014[xiv]; 28 February 2014[xv]; 12 May 2014[xvi]; 3 October 2014[xvii]).

Another departure from the neutral newspaper rhetoric is the repeated use of "horror" when referring to female circumcision:

> A 17-year-old student is calling on Michael Gove to help end female genital mutilation in Britain by asking headteachers to train and inform teachers and parents about the horrors of the practice.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[xviii])

> In an extraordinary meeting on Tuesday, Fahma – alongside other members of the youth charity Integrate Bristol – met with the education secretary, Michael Gove, to ask him to write to every school in the country about the horrors of FGM.
>
> (Guardian, 28 February 2014[xix])

> [Edna Adan] was the first woman from Somaliland to study in the UK and the first qualified-nurse midwife in her country, as well as the first female foreign minister and one of the first in the world to speak out publicly about the horrors of female genital mutilation (FGM).
>
> (Guardian, 23 June 2014[xx])

While only interviewees directly call circumcision "horrific", the authors of the Guardian's articles are effectively doing the same by writing about "the horrors of FGM". This is a departure from the correctness and newspaper neutrality of "the practice".

All of these phrasings contain moral statements. There is, however, a fundamental difference between whether the moral statement is made by an interviewee or by a Guardian article where the author's own voice and position is made invisible. Potter addresses these strategies as "procedures which […] draw attention away from the nature or identity of the producer", and thus "construct the description as independent of the agent doing the production" (Potter 1996, p. 150). When circumcision is labelled "brutal" in a newspaper article, its "brutality" becomes fact instead of opinion or rhetoric.

The same effect is achieved more covertly by the deployment of disaster metaphors in connection with female circumcision. Here, the vocabulary of natural disaster, catastrophe, and disease is used to address circumcision. Circumcision needs to be "stemmed" (eg. Guardian, 24 February 2014[xxi]) or "stamped out" (eg. Guardian, 8 February 2014[xxii]; 25

February 2014[xxiii]; 25 July 2014[xxiv]). Communities that practice circumcision are frequently referred to as ”affected communities”, girls are ”at risk”, and teachers and other professionals must be on the lookout for ”warning signs”. Fundamentally, what all of these phrasings do is liken circumcision with not only danger, but also with inhumanity and lack of reason. Metaphors like these undermine the human agency, interests, and motivations behind female circumcision and instead frame it as an abstract threat.

On the whole, then, the descriptions and namings of circumcision in the Guardian's material have two main effects: constructing the practice as an abhorrent act of violence while retaining a neutral, objective newspaper style. The truth claims made by naming circumcision “mutilation”, “abuse”, or “crime” simultaneously act as moral statements. Similarly, hiding the authors' voices from phrasings like “the brutal practice” constructs the “brutality” as an objective, factual account. A combination of these strategies serves to produce a setting where fact and moral statement are interlinked, even inseparable.

Placing circumcision: grouping and categorisation.

Truth claims are made not only by naming circumcision itself, but by groupings, categorisations and comparisons. What phenomena circumcision is treated as part of, as well as what other practices it is likened to, influence how it is presented to the audience.

The Guardian's material follows what Shell-Duncan (2008) terms the human rights approach, both explicitly and implicitly classifying female circumcision as a human rights issue:

> We are all born with the same human rights, no matter who we are or where we are from. The World Health Organisation clearly states that female genital mutilation violates a person's rights to health, security and physical integrity, the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and the right to life when the procedure results in death.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[xxv])

> The general assembly's landmark resolution proclaiming our recent International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM was sponsored by every country in Africa and embraced by the entire membership of the UN. This breakthrough shows the great value of the UN in rising as one to defend universal human rights.
>
> (Ban Ki-moon, Guardian, 18 February 2014[xxvi])

> Two years on, Egypt's leadership has been criticised internationally for other human rights abuses, but Foad hopes it will be more progressive than its predecessors on FGM.
>
> (Guardian, 14 March 2014[xxvii])

> Ban Ki-moon said FGM had to be tackled as a human rights issue.
>
> (Guardian, 12 May 2014[xxviii])

Statements such as the above, where circumcision is classified primarily as a human rights violation, are supported by the frequent referral to human rights lawyers or organisations as authorities on circumcision. This human rights framework permeates the entirety of the Guardian's material. It is closely related to the legalistic approach exemplified in the previous subchapter by the use of terms such as “crime” and “abuse”, and similarly makes a moral statement into a truth claim. What differentiates the human rights approach is its explicit universalism: the moral statement is made not only factual, but applicable to all people, everywhere in the world.

The material is clear on classifying female circumcision as not only a human rights violation, but more specifically a form of violence against women (VAW) and child abuse:

> Now she is experiencing another first: a cautious hope that the balance of power is finally tipping in the fight against violence against women and girls, particularly against FGM.
>
> (Guardian, 23 June 2014[xxix])

> A spokesman for the DfE, responding to Niven's comments, said: "Female genital mutilation is unacceptable; it is child abuse and a criminal offence. The government's new action plan for tackling violence against women and girls has a renewed focus on protecting potential victims and sends a strong message

that FGM will not be tolerated.

"Schools play an important role in raising pupils' awareness of this issue. We expect them to refer cases of concern to the relevant agencies in the same way as they would for any type of abuse."

(Guardian, 6 February 2014[xxx])

Here, no differentiation is made between circumcision and other "types of abuse". Groupings such as these effectively remove any complexity or moral ambiguity from the topic. Like naming the practice an "abuse" or a "crime", these groupings construct circumcision as objectively condemnable and the entire issue as simple and straightforward. If circumcision is just another form of violence against women or child abuse, intervention is unproblematic as well as commendable.

While the above groupings categorise circumcision as a part of a large, abstract whole called "violence against women", other passages make more specific groupings. On numerous occasions, female circumcision is grouped together with forced or child marriage:

[The Girl Summit] is aimed at mobilising domestic and international efforts to end FGM and child marriage within a generation.

(Guardian, 21 July 2014[xxxi])

Speaking at the Girl Summit – a major international conference in London designed to highlight the issues of FGM and child marriage – the home secretary, Theresa May, said the cross-party unit would help protect thousands of girls across the country.

The unit, which could operate in a similar way to the government's forced marriage unit, has been a key demand of campaigners against FGM.

...

A push to improve police responses to FGM will see forces inspected on their response to honour-based violence, with a focus on FGM and forced marriage.

(Guardian, 22 July 2014[xxxii])

The [Gatwick airport child protection] officers are also trained to deal with trafficking and forced marriage.

(Guardian, 10 September 2014[xxxiii])

In these extracts, female circumcision is treated in connection with forced or child marriage. The two are not compared or likened to each other so much as treated as parts of the same phenomenon. They are addressed in the same conference, and efforts for "ending FGM" are linked to ending child marriage. The internal workings of each is presented as comparable to the other: an anti-circumcision unit "could operate in a similar way to the government's forced marriage unit", and child protection officers working in circumcision prevention are "also trained to deal with" forced marriage.

Circumcision is also likened to or grouped together with other practices and phenomena:

"Over 140 million girls and women are mutilated – but like keeping girls out of school in Pakistan, we can come out together and be strong and change things for the next generation.

(Malala Yousafzai, Guardian, 24 February 2014[xxxiv])

The guidance contains an eight-page section that must be distributed and read by all school staff, so they can identity neglect and abuse such as FGM. It will, according to the letter, "tell them how to refer a child … to the appropriate agency and it will direct them to further, detailed information on specific safeguarding matters including female genital mutilation, child sexual exploitation, cyberbullying, mental health, and radicalisation".

(Guardian, 11 April 2014[xxxv])

"Young people too often don't have a voice to talk about hidden things – FGM, rape, child abuse – but together, I think we do."

(Jama Jack, Guardian, 13 December 2014[xxxvi])

"Although some would argue that this is a 'tradition', we must recall that

slavery, so-called honour killings and other inhumane practices have been defended with the same weak argument.["]

(Ban Ki-moon, Guardian, 18 February 2014[xxxvii])

In the first extract, education activist and Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai likens circumcision to keeping girls out of school. In the second, circumcision is treated in schools alongside a broad range of other "safeguarding matters" that include "sexual exploitation, cyberbullying, mental health, and radicalisation". The third extract likens circumcision to other "hidden things", namely rape and child abuse. Meanwhile, in the fourth extract, UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon compares circumcision to slavery and honour killings.

Like devices of naming, these comparisons, categorisations and groupings function as truth claims, influencing how the audience perceives female circumcision and where they place it. More importantly, they carry moral evaluations and themselves serve as anti-circumcision arguments. Classifying circumcision as a human rights violation, a form of child abuse or violence against women is a moral statement as well as a truth claim. Similarly, comparing or likening circumcision to rape, slavery, or sexual exploitation sends a specific message on what circumcision is and what it is not. Particularly for this study, these simplified moral statements negate the validity of cultural or religious explanations for what circumcision is and why it is practised.

Fundamentally, what all of these groupings do is promote an idea of moral absolutes – the idea of universal, unchanging moral rules, an absolute "right" and "wrong" that can be applied to every human being, in every context. Whether through use of a human rights rhetoric or through describing circumcision as "brutal" or a "mutilation", the material constructs a moral statement that is simultaneously a truth claim: the "wrongness" of female circumcision is constructed as a matter of knowledge and fact, not opinion. What is more, the human rights rhetoric does not only universalise single, separate moral statements; it universalises an ideology.

Entitlement, Agency, and Victimisation

A key element in analysing rhetoric is how the position and credibility of the author or speaker is constructed. Jonathan Potter offers three main tools for addressing the question of voices and speaker positions: *footing*, *category entitlements*, and *stakes*. For the purposes of this study, I will concentrate on category entitlements and stakes. What Potter terms *category entitlements* stand for certain categories of people being treated as knowledgeable or possessing the authority to speak about a certain issue; these people are not asked how they know things. Category entitlements are not static, but "things that can be built up or undermined" (Potter 1996, p. 134). Categorising a person as having knowledge and authority is something done, purposefully or not, in the text, but it also requires certain conduct on behalf of the person him/herself to be accepted and treated as a member of the entitled category. (Potter 1996, pp. 114, 134-136). Meanwhile, *stakes* deal with issues of personal involvement or interest that may undermine the authority of an utterance. These can be countered by strategies called *stake inoculations*, where the claim or opinion is presented as a product of objective fact or a considered, impartial choice rather than of bias, preconception, or group pressure. (Potter 1996, pp. 125-132.)

Equally relevant for analysing speaker positions is Kenneth Burke's theory of identifications and divisions – namely, rhetorical devices for making the audience identify with one party and distance themselves from another. (Burke 1950, pp. 19-29, 43-46.) This will also serve to address some of the concerns of African feminist critics regarding the victimisation and exploitation of African women in Western campaigning (see eg. Korieh 2005, Nnaemeka 2005). The presentation of circumcised women as passive victims of oppression and violence corresponds to questions of agency and entitlement: who is considered an active agent, who has the right to speak? Similarly, the presentation of African women's bodies as exotic, mutilated curiosities will be addressed in terms of Othering and division: who is presented as like us, who as unlike? (See eg. Comaroff & Comaroff 1990, Dustin 2010, Gunning 1992, Hancock 2005, Hale 2005, Hall 1992, Korieh 2005, Nnaemeka 2005, Said 1978.)

Thus, this chapter will first introduce the entitled agents of the campaign material and examine the ways in which their authority and agency is constructed. Secondly, the chapter looks into who these agents represent, who they speak for – and who, consequently, do not

have agency or voices of their own. This will touch on the previously discussed problem of victimisation. Thirdly, the differences in naming circumcised women are discussed – whether they are called survivors, victims, or cutters, and the connotations each of these terms brings to the context in which it is used. Finally, I will discuss the presentation of circumcised women as like or unlike the audience, using Kenneth Burke's concepts of identification and division.

“Courageous young women”: the hero archetype.

The Guardian's material can be said to have two protagonists, the campaign leaders Fahma Mohamed and Jaha Dukureh. Both are young Muslim women from communities that traditionally practice circumcision. Dukureh, herself circumcised as a baby in the Gambia, moved to the United States as a teenager. Mohamed, only seventeen when the campaign began, moved from Somalia to the United Kingdom with her family when she was seven years old. Older, more experienced anti-circumcision campaigners are cited several times. Like Mohamed and Dukureh, a majority of these campaigners are women from circumcising communities, and their stories follow largely the same pattern, outlined below.

These young women's authority to speak about circumcision and represent others, their category entitlement, is based on a number of characteristics. First, their status as young female members of practising communities gives them an equal footing with the women and girls they speak for, personal knowledge of what these girls are facing and thus an authority to speak for them:

> Fahma, who has seen at firsthand among friends and family the devastation that FGM can cause, said that eradicating FGM in a generation was achievable.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[xxxviii])

> An Atlanta woman who is a survivor of female genital mutilation is leading a campaign for the US to take action on a brutal practice happening in its own backyard
>
> (Guardian, 12 May 2014[xxxix])

Here, their first hand experiences and insider perspectives on female circumcision – whether through being circumcised herself, like Dukureh, or through witnessing the consequences through friends and family, like Mohamed – justify both their knowledge of and commitment to the issue. Significantly, their category entitlement is not based solely on group membership, as most women from these communities are not attributed the same authority:

> When I ask if [Dukureh's sister-in-law in the Gambia] thinks Dukureh is brave for speaking out and for defying her mother-in-law, she rolls her eyes and gives a short laugh. “Brave? Yes. She is more than brave.”
>
> (Guardian, 13 December 2014[xl])

These women's opposition to the practice despite pressure from their community marks their activism as a result of individual, reasoned choice rather than of bias or social pressure – a strategy Potter would call stake inoculation (Potter 1996, pp. 125-129). This independence and courage to question and oppose the status quo is described as a personal quality of these young women, further justifying their role in the campaign:

> Fahma Mohamed first heard about female genital mutilation (FGM) when she was 13. **Educated, open-minded and strong willed**, she didn't know what the term meant, so she asked.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014, bolding added[xli])

> “We are delighted to honour Fahma Mohamed, who proves that you don’t need access, influence or a large staff to effect real change – just **passion, drive and overwhelming determination**”
>
> (Lindsay Nicholson, editorial director of Good Housekeeping; Guardian, 13 October 2014[xlii])

> “Whatever they do, I am not afraid. They are not going to make me stop. The safety of our daughters is more important than that”.
>
> (Jaha Dukureh; Guardian, 12 May 2014[xliii])

In the first two extracts, Mohamed is described as passionate and strong-willed, but also

"educated" and "open-minded", further emphasising the independence of her decision-making. In the third, a direct quote from Dukureh, she essentially displays these same qualities. She is unafraid to oppose an abstract "them" for "the safety of our daughters", implying bravery, independence, and a noble, selfless goal.

It is not only these personal qualities – courage, passion, and determination – that mark Mohamed and Dukureh as the heroes of the story. The campaign material constructs classic hero narratives around both women, as well as other female campaigners from practising communities. These women's campaigning efforts are described in terms of a young hero overcoming obstacles – both from the outside and from within – to save others:

> Hasan said when she joined the campaign the group had to overcome prejudice and opposition from those who did not want FGM to be discussed. "I faced, and quite a few of the girls in the community faced, hardship," she said.
>
> (Guardian, 24 February 2014[xliv])

> "We have come so far – from four terrified girls to taking on the education secretary – it's been an amazing journey," Zimmermann says.
>
> (Guardian, 28 February 2014[xlv])

In the first extract, activist Muna Hasan describes how her campaign group had to "overcome prejudice and opposition" and "face hardship" because of their position. In the second one, teacher and campaigner Lisa Zimmermann presents what is not only a narrative of the hero facing an external threat, but also of the transformation of "terrified girls" into brave campaigners "taking on the education secretary".

Though the material takes some pains to identify these heroic women with the circumcised women and girls they speak for, it also clearly underlines that the brave campaigners are exceptional, somehow unlike other women in their communities:

> The award recognises "an **extraordinary** young woman's determination and campaigning spirit, in her commitment to preventing the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) and warnings to protect girls across the UK", said the organisers, who presented the 17-year-old with the award at an event in London on Monday.
>
> (Guardian, 13 October 2014, bolding added[xlvi])

> "It is **remarkable** that a 17-year-old has been able to energise a huge public response so fast and shows that people are clearly moved by Fahma's passion on the issue," Rogers Lowery said.
>
> (Guardian, 9 February 2014[xlvii])

> "She is very brave, there are other girls who have not been initiated but they don't speak out. She is **unusual**," said Aminata Sheriff, project coordinator of the NGO Plan International.
>
> (Guardian, 24 August 2015, bolding added[xlviii])

These quotes imply that bravery and determination are "unusual" qualities in girls. More specifically, it is implied that "speaking out" about circumcision is brave, and that bravery of this kind is an inherent quality of these "extraordinary young women". This is apparent in the way these qualities are described: phrases like "she is very brave" or "a young woman's determination and campaigning spirit" allocate these admired qualities to the girls themselves, not their actions. The same approach is visible in the following:

> Down the phone from New York, [Taina Bien-Aimé, director of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women] suggests that Dukureh's journey – the tension between family and her own convictions, modernity and tradition, obligation and desire – reflects the struggle faced by many FGM survivors, who know the harm they have suffered, but are unwilling to break with the culture that condoned it.
>
> (Guardian, 13 December 2014[xlix])

> "Not everyone has Dukureh's voice," [Dukureh's sister-in-law] says, telling me of her own daily struggle to prevent her daughters, aged seven and five, from being cut.
>
> (Guardian, 13 December 2014[l])

Here, Dukureh's struggle “reflects” that of other circumcised women, but whereas they are “unwilling to break with the culture that condoned it”, she is not. This serves to summarise the relationship between the brave campaigner figure and the average circumcised woman: they come from the same background and face the same pressures, thus providing the campaigner with grounds to understand what the other is going through; but at the same time, there is a fundamental difference in character between the two. The campaigner is, by nature, “brave” or “extraordinary”, fitted to challenge cultural norms; most circumcised women, by contrast, are presented as submissive. “Not everyone has Dukureh's voice”, or is thus acquitted to take action.

This exceptionality rhetoric and tendency towards hero narratives are both visible in an obituary of veteran campaigner Efua Dorkenoo, who died in October 2014:

> Dorkenoo had not only changed policy in the UK and overseas, she had made a personal difference to many survivors’ lives, she added. “She was a giant on whose shoulders we stand, she prepared the way for us, and even though she did not see the end of FGM in her generation, it will end – and that is thanks to her.”
>
> Leyla Hussein, co-founder of Daughters of Eve with Ali, said the formation of an African-led movement against FGM was Dorkenoo’s lifelong dream and despite ill-health her last months were spent visiting everyone from politicians to village leaders across the world. “The Girl Generation was Efua’s baby and she had been trying to make it happen for 30 years,” she said. “Last week Efua gave birth to it, with every last breath she had she worked to make that happen. **She was an incredible African female warrior and she never gave up.**”
>
> (Guardian, 20 October 2014, bolding added[li])

Typically for an obituary, Dorkenoo is portrayed as a selfless hero fighting tirelessly for the greater good. The narrative, however, is the same as with the young campaigners: she works “despite ill-health” and “with every last breath”, pointing to the same resilience and passion commended in the young campaigners Mohamed and Dukureh. The last sentence of the paragraph above is particularly interesting. Dorkenoo is, first of all, described as a warrior, enforcing the hero narrative. Secondly, and more significantly, she is identified as

an “African female” warrior, again underlining her equal footing with the women she “fights” for. Alternately, calling her “an incredible African female warrior” instead of simply “an incredible warrior” implies that “African” and “female” are somehow unusual qualities in “warriors” and thus worth mentioning.

Nor is Dorkenoo’s obituary the only instance of the use of war metaphors in the Guardian's material. On the contrary, “the fight against FGM” is mentioned in nearly half the articles, complemented by other similar phrasings: circumcision is “combatted” or “battled”, and the aim of the campaign is to “defeat” it. Military metaphors such as “in the vanguard” or “on the frontline” are also commonplace. Combined with the earlier discussed emphasis on courage, this war rhetoric serves to strengthen the hero narratives around anti-circumcision campaigners.

For all their commended bravery and passion, the campaigner women's agency is not undisputed. The Guardian's articles alternate between writing about Mohamed's campaign backed by the Guardian, and Mohamed being the face of the Guardian's campaign.

> A campaign led by the 17-year-old student Fahma Mohamed, and backed by the Guardian and FGM campaigners, is calling on the education secretary, Michael Gove, to write to all head teachers in the country telling them to inform teachers and parents about the risks of FGM.
>
> (Guardian, 12 February 2014[lii])

> A young woman from Bristol, Fahma Mohammed, was the face of the Guardian's British End FGM campaign and drove a petition that collected nearly a quarter of million signatures in just over 20 days.
>
> (Guardian, 10 July 2014[liii])

In the first extract, the campaign is Mohamed's, backed by the Guardian; in the second, she was only the face of a campaign that is the Guardian's. Whether Mohamed is called the leader or the face of a campaign has repercussions on how much agency she is attributed, but it is not the whole picture. On closer reading, she has more agency in the extract that calls her the face of the campaign rather than its leader. In the first, a campaign led by Mohamed and backed by the Guardian is making demands of the education secretary; in

the second, Mohamed was the face of the Guardian's campaign and drove a petition that was a great success. In the first extract, the active agent is not, in fact, Mohamed, but the campaign she leads; in the second, Mohamed personally drives the petition.

> Fahma Mohamed, the face of the campaign, which is backed by the Guardian and a range of campaigners and FGM activists, is calling on the secretary of state for education to write to all headteachers in the country asking them to inform teachers and parents about FGM before the next summer holidays, in a bid to protect girls from being mutilated during the "cutting season". She wants a meeting with education secretary Michael Gove to put her case directly.
>
> (Guardian, 9 February 2014[liv])

Here, Mohamed is again named the face of the campaign, but her agency is not disputed: she herself, rather than an abstract "campaign", is calling on the secretary of state for education, and *she* wants a meeting with him to present "her case". Mohamed is effectively the only active agent in the entire paragraph, despite only being called the face of the campaign rather than its leader or initiator.

More disturbingly for young women's real agency in the Guardian's material, there are passages like the following two, taken from the same article:

> Six months later these two young women, who have led Guardian-backed campaigns on both sides of the Atlantic, have found themselves at the heart of the movement to end female genital mutilation (FGM) – a movement that in recent months has, astonishingly, put girls' issues at the very top of the political agenda.
>
> ...
>
> Mohamed, who found herself on that front page as the face of a ground-breaking campaign in which the Guardian teamed up with Change.org, says it took on a life of its own.
>
> (Guardian, 25 July 2014[lv])

Here, Mohamed and Dukureh "find themselves" at the head of a global anti-circumcision movement, as if by accident rather than as a result of determined, well-planned campaign

work. This is emphasised by the paraphrasing of Mohamed's words in the second paragraph. The campaign here becomes one "in which the Guardian teamed up with Change.org" and that "took on a life of its own", once again undermining Mohamed's own agency as the leader of the campaign and attributing its success instead to influential organisations and luck.

> After a meeting that lasted more than an hour – to the girls' delighted surprise – [education secretary Michael Gove] agreed. Praising Fahma's "inspirational" campaign, he said the department would send every school guidance on keeping children safe by Easter – before the summer holidays – and would include material to enable teachers to tackle the subject of FGM.
>
> (Guardian, 28 February 2014[lvi])

Here, too, the young campaigners' agency is limited. Mohamed and the others are "delighted" and "surprised" when a more influential figure takes up the campaign. Mohamed is called "inspirational", but the real action is taken by someone else. Similarly, in the following quote from United Nations secretary general Ban Ki-moon, Mohamed's primary role is to *inspire* action rather than to initiate or undertake it:

> "I commend global leaders and brave activists confronting these problems, especially the courageous young women in affected communities," [Ban] said. "They deserve our full support. Like Fahma Mohamed, who inspired me so much when we met in March with the Guardian's campaign. I pledged to her, and I repeat today, that I will continue to raise my voice about the urgency of ending these harmful practices."
>
> (Guardian, 22 July 2014[lvii])

The support and praise of figures such as Ban lend credibility to the campaign and its leaders. At the same time, however, the description of campaigners as "brave", "courageous", and "inspirational" coupled with these declarations of support from more influential people attributes the real power somewhere else than in the hands of the campaigners themselves. At first glance, this looks like an undermining of the agency of young female campaigners in favour of older, more influential men. The whole picture is somewhat more complex, however, as one of these influential figures is Pakistani

education activist Malala Yousafzai, herself a young girl.

> In an exclusive interview with the Guardian, Malala praised Fahma's campaign, and joined her in calling for better education in schools about FGM. "I've watched every step of Fahma's campaign and I think she is on the edge of something huge," she said. "Over 140 million girls and women are mutilated – but like keeping girls out of school in Pakistan, we can come out together and be strong and change things for the next generation. I am her sister and I am at her side and I want her to be listened to I as I was."
>
> (Guardian, 24 February 2014[lviii])

> The campaign has gathered momentum since its launch, at the beginning of the month, becoming one of the biggest campaigns hosted on the site and winning the support of the Pakistani schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai and the general secretary of the UN, Ban Ki-moon.
>
> (Guardian, 25 February 2014[lix])

Here, Yousafzai's support and praise for Mohamed's campaign functions like Ban's in lending the campaign an additional measure of authority and credibility. But while Ban calls Mohamed an inspiration, Yousafzai calls her her "sister" and further underlines the connection between them by likening Mohamed's campaign to her own.

Notably, Yousafzai and Mohamed are both called by their first name only. This is a common trend in the material in general, and has repercussions for their authority and agency. Influential figures such as the UN secretary general or the education secretary are never referred to in this way. While Mohamed is more often called by her first than her last name, it is the other way around for Dukureh. This may be due to their respective ages and positions – Mohamed was a seventeen-year-old student when the campaign was launched, Dukureh a 24-year-old banking adviser and mother of three.

The second quote showcases the duality of Yousafzai's position: she is effectively placed on an equal footing with Ban Ki-moon while at the same time identified as "the Pakistani schoolgirl" – rather than, for example, a then Saharov prize winner and Nobel peace prize nominee. This is not uniform in the material, as in other points she is referred to as

"education campaigner" (eg. Guardian, 22 July 2014[lx]) or "Nobel peace prize recipient" (Guardian, 16 Oct 2014[lxi]); but these remain exceptions, while "the Pakistani schoolgirl" is the most used title.

Whatever the limitations to their actual agency in the campaign, it appears clear that the Guardian's campaign has taken some pains to present its young leaders as the heroes of the story. The repeated praise of these women, both by interviewees and less directly by the campaign texts themselves, produces an image of a "sisterhood" of brave, fearless, determined campaigners fighting for the rights of girls and women.

"Girls who don't have a voice": victimisation and agency.

As we have seen, the campaigners are presented as entitled to speak for a larger category of people – in this case, circumcised girls and women. Significantly for questions of agency, if a person is spoken for by someone else, she does not speak for herself. Given the history and past criticisms of anti-circumcision campaigning, whether women are afforded the opportunity to speak for themselves rather than being represented by someone else is a crucial point. Thus, this subchapter will look into issues of voice and agency from a different perspective: who are the courageous girl heroes of the previous chapters campaigning for? If they are the exception, what is the rule?

The Guardian's articles on circumcision are littered with references to "giving voice" to people who have none:

> [Mohamed] puts it simply: "I want to help these girls who don't have a voice."
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[lxii])

> Lisa Zimmermann, co-founder of Integrate Bristol, which initially met with strong opposition when it began its awareness-raising work, said Fahma had given a voice to those who could not speak out.
>
> (Guardian 9 February 2014[lxiii])

> "We are making progress. Today we are taking one more step on the road towards giving women a voice and eradicating these harmful practices," [home

> secretary Theresa May] said.
>
> (Guardian, 22 Jul 2014[lxiv])

> She is giving a voice to those who would otherwise be silenced, says Jama Jack, a co-organiser and one of Dukureh's oldest friends. "Seeing her gives me hope," she says. "Young people too often don't have a voice to talk about hidden things – FGM, rape, child abuse – but together, I think we do."
>
> (Guardian 13 December 2014[lxv])

In these extracts, circumcised women – or girls facing circumcision – either do not have voices of their own, or "cannot speak out". Someone else has to give them a voice or speak for them. Where the "extraordinary" brave women are presented as active agents making independent, well-judged decisions, these women have no agency at all. The following statements from UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon and campaigner Fahma Mohamed follow along the same lines, albeit more covertly:

> "This is part of making women's voices heard and giving them the right to protect themselves."
>
> (Ban Ki-moon; Guardian, 6 March 2014[lxvi])

> [“]I know these girls, and it just fuels my passion. I want to get their voices heard."
>
> (Fahma Mohamed; Guardian, 6 February 2014[lxvii])

Here, the women do have voices, but these will not be heard without an intervention from someone else. Likewise, Ban mentions the right of these women to protect themselves rather than to be protected, but someone else has to *give* them that right. This denial of agency to a majority of circumcised women can be seen as a form of victimisation – the presentation of these women as passive, helpless, in need of rescue (see Comaroff & Comaroff 1990, Dustin 2010, Korieh 2005, Nnaemeka 2005).

The following quote from French gynaecologist Emmanuelle Piet showcases a more direct victimisation of circumcised women and girls:

> "FGM used to be carried out mostly on infants. Now girls who have been born and educated in France are being sent back to their parents' country, when they finish primary school, where **they are cut and forcibly married**. They return before their 16th birthday pregnant.
>
> "When they come to see me. **They are veiled, they are terrified and they are traumatised.** They seem to have lost all their French education and language. It's like they have just arrived in a foreign country.
>
> "They don't want to talk about it. As with other forms of violence, **the aggressor warns them not to say what has been done to them.**"
>
> (Dr Emmanuelle Piet; Guardian, 10 February 2014, bolding added[lxviii])

These girls are "veiled", "terrified" and "traumatised", scared into silence and submission by "the aggressor". This subjugation and status as a victim is connected to the girls losing their "Frenchness", implying that being "terrified" and "traumatised" is somehow connected to being "veiled" and at odds with having a "French education". Effectively, Piet draws a connection between culture and victimisation, while at the same time presenting circumcision as something that alters every aspect of the girl and her life. Similarly, in the following extract, teacher Heather Sidery Clarke describes girls transformed into victims:

> "I have witnessed the results of this assault on children, as they would return to school in the UK after a 'trip home' during summer break.
>
> "The little girls were transformed from being happy, confident people to sullen and uncomfortable with themselves … A kind of 'shame' overhanging them. Not conducive to learning and downright unhealthy."
>
> (Guardian, 14 February 2014[lxix])

Like Piet, Sidery Clarke describes a dramatic transformation of the entire girl. The girls are transformed from "happy" to "sullen" and from "confident" to "uncomfortable with themselves". Circumcision is thus constructed as destructive of the girls' happiness and

self-esteem. Crucially, circumcision changes not only the girl's genitals, but also her personality and behaviour.

> An influential group of Britain's leading human rights barristers has told MPs that the government is in breach of its legal obligation to protect children by failing to stop **girls becoming victims** of female genital mutilation.
>
> (Guardian, 12 February 2014, bolding added[lxx])

> “Too many American girls face the oppression of FGM ... just think of a young girl going through this, unknowingly or without her permission to, in essence, **change her life forever**. It is said that FGM is to preserve the virginity of the girls and to keep them pure until marriage but it is really **taking their spirit away**.”
>
> (Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee, Guardian, 13 June 2014, bolding added[lxxi])

> A consequences chart encourages pupils to think about the impact of **having their rights taken away from them**. Give pupils a scenario, such as a 15-year-old girl undergoing female genital mutilation. One of the consequences of this is that she is then married off at a young age. The consequence of this is that she may get pregnant, which in turn leads to complications such as the baby dying during labour.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014, bolding added[lxxii])

As in the previous extracts, here, too, circumcision transforms the girl and her whole life. In the first extract, girls “become victims”, presenting “victim” as an identity marker that defines the girl as a person. In the second, circumcision permanently changes the girl's life and, significantly, “takes her spirit away”. In the third, circumcision is “taking the girls' rights away from them” and leads, in a slippery slope -argument, to early marriage, pregnancy, and complications during childbirth. In all of these extracts, girls are permanently altered and diminished by circumcision: circumcision takes away “their rights” or “their spirit” and they “become victims”, “veiled”, “terrified”, and “traumatised”. Similar issues are evoked by the Guardian's two radically different ways of describing infibulation:

> In some instances part or all of the clitoris is removed while in the most extreme cases, girls are sewn up with only a small hole left to pass urine and menstruate.
>
> (Guardian, 12 May 2014[lxxiii])

> Dukureh went through the most severe form of FGM where the clitoris and labia are removed before the vagina is sewn up leaving just a small hole.
>
> (Guardian, 6 October 2014[lxxiv])

The difference between these two extracts may not appear substantial at first glance, but is significant. In the first, the *girl* is sewn up. The operation defines the entire girl, not only her genitalia: she is sewn up, closed, subdued. This phrasing is more prominent in the material, featuring five times while the second phrasing only appears twice. Notably, however, the two instances of the second phrasing, where the vagina is sewn up instead of the entire girl, both appear later than the first phrasing. It is possible that this change in phrasing is not accidental but a result of reconsideration, perhaps as a response to feedback.

The same effect – the construction of circumcision as something that changes and defines every aspect of who and what these girls are – is achieved by naming them “mutilated”, a controversial term not embraced by most activists from circumcising communities precisely for this reason. In a more direct and physical sense than “taking their rights away”, “mutilation” also implies that these women and their bodies are somehow deficient or lacking:

> It is not necessary for young children to see graphic images of mutilated bodies to understand how FGM works.
>
> (Lisa Zimmermann, Guardian, 15 February 2014[lxxv])

> Pioneering medical advances now allow doctors to repair women's bodies and restore their health.
>
> (Guardian, 18 February 2014[lxxvi])

> All "traditions" that demean, dehumanise and injure are human rights violations that must be opposed until they are ended.
>
> (Ban Ki-moon, Guardian, 18 February 2014[lxxvii])

In the first extract, “graphic images of mutilated bodies” are thought to shock schoolchildren. Circumcised women and their bodies become graphic and repulsive, things of horror. Phrasings such as this present the bodies of circumcised women as “objects to be exhibited, gazed at, and silenced” (Nnaemeka 2005, p. 29; see also Korieh 2005, pp. 122-125). For Nnaemeka, “the ultimate violence done to African women is the exhibition of their body parts – in this instance, the vagina – in various stages of 'unbecoming'” (Nnaemeka 2005, p. 30). While Zimmermann is arguing against bringing images of circumcised genitals to the classroom, she does not do so out of respect for the dignity of African women, but out of concern for “young children” who would be exposed to the horror of these “mutilated bodies”.

The second extract is essentially saying the same, albeit more covertly. If women's bodies need to be “repaired” and their health “restored”, they need to be broken and unhealthy to begin with. In the third, women are “dehumanised” by circumcision. In all of these extracts, circumcised women and their bodies are presented as deficient, imperfect, and broken.

Thus, despite its brave young heroes from circumcising communities, the Guardian's campaign does not entirely avoid the old pitfalls of anti-circumcision campaigning. While Mohamed, Dukureh, and others are put on a pedestal, a majority of circumcised women continue to be portrayed as victims. This victimisation is achieved by claiming that these women “don't have a voice” and have to be “defended”, by constructing circumcision as the only marker that defines their life, personality, and identity, and by presenting their bodies as horrific or deficient.

“Cutter”, “victim”, “survivor”: naming circumcised women.

In the Guardian's material, circumcised women are mostly called one of two names: either victims or survivors. These terms, again, carry different connotations. *Victim* evokes impressions of helplessness, of needing rescue. *Survivor*, on the other hand, has a twofold

connotation. Firstly, it implies that living through circumcision is exceptional or at least worth mentioning; secondly and more importantly, it presents these women as strong where *victim* implies weakness and lack of agency – even, perhaps, presents the strength of these women as a result of “surviving” circumcision.

Interestingly, these terms are used almost interchangeably in the material despite their radically differing connotations. There was no clear distinction between their usage. Thus, the difference between brave campaigners and terrified, victimised women, outlined in the previous subchapters, does not exist on a level of naming; both campaigners and other circumcised women were called by both names. Generally, each article uses only one chosen term to refer to circumcised women, whether campaigners or others.

The material only includes one article that uses both. Significantly, however, this article alternates between the two with a coherent internal logic:

> A report last year on FGM by a coalition of medical groups, trade unions and human rights organisations estimates that there are 66,000 **victims** of FGM in England and Wales and warns that more than 24,000 girls under 15 are at risk. More than 2,000 **victims** of FGM sought treatment in London hospitals alone in the past three years.
>
> ...
>
> The evidence is there, if the resources were made available to uncover it, says Fatou Baldeh, herself an FGM **survivor** and now working for the Dignity Alert and Research Forum (Darf) in Edinburgh.
>
> ...
>
> In Scotland, after recent hospital figures revealed that more than 2,500 FGM **victims** had given birth in Scottish hospitals, politicians commissioned a Scotland-wide study into its prevalence.
>
> ...
>
> But not enough is yet being done, says Leyla Hussein, a **survivor** and campaigner who presented The Cruel Cut on Channel 4.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014, bolding added[lxxviii])

The extracts above, all from the same article, show a clear distinction between the uses of

victim and *survivor*. *Victim* is used to refer to the masses, to the thousands of circumcised women in the UK. *Survivor*, by contrast, is here reserved only for activists who work against the practice. This duality corresponds to the differentiation between brave campaigners and scared, helpless victims. Here, a woman transforms from victim to survivor by becoming an anti-circumcision campaigner; effectively, then, “surviving” circumcision becomes synonymous with publicly opposing it.

Interestingly, the only circumcised women who are not titled *victims* or *survivors*, and thus not defined by what has been done to their genitals, are women who carry out the practice. These women are systematically referred to as *cutters*, either with or without quotation marks:

> A senior police officer has appealed for information about the "cutters" who carry out female genital mutilation on young girls, as pressure grows over the failure to bring a single prosecution in the UK for the abuse, which is thought to affect tens of thousands of girls.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[lxxix])

> For the cutters, or "koko mekong", who can earn 2,500 Kenyan shillings (£18) for each girl, it is a livelihood.
> "The cutters ask me: 'If we leave doing this thing, what will we eat?'" Margaret says.
>
> (Guardian, 7 February 2014[lxxx])

> The practice is usually carried out by a "cutter" midwife in villages using a razor blade, but in some countries such as Egypt and Indonesia it is carried out in clinics and hospitals.
>
> (Guardian, 6 Feb 2014[lxxxi])

These women are not categorised as either survivors or victims; indeed, their own circumcisions are not mentioned at all. This is significant because they are the only circumcised women whose genitals are not a topic of discussion – not even though their voices and perspectives are not wholly absent from the Guardian's material. One article interviews a Kenyan circumciser, Margaret, quoted above; another documents Jaha

Dukureh's conversation with Sarjo, the lady who circumcised her. Both of these women speak about circumcision, but their personal experiences do not come up, not even as a mention. Instead, they are shown only in their role as “cutters”, constituting what Hancock aptly calls a “demonization of grandmothers, aunts, and *daya* (circumcisers) who maintain the tradition” (Hancock 2005, p. 248).

Though differing in connotation, all of these terms – cutter, victim, survivor – include a classification of circumcision as a brutal, violent attack that women are either perpetrators, victims or survivors of. More covertly than the classifications of circumcision discussed in the previous chapter, these namings likewise constitute truth claims about what circumcision is. More importantly, they also have repercussions for the agency and role of circumcised women.

Us or them: identification and division.

Kenneth Burke (1950) uses the concepts of *identification* and *division* to refer to devices that seek to construct closeness or distance. Identification can refer to strategies that liken a category of people or phenomena to another or to the audience. Similarly, division strategies seek to construct the object as inherently separate and different from the audience or from other groups or categories.

The Guardian's material displays two seemingly opposing tendencies with regard to whether circumcised women and girls are presented as like the audience (identification) or as distant and different (division). These can be considered as rhetorical devices used by the authors to elicit certain responses from the assumed audience. Identifications with circumcised girls and women bring the issue closer to the reader – in Edmondson's words, they function as ”ways in which communication can be made to matter to the person receiving it” (Edmondson 1984, p. 6). Divisions from these girls and women, meanwhile, underline the “brutality” of female circumcision and will be examined in relation to the concept of Othering. Fundamentally, Othering can be considered as a form of division, as its chief function is to produce and maintain distinctions between “us” and “them” and present the Other as a polar opposite of oneself (Hall 1992, pp. 277-280; Said 1978.)

The dynamics of identification with and division from circumcised women and girls start

with the framing of circumcision itself. In various points in the Guardian's material, circumcision is presented as either something belonging to another place and time, and as something happening "here" to British or American girls. The first framing constructs circumcision as someone else's problem; the second, as "ours". As the campaign is aimed primarily for an Anglo-American audience and its first goals were related to raising awareness about circumcision and its prevalence in these countries, it is unsurprising that the second framing is more directly employed in the campaign's materials. In the following extracts, female circumcision is presented as something that concerns the assumed audience, as it takes place in their own countries:

> It's important that pupils realise that this is something that doesn't just happen abroad – it happens in the UK too. It is estimated that more than 23,000 girls under the age of 15 are at risk of being genitally mutilated here each year.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[lxxxii])

> "This is absolutely an American problem. We have vacation cutting, we have people sending money home so their relatives daughters can have the ceremony," says Naima Abdullahi, 36.
>
> (Guardian, 13 May 2014[lxxxiii])

> The Guardian reported that despite almost three decades of legislation against FGM, which is thought to affect 66,000 women in England and Wales, while 24,000 girls under 15 are thought to be at risk, those working on the ground were warning that the brutal practice was still happening to British children.
>
> (Guardian, 28 February 2014[lxxxiv])

The extracts above exemplify a framing that seeks to identify circumcision with the audience's own environment. It is "happening to British children", girls are "mutilated here each year". This rhetoric brings circumcision and the women and girls it concerns close to the audience. By identifying circumcised girls as "British children", the author likens them to any British child. Whether these girls are truly presented as belonging to the same community as the audience is, however, not always this clear:

> NGOs and survivors from affected communities have told the Guardian that **American girls** are being taken overseas to be cut, while others are cut by hired women **on US soil**. When legislation outlawing FGM in the US was passed in 1996, the Department of Health and Human Services put the number of women and girls affected or at risk at 168,000. But as **affected communities have grown**, the number is believed to have grown by 35% to at least 228,000 by 2000, according to research from **the African women's health center** of Brigham and Women's hospital in Boston, Massachusetts.
>
> (Guardian, 12 May 2014, bolding added[lxxxv])

Here, the girls' identity and group membership are less definite. They are "American girls", "cut on US soil", rather like the "British children" "mutilated here each year" in the previous extracts. At the same time, however, they are identified with growing "affected communities" within the US, implying separateness. This is reinforced by the name of the research institute behind the numbers cited – the "African women's health center". Though called American, these girls also belong to separate "communities" and are referred to as Africans. A similar ambiguity is displayed in the following extracts, where the circumcisions of British or American girls are presented as surprising, as something that happens even though it does not belong to these societies:

> "**You wouldn't think that British teenagers have to worry about FGM but we do**.I know of people who have been cut – anyone who knows girls from FGM-affected communities will know girls who have been cut," [Mohamed] said. "The incredible response I have received from my petition shows how strongly the public want to see action from the Department for Education working with schools to address FGM."
>
> (Guardian, 12 February 2014, bolding added[lxxxvi])

> But [Dukureh] knows many girls who, **despite being born and raised in the United States**, were taken as children back to their family's country in order to be cut and hears stories that cutters are also at work on American soil.
>
> "FGM is not something that is happening in a far away place. It is happening here to American girls," she says.

(Guardian, 12 May 2014, bolding added[lxxxvii])

> “**People have the idea that this is happening elsewhere and not right here in their backyard.** The reality is FGM is taking place here and is happening to US citizens.”
>
> (Congressman Joe Crowley; Guardian 12 May 2014, bolding added[lxxxviii])

In these extracts, girls are circumcised “despite being born and raised in the US” or the United Kingdom. The occurrence of circumcision in these countries is presented as something unexpected, atypical. Alternately, these phrasings can be read as commentaries or even criticisms of division and Othering, emphasising instead that despite common preconceptions, circumcision does take place in these countries and is a concern for them as well as others. In the first extract, Mohamed is effectively reframing circumcision as a British problem. Her first sentence repeats how surprising it is that circumcision occurs in Britain; but in following that with how strongly the British public supports her petition, she transforms circumcision from something that is not thought to affect British girls to a problem that requires – and is receiving – the attention of the entire country.

In the next extracts, the identity and belonging of circumcised girls becomes even more ambiguous:

> "My first reaction was disbelief. **I thought it was something that happened in [her mother's] time, that happened in Somalia.** I didn't think it would be happening to girls who are my age, or in the UK," [Mohamed] says.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2015, bolding added[lxxxix])

> “**There is no way you should be born in America and still be worried about female genital mutilation**,” said Dukureh. “America is the land of the free. In this country girls are protected. But FGM is not something that is happening in a far away place, it is happening here to American girls. They may come from immigrant communities, that doesn’t make it acceptable.”
>
> (Guardian, 12 May 2014, bolding added[xc])

In these quotes from campaign leaders Mohamed and Dukureh, female circumcision does not belong in Britain or the United States. Mohamed not only places circumcision in a distant place, Somalia, but also in another time. Dukureh's phrasing is even more intriguing. She justifies campaigning against female circumcision in the United States with the incompatibility of circumcision with American ideology and values. Because of this incompatibility, female circumcision taking place in America or to American girls is more outrageous than if it happened somewhere else, to someone else. Underlining the un-Americanness of female circumcision functions as a device of division. At the same time, however, the familiar assertion that “it is happening here to American girls” is a clear identification strategy.

Identification of the audience with circumcised girls is not only achieved by generalised statements. This is also done through means of identifying the audience with individual girls:

> **Like many teens coming up to summer break**, Leyla was excited about her vacation. **Born and raised in the midwest**, her parents told her that for a special treat she was going to fly with them to Somalia to meet her grandparents and extended family.
>
> ...
>
> **Having had a typical American upbringing**, Leyla, now 23, was horrified and scared at the idea of going through surgery in a remote area.
>
> (Guardian, 13 May 2014, bolding added[xci])

Here, the author seeks to identify the audience with Leyla by emphasising her Americanness and her resemblance to any other American teenager. The function of these identifications can be assumed to be relatively straightforward. Leyla's story, which includes a rather detailed description of her circumcision and the pain she endured, will have a more profound impact on the audience if she is first identified as “one of us” instead of an Other.

At the same time, however, the tendency to Other circumcised women is evident in phrasings like the following:

> "I definitely know people it has happened to: **girls who have been taken home, or who have had it here.**["]
>
> (Fahma Mohamed; Guardian, 6 February 2014, bolding added[xcii])

> "It's a custom that is very much alive, **not just in home countries but in Scotland**," says Anela Anwar, from the Glasgow-based charity Roshni. "People have given us information saying girls are being cut in Scotland or we hear that girls are taken **back home** to be cut over the summer holidays."
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014, bolding added[xciii])

In these extracts, the girls are taken "home" to be circumcised. Contrary to the previous example, where Leyla is explicitly defined as American, the girls in these extracts do not belong in Britain. By saying that girls are being cut either "here" or "at home", the speakers are perhaps inadvertently implying that the real home of these girls is not "here" in Britain but somewhere else.

> Gambian-born Dukureh, who set up her own NGO, Safe Hands for Girls, to help FGM survivors like herself, told experts from across the government that FGM was not simply a brutal practice that happened in African countries but was happening on US soil and to US citizens, often during vacations back to their parents' home countries.
>
> (Guardian, 3 October 2014[xciv])

Again, circumcision is presented as something that is "happening on US soil and to US citizens", encouraging identification. At the same time, and somewhat more troublingly, the passage draws a connection between brutality and Africa. Essentially, "brutal practices" are considered normal for "African countries" but shocking if occurring in the United States.

On the whole, then, the Guardian's material has two simultaneous trends regarding identification with, and division from, circumcised women. On the one hand there are phrasings that frame circumcision as a "British" or an "American problem". The audience is invited to identify with Leyla and other circumcised girls, portrayed as like any other teenagers. On the other hand, the material is littered with phrasings where circumcision is

explicitly something that does not belong "here", and circumcised girls and women belong to separate "communities".

Similarly, the campaign material idolises leaders Dukureh and Mohamed, one of them circumcised, the other from a traditionally circumcising community. These narratives function as an identification device: campaigners are shown as heroes the audience can relate to, admire, and root for. Simultaneously, this idolisation can be seen as a device for attributing agency to the young women whose bodies the campaign is about.

These efforts are somewhat undermined, however, by the objectification and victimisation of a majority of circumcised women. While the audience is invited to relate to Mohamed and Dukureh's struggles, the experiences of these other women are expected to motivate shock, horror, and pity rather than identification. Presenting these women's bodies as mutilated, deficient curios constructs the women themselves as objects rather than independent actors the audience could identify with.

The Circumcision Discourse: Debates and oppositions

This chapter analyses the argumentation of the Guardian's campaign. The campaign is here approached as a part of an ongoing debate or debates. Of interest is how the campaign positions itself in relation to the past and present controversies surrounding female circumcision in the "West" – debates about autonomy and external intervention, about cultural sensitivity and universal values, and about women's right to bodily integrity on the one hand and to their culture on the other. Questions of power, agency, and Otherness play an important part in all of these debates.

One of the chief premises of any theory of rhetoric is that argumentation always presupposes a counter-argument. Rhetoric, persuasion, and argument are only necessary if an opposing position exists or is imagined to exist. (Billig 1989, pp. 113; Billig 1991, p. 143; Edmondson 1984, p. 148; Potter 1996, pp. 106-107.) Michael Billig's theory of rhetoric focuses on the argumentative aspects of thought and speech. Billig follows Chaim Perelman's idea that argumentative rhetoric circles around complementary processes of justification and criticism: the need to justify a position arises from real or assumed

criticism, while criticism is needed in cases where an accepted, justified norm has been violated (Billig 1989, p. 117; see also Perelman 1979).

Thus, an analysis on the argumentation of the Guardian's campaign will have to start with identifying the real or imagined opposing positions that are criticised. There are three main positions or attitudes towards circumcision that the material criticises: ignorance, attributed to ordinary people both African and Euro-American; indifference, cowardice, and cultural relativism, attributed to Euro-American decision-makers and occasionally also the public; and cruelty motivated by sexism, attributed to the families and communities of circumcised girls. The campaign's argumentation will be analysed in relation to these three opponents.

“Shocking levels of ignorance”: civilising mission revisited.

The Guardian's campaign began with petitions to raise awareness about female circumcision in Britain and the United States. A portrayal of ordinary people as ignorant and passive is not a surprising find since, if these people were already knowledgeable and active in this field, there would have been no need for a campaign in the first place. This assumption is stated explicitly a number of times in passages like the following:

> A lack of widespread knowledge and information about FGM put girls like Leyla at risk, says Shelby Quast, policy advisor at the campaign group Equality Now.
>
> ...
>
> She has called five different health centres, but failed to find a professional with the right training. “I’m looking for someone who I don’t have to educate about it. I’ve called five different health centres. Some don’t even know what FGM is.”
>
> (Guardian, 13 May 2014[xcv])

These paragraphs, taken from the same article though referring to two different women, demonstrate the assumed ignorance of the American public. In the second one, “not even knowing what FGM is” is presented as shocking. In the first, we also see a justification for why this matters: this ignorance is putting “girls like Leyla” at risk – Leyla, who has before this been described as an average American teenager and who the audience is thus meant to

identify with. The “lack of widespread knowledge” is presented as a direct danger to Leyla and others like her.

The same ignorance is also implied in passages that call for educating people or spreading knowledge:

> Gove said guidance on keeping children safe would be sent out by Easter – before the summer holidays – and would include material to enable teachers to tackle the subject of female genital mutilation.
>
> The material will cover prevalence statistics, factors that heighten risk, warning signs and a reminder of the statutory safeguarding duties of teachers and other school staff in relation to FGM, as well as links to other information.
>
> (Guardian, 25 February 2014[xcvi])

> Scotland's government said it would be writing to every headteacher in the nation asking them to train their staff and educate parents about female genital mutilation.
>
> (Guardian, 8 February 2014[xcvii])

> "We are doing a lot of information-raising in communities and among our own people.["]
>
> (Detective Chief Superintendent Gill Imery, Guardian, 6 February 2014[xcviii])

What is intriguing here is that it is not only teachers and other professionals who need to be educated and informed about female circumcision. “Information-raising” is equally aimed at “communities”, taken to refer to immigrant communities that practice circumcision, as at “our own people”, here probably referring to the police force. Similarly, the headteachers should both “train their staff” and “educate parents”. The ignorance of Euro-American professionals – be they teachers, doctors or police officers – is likened to the ignorance of the people who uphold the practice. Indeed, a very similar rhetoric of ignorance and a consequent need to educate is applied to circumcising communities:

> "Why are we talking about prosecuting parents before we have even sent out

information?["]

(Naana Otoo Oyortey, executive director of Forward UK; Guardian, 6 February 2014[xcix])

> There are 18 of us who perform traditional Maasai songs, updated with messages about ending female genital cutting to educate our community. After these performances, we talk to men, women and children from across the region to deliver further education and promote change.
>
> (Sarah Tenoi, Guardian, 6 February 2014[c])

Here, parents need to be sent “information” about circumcision before prosecutions are possible, and the Maasai community needs to be “educated” about it. Implied here is that parents circumcise their daughters because they do not know what circumcision really is. Parents are described as benign but misinformed or ignorant, and it is assumed that should these misconceptions be righted, they would abandon the practice:

> "Unlike other forms of child abuse a mother who agrees to her daughter being mutilated believes she is acting in the best interests of the child["]
>
> (UK College of Policing guidance on female circumcision; Guardian, 21 July 2014[ci])

> Gillette-Faye said the London-bound family were from a culture where "cutting is so ingrained they think they are doing the best for their daughters".
>
> (Guardian, 10 February 2014[cii])

Here, parents mistakenly believe that circumcision is in the best interests of their daughters. This kind of rhetoric implies that there is an universal, objective “best interest” for young girls, and consequently circumcision can be abandoned by simply informing parents that it is not involved in this universal “best interest” of girls. Furthermore, the second extract attributes this ignorance to “a culture where cutting is ingrained”, implying the parents' lack of personal agency and capability to independent decision-making. Instead, they are conditioned to circumcise their daughters by an abstract “culture”.

As with the previous example of how a “lack of knowledge” endangers “girls like Leyla”, ignorance is presented as a contributor to the continuing persistence of traditions like female circumcision. Thus, to achieve abandonment of circumcision, people need to be

“educated”, “taught”, or “trained”. The content of this education is twofold. First, as in the passage about doctors who do not know what circumcision is or the teachers who need to be told about “prevalence statistics” and “warning signs”, the education is about imparting information on what circumcision is. More interestingly, this education also includes a moral or ethical dimension. People, both within circumcising communities and outside them, need to be told as fact that circumcision is morally wrong:

> Your pupils should know that female genital mutilation is wrong and should not be happening.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[ciii])

> But an NSPCC report revealed shocking levels of ignorance among teachers in England and Wales, with 83% saying they had not had child protection training in this area. The poll of 1,000 teachers also suggested that 68% were unaware of government guidance about safeguarding policies regarding FGM, with one in six teachers saying they did not know that it was illegal in the UK. The same proportion did not see it as child abuse.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[civ])

Like in the first analysis chapter, the moral statement – female circumcision is wrong – is here treated as a matter of knowledge or fact: “they should *know* that it is wrong”. Similarly, in the second extract, not classifying circumcision as child abuse is treated as an example of ignorance. Moral absolutes about circumcision are to be expected in a campaign the aim of which is to oppose it. However, in line with the agency issues discussed in the previous chapter, questions of authority and entitlement need to be addressed in relation to this mission for spreading “truth” about circumcision.

> If we can just give teachers and other adults the tools and the language with which to communicate the anti-FGM message, more schools are likely to take part in this growing national campaign.
>
> (Lisa Zimmermann; Guardian, 15 February 2014[cv])

> "I see this as a huge victory," said Zimmermann. "It is a first if incomplete step, I believe that head teachers want to do their best for their children but they

need to be told how to help."

(Guardian, 25 February 2014[cvi])

"If we think this is going to happen, we call in the parents and examine the children. We explain why FGM is a crime and warn that we have recorded the child with nothing missing, so if she comes back cut then they will be prosecuted."

(Isabelle Gillette-Faye; Guardian, 10 February 2014[cvii])

These extracts showcase the issue. In the first, headteacher and campaigner Lisa Zimmermann explains how "we" should "give teachers and other adults the tools and the language" to talk about circumcision. This statement effectively asserts that the abstract "we" – probably referring to anti-circumcision campaigners – is in possession of the right tools and language for the job, and are entitled to give them to others. Similarly, teaching about circumcision is likened to "communicating the anti-FGM message", emphasising the moral absolute. The second extract continues in the same vein, asserting that teachers "need to be told how to help". This assumes both that there is a single, objectively "right" way to help, and that someone is in possession of it. In the third extract, French activist Isabelle Gillette-Faye presents a similar assertion of authority not only to define circumcision, but to "explain" its criminal nature to parents.

This tendency to present campaigners as the first authority on both facts and moral truths about circumcision is not always as explicit as above, and not only found in direct quotes from interviewees. Even a simple article headline, "Female genital mutilation: facts you need to know about the practice" (Guardian, 6 February 2014[cviii]), presupposes that the Guardian is in possession of, and has the authority to impart, knowledge about circumcision. Somewhat more troublingly, this headline implies that the campaign not only possesses this knowledge, but is entitled to decide which parts of it "you need to know".

["]We need to do a great deal more in educating people, making it known what FGM is, and making sure that there are places that girls who are at risk can report and those that hear them have some place that they can go."

(Shelby Quast, senior policy advisor at Equality Now; Guardian, 12 May 2014[cix])

Here, too, an abstract "we" needs to "educate people" about "what FGM is". In effect, campaigners are again presented as entitled to define circumcision. The picture becomes still more complex when this rhetoric of campaigners' unquestioned factual and moral knowledge, coupled with their duty to educate and inform others, is complemented by the use of words such as "primitive" and "barbaric" when referring to circumcision:

Teachers and former teachers are already urging Gove to follow suit. Heather Sidery Clarke, from Hastings, said: "Apart from being such unnecessary and primitively barbaric behaviour, genital mutilation is, in this day, a violent crime.["]

(Guardian, 14 February 2014[cx])

As the face of the Guardian's new campaign to have FGM recognised as a key government priority, Mohamed, one of nine daughters in a Muslim Somali family that came to Britain when she was seven, believes Gove could do more to help curtail the barbaric practice.

(Guardian, 6 February 2014[cxi])

The first quote, from a Hastings teacher, is the only instance of the use of "primitive" in the entire material, and can be treated as only the opinion and wording of a single interviewee who is not an official representative of the campaign. The use of "barbaric" in the second extract is more noteworthy. "The barbaric practice" is, if not commonplace, at least not a unique way of naming circumcision in the material, occurring numerous times.

This contrast between "barbaric", ignorant Africans on one hand, and enlightened campaigners with a duty to impart knowledge and moral truth on the other, is reminiscent of colonial ideals of the "civilising mission". The ethnic background of the campaigners does not negate the imbalance of power in this setup. Ultimately, the right to define truth and morality is a question of authority and entitlement, made all the more pressing by a long history of unequal power relations. Simultaneously, this new "civilising mission" is less explicit than its colonial counterpart, expressed in newspaper articles and directed towards "Western" people almost as much as towards Africans.

“Cultural sensitivities”: cowardice, racism, and relativism.

Ignorance is not the campaign's only enemy in Britain and the United States. Politicians and decision-makers in these countries are charged with neglect and cowardice for their hesitancy to address circumcision. At its simplest, this rhetoric is displayed by the use of the word “ignore” in the following extracts:

> Debbie Ariyo, of the charity Afruca [...] said Fahma Mohamed would prove impossible for ministers across the government to ignore.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[cxii])

> However, the problem of FGM on US soil continues to be largely ignored.
>
> (Guardian, 10 June 2014[cxiii])

Here, the problem is not that people do not know what circumcision is or whether it is morally justified; here, the problem is that they do not bother to get involved but wilfully ignore the issue. This neglect to address circumcision is attributed to both passivity and a lack of caring:

> Nimko Ali, who founded the campaign group Daughters of Eve with [Leyla] Hussein, said: "Every other minister has spoken out on this. Gove is the only one that hasn't. **I just don't think he cares about the social wellbeing of children**; it is only about academic achievement. He doesn't want to talk about a child's safety, but he will talk about Latin. It's like he doesn't care and that is very sad."
>
> (Guardian, 8 February 2014, bolding added[cxiv])

> "For this to have got so big and to have so many signatures shows people do care, but it is politicians' time – it's their turn to start caring and do something active to stop FGM in this country," [activist Muna Hasan] said.
>
> (Guardian, 24 February 2014[cxv])

Here, ignoring or not ignoring circumcision is framed as a question of caring. In the first extract, Ali concludes from education secretary Michael Gove's silence on circumcision

that he does not care about “the social wellbeing of children”. Similarly, in the second extract, Hasan calls for politicians to “start caring” and to “do something active”, implying passivity.

Intriguingly, the presentation of Gove in the material undergoes a dramatic transformation as he moves from not commenting on Mohamed's petition to agreeing to meet with her to discuss it:

> "I have a question for Michael Gove – is he scared of me? I'm just a student who is passionate about this, and apparently he just wants to ignore this issue and hope it will go away."
>
> (Fahma Mohamed, Guardian, 8 February 2014[cxvi])

> Mohamed, one of nine girls in a Somali family that came to the UK when she was seven, said that she looking forward to talking to the education secretary about how he could play a vital role in bringing an end to FGM in the UK within a generation. "It's amazing that Michael Gove has agreed to meet with us – he is manning up and that is fantastic. Now finally I hope we can get our point across," she said.
>
> (Guardian, 10 February 2014[cxvii])

> Mr Gove has responded to the campaign by offering to meet Fahma Mohamed. That meeting takes place on Tuesday. From time to time, the Guardian has been critical of some of Mr Gove's schools policies. But no one would accuse him of lacking courage or determination. That is what our campaign needs, now.
>
> (Guardian, 24 February 2014[cxviii])

In the first extract, Gove is presented as purposefully ignoring the issue, and Mohamed insinuates that he might be scared of her. In the second, when Gove has agreed to meet her, the tone is already different: Gove is “manning up”, and Mohamed is waiting to tell him how he “could play a vital role” in achieving a noble goal. In the third extract, from a Guardian editorial, Gove is suddenly described as brave and determined. Gove is thus transformed from a coward to a courageous, determined leader in the space of just over

two weeks. Strikingly, Gove's cowardice or bravery seem dependent on his stance on circumcision.

The agency chapter already presented some examples of connecting anti-circumcision campaigning with bravery and courage. Here, Gove's shift from not commenting on the campaign to agreeing to its demands is a simultaneous shift from a spineless, uncaring coward to someone “no one could accuse of lacking courage and determination”. Similarly, as we have seen, girls and women who actively campaign against circumcision are repeatedly described as “brave” and “courageous”, while girls who do not are “scared” or “terrified”.

In the case of circumcised girls who are presented as having been scared into submission by their families or communities, the cause of their “fear” is apparent. In the case of Michael Gove and other politicians and decision-makers, their fear is explained in terms of exaggerated cultural sensitivity:

> Hard facts about how many girls are being cut, where and by whom, are scarce because, according to campaigners, the issue has been neglected by successive governments scared of confronting so-called cultural practices.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[cxix])

In the paragraph above, what scares governments is “confronting so-called cultural practices”. This ties to questions of minority politics and the rights of women, explored extensively by Moira Dustin (2006, 2008, 2010) and Anne Phillips (2007, 2008, 2010). Politics of intervening on grounds of universal moral rules, and not intervening on grounds of cultural sensitivities, have both been heavily criticised by public discourse and academics alike.

> ["]The law in this country applies to absolutely everyone and political or cultural sensitivities must not get in the way of preventing, uncovering and prosecuting those who instigate and carry out FGM."
>
> (Crime Prevention Minister Norman Baker, Guardian, 6 February 2014[cxx])

Here, the circumcision debate is presented as very simple: “political and cultural

sensitivities” are irrelevant in the face of the law. As female circumcision is illegal, cultural considerations should play no role in the debate surrounding it. Conversely, taking “cultural sensitivities” into account is equated with going against the law.

“Cultural sensitivities” and cultural relativism are not only connected to cowardice and passive contribution to criminal activity, but to indifference and racism. In the following extracts, a relativist position is criticised for the very same thing relativists have before criticised anti-circumcision campaigners for:

> Dr Emmanuelle Piet says tiptoeing around religious or social traditions has no place in the FGM debate.
>
> "I've seen what FGM does and frankly I don't give a damn about cultural sensibilities. It's more important to prevent a violent crime being committed against a child or woman.
>
> "People talk of culture and tradition, but children have a fundamental human right not to be mutilated. **It's racist to think otherwise.** Can you imagine the outcry if this was happening to white, blonde girls?"
>
> (Guardian, 10 February 2014, bolding added[cxxi])

> But, as the pilot demonstrates, the days when health, police and social services may have been reluctant to tackle FGM because of cultural sensitivities are over, said Johnsdotter. "That is not the case in Sweden, people in fact say the opposite that **it is racist not to protect African children from abuse**, or think they do not merit the same protection."
>
> (Guardian, 27 June 2014, bolding added[cxxii])

These extracts can be read as responses to the accusations of racism and Eurocentrism levelled at anti-circumcision campaigns in the past. In contrast to claims that interventions from the outside have racist or imperialist overtones, these extracts are essentially claiming the exact opposite. Here, *not* intervening is the racist course of action. What is significant from a rhetorical perspective is that a great weight is placed on the term “racist” and who carries this label.

> Specially trained Border Force agents will be working with police forces, which will receive new advice telling officers to **put aside cultural sensitivities and fears of being branded racist** in order to pursue investigations into FGM.
>
> (Guardian, 21 July 2014, bolding added[cxxiii])

Here, “cultural sensitivities” are associated with “fears of being branded racist”, once again showcasing the campaigners' awareness of previous debates and criticisms. In order to act, officers need to “put aside” these sensitivities and fears. This has multiple implications. Statements such as this construct a social environment wherein “fears of being branded racist” if cultural values are insulted are a serious enough concern to hinder the work of police officers. Secondly, it follows that intervening in circumcision demands a redefinition of “racism”.

At the same time, however, the Guardian's material contains some examples of an opposing tendency:

> Another London headteacher, Bavaani Nanthabalan, added: "The Department of Education has never communicated with schools directly on FGM or given us any guidelines. It is a hugely sensitive issue.
>
> "A supportive letter from Mr Gove encouraging us to raise awareness of this issue in schools would help schools address this serious problem in a sensitive way. Schools can do more to protect girls at risk of FGM with the right support from the government."
>
> (Guardian, 8 February 2014[cxxiv])

> As a headteacher, it can be difficult to know how to raise such sensitive issues, and I have experience to prove it.
>
> (Lisa Zimmermann; Guardian, 15 February 2014[cxxv])

> “We need to alert educators and counsellors on how to look for girls at risk,” [congressman Joe Crowley] added, calling for a “national hotline so people

> who know girls at risk can call in and found out how they can approach this sensitive issue.”
>
> (Guardian, 13 June 2014[cxxvi])

In the extracts above, circumcision is a “sensitive issue” that, accordingly, needs to be addressed “in a sensitive way”. This rhetoric seems at odds with the earlier extracts that demand the abandonment of “cultural sensitivities”. Nor is this sensitivity rhetoric necessarily separate from the earlier discussed focus on courage:

> Addressing such culturally sensitive issues takes courage and determination on the part of educators. Most teachers are not trained in how to tackle this issue, and many shy away from approaching it for fear of giving offence.
>
> (Lisa Zimmermann, Guardian, 15 February 2014[cxxvii])

Here, the two are combined in the same argument. “Tackling” circumcision takes “courage and determination” precisely because it is “culturally sensitive”. In other words, circumcision is difficult to address because it is a “culturally sensitive issue” and addressing it in the wrong way is feared to “give offence”. Thus, here the fear is not of appearing racist but of genuinely offending other people. Simultaneously, the passage insinuates that most teachers do not possess this kind of “courage and determination” because they have not been “trained in how to tackle the issue”.

> Despite these shocking statistics, female genital mutilation is often shrouded in secrecy and it may feel like a difficult and sensitive topic to tackle in the classroom.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[cxxviii])

In this extract, circumcision “may feel like” a difficult and sensitive topic, implying that it factually is not. Again, it is suggested that a factual truth of what circumcision is and how it should be addressed exists and is presumably possessed by campaigners. What is more, the “sensitivity” of circumcision is acknowledged but concluded to be a misconception.

The downplaying of “cultural sensitivities” or “cultural tolerance” as forms of racism is closely related to the simplifications and moral absolutes discussed earlier. Again, the

circumcision debate is presented as simple: circumcision is morally wrong, and thus any reservations about "tackling" it are attributed to cowardice, racism, or lack of caring. Misguided "cultural sensitivities" are presented as standing in the way of protecting girls and women from a violation of their universal human rights.

Crucially, these references to universal morals, rights and values do more than just undermine old relativist arguments; they also negate the relevance of any alternative perspectives on circumcision. If circumcision is a violation of universal, inviolable, unquestioned moral rules, the complex cultural, social and economical motivations behind the practice and the perspectives of the people who practice it become irrelevant to abandonment efforts. As the next chapter will show, however, this undermining of other truths about circumcision does not mean that these other truths are wholly absent from the Guardian's material.

"Controlling women's sexuality": Patriarchy, communities, and the pro-circumcision argument.

While the Guardian's material is fairly unambiguous in its definition of circumcision as an indefensible human rights violation, it also contains numerous passages that seek to explain why circumcision is performed and what it means to practitioners and practising communities. Their views about what circumcision is and why it is performed can be expected to contradict the claim that circumcision is "simply abuse". These views, while not absent from the material, have to be presented in a way that does not threaten the status of the Guardian's version as the real, objective description, or of the Guardian's argument as justified. Therefore, it can be assumed that these positions will be criticised and their truth claims ironised.

The motivation behind female circumcision is addressed comparatively often in the Guardian's material. It includes several interviews with circumcisers and other people who support the practice and who are given, within certain limits, an opportunity to explain their position. More common are paraphrased explanations for why circumcision is performed, often linked to passages on what circumcision is.

Fundamentally, both kinds of explanations circle around issues of female sexuality and

sexual desire. Circumcision is explained as an attempt to either destroy or control a woman's sexuality, or to answer to scientifically unsound superstitions about the female body. These explanations have serious repercussions for the image the campaign presents of circumcised women and the communities they come from.

> More than 130 million girls and women worldwide have gone through female genital mutilation which, in its most extreme form, sees the labia removed or sewn together. It can cause severe bleeding, chronic pain, infections, cysts, problems during childbirth, infertility and trauma, and destroy sexual pleasure.
>
> (Guardian, 13 December 2014[cxxix])

> Dr Robert Graebe, an ob-gyn based in New Jersey, recalls when he first began seeing patients, they would come in, often with discomfort. "And I would encounter some fairly extreme destruction of the vagina. It's debilitating and severe."
>
> (Guardian, 10 June 2014[cxxx])

In these extracts, circumcision is explicitly presented as destructive to female sexuality. The first places a heavy emphasis on infibulation, effectively likening all cases of female circumcision to the ten to fifteen per cent who have been infibulated. As noted by Shell-Duncan (2008, p. 226) and others, this focus on infibulation is a common trend in listing the health risks of female circumcision, and one example of the way "health information" can be used to support a campaigning goal. Similarly, the construction of circumcision as "destroying" the vagina, female sexuality, or female sexual pleasure is linked to a conception of female sexuality as fragile and female sexual pleasure as dependent on the clitoris (for further discussion see Bell 2005).

Simultaneously, by talking or writing about a "destruction" of the vagina or female sexual desire, circumcised women are once again presented as victims, their bodies as "mutilated", deficient, not functional. What is more, "destruction", like "mutilation", carries an implication of purposeful cruelty. This is strengthened by implying a lack of compassion from cirumcisers and parents:

> Experts said some families, put off by expensive air travel, were clubbing

together to pay for cutters to travel to Britain to mutilate their girls in "cutting parties".

(Guardian, 6 February 2014[cxxxi])

When Dukureh talks of her own pain, as a 15-year-old in the US, Sarjo just smiles.

(Guardian, 13 December 2014[cxxxii])

She has also put more girls than she can remember under the knife. When Margaret started, the tool of choice was a curved nail; more recently this has been replaced with imported razor blades.

The work, she concedes, is gruelling: frightened young girls would typically sit naked on a rock; once done, their excised clitorises would be thrown to the birds. For the cutters, or "koko mekong", who can earn 2,500 Kenyan shillings (£18) for each girl, it is a livelihood.

(Guardian, 7 February 2014[cxxxiii])

In the first of these extracts, families organise “cutting parties” to “mutilate their girls”, implying a celebration of cruelty and intentional physical harm on their own daughters. Similarly, in the second, Dukureh's circumciser Sarjo “just smiles” when Dukureh tells about her pain, implying a pronounced lack of compassion. In the third, an extract from a long interview with a Kenyan circumciser called Margaret, “frightened young girls” have their clitorises “thrown to the birds” while the circumciser reaps a profit for each. Significantly, while the parents in the ignorance chapter were presented as oblivious to what circumcision really is, the parents who organise “cutting parties” to mutilate their daughters are presented as active agents very much aware of what they are doing and what it will mean.

Detective Chief Superintendent Keith Niven, who leads the sexual offences, exploitation and child abuse command of the Metropolitan police, said he would use every tactic available to him, including covert methods, to investigate and prosecute individuals who mutilate babies and young girls.

(Guardian, 6 February 2014[cxxxiv])

Every summer hundreds are taken abroad to be cut – often in unhygienic conditions, without anaesthetic and certainly without consent, as our research has confirmed – while they are on what is supposed to be a holiday with their extended family. It is an experience that will leave them terribly scarred, physically and emotionally.

(Guardian, 24 February 2014[cxxxv])

Parents are taking their daughters to remote regions of Kenya to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM) in secret, according to the head of the country's new FGM prosecution unit.

Christine Nanjala, who has led a high-profile crackdown on the practice, said perpetrators were becoming increasingly difficult to catch as many moved underground to carry out the practice.

(Guardian, 24 July 2014[cxxxvi])

These extracts present parents who knowingly – and with careful planning – commit violent acts on their own children. Parents are shown as devious and evil, prepared to go to lengths to mutilate their daughters. This setting is underlined by the good versus evil -framing in the first extract, presenting a heroic police officer who seeks to prosecute “individuals who mutilate babies and young girls”.

The motivation behind circumcision, as presented by the Guardian's campaign, goes beyond mere cruelty. The cruelty is not presented as irrational or sadistic, but instead as motivated by patriarchy, misogyny, and a need to control. This explanation is especially prevalent in passages describing circumcision:

Deeply rooted in some cultures where it has been practised for thousands of years, FGM – sometimes referred to a female genital cutting – is traditionally seen as a way of maintaining a girl’s virginity before marriage, but condemned by campaigners as a means of controlling women's fertility and sexual desire.

(Guardian, 12 May 2014[cxxxvii])

> It is used to control women's sexuality and fertility by mutilating their sex organs to make sex too painful.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[cxxxviii])

> It's estimated that 6,000 girls are still being mutilated daily by FGM - the partial or total cutting off of the clitoris and labia to make sexual intercourse painful and to control women's sexuality.
>
> (Guardian, 10 July 2015[cxxxix])

> The World Health Organisation estimates that up to 140 million girls and women have been subjected to FGM, a traditional practice designed to curb sexuality that involves the partial or total removal of the outer sexual organs.
>
> (Guardian, 16 October 2014[cxl])

Here, the purpose of female circumcision is to cause pain – it is practised "to make sexual intercourse painful". This pain is, however, not about wanton destruction, but "designed" to "curb" or "control women's sexuality", "fertility", or "sexual desire". Interviewees from circumcising communities emphasise similar points, though less directly; their explanations are centered on virtue, purity, male preferences, and sometimes claims on health benefits:

> But according to research, FGM still has high support in areas with a lower standard of education, where proponents claim mutilation makes women less likely to commit adultery.
>
> (Guardian, 14 March 2014[cxli])

> "We used to think that it was better, and the children, they wanted to do it," [Nora Dore] said. "We thought that those who aren't cut would chase after men before they were married, and that they would have a baby without a father."
>
> (Guardian, 27 June 2014[cxlii])

> [Sarjo] explains that if a woman is not circumcised, she isn't considered clean. She also believes that it helps women during childbirth: she has heard that when an uncut woman has a baby, her clitoris can explode – and, anyway, it is

> better for the husband. "We believe if a woman is not circumcised, making love with them will not be enjoyable," she says, smiling.
>
> (Guardian, 13 December 2014[cxliii])

Here, uncut women are not "considered clean", and are more likely to commit adultery or "chase after men". Circumcision is thus explained in terms of monitoring female sexuality strikingly similar to the campaigners' own explanations for circumcision. Whether the campaigners' choices of who to interview and which quotes to include in their texts have been influenced by their preconceptions, or whether their explanations have been influenced by the views of these interviewees, is open to speculation.

Interestingly, however, the material also includes pro-circumcision arguments that are not in line with the reasons cited by campaign authors – mainly reasons related to economic concerns or to resistance of colonial policies. The economic concerns of parents who support circumcision are addressed in the article about Kenyan circumciser Margaret:

> Underpinning the practice is a sharply divergent vision of the roles of sons and daughters. In Kenya, a dowry is paid by the groom's family. As a result, girls are seen as a valuable asset to their families, if they can be offered for marriage in the "right" condition.
>
> "**The daughters are seen as cattle to be sold**," said Kipteroi, who added that a bride price would be typically counted in livestock, worth perhaps as much as 30 cows. "No one will even negotiate a bride price for uncut girls."
>
> Reuben Orgut, a wiry man in his 60s with a sprinkling of silver stubble, one of the elders in Sandai, is **unapologetic** about FGM and the economics behind it.
>
> "When I get this dowry it's a way to support the other siblings. It means that when my sons also marry I have something to give out."
>
> He says the girls who refuse to be cut and married off are "stealing" from their own families. "It is not fair since **they are a source of wealth**. Some who have not been circumcised leave the family without us getting the bride wealth."

(Guardian, 7 February 2014, bolding added[cxliv])

Though addressing valid economic concerns – how to support a family in a society whose economics rely on bride wealth – the parents in this extract are presented as treating their daughters as "cattle" or "sources of wealth". In reality, the livelihood and economic security of the daughters is dependent on making a good marriage, just as the sons' marriages are dependent on the bride wealth of their sisters (for discussion see Boddy 1998, Gruenbaum 2001). These complex family economics are brushed off with "the daughters are seen as cattle to be sold". Crucially, instead of presenting these parents as legitimately concerned for the survival of their families, they are shown as selfishly seeking financial gain on the expense of their daughters. Margaret also addresses the economic concerns of the circumcisers themselves:

> "The cutters ask me: 'If we leave doing this thing, what will we eat?'" Margaret says. "Tell the government to give us what to eat. If it's just workshops then it will be no use. The circumcisers will not leave their career simply because they're being told to leave it."
>
> (Guardian, 7 February 2014[cxlv])

Here, Margaret ironises anti-circumcision campaigns – "if it's just workshops then it will be no use" – and demands economic support for circumcisers on abandoning the practice. Again, circumcision is shown to be related to economic issues as well as tradition or sexuality.

As we have seen, the circumcision debate has also served as an arena for negotiating cultural autonomy and resistance to external imposition of cultural values and norms. These perspectives are voiced by several interviewees from practising communities:

> The laws are still seen as foreign by many Endorois, especially the male elders, says the chief. They accuse him of criminalising their culture.
>
> (Guardian, 7 February 2014[cxlvi])

> The soweis are unhappy with attempts to force them to abandon the practice, seeing it as an attack on their culture[.]

> (Guardian, 24 August 2015[cxlvii])

> "If I speak to her in a way that [Sarjo] thinks is disrespectful, then my message is blocked. She's never going to listen to me – I'm just a person with western ideology," [Dukureh] says. "Just saying, you're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong doesn't work. I can't take that approach if I really want to make change."
>
> (Guardian, 13 December 2014[cxlviii])

During the anti-colonial struggle, female circumcision became a symbol of cultural autonomy, and West-led abandonment efforts were resisted as cultural imperialism (Ajayi-Soyinka 2005; see also El Saadawi 2005, Gruenbaum 2001, Nnaemeka 2005). Here, these same concerns are addressed by "male elders" of the Endorois and the soweis (circumcisers) of Sierra Leone: anti-circumcision campaigning is perceived as an attempt to criminalise or attack their culture. Similarly, Dukureh explains that Sarjo will not listen to her if she appears to be "disrespectful" or to have a "western ideology". Significantly, Dukureh's explanation draws a connection between disrespect and "western ideology", suggesting that in Sarjo's view the two are interlinked.

Although these reasonings are included in the campaign material in the form of interviews, their absence from the campaign's own explanations of why circumcision is carried out is striking. Fundamentally, explaining circumcision only in terms of "controlling women's sexuality" and disregarding economic or political reasons constitutes a truth claim: these other reasons are not a part of the official newsprint explanation of what circumcision is. This omission indirectly ironises these reasons and explanations, reducing circumcision to only an issue of sexuality rather than, for instance, family economics and anti-imperialist politics.

This ironisation of their concerns and perspectives forces proponents of circumcision into the only role left for them – as conservative, backward followers of a patriarchal culture. Apart from the previously discussed roles for parents – as either ignorant or cruel – there is a third position offered to them. The following extracts show parents as passive and consequently attribute the bulk of the blame somewhere else:

At the international Girl Summit in July, the British government promised more aid to help countries combat FGM, while announcing plans to prosecute parents who allowed their daughters to be mutilated as well as the creation of an FGM unit.

(Guardian, 16 October 2014[cxlix])

Speaking at the Girl Summit – a major international conference in London designed to highlight the issues of FGM and child marriage – David Cameron also said parents would be criminalised if they failed to protect their children from the practice.

(Guardian, 22 July 2014[cl])

We also want to prosecute those who knowingly let this terrible abuse happen to children they are responsible for.

(UK Justice minister Mike Penning, Guardian, 20 October 2014[cli])

These parents “fail to protect” their children, “allow” them to be “mutilated”, or “knowingly let this terrible abuse happen” to them. What these phrasings have in common is an implication of parents who do not actively advocate circumcision for their daughters but do not do enough to stop it happening. These parents are either passive and indifferent – as suggested by the verbs “let” and “allow” – or incapable of protecting their children. But while parents are presented as incompetent and possibly indifferent, the real perpetrators of “this terrible abuse” remain unnamed and abstract.

Likewise, the families and “communities” these girls come from are presented as dangerous environments:

"For many children from these communities the only time they can get support is at school. Teachers in schools need to know the dangers that these children are exposed to."

(Guardian, 6 February 2014[clii])

Police officers in England and Wales will be told that when investigating the mutilation of young girls in the UK they must consider all child protection

measures, including removing a girl from her family if they believe she is at risk.

(Guardian, 21 July 2014[cliii])

The girls cannot “get support” in the “communities”, and may have to be removed from their families for their own protection. As with the heroic police officer in the earlier extracts or with the victimising discourses of the agency chapter, here, too, girls have to be protected and supported by people outside of their families or communities.

Mariama Diallo, African Community Specialist at Sanctuary for Families, a non-profit that works with affected communities, said she regularly came across cases of high school students who had been taken “home” to be cut.

(Guardian, 12 May 2014[cliv])

The quotation marks around the word “home” imply that the place is not really a home. Similarly to phrasings like “what is supposed to be a holiday with their extended family”, this phrasing serves to reinforce the image of the families and communities of circumcised girls as unsafe and uncaring, not fulfilling the chief requisites of home and family. But while these environments are portrayed as unsupportive or downright dangerous to girls, the real agent is, again, left unclear.

The guidance says: "Officers … should not use members of a person's own family or community as an interpreter as this may result in information being fed back to the suspects, the victim or witness being ostracised from their community, pressure being applied to withdraw a statement and the traditional view of the community being relayed to the witness."

(Guardian, 21 July 2014[clv])

Here, the family and the community are pressuring individuals not to speak about circumcision to authorities. Instead of allotting blame to responsible, independently acting individuals, the “traditional view of the community” is presented as the enemy. Similarly, conservative ”community elders” or old women act as the villains of the narrative, directly opposing the campaigners:

> But resistance to the law remains high, often led by older women. "We spoke to one community elder about FGM – he went back to his village to give the message and the old women beat him up and took his cattle," Nanjala said.
>
> (Guardian, 24 July 2014[clvi])

> Isatou Foom, an 18-year-old delegate from the Central River region, said she wanted to be part of the change she was sure was on its way. “Those old guys in the village are hard to convince. They tell you it’s a cultural value and get angry,” she said [...]
>
> The two-day summit, which is co-funded by the Guardian and the Girl Generation, is a very 21st century conference, coming out of a Facebook group of young Gambian organisations such as Think Young Women and the National Youth Council, who joined with Dukureh to put on the event.
>
> (Guardian, 7 October 2014[clvii])

In the first extract, “the old women” beat up a man who tried to “give the message” in their village. In the second, the “old guys in the village” are presented as the adversary, standing in sharp contrast to the description of “a very 21st century conference” in the following paragraph. Circumcision is presented as old-fashioned, outdated and, once again, misinformed:

> "Wherever [ethnic minority] communities [that practise FGM] are residing, it is a problem," she says. "Because why would they stop? Why should they stop? What will make them stop?
>
> "No one is giving them information. If they arrive in this country, they do not know the laws of the land – they come with their cultures and hold on to them."
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014, brackets in the original[clviii])

Sarah McCulloch, a representative of the Agency for Culture and Change Management, here summarises these connections between conservatism, ignorance, and culture. “Ethnic minority communities” have no incentive to stop circumcising their daughters because “no one is giving them information”. More crucially, in the last sentence, McCulloch contrasts

“their cultures” with “the laws of the land”. These people are presented as “holding on to” their “cultures”, as opposed to the British society, organised around law.

> Joseph Kapkurere is one of a trio of local teachers who have been trying to change ingrained attitudes among pupils and parents, even if doing so comes at the cost of frequent confrontation with relatives, friends and neighbours.
>
> Kapkurere escaped the strictures that he grew up with when he went to college in Kisumu, a city in western Kenya where female genital mutilation is not common. "I was able to question why this happens and make up my own mind," he said.
>
> (Guardian, 7 February 2014[clix])

As with the ignorance arguments, where parents “come from a culture where cutting is ingrained” (see eg. Guardian, 10 February 2014[clx]), Kapkurere was only “able to question” circumcision once he had “escaped the strictures he grew up with”. These phrasings present circumcising communities as either wilfully or unknowingly brainwashing their members to support circumcision. Effectively, what this achieves is an image of Africans as conditioned by culture and incapable of independent judgement.

This line of argumentation constructs the entire communities, led by “elders” or “old women”, as the chief opponent to anti-circumcision campaigning. The parents who “allow” their daughters to be “mutilated” are pressured to do so by an abstract “community” or “culture” obsessed with patriarchal norms of regulating female sexuality. This lack of agency and independence afforded to members of these communities – whether circumcisers, parents, or girls facing circumcision – paints the entire issue as a matter of social and cultural pressure rather than reasoned choice in prevailing circumstances.

This stands in sharp contrast to the public discourse of genital surgeries on Euro-American women, framed as a “free choice” not influenced by pressure or by cultural conceptions of what female sexuality is or should be. Ultimately, this portrayal of Africans as slaves of a patriarchal culture, pressured into “mutilating” their daughters by an oppressive “community”, again serves to deny their own agency and justify the campaigners' authority to formulate their solutions for them. Similarly, the campaign texts indirectly undermine

wider, more complex dynamics at work behind the continuation of female circumcision – questions of family economics and anti-colonial identity politics – and instead reduce it to only an issue of controlling female sexuality. This approach simplifies the issue and allows for a more direct condemnation of and intervention in the practice. At the same time, however, it further antagonises people in circumcising communities.

Religion, Culture, and Tradition.

As we have seen, the Guardian's campaign material approaches female circumcision from within a universalist framework, as something that is objectively "wrong". Its proponents are presented as ignorant and superstitious, conditioned by patriarchy to control the sexuality of their daughters. "Cultural sensitivities" are presented as cowardice or even racism, and circumcision is treated as "simply abuse" instead of a culturally meaningful practice. The campaign as a whole is characterised by moral absolutes and a purposeful removal of ambiguity from the topic.

At the same time, however, the makers of Guardian's End FGM campaign appear very aware of past criticisms that have accused anti-circumcision campaigning of racism, cultural imperialism, and a wilful objectification and victimisation of African women. These criticisms are explicitly addressed numerous times in the material. Similarly, the campaign strives to present a more complex, multifaceted image of circumcision, interviewing also circumcisers and "community elders" who support the practice.

Discussing the cultural or religious aspects of circumcision in this context thus becomes a negotiation between moral absolutes on the one hand, and the avoidance of imperialist or victimising discourses on the other: how to address circumcision as morally wrong while remaining respectful towards practising communities? If circumcision is an abhorrent form of child abuse, how can its cultural or religious significance be explained without simultaneously legitimising the practice or reintroducing the ambiguity the campaign strives to erase?

This chapter will focus on the handling of the concepts of religion, culture, and tradition in the Guardian's campaign. Following the principles of discursive study of religion and

Potter's theories of categorisations and truth claims, "religion", "culture", and "tradition" are studied as categories of classification instead of existing, factual objects (see Arnal & McCutcheon 2013; McCutcheon 1997, 2003, 2008; Moberg 2013; Potter 1996; von Stuckrad 2010; Taira 2006, 2013; Wijsen 2013). Of interest is what the authors of the Guardian's material classify as belonging to each of these categories and what is achieved by these categorisations.

Redefining religion.

In discursive study of religion, the category of "religion" becomes the object of study. Instead of studying an existing entity called "religion", the line of research focuses on how this concept is used as a category of classification. What is classified as "religion", what is not? What effects do these classifications have? Crucially for the present study, discursive study of religion also addresses questions of power related to these classifications: who has the authority to define "religion" and decide what it entails?

The first, and perhaps most striking, feature of the Guardian's use of "religion" is a tendency to deny the religious aspect of circumcision:

> There is no developmental, religious or health reason to cut or mutilate any girl or woman.
>
> (Ban Ki-moon; Guardian, 18 February 2014[clxi])

> Although the practice is mainly found in some Muslim societies, who believe, wrongly, that it is a religious requirement, it is also carried out by non-Muslim groups such a Coptic Christians in Egypt, and several Christian groups in Kenya.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[clxii])

> Unfortunately, there are many myths used to justify the practice of female genital mutilation. For example, many people believe it is enshrined in religious teachings while young girls are told that the procedure will keep them clean and pure before marriage.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[clxiii])

In these extracts, religious reasons for circumcising girls do not exist. In the first, religious reasons for circumcision are likened to "developmental" and "health" reasons for it, known to be medically inaccurate. "Religion" is treated as a uniform, objective, clearly defined category that circumcision can be declared not to belong to. The other two extracts display this same tendency. In the second, people "believe, wrongly, that it is a religious requirement", while in the third, the religious justification of circumcision is a "myth". Essentially, these passages imply the existence of a single, objective truth about what "religion" is and what is allowed to belong to this category.

> "Almost everyone who practises FGM believes it is a religious obligation, and this religious scholar has told us that this is not the case," [Jaha Dukureh] said.
>
> (Guardian, 8 October 2014[clxiv])

Dukureh's phrasing is identical to that of the previous examples. Again, the connection between circumcision and religion is presented as *factually* non-existent. The scholar Dukureh refers to, Hama Jaiteh, spoke at a Muslim youth summit on circumcision in the Gambia. Jaiteh's argument provides insight into what defines membership in this uniform, factual category of religion:

> Speaking at the youth summit – a two-day event being co-funded by the Guardian, and The Girl Generation, a consortium funded by Britain's international development department – Jaiteh said FGM was not justified by either the Qur'an or the sunnah or hadith (traditions and sayings of Muhammad).
>
> Directing his words to "venerable so-called Islamic scholars" Jaiteh said: "There is no valid hadith they can bring to support their claims [...] he who created a woman knows the benefit of that thing there, leave it. Let everybody go back and read, conduct research. Islam is Islam, it is here to preserve the interests and rights of the woman. This FGM is completely against Islam."
>
> (Guardian, 8 October 2014[clxv])

According to Jaiteh, female circumcision is un-Islamic because it is not supported by the

Qur'an or any "valid" hadith. The validity of hadiths or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad has been debated among Islamic scholars for centuries. An objective evaluation of which hadiths are "valid" is virtually nonexistent; instead, even completely opposite hadiths have been claimed as valid by different groups of scholars (see eg. Burton 1994). Intriguingly, not only does Jaiteh present a claim to authority for determining what Islam is "here" for and which hadiths are valid, but Dukureh in the previous extract elevates Jaiteh to a position from which he is authorised to decide whether or not circumcision is a "religious obligation".

In Jaiteh's view, then, whether something is "Islamic" is dependent solely on literary sources, disregarding other commonly recognised aspects of "religion" such as tradition, ritual, ideology, and even individual faith. This doctrinal focus is repeated also elsewhere in the Guardian's material:

> Religious and community leaders have signed a historic declaration condemning female genital mutilation, but said there are still barriers to ending the practice in the UK.
>
> The Somali Bravanese Community, Muslim Women's Network UK and the Church of England were among 160 groups to have voiced support for the declaration, which states that the practice is not supported by any religious doctrine.
>
> (Guardian, 20 June 2014[clxvi])

> Yousafzai added that Islam did not condone FGM and early forced marriage, and challenged those who used religion as an excuse to subjugate girls. "There are people who need to read the Qur'an again and do a little bit more study," she said.
>
> (Guardian, 22 July 2014[clxvii])

In the first extract, "religious and community leaders" condemn circumcision by declaring that it is "not supported by religious doctrine". Similarly, Yousafzai's statement echoes Jaiteh's in its call for people to "read the Qur'an again" or "go back and read", effectively stating that the undisputable, uniform truth about what is or is not Islamic can be found in

textual sources. Yousafzai underlines the factual, objective nature of the categories of “religion” and “Islam” by talking about people who “use religion as an excuse to subjugate girls”. Here, people who circumcise their daughters for religious reasons are not really practising religion, but using it to justify mistreating girls and women. Religion, in other words, is only something they use as an excuse for a practice they would carry out in any case. Jaiteh takes a similar stand:

> A youth summit of more than 100 young Gambians has been told by an Islamic scholar that the practice of female genital mutilation is not Islamic. Hama Jaiteh told the Muslims gathered at the first youth summit on female genital mutilation (FGM) in Banjul, Gambia, that Islam was being used to “shield an evil intention [that is] harmful to a person’s development”.
>
> (Guardian, 8 October 2014[clxviii])

Here, too, circumcision does not belong to the category of “Islam”. Instead, religious arguments for the circumcision of girls are only attempts to justify cruelty by referring to religion: Islam is “being used to shield an evil intention”. Effectively, Jaiteh solves the problem of moral absolutes and cultural or religious significance by asserting a division between a pure “Islam” that is, in the earlier extract, defined as being “here to preserve the interests and rights of the woman”, and the “evil intention” it is being wrongly used to shield.

While questioning the “factual” validity of these religious arguments, the Guardian's material does not attempt to deny that many people do connect circumcision with religion. In the following extract, from an article about an Egyptian girl who died of complications following circumcision, these religious arguments are explicitly criticised:

> Some **Islamic fundamentalists** claim FGM is a religious duty, but it is not nearly as widespread in most other majority-Muslim countries in the Middle East.
>
> ...
>
> Officially, Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood claimed they opposed FGM, but prominent members and allies of the group expressed support for it. "People are entitled to do what suits them," said Azza al-Garf, a female MP from the Brotherhood's political arm, in 2012. Another **ultra-conservative** MP, Nasser al-Shaker – a member of a Salafi party that was then an ally of the Brotherhood – called for legalisation of FGM, and said it had a religious mandate.
>
> Two years on, Egypt's leadership has been criticised internationally for other human rights abuses, but Foad hopes it will be more **progressive** than its predecessors on FGM.
>
> (Guardian, 14 March 2014, bolding added[clxix])

Despite the high prevalence rate of female circumcision in Egypt – 91% in 2013, according to a UN estimate (UNICEF 2013, p. 22) – religiously motivated pro-circumcision arguments are attributed only to “some Islamic fundamentalists”. This effectively marginalises religious support of circumcision to a small group of extremists. Moreover, “Islamic fundamentalist” is a highly loaded term in today's Euro-American public discourse, carrying connotations of fanaticism and even terrorism. In the second paragraph of the same extract, this link is strengthened by the description of an MP who supports circumcision as “ultra-conservative” and “Salafi”, and the likening of anti-circumcision measures with being “progressive”.

> Sheikh Tayeb Mustapha Cham, imam and founder of the Taiba Welfare Foundation, said some imams still resisted condemning FGM, but religious leaders had a responsibly to speak out. "Before there were barriers when we talked, but now we can openly condemn [the practice]. Now it is only imams who are isolated from society who still support this practice. Together we can remove those barriers and say this is nothing to do with religion," he said.
>
> (Guardian, 20 June 2014[clxx])

Similarly, in the passage above, only “imams who are isolated from society” support circumcision. As with the contrast between “ultra-conservative” and “progressive” in the previous extract, circumcision is linked to old-fashioned, outdated forms of religiosity. This rhetoric is reminiscent of the patriarchy argument in the previous chapter, where conservative “community elders” or “old guys in the village” who support the practice are presented as backward, stuck in the past. The following passage continues along the same lines:

> Religious dogma is one of the toughest challenges campaigners face in the Gambia. Despite the fact that FGM predates Islam and is not referred to in the Qur'an or practised by the majority of Muslims, the Gambia's Supreme Islamic Council maintains its support for the practice on religious grounds.
>
> The council, which wields significant influence in a country in which 90% of the population are Muslim, has refused to justify its position, but religion may only be a part of it. Last year, its president, Muhammed Alhajie Lamin Touray, the country's most senior imam, said during a BBC interview that he had heard "on reliable authority that the clitoris makes a woman itch, making her want to scratch all the time, and that the clitoris makes water leak from her private parts".
>
> (Guardian, 8 October 2014[clxxi])

A number of things in this passage bear scrutiny. First, it repeats the doctrinal focus of the previous extracts in defining what counts as "religion" or "Islam" and what does not. Secondly, it questions the relevance of religious reasons for defending circumcision, suggesting instead that ignorance and superstition play a larger role than religion in the minds of the council. Here, any religious grounds for practising or supporting circumcision are dismissed as false, and religious pro-circumcision arguments are instead explained in terms of misinformation, backwardness, and superstition. Interestingly, too, "religious dogma" is presented as an adversary to anti-circumcision campaigning, while the rest of the extract is dedicated to showcasing the lack of "real" religious knowledge of the Supreme Islamic Council.

While doctrine and scripture are treated as positive, indispensable attributes of "religion", "rite" and "ritual" carry much less positive connotations in the material:

> Without a prosecution under federal law and little awareness of the highly secretive ritual, experts warn that the practice is still being carried out when girls are taken to meet extended families, or is happening by hired "cutters" on American soil.
>
> (Guardian, 12 May 2014[clxxii])

> Mariatu's story goes to the heart of the challenges for anti-FGM campaigners in Sierra Leone, touching on the silent power of the secret societies, who carry out the cutting as an initiation into the group. It also speaks of the cultural and political significance of the country's ancient structures.
>
> ...
>
> The soweis are unhappy with attempts to force them to abandon the practice, seeing it as an attack on their culture, which is rooted in ancient rituals designed to protect the community against evil spirits and regulate the passage of adolescents to womanhood.
>
> (Guardian, 24 August 2015[clxxiii])

> And so now, during the longer holidays, dozens of girls will stay in the sanctuary of the school in Sandai to avoid the rite of passage.
>
> (Guardian, 7 February 2014[clxxiv])

In the first extract, "ritual" is presented as something "secretive" and mysterious; in the second, as something "ancient", connected to superstitions about "evil spirits". These descriptions of ritual stand in sharp contrast to the clearly defined, doctrine-oriented "religion" in the earlier extracts. In the third extract, "the rite of passage" is something frightening and dangerous that girls need to "avoid" by staying in a sanctuary. What all of these extracts have in common is that while the material displays a hesitancy to connect circumcision to "religion", the same does not seem to hold true for "ritual". On the other hand, the material also includes instances where "ritual" or "rite of passage" is treated the same way as "religion" in the earlier examples:

> Traditionally seen as a rite of passage carried out to keep girls "pure" before marriage, it is condemned by campaigners as a means of controlling women's fertility and sexual desire.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[clxxv])

> The challenge of eliminating the practice in a culture that sees it as a rite of passage is huge, but the stakes couldn't be higher.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[clxxvi])

The difference to the previous extracts is small but significant. Whereas the previous extracts presented circumcision as a rite of passage, here it is only “seen as” one. These extracts bear a stronger resemblance to the passages on how circumcision is “believed” to be a religious requirement even though it is factually not.

Crucially for European campaign texts on female circumcision and religion, Arnal and McCutcheon (2013) have pointed out that the idea of “religion” is itself embedded in colonial structures and ways of thinking. As a concept, “religion” is based on post-Enlightenment European folk taxonomies. Thus, its uncritical application to other contexts, ideologies and belief systems carries a danger. The use of “religion” as a static, universal category of classification enables a hierarchical presentation of the “religions” and “religious” views and practices of others. (Arnal & McCutcheon 2013, pp. 94-96, 107-108.) More disturbingly, Daniel Dubuisson argues that universalising the category of religion is “to create a universal *human* quality or characteristic that is, in fact, best manifested in the European person” (Dubuisson 2003, paraphrased in Arnal & McCutcheon 2013, p. 108). European forms and understandings of “religiosity” are thus placed on a pedestal, as they (naturally) fall most neatly within the boundaries of the category.

Meanwhile, understandings that do not follow this classification of what belongs to “religion” or, for instance, “Islam”, can be brushed off as false, misguided, or even purposefully deceitful. The doctrine orientation of the Guardian's use of “religion” showcases this tendency: “religion” in its true form is found in scripture, not practice, ritual, tradition, or ideology. Other forms or definitions of “religiosity” – or “Islam”, or “Christianity” – are treated as *factually* wrong or at least deficient.

The culture confusion.

As a concept, “culture” has been even more heavily questioned and criticised than “religion”. This may be due to its broader scope and consequent vagueness; as summarised by Gustav Jahoda, “culture is not a thing, but a social construct vaguely referring to a vastly complex set of phenomena” (Jahoda 2012, p. 300; see also Bayart 2002, Breidenbach & Nyíri 2009, Phillips 2010a, Wikan 2002). Given the breadth of the concept, it is unsurprising that it can be used in a variety of contexts to convey different, sometimes

even opposite meanings.

Indeed, in the Guardian's material, the category of “culture” appears much less clearly defined than that of “religion”. While the material displays a relatively uniform line on religion, the same does not seem to apply to culture. On the contrary, the material shows a distinct incoherence and confusion about whether or not circumcision is – or should be treated as – “cultural”, instead showing several conflicting tendencies. In a number of instances, “culture” is used in the same way as “religion”, and any real connection to circumcision is denied:

> “It’s not cultural, it’s power. When politicians want to talk to communities, they call for the soweis,” said Sheriff.
>
> (Guardian, 24 August 2015[clxxvii])

> The French former justice minister Rachida Dati summed up France's attitude, saying: "This mutilation has no foundation in any religion, philosophy, culture or sociology. It is a serious and violent abuse of a female. It cannot be justified in any way. FGM is a crime."
>
> (Guardian, 10 February 2014[clxxviii])

> "I think there was a collective dawning that this was not a cultural issue to be tiptoed around – we were talking about girls having their genitals cut off," says Lib Dem international development minister Lynne Featherstone, a staunch campaigner in the government's ranks.
>
> (Guardian, 29 May 2014[clxxix])

In these extracts, circumcision is explicitly “not cultural”. Significantly, all three also include an assertion of what circumcision is “really” about, something that is presented as incompatible with cultural meaning. In the first extract, circumcision is “not cultural, it's power”. In the second, it “has no foundation in any religion, philosophy, culture or sociology” but is, instead, a violent crime. In the third, it is “not a cultural issue” but “girls having their genitals cut off”. In the first extract, questions of power are incompatible with culture; in the second and third, crime and violence are the same. In all of these extracts, culture is treated as an inherently positive category, incompatible with questions of

violence and power. The same effect of undermining the connection between circumcision and culture can also be achieved by less explicit means, as in the following extract:

> "There is a big lack of knowledge about FGM. It's seen as a cultural issue, but it is a harmful practice that amounts to child abuse and it is happening to US citizens," [Mariama Diallo, Sanctuary for Families] says.
>
> ...
>
> But a lack of prosecutions and desire to hold on to what is seen as a deep-rooted cultural practice, means American girls are still being cut, according to experts.
>
> (Guardian, 13 May 2014[clxxx])

As with the examples in the religion chapter, circumcision is here "seen as a cultural issue", implying that it is, in fact, something else. A similar connotation is created by phrasings such as "so-called cultural practices" (eg. Guardian 6 February 2014[clxxxi]). In the previous extracts, the cultural aspect of circumcision was presented as non-existent; here, it is imaginary.

At the same time, the material displays an opposing tendency, one of explicitly discussing circumcision as a cultural issue:

> Told that the removal of a woman's outer sexual organs was something that had been carried out in her culture – among many others – for hundreds of years as a way of preparing girls for adulthood and assuring their virginity, [Mohamed] was horrified.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[clxxxii])

> The theme of this year's UN-supported International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), on 6 February, is "Preserve the best in culture and leave harm behind".
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[clxxxiii])

> I was circumcised when I was 13, as is the custom in my culture.
>
> (Sarah Tenoi, Guardian, 6 February 2014[clxxxiv])

In these extracts, circumcision is treated as a part of "culture". Contrary to the previous examples, where "harm" was incompatible with cultural meaning, the first two of these extracts openly portray a violent practice as cultural. This approach, where culture is not an inherently positive term incompatible with violence, is made explicit in phrasings like the following:

> "When people come to this country they bring their traditions with them – they eat the same food, dress in the same way – what makes people think that they won't continue with FGM?" she asks. "Yes it's a cultural issue but I'm from this culture and I am saying, this is not to our benefit. This is abuse."
>
> (Guardian, 12 May 2014[clxxxv])

> Yes this is a cultural issue, but it's a cultural problem," [Naima Abdullahi] says.
>
> (Guardian, 13 May 2014[clxxxvi])

Here, circumcision is "a cultural issue" comparable to traditions of food and dress, but this is not presented as incompatible with "abuse" or being "a problem". This is in sharp contrast to the treatment of religion in the same material. Whereas the extracts presented in the beginning of this chapter showcase a likening of culture to religion in this context, the following explicitly contradicts this:

> Sohair's family are reported to oppose her father's prosecution. "It's a cultural problem, not religious," said Vivian Foad, an official who led the NPC's investigation. "Both Muslims and Christians do it. They believe it protects a woman's chastity."
>
> (Guardian, 14 March 2014[clxxxvii])

Foad's definition, though unique in its explicity, showcases the attitude displayed more covertly in the previous extracts: unlike religion, culture is not a uniformly positive category. Ideals of female chastity are attributed to "culture" and not "religion". "Religion" is not relevant for circumcision because "both Muslims and Christians do it". Again, religion is tied to doctrine rather than ideology or tradition. Circumcision cannot be

explained in terms of religion because it is practised for similar reasons in two separate “religions”. Significantly, instead of allowing for Muslims and Christians sharing “religious” ideas and beliefs, Foad attributes all similarities to “culture”. Implicitly, “religions” are thus framed as separate entities, while “culture” is constructed as something Muslims and Christians can have in common.

More interestingly still, “culture” is not only an abstract framework within which circumcision happens; it is also, on numerous occasions, presented as an active agent:

> Girls often want to be circumcised so that they will be fully accepted by their culture.
>
> (Guardian, 6 February 2014[clxxxviii])

> Down the phone from New York, [Taina Bien-Aimé] suggests that Dukureh’s journey [...] reflects the struggle faced by many FGM survivors, who know the harm they have suffered, but are unwilling to break with the culture that condoned it.
>
> (Guardian, 13 December 2014[clxxxix])

Culture “condones” the harm suffered by women, attributing agency to culture rather than people. Similarly, girls want to be circumcised to be “accepted by their *culture*” rather than, for instance, their family, community, or society. Unni Wikan (2002) and Anne Phillips (2007) have addressed this approach as “cultural defence”, an explanation of violent acts with “culture” and thus undermining the agency of the people involved. Female circumcision is, once again, presented as the product of an oppressive patriarchy, here named “culture” instead of “community”.

As we have seen, “religion” is used as a relatively clear-cut category of classification, and retained largely the same meaning throughout the material. Conversely, “culture” shifts meanings and implications depending on the context, presented as a uniformly positive category like “religion” on some occasions and as a direct perpetrator of violence on others. The existence of blatantly contrary statements – circumcision defined explicitly as both a “cultural practice” and “not cultural” – can be interpreted as the usage of “culture” as less a category of classification and more an empty signifier used as a rhetorical device.

This controversy and lack of coherence can be attributed, in part, to the vagueness of the concept itself. When coupled with the charged and internally controversial treatment of “cultural sensitivities” or “cultural tolerance” earlier, however, there seems to be something else at work here. Whether circumcision is factually “cultural” or not does not seem to be the issue. Instead, there appear to be two alternating attitudes towards “cultural sensitivities” that, in turn, determine whether circumcision can be labelled “cultural” or not. If “cultural sensitivities” are accepted as a valid concern, circumcision has to be treated as “not cultural” if it is to be criticised without being exposed to accusations of racism or cultural imperialism. If, however, “cultural sensitivities” are *themselves* dismissed in this context, circumcision can be framed as a “cultural” issue.

“Tradition” seems to follow a similar pattern as “culture” in the Guardian's material. Though circumcision is regularly referred to as a “tradition” or a “traditional practice”, the material also includes examples where it is explicitly not a tradition:

> A practice that demeans, dehumanises and injures is not a tradition, it's a human rights violation.
>
> ...
>
> Although some would argue that this is a 'tradition', we must recall that slavery, so-called honour killings and other inhumane practices have been defended with the same weak argument. Just because a harmful practice has long existed does not justify its continuation.
>
> (Ban Ki-moon, Guardian, 18 February 2014[cxc])

As with earlier discussed examples, where circumcision is not “religious” or “cultural” because it violates human rights, here “tradition” is likewise incompatible with violence. However, Ban's rhetoric is an exception in a material that does not present “tradition” as unambiguously positive to the extent it does “religion” or even “culture”. In the following extracts, a “tradition” can violate human rights:

> In Washington six days later, Obama spoke publicly about FGM for the first time. “I have to say there are some traditions that just have to be gotten rid of and there’s no excuse for them. Female genital mutilation – I’m sorry, I don’t

> consider that a tradition worth hanging on to," he said at a gathering of young African leaders. "I think that's a tradition that is barbaric and should be eliminated. Violence towards women – I don't care for that tradition. I'm not interested in it. It needs to be eliminated."
>
> (Guardian, 3 October 2014[cxci])

> "We are an enormously diverse country and we welcome the diversity of traditions, but we don't welcome oppression or the denial of human rights," [Sheila Jackson-Lee] said.
>
> (Guardian, 13 June 2014[cxcii])

> The education campaigner Malala Yousafzai, who was shot in the face by the Taliban while trying to get an education in Pakistan as a 15-year-old, called on practising countries to change traditions. "We should not be followers of those traditions that go against human rights," she told the summit. "We are the human beings and we make the traditions. Traditions are not sent from God. We have the right to change cultures and we should change it."
>
> (Guardian, 22 July 2014[cxciii])

What is noteworthy about these extracts is not only that a "tradition" can simultaneously be a human rights violation; more significant is the absence of the extreme carefulness that characterises the material's treatment of "religion" and the hesitancy about "cultural sensitivities". More strongly than "religion" or even "culture", tradition carries connotations of stagnation and backwardness and can be used to refer to "the old guys in the village", people who belong to the past.

Discussion

As we have seen, the entirety of the Guardian's campaign operates from a universalist framework. An assumption is made that universal moral rules exist and can be applied to every human being in every context, thus constructing the "wrongness" of circumcision as a matter of fact rather than opinion. These moral absolutes are justified by a discourse of human rights, essentially a universalisation of one specific value system or ideology.

The possession of moral as well as factual truth places campaigners in a position from which they have a right and even a duty to educate others. Unsurprisingly for an awareness-raising campaign, this mission to inform and educate lies at the heart of all the materials. From a perspective of postcolonialism, power relations and discourse, however, this right to define circumcision and its moral worth also signifies a position of power. Nor can it be addressed without referring to colonial ideals of the civilising mission, wherein privileged Europeans had a duty to intervene in the brutalities of Africans.

Anti-circumcision campaigns have indeed been accused of racism, arrogance and cultural imperialism in the past. Intriguingly, the makers of the Guardian's campaign appear very aware of these accusations. The question of racism is explicitly addressed on numerous occasions. In the rhetorics of the campaign texts, intervening in female circumcision becomes a matter of respecting the rights of all women regardless of cultural or ethnic background, thus making *not* intervening the racist course of action.

The most frequently voiced criticism – that anti-circumcision campaigning takes place without reference to, or respect for, circumcised women themselves – is addressed somewhat more subtly. By the choice of campaign leaders such as Fahma Mohamed, Jaha Dukureh, and others, the campaign brings young women from circumcising communities to the foreground. The narratives constructed around these women present them as brave, determined, and inspirational, the undisputable heroes of the story. Significantly, circumcised women are not being rescued by white men or women, but by a "sisterhood" of young women from their own communities.

The Guardian's campaign does not, however, dispute that circumcised women do need to be rescued. While Mohamed, Dukureh and other campaigners are presented as active

agents capable of independent judgement, the same treatment is not extended to the majority of circumcised women. By treating the brave girls and women as exceptions, and by labelling others as oppressed victims of a brutal patriarchy, the campaign only manages to solve part of the problem. The victim stereotype – African women and girls as helpless and passive, waiting to be saved – persists in spite of the new identity of their saviours.

In this context, the categories of "religion", "culture", and "tradition" become extremely charged. The authors of these texts are dealing with a serious challenge: how to write about the complex cultural meaning of a practice they need to portray as condemnable in every way? From the universalist human rights framework, female circumcision is unambiguously wrong – a brutal attack, a destruction of female sexuality, a form of child abuse and violence against women. These explanations of what circumcision is leave no room for its cultural or religious aspects.

Simultaneously, the campaign cannot completely ignore these aspects without risking accusations of insensitivity and racism. By interviewing proponents of circumcision and allowing them to explain their point of view, the Guardian's campaign seeks to present a more comprehensive picture of the complexities surrounding the issue than many of its predecessors have done. However, these attempts at respectful dialogue take on a bizarre appearance when coupled with clear moral statements elsewhere in the campaign – whether explicit, or implied in naming the practice a mutilation, an abuse, or a crime.

These difficulties are also visible in the carefulness surrounding the uses of "religion" and "culture" in the material. A hesitancy to accuse "religion" or "culture" is paramount, attributable – again – to a keen awareness of past criticisms. By framing circumcision as "not cultural" or "not religious", intervention efforts may seek to avoid accusations of cultural imperialism. At the same time, the ironisation or downright denial of the cultural and religious significance of female circumcision effectively undermines any efforts towards a more comprehensive and respectful portrayal of practising communities.

Similarly, ignoring the wider political or economic motivations connected to circumcision and focusing only on questions of sexuality promotes an image of practising communities as brutal, old-fashioned, and unreasonable. These simplifications justify a more direct intervention and simultaneously avoid difficult questions of colonial politics and economic

inequality: accusing "culture" or "patriarchy" is easier than tackling international political and economic concerns. At the same time, however, reducing female circumcision to a violent attack on female sexuality serves to further victimise and objectify circumcised women.

Conclusion

The present study set out to examine dynamics of religion, culture and agency in the Guardian's campaign. More specifically, the interest of this study has been in how the Guardian's campaign positions itself in the power relations and controversies surrounding the circumcision debate in Europe and the United States. The analysis studies the campaign's stance on how an intervention in the culturally mandated practices of others can be achieved without insulting their religious and cultural values or reinforcing colonial stereotypes and power relations.

Previous studies on anti-circumcision campaigning have found undertones of racism, cultural arrogance, and lack of respect towards circumcised women and their bodies. The results of this study indicate that the Guardian's campaign is implicitly and explicitly responding to these criticisms. In a sense, then, the campaign texts can be read as an effort to take the circumcision debate away from discourses of "the West and the Rest" and into one of a sisterhood of empowered young women fighting for universal human rights. At the same time, the campaign texts indirectly undermine the agency and autonomy of people from circumcising communities by ironising their own explanations and definitions of circumcision and its cultural or religious significance.

The present study is ultimately a case study of a single campaign. As such, the results outlined in the previous chapter cannot be generalised to apply to anti-circumcision campaigning in general. However, given the scope and influence of the Guardian's campaign and the attention and support it is receiving from the UN, this campaign's approach and rhetoric can be indicative of current trends in the field. At any rate, these results show a new approach to female circumcision in Euro-American campaigning, one that combines features of the old tropes of African women as passive victims of patriarchy with the idolisation of young female campaigners from circumcising communities, and interviews of circumcisers with an indirect ironisation of their concerns.

Further research is necessary for determining whether a similar trend is indeed visible in other campaigns active today. A comparative study would also allow for a more contextual analysis of the Guardian's campaign – that is, differentiating between common trends in anti-circumcision campaigning, and factors determined by the authors, aims, and audience of this particular campaign. Future studies could also address the motivations and attitudes of campaigners and journalists through interviews, and the reception these campaign texts and their rhetoric have had through studying the comment sections and readers' letters. A joint analysis of these perspectives would provide a more comprehensive picture of why these texts are written the way they are, and what effect they have on the audience they are aimed for.

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